FALLOW FIELDS

FAMINE AND THE MAKING OF LEBANON

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By

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FALLOW FIELDS: FAMINE AND THE MAKING OF LEBANON

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation narrates Lebanon’s environmental history through the lens of the country’s World War I famine. My analysis uses the catastrophe as a prism through which to reconstruct Lebanese agrarian life. Between 1887 and 1914, as many as 150,000 Lebanese migrated to the Americas. On the war’s eve, remittances from abroad formed the largest source of income for the Lebanese, followed by the export of silk. Wartime conditions made both sources of income all but impossible to obtain and the ensuing famine exposed the vulnerabilities of Lebanon’s reliance on global flows of humans and capital. One in three Lebanese perished during the war. Years of demographic instability became a crisis of excess mortality once the war denied the population access to its livelihood and the safety valve of migration.

By taking the human relationship with the rest of nature as its unit of analysis, my study posits broad continuities between the late Ottoman period and the French Mandate era whereas most studies have seen World War I, and the subsequent imposition of French colonialism, as a decisive rupture. Lebanon’s silk economy—already languishing before the war—continued its trajectory of decline despite French plans to energize commercial agriculture. The latter stumbled amidst falling global demand and the degradation of the Lebanese landscape, a salient (an unremarked upon) legacy of the silk industry. Lebanon’s environmental history shows that human ecological relationships were much less apt to rupture than the discourses and governmental strategies that have been the primary object of recent scholarship on the history of Lebanon and the modern Middle East.
For my family,
and especially the memory
of my grandfather
T. Clyde Auman (1909-2000),
peach farmer and progressive
North Carolina legislator.
NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND STYLE

For Arabic-language transcription, I have relied on the style guide of the International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES). The names of places and people will therefore lack diacritical marks except hamza and ʿayn. For Turkish-speaking Ottoman officials, I have transliterated their names according to the rules of modern Turkish (Cemal and not Jamal; Hakkı and not Haqqı). For citation purposes, I have followed the Chicago Manual of Style 16th edition.

In at least three cases, I have intentionally deviated from the IJMES transliteration system to respect the spelling of names as they were romanized by their owners: thus, Khalil Gibran (and not Jibran), the Sursock family (not Sursuq), and Louis Cheikho (not Shaykhu). In other cases, I have reproduced the spelling of town names as they were rendered in Roman characters by their own inhabitants. In most cases I have respected IJMES transliteration, however, even in cases that could easily be puzzling to those familiar with Lebanon. For instance, Zahla and Juniya have been preferred to the more recognizable Zahlé and Jounieh (the latter renderings are more faithful to the pronunciation of Lebanese dialects of Arabic and represent standard transliterations for Lebanese).
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Whoever has taught me [even one] letter, I have become a servant unto them

[man ʾallamani harfān surtu lahu ʿabdān].

- ʿAli bin Abi Talib

Such is the extent of debts incurred in writing this dissertation, it would be impractical to follow Ali’s saying in any literal sense. In acknowledging those that made this project possible, however, I would like to invoke Imam Ali’s sentiment of humility and gratitude. Meanwhile, I must also lament that I will be hard pressed to repay the help that has been given to me by hosts of kind people, in several countries, over the course of this dissertation’s prolonged gestation.

Since I arrived as a master’s student, Georgetown University’s history department has afforded me every opportunity to succeed as a scholar. Judith Tucker had sufficient imagination to detect promise in the first incarnation of my work on Lebanon’s agrarian history. Her encouragement convinced me to pursue a PhD. Since then, she has been my principal mentor in the study of Middle East history. John Tutino indulged my interests in the history of Mexico and shaped my intellectual worldview with his distinctive approach to the history of its rural communities. For all of us studying Ottoman history, Mustafa Aksakal’s mentorship has been invaluable. Among Georgetown’s history faculty, I must also thank David Painter, Alison Games, Gabor Agoston, Aviel Rosenthal, Bryan McCann, Tommaso Astarita, Dagomar Degroot, and Susan Pinkard for their kindness.

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There is no way to adequately express thanks to my advisor John R. McNeill. Needless to say, this project would not have come to fruition without his steadfast mentorship. He stayed late to workshop research papers, edited rough drafts on weekends, and always had an encouraging word to say. I thank him for his patience, high standards, and relentless perseverance in support of this project.

It is said that our history faculty maintain a uniquely collaborative atmosphere. The same is true for the graduate students in our department. From the moment I walked in the door years ago, senior graduate students Emrah Safa Gurkhan, Anand Toprani, Jonathan Wyrten, and Zeinab Abu al-Majd were more than generous with guidance and encouragement.
Many current Georgetown colleagues and friends contributed to this dissertation in critical ways. They are: Kate Dannies, Benan Grams, Faisal Hussein, Jackson Perry, Graham Cornwell, Laura Goffman, Enass Khansa, Nick Danforth, Eric Gettig, Chris Gratien, Jeff Reger, and Önder Akgul. From outside Georgetown, I thank Secil Yılmaz, Reem Bailony, Sam Dolbee, and Zach Foster. Paul Kohlbry, Nate Christensen, and Jess Martin joined me in designing a seminar on Arab historiography at the Center for Arabic Study in Cairo. Our “Skype” theory workshop was later an invaluable intellectual home.

More than simply providing assistance, Zach Foster and Chris Gratien should properly be acknowledged in their regard as collaborators. The three of us pooled research and worked as a collective. Our solidarity has made each of our scholarship more rigorous. It also made the process more rewarding.

The success of my work in Lebanon relied on the kindness of others. Several archivists in Lebanon afforded me gracious help. At the Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik, Father Joseph Moukarzel granted me access to collections that were ultimately crucial for this dissertation. At Kaslik’s archive, I now count Elie Elias, Abir Khoueiry, Rodica Ojeil, and Nancy Machaalany as friends. At Notre Dame University, Guita Hourani lent me invaluable assistance, as did Sami Salameh. Sami welcomed my weekly visits to the Maronite Patriarchate’s archive at Bkirki and I benefitted from his intimate knowledge of its collection. At the American University of Beirut, Samar Mikati has been kind to host me over the course of eight years of research. Nadine Knesevitch, Iman Abdallah, and Mirvat Kobeissi made my time in the basement archive as pleasant as it was efficient. Upstairs, Fatmeh Charafeeddine, Carla Chalhoub, Alberto Haddad, and Claude Matar were equally gracious and helpful. At the St. Paul Society in Harissa, Father George Khawam and his predecessor Elias Aghia were generous to allow me access to their monastery’s daily register. Lebanese historians Suad Slim, Abdallah Said, and Abdallah al-Mallah took time to give me guidance at critical moments. Samer Frangieh always made himself available to give counsel. When I first arrived for research in Lebanon in 2008, Natalia Sancha and Karim Sadek hosted me in Monot. In the intervening eight years, I have not forgotten their graciousness.

Thinking I had found the pinnacle of hospitality in the Arab world, I later found its rival in France. Elodie and Iban Julien lent me their apartment in Paris for months on end. Her cousins Guillaume and Noemi Clement generously opened their home to me when I first arrived in Nantes. Also in Nantes, Sandrine Mansour and her family made me feel as if the city were my home, and introduced me to Fabienne Georgan and Jean Paul Trouillet, in whose home I lived for months. I now count as Sandrine, Fabienne, and Jean Paul as life-long friends.

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archives in Turkey and took time to help me assess Ottoman documents. In the latter regard, I must also cite the patient and able efforts of Abdullah Uğur.

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, especially my parents Robert and Laura, my sister and brother-in-law Cameron and Damien, and their children Georgia Hunt and Robert Watts. Also, of course, Watts and Ruth, Bill and Nixie, Laura and Scott, Kelly, Nancy and Charlie, Bob and Agnes, Abby and Matt, Ed and Kim, Allison, Page and Scot.

Although it invites a counterfactual question—anathema to historians—I am confident in the assertion that this project was only possible because of you, Sarah.

Despite all of the help I have been given, this dissertation still has flaws. The latter are, of course, my responsibility in full.

West End, North Carolina
May 21, 2016
ABBREVIATIONS

AUB - American University of Beirut, Lebanon
Bkirki - Archive of the Maronite Patriarchate, Bkiri, Lebanon
BOA - Başkanlık Osmanlı Arşivi, Istanbul, Turkey
BNA - The [British] National Archive, Kew, England
CADN - Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes, France
CDJ - Compagnie de Jésus, Province du Proche Orient Curie Provinciale, Beirut
FRUS - Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States
MAE - Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, La Courneuve, France
NARA - National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland
NEST - Near East School of Theology, Beirut, Lebanon
RF - Rockefeller Foundation Archive, Sleepy Hollow, New York
SHC - Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
USEK - Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik, Kisrawan, Lebanon
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INTRODUCTION

Lebanese awaited the looming war with foreboding in the summer of 1914, aware of the potential danger it entailed for their livelihood. Amidst “days of anxiety and instability” in late August 1914, Brother Yusuf al-Sayigh, superior of the Melkite St. Paul Society of Harissa, Mount Lebanon, sat down to make predictions about what the “European War” would entail. The contours of an impending demographic and economic crisis were already manifest, even before the Ottoman Empire’s November 1914 declaration of war. “All work is stopped and the banks have ceased releasing funds,” he noted. Decreased capital mobility threatened the livelihood of the Lebanese more than any other Ottoman population, reliant as they were on remittances from the Americas and the export of silk. Uncertainty also sowed fear of potential outbreaks of sectarian violence. Christians from Muslim-majority districts sought refuge with their coreligionists in Mount Lebanon. “Men of military age fled,” in particular, to autonomous Lebanon to avoid the conscription underway in surrounding provinces. “Those with horses also smuggled them to the Mountain” in light of orders for their requisition from the vali of neighboring Beirut province, Bekir Sami Bey, who prepared for a military occupation of Mount Lebanon to arrest draft dodgers and seize livestock. France’s representative in Beirut, François Georges-Picot, still retained enough influence to stop him.

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2 Born in Aleppo, in 1878, Yusuf al-Sayigh had been elected superior at Harissa’s St. Paul’s monastery in 1912. Now remembered as Maximos IV, al-Sayigh became Patriarch of the Melkite church in 1947 and advocated persuasively at Vatican II on behalf of the Eastern Catholics’ bid to maintain their distinct liturgies.
3 Mount Lebanon had become an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire in 1861.
Bekir Sami, along with other members of the Ottoman ruling clique, the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), viewed the Lebanese as disloyal and deeply resented French interference in their internal affairs. Alliance with Germany presented the CUP with a chance to end Lebanon’s autonomy, along with other “capitulations” of Ottoman sovereignty. Picot would depart as soon as the Ottoman Empire entered the war. France could no longer protect the Lebanese from the full imposition of Ottoman authority. Bereft of its main political protector, Lebanon also lost access to the open flows of capital on which it relied. Brother Yusuf realized the danger the war could pose for Lebanon. German victory would spell the end of Lebanon’s privileges: “Al-salām ēala Lubnān”—bye, bye Lebanon, he predicted. The war did result in the abrogation of Mount Lebanon’s autonomous status, if not because of an ultimate German victory. In an attempt to rid itself of foreign impositions on their sovereignty, such as Lebanon’s autonomy, the Ottoman Empire collapsed. France and Britain took advantage of the void left by the crumbled empire, colonizing territory their governments had long coveted.

At the war’s outset, it seemed natural for Brother Yusuf to interpret the war as a clash of nations, empires, and religions. Still, today, those civilizational units provide the lowest common denominator of analysis; the formative events of the history of the Middle East are generally refracted through them. European powers vied to colonize the Arab lands. The Ottoman Empire fought Britain and France alongside Germany and the

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5 For the Ottoman decision to enter the war see Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
6 Ottoman officials would pretend that Lebanon maintained its special status during the war. In some sense, they were right: throughout the war, Lebanese residents in Mount Lebanon retained their exemption from conscription.
Austro-Hungarian Empire in World War I. Small nations, such as Serbia and Lebanon, suffered the highest rates of civilian casualties during the war. The Muslim Ottoman Empire oppressed its Christian minorities. This level of analysis is inevitable, but insufficient to grasp the diversity of human experience entailed by the war and is liable to foster the assumption of homogenous national and civilizational units. It becomes easy when asking questions about the ‘Lebanese experience’ of World War I, as this dissertation will, to imbue that category with more coherence than it merits. A project for an independent Lebanon predated World War I, as did a Lebanese national identity (if only for some). Therefore the “nation” of Lebanon is not an inconsequential unit for understanding the war, but any convincing analysis must acknowledge the fissures inherent to Lebanese society, and the incompleteness of the fledgling nation-building project in Lebanon.

Writing in his detailed daily notes only a few months after he had predicted which empires would triumph, the likelihood of Christian-Muslim sectarian violence, and Lebanon’s probable fate during the war, Brother Yusuf ceased using national, imperial, and religious distinctions to understand the conflict and the suffering entailed by it. Instead, beginning in 1915, he began to see the war’s events, and especially the growing food crisis, as the expression of conflict between Lebanese social classes. Corrupt, profiteering elites (both ecclesiastical and secular) were to blame for the famine that afflicted the poor and middle class in Mount Lebanon, in his view. As factions associated with two local strongmen in the coastal town of Juniya fought in the aftermath of the withdrawal of Ottoman and German troops in early October 1918, Brother Yusuf leveled his critique against local elites in especially severe terms:
The kaymakam Amin Abi al-Lama and Hanna Bek Dahir, the commander of the Gendarmes clashed in Juniya. The latter accused the former of neglecting the orders to declare an Arab government because of his relationship with the Turks. The truth is that both men are of the most evil in God’s creation. The Turks did not commit even a fraction of the oppression […] they committed against the people of Kisrawan. They were the reason for the neglect of many, and the murder of many, and the death by starvation of thousands […] because they sold wheat destined for the poor.9

In his contemporary recounting, the suffering of the Lebanese did not stem from an Ottoman genocidal urge (as alleged by many), nor was it animated by a conflict between Christians or Muslims, but rather between a wealthy class exploiting the conditions of the war and the rest of society. Read now, Brother Yusuf’s daily register appears iconoclastic in its eschewal of the standard narratives that take national and religious groups as their primary units of analysis. He did, in fact, have an especially sharp social consciousness and a willingness to critique those in power. However, as will be seen, contemporary manuscript sources from the period of the war confirm his view that the disruptions in food supply were understood to have resulted from corruption at the local level, contrary to the manner in which the history of the war has been presented subsequently.

Censorship has meant those sources have not received sufficient attention from scholars. Many of the same families that engaged in corruption during the war still hold power today in Lebanon and archivists have been, for almost a century, loath to risk their position by providing access to them. Historians in Lebanon feared reprisal for detailing the role of Lebanese elites in the famine. Equally, narratives drawing attention to Lebanese oppressing Lebanese were unwelcome in a nationalist historical canon that emphasized collective suffering at the hands of a bloodthirsty Ottoman regime. The sources of oppression appeared to be external to the nation in nearly all accounts, as they

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were in the nationalist narratives across the region and in most texts of contemporary Middle East studies.

Since the Arab Spring of 2011, willingness to critique received wisdom and hold national elites accountable has grown. In that context, archivists have made available several collections previously unavailable to scholars that shed light on the social and environmental history of World War I as well as the history of Lebanon more broadly.\(^\text{10}\) Reliant on a novel base of archival material, this dissertation uncovers dynamics of Lebanon’s World War I famine that have oftentimes remained invisible in studies which drew primarily on memoirs and diplomatic archives. Instead of replacing a paradigm that cast the sources of Lebanese suffering as external (either French or Ottoman) with a framework that sees them as internal—as did the previous generations of Orientalists—this dissertation will try to eschew that distinction by putting the dramatic events of World War I against the backdrop of the country’s environmental history in hopes of bringing fresh perspective to Lebanese, Middle East, and global history.

THE ARGUMENT (IN BRIEF)
World War I generated a landscape of extraordinary suffering in Mount Lebanon. Although remote from the war’s battlefields, the province became the venue for war-induced horror nonetheless: one in three Lebanese died of famine and epidemic disease between 1915 and 1918. Mount Lebanon’s de facto capital Beirut, suffered similar, if not greater, mortality. The sources of Lebanese suffering defy characterization as external or

internal, foreign or local. The province’s incorporation into global capitalism as an exporter of silk in the nineteenth century produced a social terrain and ecological landscape vulnerable to famine. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the carrying capacity of Mount Lebanon became linked to the export of silk fabric to France. Lebanon’s population subsequently grew at an unprecedented rate but the volatile silk industry provided only fickle guarantees of sustainable prosperity to the peasant population who embraced silk’s cultivation. Falling commodity prices and population pressure, along with degraded soil, water, and timber resources pushed 150,000 Lebanese to migrate to the Americas between 1887-1914. The carrying capacity of Mount Lebanon’s human ecology relied on global flows of capital, goods, and humans more than any other rural locale in the Ottoman Empire, as the famine would reveal. The war disrupted the mobility of each and exposed the vulnerability of Lebanon’s human ecology, exacerbating an environmental crisis already underway. Prewar demographic instability morphed into a crisis of substantial excess mortality when silk’s prolonged bust culminated in the famine.

Lebanon’s aggressive incorporation into the global economy through silk generated a particular social and institutional landscape, critical to understanding the dynamics of famine. In Christian communities, a network of monasteries and ecclesiastical institutions played the role of government, coordinating economic activity and providing social protection to the destitute. Without a centralized authority capable of guaranteeing the import of grain or its sale at set prices, Lebanon’s food market lacked the coordination required to avert famine during WWI. Despite the church’s substantial

political and social influence, perhaps the most powerful political force in Beirut and Mount Lebanon was a merchant class that succeeded in co-opting the apparatus of the state for its own profit. A small clique of the most powerful Beiruti merchants monopolized the flow of grain into Beirut and Mount Lebanon, decisively undermining efforts at systematic relief.

Lastly, a detailed assessment of Lebanon’s political, economic, and ecological position vis-à-vis France is key to any full account of the famine and its consequences. France had long fashioned itself as the protector of Lebanon’s Christians. The nineteenth-century silk boom had deepened economic relations between France and Lebanon, reliant as the latter was on the export of silk (and the import of grain) through the port of Beirut, rendering Lebanon particularly susceptible to France’s wartime blockade. Despite substantial pressure from the U.S. government and the Lebanese diaspora, France declined to allow a relief mission that might have ameliorated the famine, hoping that starvation would undermine Ottoman authority and ease the postwar imposition of the French colonial project. That plan worked. France, perhaps as recompense to its erstwhile Lebanese proxies, declared Lebanon’s status as independent from the rest of Syria with triple the territory of the Ottoman province of Mount Lebanon in September 1920. The grain-producing hinterlands added to Mount Lebanon were meant to ensure that the Lebanese would have sufficient access to food from within their new national borders. They were to be a bulwark against another famine. The food crisis facilitated the realization of the French colonial project in Lebanon by undermining Ottoman authority and allowing France to pose as Lebanon’s savior.
LEBANON’S WORLD WAR I IN SCHOLARSHIP AND HISTORICAL MEMORY

Rifaat Bek: “You’ve committed treason against the [Ottoman] State [al-dawla al-‘aliyya].

Abu Ahmad: “We’re the State now […] Go back to Anatolia!”

Rifaat Bek: “Wherever we are is Anatolia!”

Abu Ahmad: “Wherever you are is hunger, destruction, and oppression.”

-Safar Barlik (film)

The famine, it will be remembered, was due to a variety of causes; but behind those causes there lay a deliberate motive that was vindictive. On instructions from Jemal Pasha, facilities for the purchase of corn were granted or withheld on political grounds. In the Lebanon where whole sections of the population were known to be disaffected and were suspected of being in sympathy, if not in active league, with the Allies, the discrimination was applied wholesale and with a dastardly indifference to its consequences.

The effects of these visitations were only too visible when the British forces entered Bairut, and a tribute is owed them for the speed and efficacy with which they distributed food and clothing from their own stores of supplies. The crews of the French destroyers who had entered Bairut harbour on the eve of the arrival of the British were equally helpful. Still more creditable were the efforts made in the months that followed, to provide necessities on a larger scale to the destitute population in the inland districts, when French, British and American relief agencies sprang up, that vied with each other in a humane and honourable competition.

-George Antonius, The Arab Awakening (1938)

Writing in one of Arab nationalism’s seminal tracts, George Antonius allowed that Lebanon’s World War I famine stemmed from a variety of causes, including unkind weather and locusts. In the same analysis, however, Antonius charged that Arab-speaking populations in general and the Lebanese in particular suffered from hunger because of a deliberate Ottoman plan to starve them as punishment for their disloyalty.12

World War I was a crucial watershed in the development of Arab national consciousness(es). The experience of the war seemed to corroborate the accusation that Ottoman rule represented a legacy of oppression and economic stagnation. Internal and

external critics had consistently charged that Ottoman governance was inept and violently oppressive toward its native Christian populations. An extermination thesis charging the Ottoman regime with having intentionally starved the Lebanese population amplified that narrative after the war. The French colonial authorities encouraged this interpretation but it outlasted them and their colonial project in the Middle East. Its persistence testifies to its narrative clarity as well its usefulness for the interests of a particular class of economic and political elites. The narrative depicted in popular media, largely unchallenged in scholarly treatments for the past one hundred years, maintained that a clash between Lebanese and Turkish nationalism animated the events of the war and caused the famine. The culmination of that conflict, the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the Arab provinces, facilitated the realization of a Lebanese nationalist agenda. The “backward” Ottoman past would become the central foil for a progressive, national future. That narrative rested on a particular understanding of World War I as a battle of Lebanese nationalism against an Ottoman regime keen on destroying the Lebanese bid for freedom and prosperity.

That nationalist narrative of World War I has gone largely unchallenged by scholars. In recent decades, predominant scholarly paradigms in Middle East history have avoided answering with “what really happened” sorts of research questions, thereby ceding discussions of the war’s events to nationalist historians and popular media. As will be seen below, however, scholars have continued to see the war as a decisive moment of rupture with the past. In that sense, there is a precise symmetry in the way diverse scholars have viewed the war, despite widely variable scholarly orientations. Historians working a traditional mode have noted the political salience of the war for the creation of
the Middle East’s nations and nationalism while scholars influenced by contemporary discursive paradigms have highlighted ruptures produced by the war in the relationship between state and society, gender relations, and cultural understandings of food, among other matters. For both schools, World War I has been seen as the pivot on which the country’s modern history turned. Thus, even scholars not overtly invested in Lebanese or Arab nationalism have reproduced the nationalist periodization by casting World War I as the key transformative moment of the Lebanese history and Arab-speaking peoples more broadly. The next section will consider popular and scholarly narratives of Lebanon’s World War I experience in more detail.

As a train crosses a flowery meadow in the Lebanese mountains, tarbush-adorned resistance fighters lie prone, ready to spring an ambush. A barricade of felled trees and branches obstructs the train, which whistles and stops. Having successfully exaggerated their strength, a few rebels overwhelm the Ottoman troops riding on the train, who surrender despite their superior numbers. The rebels discover prisoners condemned to exile [safar barlik] in one of the train cars, release them, and lock the Ottoman troops in their place. While distributing captured arms, the resistance leader, “Abu Ahmad,” explains the growing food crisis in Mount Lebanon as an attempt by the Ottoman state

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“[…] to starve the [Lebanese] people, because when a population becomes hungry, the people stop thinking about resistance.”\textsuperscript{17} The above scene highlights the central theme of the 1967 Lebanese film, \textit{Safar Barlik: 1914}, a binary conflict between the Lebanese people and an oppressive Ottoman state. Still today, nearly a half century after its release, Lebanese primarily encounter the history of WWI by watching the film. Its narrative of events encapsulates the nationalist imaginary of World War I. The country’s most ubiquitous musician, the singer Fairuz, stars as its protagonist \textsuperscript{\textsuperscript{2}}Adla. \textit{Safar Barlik}’s longevity stems from its cinematic quality, in particular attractive shots of the Lebanese landscape, along with a transcendent musical score.

\textit{Safar Barlik}, similarly to the broader nationalist narrative on the war, blends fact and fiction. “By the order of the Ottoman government, we are to eat barley,” exclaims the \textit{mikārī} [muleteer] Asaad, after a detachment of Ottoman soldiers forced him to hand over sacks of grain loaded on his donkey cart. A small pile of grain had fallen on the ground and a young man attempts to scoop it up and put in his pocket. Soldiers check Asaad’s cart to be sure to have taken everything. The above scene played out beside a train station along the Beirut-Damascus line in 1914.\textsuperscript{18} The movie’s depiction of systematic requisition of grain in 1914, along with active interdiction of its transport, cannot be regarded as a total fabrication, as will be seen. Some grain may have been requisitioned in Mount Lebanon by Ottoman units after November 1914,\textsuperscript{19} but only in

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Bidhu yajau ḍī al-ahāli liāna annās̱s lamā bija’ū mā bi’ adā yifakirū bil-mu’āwama.} Assi Rahbani and Mansur Rahbani, \textit{Safar Barlik}, film, directed by Henry Barakat (Beirut: Phenicia Films, 1967).

\textsuperscript{18} \textit{Safar Barlik} begins with text introducing the film stating, “at the beginning of the 1914 war, the Ottoman state cut off grain [shipments] to Lebanon with the intention of starving its people and weakening their resistance while arresting and exiling the country’s young men, this period was called \textit{Safar Barlik} [the latter phrase was translated into Arabic as manfā, or exile].”

\textsuperscript{19} Antun Yammine’s account suggests that the first Ottoman units to occupy the country in November 1914 requisitioned grain. See his \textit{Lubnān fil-harb}, 15. Ottoman troops did occupy some monasteries and
isolated cases. Requisitions in Lebanon did not cause the famine, but levees on grain in the Syrian interior did contribute to the malfunctioning of the regional grain market.  

Adla’s search for her fiancée, Abdu, who was conscripted into a labor battalion while sitting at a café popular with muleteers, accurately represents the new roles and mobility taken on by women during the war in the absence of men who had left in search of food or work. The film also accurately portrays the difficulty encountered by muleteers, who formed the backbone of Lebanon’s internal transport network, in moving grain to the mountain and within in it.²⁰ The portrayal of Turkish-speaking Ottoman soldiers forcing muleteers to fell timber alludes to the substantial deforestation that happened during the war, as well as the conscription of Lebanese into labor battalions (but not the Ottoman Army).

What the film’s careful attention to historical aspects of the war reveals is that its writers, brothers Assi and Mansour Rahbani, had researched the war in some detail. Their reading would not have revealed evidence of an armed rebellion but rather the more salient reality of Lebanese cooperation with the Ottoman regime. In turn, Safar Barlik implicitly grapples with the uncomfortable reality that among the Ottoman troops shown to be oppressing the people were native Lebanese. That fact could easily disrupt the binary of Turkish versus Lebanese on which the nationalist narrative relies. The one sympathetic figure among the Ottoman officers depicted in the film, Sulayman Effendi, referred to as “a son of [our] country [ibn al-biläd]” by Adla’s aunt. Sulayman waits

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requisition their draft animals, funds, and productive agricultural lands from the monks. Dayr Mar Ashay’a was one of those monasteries according to Emmanuel Ba’abdati to Patriarch, 3 March 1915, Huwayyik 115/301, Archives of the Maronite Patriarchate, Bkikri, Lebanon (Bkikri).

²⁰ Brother Yusuf al-Sayigh’s register notes that muleteers refused to move grain through the Kisrawani town of Raifun in July 1915, fearful of the sukhra, or corvée. Al-Sayigh, “24 July October 1915,” Sijil al-Yawmiyyat, Harissa. Later in the war, transportation of grain with draft animals became even more difficult, in the face of widespread Army conscription see Al-Sayigh, “February 1917,” Sijil al-Yawmiyyat, Harissa.
outside while his detachment searches the women’s house, and ‘Adla’s aunt taunts his mixed loyalties, exhorting him to “go toss the house with them [rūh kāsir al-bayt ma‘hum],” the sounds of destruction emanating from the interior. In the film’s dramatic finale, Sulayman helps the villagers circumvent the patrols tasked blockading grain from entering the village. Rifaat Bek, the troops’ commander, kills Sulayman Effendi when he realizes that he collaborated with Abu Ahmad to furnish the town with grain.\(^{21}\) The village’s elected mukhtar, played by well-known musician Nasri Shams al-Din, abets the resistance fighters in secret, but had to “remain above suspicion,” [lāzim yadul fawq al-shubha] for fear of reprisals from Rifaat Bek. The latter’s intelligence service has nevertheless implicated the mukhtar in “inciting the people against [Ottoman rule]” and calling for independence.

A plausible reading of Sulayman Effendi and the mukhtar’s narrative function suggests an attempt to reconcile widespread local collaboration with the wartime Ottoman regime. Lebanese acquiescence to Ottoman rule was only a mirage, according to Safar Barlik, obscuring a nationalist undercurrent of concerted opposition against Ottoman rule. Abu Ahmad’s fictional rebellion replaces the painful history of collaboration with masculine heroism embodied by armed resistance. The absence of any significant armed opposition to Ottoman rule appears to undermine claims of a fundamental antagonism between the Lebanese populace and Ottoman authorities.

Safar Barlik’s invention of a resistance movement parallels a similar tradition in printed texts. One of the most influential novels in the Lebanese canon, Al-Raghif (1939)
by Yusuf Tawfiq ‘Awwad, set during the war, features a secret resistance cell, comprised of men and women, bent on combatting the oppressive Ottoman Army. The protagonist, Sami ‘Asim finds himself in front of the military tribunal at ‘Alayh where he boldly defies the judge’s taunts, declaring, “We are Arabs, we are calling out for freedom and independence.” The judge responds to Sami, declaring his intention to, “starve you all to death, [just as] you said we will, starve you to death.” The “we” in the judge’s threat clearly intended “the Turks,” confronted by Sami’s militant nationalist movement. Many Beirutis and Lebanese did end up in front of the military tribunal, thirty-three of whom were executed for their membership in secret societies, or for having corresponded with Entente powers. Other members of the elite class faced deportation at the war’s outset. Al-Raghif thus depicts real political oppression that happened during the war, but the crimes of those who were executed never reached open rebellion. Moreover, it is certain that no judge uttered such a direct explanation for the famine. The nationalist narrative benefits from no such explicit evidence.

On the one hand, the retrospective presentation of World War I in the Lebanese historical consciousness appears to be so far from reality that it could only have been an invention in retrospect, or by outside powers with an agenda. The Lebanese nationalist and French colonial accounts of World War I evince a striking similarity. In fact, they are fundamentally indistinguishable. Already during the war, the French government adopted the extermination thesis as its official interpretation of the food crisis. In May 1916, French intelligence reported a smoking gun linking the Ottoman Administration to an intentional plan for starvation, spoken by no less a figure than the Ottoman Minister of

War, Enver Pasha: “The Ottoman government cannot gain its liberty and honor until having cleansed the Turkish Empire of Armenians and Lebanese. We destroyed the Armenians with the sword, we will destroy the Lebanese with hunger.” News of Enver’s pronouncement, reportedly made on a trip to Mount Lebanon, derived from intelligence gathered by a local agent disguised as a “Muslim priest [sic].” The latter only spoke French “with difficulty,” implying some loss of clarity in translation with his handler, an officer attached to the intelligence service of the French 3rd fleet [Service des Renseignements de la 3º Escadre]. The same French naval units gathering the “intelligence” which produced the apocryphal quotation attributed to Enver, were at the time primarily engaged in enforcing the blockade which prevented the arrival of foodstuffs to Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Was the extermination/blockade thesis designed to justify to themselves, or to others, that they were not responsible for the death of their erstwhile Lebanese allies? That the French imperialist organ l’Asie Française saw fit in 1922 to accuse the Ottomans of having conducted the naval blockade, in a blatant fabrication, suggests that French diplomats sensed the need to obfuscate their role in the famine.

In the war’s aftermath, the contribution of the French blockade to food scarcity was an uncomfortable reality for the colonial administration and its local allies. Equally, many leading Lebanese families had taken advantage of the food crisis to enrich themselves through hoarding, speculation, and corruption. Those families hoped their

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24 "Lebanon was thus blockaded from all sides. No more provisions by the sea that was patrolled by the Turk-Kraut [sic. "Turco-boche"] submarines [...],” in L’Asie Française, "La Famine du Liban: et l'Assistance Française aux Libanais Pendant la Grande Guerre (1915-1919)," (February 1922) 4.
complicity in mass starvation would be quickly forgotten. Leading ecclesiastical authorities, and especially the Maronite Patriarch, had coordinated with the “oppressive,” Ottoman regime. An ideological ally of French colonialism, the institution of the Patriarchate likewise had a vested interest in concealing its wartime relationship with the Ottoman regime. Church institutions had also purchased land during the war from desperate families at low prices. Thus, the most influential political forces in post-war Lebanon disseminated a narrative about World War I wherein its “natural” causes, unkind climate and locusts, along with Ottoman policy (conscription and corvée labor, war requisition, currency devaluation, [Ottoman] official inefficiency), resulted in the death of one in three Lebanese. Blaming a collapsed state and natural disaster was a happier alternative than accepting their own responsibility and, in its simplicity, conjured a more easily communicated explanation for the famine’s causes than the complex reality of what had transpired. The most influential political forces in Lebanon, the Maronite Church, elite capitalists, and French colonial authorities had a vested interest in concealing the history of the war in order to justify their position after it.

Until today, that interpretation has remained broadly persuasive for historians with nationalist political commitments, such as Rashid Khalidi. He saw the “blockade” of foodstuffs as collective punishment for the perceived disloyalty of the Arab populations: “[…] having to their own satisfaction proven […] the untrustworthiness of Arabs in general, the Ottoman authorities under the direction of the vindictive Fourth Army commander, Cemal Pasha, proceeded to punish the general population […] In the case

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25 Cemal Pasha (1872-1922), wartime governor of the Syrian provinces, has served as the pantomime villain of the nationalist narrative. Still today, the epithet of “butcher [al-saffāḥ]” is readily associated with his name by the Lebanese and other Levantine populations. Cemal’s association with violence does not
of the Mount Lebanon region, these exactions extended to a blockade to prevent food from reaching the area.”

Lebanese historian Christian Taoutel, writing in 2015 with Jesuit Father Pierre Wittouck, referred to “an Ottoman political calculation to […] to weaken Christians in general and Lebanese in particular by starving them [en les affamant] instead of massacre as in Armenia.”

The Lebanese nationalist narrative mirrors, albeit inversely, the Kemalist version of events. In both, wartime civilian suffering resulted from political conflict between opposing nationalisms. Stanford Shaw and Edward Erickson, U.S. scholars committed to a Turkish nationalist view of history, have emphasized the inherent disloyalty of Ottoman Christian populations, charging that they planned to revolt against Ottoman rule with foreign support and, by implication, deserved whatever tragedies befell them. According to Shaw, “the hostility of Mount Lebanon’s Christians […] forced Cemal Pasha to modify his original promises in Lebanon.”

Shaw has described a systematic Lebanese resistance movement supplied by the French navy. For them, internal events in the

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26 Rashid Khalidi, “The Arab Experience of the War,” in Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced, eds. Hugh Cecil and Peter Liddle (London: Cooper, 1996), 646. Khalidi then qualifies his claim, misdating the start of the famine: “To what degree such Ottoman measures were responsible for, or contributed to, the famine which followed in 1917 and 1918 is probably impossible to discern at this remove in time. The famine has certainly gone down in popular memory as having been caused by ‘Turkish’ actions.”


28 Stanford Shaw, Ottoman Empire in WWI, vol. 2 (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2008), 1684. Erickson characterizes the non-Turkish inhabitants of the Empire as disloyal in Ordered to Die: a History of the Ottoman Army in the First World War (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001), 15. This flawed interpretation emerged soon after the war, as reflected in Yalman Emin’s volume on the Ottoman Empire in WWI, which only counts the “Turkish” inhabitants as loyal: “‘From the viewpoint of war resources, nine or ten million Turks must be held to be the only willing bearers of the military burden. The rest of the population was mainly a hostile element which did not regard its destiny as the same as that of the Empire.” Ahmed Emin Yalman, Turkey in the World War (New Haven: Yale University Press), 79.

29 Stanford Shaw alleged that: “[…] arms, ammunition, and money provided by […] French ships [were] the main support for the increasingly violent insurgent activities mounted by Arab Christians […] during the winter and spring of 1914 and January 1915. Shaw, Ottoman Empire in WWI, vol. 2, 1687.
Ottoman Empire obeyed the logic of a clash between a centralizing Turkish state and the separatist nationalisms opposed to it. That view seeks to absolve the Ottoman wartime regime of the mass suffering among the ranks of minority populations. In particular, these historians have seen the destruction of Anatolia’s Armenian population as the consequence of a “civil war” between Turks and Armenians, citing isolated cases of insurgency as evidence that Armenians represented a coherent nation, wholly disloyal to the Ottoman cause in World War I. Although the experience of Lebanese (and Arabs more broadly) occupies much less space in the Kemalist historical imaginary, scholars such as Stanford Shaw have invoked the same paradigm of a disloyal population, insurgency, and counterinsurgency to account for excess mortality among the civilian population during the war.

While some Lebanese historians have done their utmost\(^3\) to uncover an organized rebellion as portrayed in the film *Safar Barlik*, Lebanese patriots only organized attacks against the Ottoman Army in novels and movies produced in retrospect. No significant armed resistance took place in Mount Lebanon, although some Lebanese exiles participated with Entente intelligence services in limited sabotage.\(^3\) For the Armenian question, the denialist paradigm developed by Lewis, Shaw, and more recently Erickson, has been totally discredited. For Lebanon, however, the “extermination thesis” and the WWI famine have not received enough scholarly attention to address core historical


questions. While one can easily brush aside some aspects of the nationalist narrative, such as the existence of an armed resistance movement, the basic outlines of the war’s political history remain obscure. What was the policy of the Ottoman regime toward the Lebanese during the war? Were they, like the Christian populations of Anatolia targeted for extermination?

   The answers to those questions are by no means clear in the extant scholarship. The most exhaustive study of the political events of the war to date remains Nicholas Ajay’s dissertation, which he defended in Georgetown University’s history department in 1972.32 Relevant archives remained generally closed during his research stint in the 1960s, so Ajay read Arab and English language memoirs from the period, collected journals and correspondence from private family collections. In 1964 and 1965, he also conducted interviews with thirty individuals who had managed to witness the events of the war and survive the half-century which followed the war. Ajay, despite some evidence of a commitment to the Lebanese nationalist version of events, refuses to conclude that the Ottoman government had intentionally caused the famine.

   A considerable body of opinion in Lebanon has always believed that the Turkish government and Jamal Pasha in particular established a land blockade around Lebanon in order to prevent the supplying of vitally-needed grain supplies from the Syrian interior. It is claimed, furthermore, that the sole intention of this policy was to decimate the people of Lebanon by starvation. The history of what happened to the Armenians reinforced this belief. While the available evidence is still inconclusive, there is good reason to believe that the hardships which resulted from the Turkish control of the movement of supplies were not due solely to any single factor, but rather to a combination of several of them. First, the Turkish government was sincerely trying to institute a policy to control the movements of food supplies in order to meet both military and civilian needs. Vital to this policy was the restriction of movement from one administrative jurisdiction to another. By trying to ensure an equal distribution of the available food supplies, the authorities hoped to provide a minimum ration

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for all, while simultaneously discouraging hoarding and profiteering. Secondly, the whole economic and political machinery of the civil and military authorities was almost totally inept in dealing with the situation. Corruption and inefficiency on the political level combined with inadequacy of economic planning and means to transport and resulted in a gross mismanagement of the whole food supply program. It is not improbable that, had the authorities been able to overcome these problems, the available food supplies in Syria would have been able to meet the minimum needs of the people and the military in Syria and Lebanon. And thirdly, there seems little doubt that the Turkish authorities were using food controls as a limited political weapon to suppress the people, even to the point of causing serious hardship. While it is difficult to determine the extent to which they intended to go, it seems very likely that they did not want the conditions to get as bad as they did. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the political and social estrangement between the Lebanese and the Turks hindered the development of a true spirit of cooperation and good will which were vital to overcoming these problems.  

Ajay’s broad engagement with relevant published sources did not corroborate the widely held view that Cemal and the Ottoman administration had intended to cause the famine. Food did become a political weapon, according to him, but mass famine to punish the Lebanese had not been foreseen by “Turkish authorities.” While raising doubts about the main content of the nationalist narrative, Ajay retained its form. The key units of his analysis remained Lebanese and Turks, too set in their national groupings to effectively coordinate the transport of food with one another. Despite doubts raised by Ajay and others  as to the veracity of the “extermination thesis,” some of its key claims have remained unchallenged in the work of contemporary scholars.

Ajay did not neglect Lebanon’s reliance on the export of silk and the import of cash remittances from Lebanese of the mahjar as drivers of famine. That said, however, he did not dwell on structural factors, focusing instead on an exhaustive account of what happened during the four years of the war. In two recent dissertations, Melanie Tanielian

and Aaron Tylor Brand have also taken the interval between 1914 and 1918 as their main unit of analysis. Both authors distinguish their studies from previous scholarly offerings in that they take the civilian experience of the war as their main unit of analysis. Brand argues that climate anomalies during the war, especially a dearth of rainfall, decisively contributed to the famine. Tanielian, like Ajay, made reference to economic transformations of the nineteenth century, but focused nearly all of her analysis on the events of the war itself. Each of the above dissertations takes the experience of the Lebanese people as its primary unit of inquiry.

A focus in the scholarship on the interval of the war has enhanced the effect that the war was a decisive moment transforming diverse aspects of Lebanese existence. In so many ways, the ruptures produced by WWI are the most readily apparent aspect of the war’s legacy: the demise of the Ottoman Empire after 400 years, the imposition of French colonialism in its place, and the creation of Lebanon in its contemporary borders (three times larger than the Ottoman province) in 1920. In turn, contemporary scholarship on World War I has emphasized how the war set in motion a series of novel cultural and political trajectories. Elizabeth Thompson, most prominently, has emphasized how

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35 Aaron Tylor Brand, "Lives Darkened by Calamity: Enduring the Famine of World War I in Lebanon and Western Syria," (PhD dissertation, American University of Beirut, 2014), 34.
36 Tanielian, “The War of Famine.”
37 Recently, scholars working on diverse topics have looked to Foucauldian paradigms of “governmentality” to show how the war altered Lebanon’s historical trajectory. Melanie Tanielian has argued that the role of Beirut’s municipality became “a strategic sight for showcasing the competence of local leaders and convincing the city’s inhabitants of the possibility of increased autonomy from the Ottoman central government.” Melanie Tanielian, “Feeding the City: The Beirut Municipality and the Politics of Food During World War I,” International Journal of Middle East Studies 46, no. 04 (2014): 739. Talha Cicek has seen Cemal Pasha’s governorate in the Syrian provinces (including Lebanon) has an attempt to render the territory under his control more governable. Talha Çiçek, War and State Formation, 16. Like Tanielian and Cicek, Taner Akçam, in his discussion of the Armenian genocide, looks to Foucault’s governmentality to describe the Committee of Union and Progress’ incentive to perpetrate genocide against its Armenian population. Taner Akçam, The Young Turks' Crime against Humanity: the Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire (Princeton University Press, 2012), Introduction.
famine in Lebanon during the war engendered a crisis of “paternity,” then deepened by the imposition of French colonialism, indelibly shaping the relationship between state and society in Lebanon and Syria.\(^{38}\) Her focus on the formative impact of the French Mandate is characteristic of an emergent body of literature on the Levant.\(^{39}\) That paradigm, despite its innovations, retained its main units of analysis from earlier historiographical schools: the national units of colonized and colonizer, French and Lebanese, Orient and Occident.

Scholarly work on Lebanon (and the Middle East more generally) has largely avoided questions of class. National groupings, and not subsets thereof, have proven the most resilient units inquiry for scholars. The proclivity for seeing the history of the Middle East as the expression of interaction between national and civilizational units has survived dramatic paradigm shifts in the discipline. Even in deconstructing the work of the Orientalists that had relied on a binary distinction between “east” and “west,” those who followed Edward Said’s lead in *Orientalism* maintained those very units in their critique. In turn, scholars largely neglected the study of social relations internal to Arab societies.\(^{40}\) Those studies that consider class as a principal variable have located substantial continuities between the late Ottoman and Mandate period.\(^{41}\) Partly because of


its inattention social relations, recent scholarship has continued to seize on the war as a point of rupture.

This brief assessment of Lebanon’s World War I in historical memory has located class as a key blind spot in scholarly and popular narratives of the war. For one hundred years, elite interests shaped understandings of the war’s history by deflecting blame for the famine toward the Ottoman regime. Insufficient attention to social relations has hampered scholarship on the Middle East more broadly. Thus, any attempt to chronicle the social history of the war will be doubly worthwhile. Finally, because the basic outline of the war’s history remains unclear, a fresh look at the war’s history based on newly-available archival material is likely to reach novel conclusions.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF LEBANON: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Although no historian has published work under the moniker “environmental history” of Lebanon, scholars have long been aware of the importance of human interaction with the non-human environment. Patriarch Istifan al-Duwayhi’s seventeenth-century chronicle *Tarikh al-Azmina* is replete with references to the weather, locusts, and famine.\(^{42}\) The forty-odd references to Lebanon and its cedar trees in the Bible piqued the interest of Europeans whose eighteenth and nineteenth-century travel accounts prominently feature descriptions of the Lebanese environment.\(^{43}\) For most of the twentieth century the environment continued to be a core interest to scholars.\(^{44}\)

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\(^{44}\) A collection of “scientific and social investigations” published during World War I under the title *Lubnan* [Lebanon] devoted 13 of its 26 articles to questions of resources, natural history, geography, and
In its inattention to environmental questions, the most recent generation of scholarship has been an exception. The material conditions of life in the Middle East faded from the agenda of scholars working in the U.S. and European academy, with few notable outliers. Engaged in the important task of confronting the cultural legacies of European imperialism, historians largely neglected the study of the region’s diverse economies and ecologies. In turn, the poverty of information on fundamental questions of environmental history is striking. Estimates for the population of the Ottoman province of Mount Lebanon in 1914 vary enormously (between 300,000 and 800,000 inhabitants) meanwhile guesses as to the land area devoted to commercial agriculture evince similar ambiguity.

The environmental history of the twentieth-century Lebanon remains to be written. The previous generation of scholars focused their attention on the period between antiquity and the nineteenth century. In assessing the century’s seminal environmental catastrophe, the famine of World War I, this dissertation offers a step towards reconstructing a neglected dimension of the Lebanese experience. Below, I will briefly


outline Lebanon’s nineteenth-century environmental history drawing on the work of historians Dominique Chevallier and Akram Khater. Chevallier wrote in the tradition of the Annales school in the 1970s, while Khater’s work stands as a rare contribution to Lebanon’s social history from the 1990s and 2000s.

Of the mountain chains bordering Syria’s Mediterranean coast, Mount Lebanon rises the highest (its tallest peak reaches 3,088 meters). Those mountains catch plentiful rains (as much as 1,500 millimeters per year), nearly all of which fall between October and April. Lebanon is also blessed with abundant groundwater and its springs are “numerous, abundant, and well distributed.” Mount Lebanon’s geographical peculiarity within a drier region fostered an early proclivity for exchange. In particular, its human inhabitants have long relied on their comparative advantage in growing timber and tree crops to trade with surrounding regions. The Bible attests at length to the quality of Lebanese timber, indicating sustained patterns of exchange between Palestine and Mount Lebanon. In a much later period, Islamic scholars refer to the diversity of plant life in Lebanon’s mountains. The geographer al-Dimashqi, writing around the year 1300 CE, counted ninety useful plants that grew in the foothills and could be had at “no cost.” He also commented on the “abundant” fruit trees that yielded almonds and prunes, which—unlike

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46 Lebanon’s mountains rise over 3,000 meters, catching snow that melts in the spring to recharge its vast Karst systems. One of which, the Zarqā’, contains a 27 billion m³ capacity. Michel Bakalowicz, Massaad El Hakim, and Ahmad El-Hajj, "Karst Groundwater Resources in the Countries of the Eastern Mediterranean: The Example of Lebanon," Environmental Geology 54, no. 3 (2008): 597.


the above plants—must have been produced for exchange.\textsuperscript{49} Those tree crops were likely exchanged for grain, as Lebanon’s rocky topography made it a suboptimal producer of grain compared to surrounding regions, notably Egypt, Palestine, and the plains of the Syrian interior.

In 1652, a European missionary reported seeing “little grain” in Mount Lebanon, noting that Palestine furnished its wheat supply, and Egypt its rice.\textsuperscript{50} During a period of substantial population growth over the long eighteenth century, Lebanon became more specialized in the production of commercial crops, especially silk and olives, and therefore even more dependent on imports of grain.\textsuperscript{51} Even before Mount Lebanon was producing for an industrial capitalist market, disruptions in trade wreaked havoc on its subsistence capabilities, as in 1812 when European conflict caused the Levant trade to tumble and sparked a famine in Mount Lebanon. The persistent grain deficit also undermined bids for political autonomy. For example, the pashas of Acre and Damascus, in the early nineteenth century, could easily pressure Amir Bashir II\textsuperscript{52} into paying taxes by cutting off the supply of grain to Mount Lebanon. Ibrahim Pasha\textsuperscript{53} exploited the same vulnerability when the inhabitants of the Mountain rose against Egyptian rule in 1840.\textsuperscript{54}

Despite the upheavals entailed by the Egyptian invasion, Lebanon’s commercial economy and its relatively salubrious disease environment supported a burgeoning

\textsuperscript{50}Chevallier, \textit{La société du Mont Liban}, 43.
\textsuperscript{51}Despite the primacy of exchange, Lebanon’s rural economy was not primarily driven by cash in the early nineteenth century. Peasants bartered their silk, olives, or almonds at market in exchange for foodstuffs and other goods. Akram Khater, “She Married Silk: A Rewriting of Peasant History in 19th Century Mount Lebanon,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Berkeley, 1993), 38-39.
\textsuperscript{52}Bashir Shihab II (1767-1850) administered the southern portion of Mount Lebanon between 1789 and 1840.
\textsuperscript{53}Ibrahim Pasha (1789-1848) led his father Mehmet Ali’s armies in their invasion and occupation of Syria which lasted between 1831 and 1841.
\textsuperscript{54}Chevallier, \textit{La société du Mont Liban}, 44.
population. Over the course of the 1830s, the population of Mount Lebanon reached approximately 200,000 inhabitants with a population density of 250 inhabitants per square kilometer of cultivatable land. Between 1840 and the outbreak of World War I, the cultivated area barely expanded meanwhile the population more than doubled to 450,000.\textsuperscript{55} Just as Mount Lebanon’s population overshot its carrying capacity, a solution to demographic saturation appeared in the form of steamer traffic to the port at Beirut. In 1824, mulberry trees covered less than 10 percent of Mount Lebanon.\textsuperscript{56} Before the inception of regularly scheduled steamer traffic to the port at Beirut in 1835, Lebanese silk had been too expensive for European markets but no longer. The steamer “liberated” sea traffic from the contingencies of weather and season, reduced travel time, and substantially increased shipping capacity thereby bringing Lebanon’s soil much closer to European markets as the industrial revolution was increasing demand for raw materials in Europe.\textsuperscript{57} Silk export to Europe offered rural Lebanese a way to increase the carrying capacity of their human ecosystem in the absence of a land frontier.

The small amount of capital available in the Ottoman Empire limited the potential for economic integration with Europe, however. Trade imbalance quickly relieved the Ottoman population of its currency reserves. Only through increased local production could trade between Europe and Lebanon fill the new capacity created by steamer technology. Lebanese silk cultivation and the development of silk factories, helped inject capital into the Syria and thereby created a market for French goods. Meanwhile an

\textsuperscript{55} Chevallier, \textit{La société du Mont Liban}, 41-49.
\textsuperscript{56} Khater, \textit{She Married Silk}, 39.
\textsuperscript{57} The English first established regular steamer traffic to Beirut in 1835, on the Liverpool-Alexandria-Beirut line. A regular Marseille-Beirut line opened ten years later in 1845. Chevallier, \textit{La société du Mont Liban}, 183-184, 225.
expansion of banking activity helped increase the mobility of capital.\(^{58}\) In turn, a new class of merchant was born in Beirut and Mount Lebanon at the expense of an increasingly indebted landlord class in rural areas. The Bayhums, Asfars, and Sursocks—prominent Lebanese families—made their fortunes lending money and investing in silk factories. By the turn of the twentieth century, those families also accumulated substantial political influence to match their political sway (see chapter 3).

Rather than see Lebanon’s peasants as caricatured victims of global capitalism, Akram Khater has persuasively argued that Christian fellahin in Mount Lebanon adopted the production of silk on their own terms.\(^{59}\) Silk offered the opportunity to improve their lot and peasant families formed the ideal unit for producing silk worms. Mulberry leaves wilt easily, and so the care of silk worms must occur adjacent to the orchards. Lebanon’s soil and elevation were well suited to the production of mulberry trees, which were never a monoculture in Mount Lebanon. Peasants intercropped beans, grains, and even tobacco with mulberry trees before World War I.\(^{60}\) The silk industry gave peasants a chance for social mobility and increasing autonomy from the traditional landholding class in Mount Lebanon. Women entered silk factories and endured tough working conditions but also gained more autonomy in the household.\(^{61}\)

By the early 1880s, the silk boom had turned to bust along with the fortunes of Lebanon’s fellahin. “As French industrialists began to buy their cocoons from China and Japan, and as Lebanese silk factories went out of business, those prices began an irreversible and steep downward trend. Thus, the price hovered around 22 piastres per

\(^{58}\) Chevallier, *La société du Mont Liban*, 184-186, 190-191, 199.


\(^{61}\) Khater, *Inventing Home.*
oka through the 1880s, and after the 1890s it fell to the 19 piastres mark, from which it never recovered."\(^{62}\) The main avenue Lebanon’s rural working class found to maintain its prosperity was emigration to the Americas. From that point on, the Lebanese would become increasingly reliant on the flow of capital from the *mahjar*. The 1915-1918 famine would reveal the extent of that reliance, as well as the environmental degradation caused by the silk boom. As will be seen, the water table had suffered, along with Lebanon’s timber and the fertility of its soil. By 1880, Lebanon produced less than twenty percent of its grain needs.\(^{63}\) Mount Lebanon, despite its rural character, had too large a population, and too much of its land area devoted to mulberry trees to subsist in the face of World War I’s interruption of commerce.

Tradition maintains that one in three Lebanese lost their lives during World War I.\(^{64}\) A lack of precise demographic data, for any period, complicates any study of Lebanese demography. The official Ottoman census of 1913 counted 414,800 inhabitants in Mount Lebanon, including 124,400 non-resident tax-paying immigrants.\(^{65}\) Those official figures, when compared to the post-war population of Mount Lebanon indicate that mortality during the war may have been exaggerated. Around 302,000 souls remained in the territory of—what had been—the Ottoman province of Mount Lebanon in 1919,\(^{66}\) approximately the same number as indicated by the official statistics. Overwhelming qualitative evidence refutes that inference, however. A plausible estimate

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\(^{63}\) Based on the archive of the Administrative Council of Mount Lebanon, Asad Rustum calculated that in 1880 Mount Lebanon produced 387,000 *mudd* and imported an additional 1,600,000 *mudd*. Assuming a *mudd* to be 18 liters by volume, that would mean Lebanon imported 28.8 million liters of grain in 1880. Asad Rustum, *Lubnan fi Ṭāḥr al-Mutasarrifiyyah* [Lebanon During the Era of the Special District] (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 1973), 208-209.

\(^{64}\) Paul Noujaim [Bulus Nujaym], “La question du Liban: étude de politique économique et de statistique descriptive,” *La revue phénicienne* (Beirut), August 1919.


\(^{66}\) See Albert Naccache, “Notre avenir économique,” *La revue phénicienne* (Beirut), July 1919.
for the population of Mount Lebanon in 1914 is 450,000 persons\textsuperscript{67} and archival studies on the demography of local areas substantiate a mortality rate of one in three.\textsuperscript{68} Therefore, it appears that 150,000 inhabitants of Mount Lebanon perished between 1915 and 1918. A mortality rate of one in three indicates that Lebanon’s World War I tragedy exceeded that of any other national territory in per capita terms.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1 details the war’s environmental history, with a special emphasis on fissures of class and gender in mediating experience of the war. It aims to illuminate not only the war, but more importantly the broader themes of Lebanon’s environmental history in the twentieth century. The demographic collapse among Lebanon’s rural working class undermined attempts to recapitalize Lebanon’s agricultural sector in the war’s aftermath.

Chapter 2 considers the international political dimensions of the famine, which remain obscure in the relevant scholarly literature. The Ottoman ruling clique, the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP), harbored suspicions about the Lebanese that proved the initial catalyst of scarcity. As the nationalist narrative charges, the CUP limited grain shipments to Beirut and Mount Lebanon beginning in August 1914. The Ottoman goal, however, was to discourage a rebellion, not cause a famine. Meanwhile, France refused to compromise its blockade to alleviate the starvation conditions

\textsuperscript{67} Ajay, “The War Years,” 432.
\textsuperscript{68} Between 11 February and 14 April 1918, two priests sent by the Maronite Patriarchate assessed the damage wrought by the famine in a region of the Shuf mountains which had 25,480 inhabitants before the war. From that region, they registered 8,938 dead during the war, indicating a wartime mortality rate of 35 percent. See Huwayyik 32/26, Archive of the Maronite Patriarchate, Bkirkì, Lebanon (Bkirkì). An undated manuscript detailing mortality in the region of Batrun noted 5,397 “war dead [\textit{mawta al-\-ḥarb}]” along with 3,571 individuals who had emigrated and 7,149 survivors—indicating a death rate of 34 percent. See Huwayyik 32/416, Bkirkì. The Patriarchate’s demographic tally indicates that that in 1913, Mount Lebanon contained 329,482 Christians and in 1918, 226,000 remained, a loss of 32 percent, Huwayyik 39/57, Bkirkì.
prevailing in Lebanon. In turn, as the post-war settlement took shape, Lebanese nationalists exploited the specter of French culpability for the famine and successfully lobbied for the creation of Greater Lebanon, distinct from the rest of Syria. The political dimensions of the famine offer an indispensable, but incomplete account of the famine.

Chapter 3 explores another aspect of the war’s class dimension by considering the culpability of Beirut’s merchant class in creating conditions for the famine. That class’s power was another salient consequence of the nineteenth-century silk boom. Merchants were able to use their wealth, before, during, and after the war to wield substantial influence over the state, and mold its activities for their own purposes.

Chapter 4 considers the role of the Church as a de facto governance organization in Mount Lebanon. Church institutions significantly enhanced their political and economic power as a consequence of Lebanon’s integration with the global economy, but also were responsible for providing social welfare. That dynamic continued during the war itself, as Church institutions could rely on their secure material position to purchase land but also became the main vehicle of relief in rural Lebanon. Chapter 5 highlights the plight of Armenian refugees during both conflicts attests to relative continuity of Lebanon’s disease environments between the late Ottoman and Mandate periods.

Despite the scale of Lebanon’s World War I tragedy, the event has been peripheral to understandings of the country’s modern history. By taking the human relationship with the environment, and social relations between humans, as my main units of analysis, I hope to show how the famine illuminates Lebanese history more broadly. I will not
primarily portray the famine as a transformational event that reshaped the country’s social, political, and ecological relations. Most striking, and least remarked upon by scholars, are the continuities my analysis suggests between the late Ottoman and Mandate periods.

Previously separated into two districts, the entirety of Mount Lebanon became a united, autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire in 1861. After that time, France and other “Great Powers” guaranteed the autonomy of Administrative Lebanon [mutasarrifīyat Jabal Lubnan] until the outbreak of World War I (when Ottoman authorities reasserted direct control). During that fifty-three year interval, Lebanon’s political affairs were subject to complex negotiations between local actors, the Ottoman and French government, and various European monarchies. After World War I, France established direct colonial control over an expanded Lebanon, including the coastal cities of Tripoli, Sidon, and Tyre, as well as the rural baskets of c‘Akkar, the Bekaa valley, and Jabal c‘Amil to the south. France administered Lebanon from October 1918 until 1941, when the Free French government renounced its League of Nations Mandate. The Lebanese republic gained formal independence in 1943, and French troops withdrew in 1946 (under pressure from the British who had occupied the country in June 1941). Most scholarly studies, including the most influential (and critical) cultural histories, tend to obey these politically determined temporal boundaries. This dissertation seeks to explore the benefits of considering historical trajectories that transcend them.

A few caveats are in order. The reader will have to indulge the project’s shifting geographical scope. In seeking to assess Mount Lebanon’s experience during World War I, one could not ignore its relationship with the city of Beirut. Despite being the capital of
a distinct province (that included Tripoli, Latakia, Nablus, and Haifa), Beirut was surrounded on all sides by Lebanese territory. Leila Fawaz has substantiated the depth of economic and social linkages between Beirut and Mount Lebanon that developed over the course of the nineteenth century. At the same time, Mount Lebanon became more tightly linked economically with the regions that would be added to the Ottoman province of Greater Lebanon, created in September 1920. In that sense, Lebanon’s new political borders are less arbitrary than they have sometimes been portrayed by scholars.

Lebanon forms part of the region of Syria and will be referred to as such in the dissertation. When they arrived in the United States, immigrants from Mount Lebanon often identified themselves as Syrian. I also use the distinction “Lebanese” for the late Ottoman period, however, because it appears in my Arabic, French, and Ottoman sources. Equally, this dissertation concerns Lebanon, but it is not about Lebanese people per se. Two of the war diaries that furnish its most critical source material were produced by men not born in Lebanon. Melkite Brother Yusuf al-Sayigh was born in Aleppo in 1878. Louis Cheikho, a Jesuit scholar based at St. Joseph University, was born in 1859 in the Anatolian town of Mardin. The final chapter puts the experience of Armenian refugees at the center of its analysis.

A unique set of archival resources inform this dissertation. Material from several private repositories in Lebanon, along with the archives of the Ottoman, French, British, and American empires furnish its documentary base. I hope to have engaged those sources rigorously and used them to contribute to human understanding of the history of Lebanon, the Middle East, and the globe.

CHAPTER 1

‘ALL THE POOR PEOPLE HAVE DIED’: FROM SILK TO STARVATION IN MOUNT LEBANON

This chapter aims to interpret Lebanon’s World War I famine based on the ecological, social, and gender relations constituted by Lebanon’s silk boom (1830-1914). Where other scholars have emphasized rupture, this analysis maintains that the famine is best understood with reference to the wartime intensification of processes already underway. Lebanon’s reliance on the export of silk engendered prosperity during the nineteenth century, but also catalyzed decades of demographic instability. Once commerce ground to a halt after the Ottoman entrance into the war in November 1914, that instability evolved into a demographic crisis that killed one in three Lebanese. The environmental impacts of decades of intensive silk production undercut the populace’s ability to produce food during the crisis. Mulberry trees dominated the most fertile land. Deforestation had decreased the recharge rate of aquifers. The social mechanisms developed to absorb the dislocations wrought by the silk boom faltered during the war. Migration was no longer possible, nor could the Lebanese receive remittances from their relatives in the Americas. Women were especially vulnerable in the latter regard. Silk production had created a dynamic economy, but with significant ecological and social vulnerabilities, exposed by the war.

The scholarly literature on the famine has highlighted a “laundry list”¹ of seemingly unrelated, proximate factors that contributed to the mass starvation in

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¹Zachary J. Foster recently contended that the “laundry list” of factors used to account for the famine was no longer tenable. Foster, "The 1915 Locust Attack in Syria and Palestine and its Role in the Famine During the First World War," Middle Eastern Studies 51, no. 3 (2015): 384.
Lebanon. A “noxious cocktail of causes,” rendered the famine “overdetermined” according to the standard account: “unusually snowy winters, locusts, conscription and corvée labor, war requisition, currency devaluation, [Ottoman] official inefficiency, the Entente blockade, hoarding, speculation, and corruption.”  

All of the these factors impacted the entire Syrian region, of which Mount Lebanon formed part, and therefore cannot provide a sufficient explanation for why famine began in Lebanon at least a year before anywhere else in the region. In taking the interval of the war (1914-1918) as the primary chronological unit of analysis, most studies have not been well placed to grasp the deeper sources of the famine and have not acknowledged cleavages within Lebanese society. Only with proper attention to Lebanon’s environmental history before the war can a full account of the famine’s causes and consequences be given.

What follows will contend that the prime mover of the wartime food crisis was the environmental, social, and economic inheritance of the rise of silk production in Mount Lebanon. Class and gender, in particular, mediated the nature and extent of the vulnerabilities produced by the silk boom. During the war, fellahin, more than financiers, suffered from the unavailability of capital, which became a lethal condition for many of their class and a testament to their lack of ecological autonomy and propensity

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4 Literally, those who plow. Here, fellah will be preferred to “peasant.” A substantial percentage of Lebanon’s fellahin owned land and the Arabic word carries a more positive connotation than its closest English equivalent.
for indebtedness. They were the first victims of the famine. Women survived at higher rates than men but endured gendered forms of hardship. Many were left to rear children and manage dwindling family finances in the absence of men who were in the Americas or had left to find work elsewhere in the Syrian provinces. Silk and migration had created opportunities for women to achieve new levels of material comfort and participation in the workforce but had also exposed them to new dangers stemming from the mobility and uncertainty of labor markets. In all of these ways, the food crisis of WWI functions as a window into Lebanon’s broader environmental and social history. It also played an inescapable role in shaping that history, by exacerbating a crisis that had been underway since falling prices plunged the silk economy, and Lebanese society, into crisis in the 1870s.

In salient ways, Mount Lebanon’s environmental history conformed to broader Mediterranean and global processes. Lebanon’s ecological vulnerability mirrored that of other Mediterranean mountain locales in that population growth and market integration had engendered substantial demographic instability by the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—a process John R. McNeill emphasized in his *Mountains of the Mediterranean* for diverse human ecologies across the basin. Jason Moore has shown that as global expansions of capitalism drew “cheap” resources and populations into its purview, ecology became so intertwined with economic and social relations that the distinction between nature and humanity was no longer meaningful. His analysis chimes with Lebanon’s experience: the carrying capacity of its human population had

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become hitched to the expansion and contraction of global capitalist markets. The international price of silk sustained Mount Lebanon’s human ecology along with the flow of remittances from the Americas, an unsteady equilibrium that World War I disrupted. This case study of Lebanon’s environmental history appears to confirm McNeill’s arguments about Mediterranean mountain ecologies and Moore’s characterization about global environmental history in the modern age.

On the other hand, in the late Ottoman context, Lebanon’s environmental history appears to have been quite peculiar. In particular, the scale of the Lebanese peasantry’s reliance on global markets distinguished it from the rural Ottoman populations of other locales, which kept a large amount of land in subsistence production. After Mount Lebanon, the Ottoman province of Adana devoted the least amount of its agricultural land to staple food crops: 64 percent, with a third of its production in commercial crops “such as cotton, sesame, tobacco, and opium.” On average, the Asian provinces of the Ottoman Empire only devoted 5 percent of cropped area to commercial crops. Lebanon appears to have been a significant outlier in that regard, with only 12 percent of its land area devoted to the production of staple grains, and the rest devoted to silk, olives, and tobacco.

The events of the war emphasized the contrast in the agricultural economy of Lebanon with surrounding regions. Even though the Ottoman Army carried out direct requisitions in the Syrian interior, conditions there remained better: the rural population could grow more than enough grain for its own consumption and have enough left over to sell to nearby cities. In Mount Lebanon, with so little land invested in subsistence crops

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7 Chris Gratien, “The Mountains are Ours: Ecology and Settlement in Late Ottoman and Early Republican Cilicia, 1856-1956,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Georgetown University, 2015), 227. For land use in Lebanon, see below.

8 My calculation based on Paul Jouplain [Nujaym], La question du Liban, étude d’histoire diplomatique et de droit international (Beirut: 1961[1908]), 495.
and a dearth of animal herds, the rural population could not feed itself once denied its sources of income and the ability to import foodstuffs, much less furnish Beirut with food. Death rates in Mount Lebanon exceeded one in three inhabitants (see introduction) and famine began in earnest in 1915. In other regions of Syria, the population withstood famine until 1917. Less than one in ten of the civilian population died during the war. Mount Lebanon’s tragedy was thus of a much greater magnitude than the rest of the Syria. Lebanon was prone to such a catastrophe, I will argue, because of its peculiarly intense reliance on flows of capital, grain, and humans. Lebanon’s environmental history was not unique in a Mediterranean or global context, but was eccentric in the Ottoman sphere.

THE ECOLOGY OF SILK

The Lebanese primarily inhabited rural areas and engaged in agriculture as their primary productive activity. Mulberry trees—not subsistence crops, in contrast to the situation in most Ottoman landscapes—dominated its best soils. Before 1830, Lebanon’s silk

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10 In February 1916, as famine threatened an increasingly broad swath of the population in Mount Lebanon, Aleppo’s Maronite community was trying to lobby Cemal Pasha’s administration to transport grain from the region around the city to Mount Lebanon to stem the tide of hunger. Mikhail Akhras (Maronite Bishop of Aleppo) to Patriarch, 22 February 1916, Huwayyik 32/32, Bkirki. The existence of a surplus of exportable grain in Aleppo province belies the possibility that famine had struck the Syrian interior at the time, or that food scarcity was eminently. Scarcity did impact Aleppo and Damascus in the last two years of the war, but mortality rates did not come close to those among Lebanese. Assuming the round death toll posited by Schilcher of 500,000 for the whole Syrian region that contained an approximate population of 4 million, the total death rate for the region was 12.5 %. However, if 150,000 of those deaths took place in Mount Lebanon and another 50,000 in Beirut, with a combined population of 600,000 then the remaining 300,000 famine deaths affected the rest of the 3.4 million inhabitants not resident in Mount Lebanon and Beirut, a mortality rate of no more than 9%. The above are my calculations based on Linda 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), 229; Zachary J. Foster, “The 1915 Locust Attack in Syria and Palestine and its Role in the Famine During the First World War,” Middle Eastern Studies 51, no. 3 (2015): 370, 385. For population and mortality in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, see introduction.
predominantly found markets in the Muslim Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{11} After the inception of steamer traffic to Beirut in the 1830s and in response to heightened European demand, Lebanese peasants embraced the care of silkworms, and the cultivation of mulberry trees on which they fed, as their main source of income. Silk quickly gave Lebanon one of the most heavily commercialized agricultural economies in the Ottoman Empire. By the time of World War I, mulberry trees covered as much as 31,500 out of a total of 80,000 cultivated hectares.\textsuperscript{12} Silk production became a potent form of social mobility, enabling Lebanese fellahin to reinvest in land and educate their children. Population density increased the incentive for Lebanese to crop their Mountain terraces intensively and to produce tree crops instead of staple grains. In 1840, Mount Lebanon’s population of approximately 200,000 individuals relied on no more than 80,000 hectares of arable land. At 250 inhabitants per square kilometer of agricultural land, the province was already experiencing population pressure in the mid-nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{13} Its population would more than double before WWI without any significant extension of the cultivated area (see introduction).

In turn, Mount Lebanon’s carrying capacity expanded along with the rising price of silk for most of the nineteenth century. Declining prices reversed that trend in the 1870s, thereby weakening the peasant class’s hold on its newfound prosperity. That

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Dominique Chevallier, \textit{La société du Mont Liban à l’époque de la révolution industrielle en Europe} (Paris: Librarie Orientaliste, 1981[1971]), 225.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Celal Bey, “Al-Ahwal al-Zira'iyya wa al-Tijariyya fi Jabal Lubnan [the Agricultural, Commercial and Economic Conditions of Mount Lebanon],” in Hakkı Bey, \textit{Lubnan: Mabahith Ilmiyya wa Ijtima'yya} [Lebanon: Scientific and Social Investigations] (Beirut: Dar Lahad Khatir 1993[1918], vol 2.86; Another contemporary estimate contradicted Celal’s calculations, maintaining that Mount Lebanon only possessed approximately 10,000 hectares of “good soil,” and that an additional 20,000 were planted “regardless of the poverty of its soil.” See Naqqash, “Nazara fi Halat Jabal Lubnan al-Iqtisadi [An Inquiry into Mount Lebanon’s Economic Situation],” Hakkı Bey, \textit{Lubnan}, 2:101. Naqqash’s estimate appears much too low.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Chevallier, \textit{La société du Mont Liban}, 43.
\end{itemize}
stagnation was both environmental and economic, as yields plummeted in response to declining soil fertility (see below). Migration to the Americas, which began in force from 1887 and peaked in 1913, presented a solution to more than 150,000 Lebanese who left for the Americas in hopes of sustaining the uncertain prosperity they had gained through silk cultivation. Emigration thus became a reliable safety valve to protect the citizenry from the “erratic” fortunes of the silk crop. In time, money sent from the Americas became Lebanon’s largest source of income. On the war’s eve, silk and remittances accounted for nearly 80 percent of Mount Lebanon’s revenues. World War I made both sources of income inaccessible.

Lebanon’s incorporation into the global silk economy also brought new types of social and gendered differentiation. The silk economy and migration to the Americas offered women increased autonomy, as Akram Khater has demonstrated. In particular, Khater identifies the ascendance of the “factory girl” who provided (relatively) cheap labor in the karhane silk workshops and challenged the binary class distinctions between peasants and rural elites (shuyūkh). Once having emigrated to the Americas, Lebanese women faced novel conditions, obliging them to participate in new forms of sociability. Many lived in close quarters with strange men in crowded urban apartments, or peddled

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15 According to the estimates of Celal Bey, the Lebanese received 90 million piasters annually from the Americas, meanwhile the silk economy was worth an annual 65 million piasters. The province’s total yearly income, according to Celal, amounted to 196.3 million piasters. Another contemporary estimate put annual income at 220 million piasters, 90 million of which were the net gain from cash transfers with the Americas, and the total silk economy at 80 million piasters. That estimate produces a very similar combined total for silk and remittances of 77.27 percent of total income. See Celal Bey, “al-Aḥwal al-Zira‘iyya wa al-Tijariyya wa al-Iqtisadiyya fi Jabal Lubnan,” 88.
goods door to door in rural America, face to face with strangers in a strange land. Many of those women returned to Lebanon, with a new “middle class” sensibility.\textsuperscript{16}

The environmental consequences of the silk economy, all but undetected by historians, were as marked as the social and gender transformations silk wrought. Environmental degradation stemming from silk production accelerated the crop’s decline as a viable source of long-term prosperity. The demise of Lebanon’s forest cover is perhaps the most salient aspect of that process and while the plight of Lebanon’s forests is well known, scholars have barely explored the question. Extant studies can only affirm that Lebanon’s forest cover dwindled sometime between antiquity and the twentieth century. The scant literature on deforestation reliably notes that Lebanon was covered in forests during the centuries described by scripture. Biblical references to the cedars of Lebanon provide one of the most well known associations with the country’s geography. Yet, previous studies of deforestation in Lebanon have been unable to suggest when in the expansive interval of time deforestation took place.\textsuperscript{17}

Lebanon’s forest cover, which compared favorably with other Mediterranean locales in the late eighteenth century,\textsuperscript{18} receded significantly during the silk boom of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Along with soil and labor, water and firewood were key inputs for the production of cocoons. Mulberries required irrigation to be commercially viable. In the karhane, fuelwood provided heat for the basins of water that dissolved the cocoons into individual threads of silk. Soon after the creation of the early autonomous Mount Lebanon in 1861, deforestation reached such dangerous proportions

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that the normally *laissez-faire* authorities acted to limit the harvesting of trees. The first edict in this regard established protections for the forests along the border between the *Matn* and *Shuf* regions in 1868, noting that they were “nearly destroyed.” An additional measure for reforestation in 1869 observed a key detail: the current generation of inhabitants had “inherited the land covered by diverse [species] of trees, which has now become barren and empty […]”  

The government responded to rampant deforestation with a campaign of planting 11,000 pine trees.  

Yet, deforestation continued apace throughout the rest of the nineteenth century, largely an indirect result of the silk boom. Investors sought to place their silk factories adjacent to forests, needed for the fuel to heat the estimated 10,000 basins. Disappearing forests and stringent regulations against cutting the remaining trees pushed the price of using coal below that of wood, “some years,” before 1913. By the turn of the twentieth century Lebanon’s forests had become so devastated that coal imported from England became a cheaper alternative to firewood.

Years after the war, Lebanese scientists observed that denuded land increased susceptibility to catastrophic flooding, and prevented the soil from absorbing rainwater at the same rates as had the forested landscape. Aggressive deforestation must have quickened erosion on Lebanon’s steep hillsides and contributed to destructive flooding. Commercial agriculture relied on the regularity of irrigation, mostly supplied, in the case of mulberries for the silk crop, through groundwater. Damage

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caused by heavy rains in 1914\textsuperscript{23} indicates that the landscape was vulnerable to torrential rains, which ran off too quickly to be absorbed into the soil and recharge aquifers. Deforestation was by no means the only salient environmental impact of the silk boom. In fact, yields had been plummeting for decades in response to the degradation of the soil and the importation of inferior cocoons. Picot acknowledged as much on the eve of the war. "It is impossible to hide, in effect, that the crops which currently provide wealth to the country are gravely threatened," he offered, before clarifying that it would be more precise to state that they were inevitably "condemned to quickly disappear."\textsuperscript{24} Mount Lebanon had become the least efficient among silk producers in the Mediterranean and Europe. "In 1854, 25 grams of local eggs produced close to 54 kilograms of cocoons, by the 1880s a box (25 grams) of Japanese eggs yielded a bare 29 kilograms. In later years, matters got only worse for Lebanese peasants. Between 1906 and 1911 the average yield of 25 grams of eggs in Mount Lebanon was 22.733 kilograms of cocoons."\textsuperscript{25} Meanwhile the average yield for 25 grams of eggs in the Ottoman Bursa province (between 1890-1905) was 34 kilograms and 39 in Italy over the same period. France averaged 44 kilos in 1908.\textsuperscript{26} If Lebanon’s downturn in yields represented “the importation of inferior silk worm eggs from different climes,”\textsuperscript{27} it must have also stemmed from the depletion of the soil’s fertility and the extension of mulberry production to marginal lands. Other crops, including olives, lemons, oranges, bananas, and grapes were more profitable than the production of mulberries in the

\textsuperscript{23} For the heavy rains of fall 1914, see Al-\textit{Ittihad al-Uthmani}. 25 November 1914, 26 November 1914; see also, Al-Sayigh, “28 September 1914,” \textit{Sijil al-Yawmiyat}, Harissa.
\textsuperscript{24} Picot to Bompard, 19 July 1914, Constantinople Ambassade 275, Centre des Archives diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN).
\textsuperscript{25} Khater, \textit{Inventing Home}, 59.
\textsuperscript{26} Naqqash, “Nazara fi Halat Jabal Lubnan al-Iqtisadi,” 118.
\textsuperscript{27} Khater, \textit{Inventing Home}, 59.
period immediately before WWI. Peasants and financiers could not easily respond to market incentives, however, because their land and capital were sunk in the silk industry.

Finally, Mount Lebanon, uniquely in the Ottoman Empire, was almost totally reliant on imports for food. Grain production accounted for perhaps 12,000 hectares of the 80,000 hectare district. An oft-repeated piece of received wisdom maintained that Mount Lebanon produced enough grain to cover its needs only one-fourth of the year. References to that formula date as far back as the 1830s, when mulberry trees covered a much smaller percentage of the Mountain’s arable acreage. The 1914 estimates of Mount Lebanon’s wartime Minister of Agriculture and Forests, Celal Bey, indicated that Lebanon produced only 6.3 percent of its grain needs, or enough for only three weeks of the year. A Lebanese capitalist, writing in the same volume as Celal, admitted the “lack of official statistics” quantifying grain imports to Lebanon, asserting that “the greatest portion,” arrived via coastal maritime traffic from other Ottoman provinces. Some grain, as well, found its way to Beirut and Mount Lebanon via the Beirut-Damascus rail line or on the backs of donkeys from the districts that surrounded Lebanon, Jabal ‘Amil,

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29 Paul Jouplain [Nujaym], La question du Liban, étude d’histoire diplomatique et de droit international (Beirut: 1961[1908]), 495.
30 François-Georges Picot asserted this in his analysis of Lebanon’s economic prospects in 1914. Picot to Bompard, 19 July 1914, Constantinople Ambassade 275, CADN.
31 Lebanese nationalist Bulus Nujaym attributed that formula to Emir Bashir II (1767-1850). Jouplain, La Question du Liban, 527.
33 My calculations based on Celal Bey “Al-Ahwal al-Zira’iyya wa al-Tijariyya wa al-Iqtisadiyya,” 85-88. Celal acknowledged that the Ottoman authorities were “as he who gathers wood at night,” without proper statistics to quantify, or indeed coordinate, economic activity.
Akkar, and the Bekaa. The latter regions had, increasingly in the nineteenth century, produced foodstuffs for Mount Lebanon.\(^\text{35}\)

After the outbreak of war, Lebanon lost access to the flows of capital and grain that had sustained its inhabitants. The Entente blockade stopped the boats that delivered most of Lebanon’s grain as the Ottoman Army monopolized the use of the railroad and requisitioned draft animals for its own use. During the war, the imperative to rely on Lebanon’s own soil was fatal for a population much too large to subsist off of extant agricultural resources that had been geared to, and degraded by, decades of intensive silk production. Bereft of income from silk and remittances, without the safety hatch of emigration or France’s protection, and with little ecological surplus to ratchet up food production quickly, the Lebanese would starve *en masse* during the war years. That starvation was the consequence of the ecology and political economy that emerged in decades after 1870.

**ECOLOGY OF FAMINE**

The WWI famines in Greater Syria have sometimes been attributed to natural environmental factors such as drought and locusts, but these factors do not account for the ecological context of the famine.\(^\text{36}\) In fact, water issues and environmental

\(^{35}\) Lebanon’s economic integration into the global market facilitated a rising standard of living for its inhabitants over the preceding decades. Lebanese export of silk to France, and labor to the Americas made the province’s population on capital returning from those places. Those capital flows, in turn, intensified the economic linkages Mount Lebanon had with surrounding territories as it imported more foodstuffs over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The mere existence of the city of Zahla testifies to the salience of the Mountain’s connections with the Bekaa. Insignificant at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Zahla’s population expanded exponentially over the course of the century as a source of sheep and grain to Mount Lebanon. Alixa Naff, “A Social History of Zahle: the Principal Market Town in Nineteenth-Century Lebanon,” (PhD Dissertation, UCLA, 1973), 40.

\(^{36}\) For a locusts-centric explanation of the famine, see Foster, “The 1915 Locust Attack,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 51, no. 3 (2015): 370-372. For an explanation that cites drought as the famine’s major cause, see
degradation did play a role, not due to drought or locusts, but rather anthropogenic factors. The depletion of Mount Lebanon’s water table appears to have been the product of the intensive cultivation and production of silk. Meanwhile, mountainous terrain denuded of its tree cover became more susceptible to erosion and less able to absorb rainfall and replenish the underground springs that underpinned the country’s irrigation systems and drinking water. WWI’s trying conditions rendered that vulnerability evident. Meanwhile deforestation continued apace, once wood became the main source of fuel for locomotives. In this way, WWI amplified processes already underway while also revealing the stress wrought by the silk boom on Lebanon’s human ecology.

While the ecological and economic changes of previous decades are key to understanding the food crisis, the war’s conditions were admittedly novel. The coastal populations of the Eastern Mediterranean had transported foodstuffs by sea for all of recorded history. Certainly at no other point in Ottoman history had the population lost access to the sea-lanes critical for the functioning of the regional grain market. The Entente blockade severed the main artery by which Lebanese acquired foodstuffs. The implications of having to transport grain by land were stark for Mount Lebanon. “If not for the sea blockade,” two bureaucrats transiting Mount Lebanon in 1917 wrote, a steamship [bākhira] could have taken them from Beirut to Tripoli in three hours. As it was, a carriage had to suffice them to cross the ninety kilometers between the two port cities. The journey took more than a day, and they had to stop 60 kilometers north of Beirut in Batrun, to stay the night. They had trouble sleeping because, they reported,
“outside a voice said in the mountain dialect, ‘hungry, hungry’ [jiyān, jiyān].”

On the last thirty kilometers between Batrun and Tripoli, the authors had commented that the “narrow” road barely allowed their carriage to pass along a 300-meter drop-off, the “most frightening” portion of the entire coastal road. North of Beirut, as well, the poor condition of the road had caught their attention. Whatever animals pulled their carriage (they did not specify) were rare at that late point in the war, most had been requisitioned, eaten or had succumbed to starvation. A special permit was required to move freely with draft animals, which would otherwise be seized at army checkpoints. Mount Lebanon’s network of roads had not been constructed to link internal markets by land transport but rather to carry goods to and from the port cities of the coast, Beirut, Tripoli, and Sidon (each of which were part of the Beirut province, not autonomous Mount Lebanon).

With full acknowledgement of the impact of the war’s particular circumstances, especially the Entente blockade, scholars have exaggerated the proximate environmental sources of the famine, assuming that the war period witnessed insufficient rainfall and unkind weather, or locusts, were largely responsible for food scarcity. The instrumental data from Syrian Protestant College does not indicate any anomaly in precipitation for the winter of 1914-15. The rainy season of 1914-15 brought 877 millimeters of rain to Beirut, only ten millimeters shy of a ninety-four year average. Rain levels recorded during the most critical months for the harvest cast serious doubt on the claim that a

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38 Ibid.
“spring [1915] drought […] led to poor grain harvests” and catalyzed the famine.\textsuperscript{41} February 1915 saw 154.4 mm of rain, March 99.2, and April 175.3.\textsuperscript{42} Soil moisture necessary for a late spring or early summer harvest should have been more than sufficient based on those totals. Furthermore, assertions of bumper harvests made by the governors of Aleppo and Syria provinces belie the possibility that proximate environmental factors primarily caused food shortages. Despite an unprecedented plague of locusts which afflicted Palestine and Lebanon between April and July 1915, the vali of Damascus, Hulusi Bek, repeatedly insisted that he had “as much grain as is needed,” to supply Beirut and Mount Lebanon but that a “clique” of Beiruti merchants engaging in speculation prevented the effective distribution of foodstuffs.\textsuperscript{43} Meanwhile the vali of Aleppo, Celal Bek, noted that the harvest was the best in “twenty to thirty years.”\textsuperscript{44}

Despite adequate rainfall, the local experience in Mount Lebanon indicates that groundwater levels had suffered for other reasons. In October 1915, the inhabitants of al-Hazmiyya, a town at the foot of Mount Lebanon just east of Beirut, wrote to the Maronite Patriarchate about “filth” polluting the water that the town had relied upon since time immemorial \textit{[min zaman la yu‘raf bidehi]}. Although a day’s ride from the Patriarchal seat at Bkirki, the upper entrance to the town’s spring sat on Patriarchate land. The spring provided sustenance to approximately 5,000 individuals, “not to mention passerby and strangers \textit{[ghurabā‘]},” who relied on its lower entrance. Its

\textsuperscript{41} Brand, "Lives Darkened by Calamity," 38.
\textsuperscript{43} Şam Valisi Hulusi [Governor of Damascus] to Dahiliyye Nazaretine [Interior Ministry] 4 Mayis 1331 [17 May 1915], DH,ŞFR 471/105, BOA. See also Chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{44} Celal to Interior Ministry, 19 Nisan [1]331 [2 May 1915], DH. ŞFR 469/45, BOA.
flow had dwindled by October 1915, “just like all springs these days, and congestion [of people] at the spring was great.” The townspeople demanded the Patriarch’s intercession against the sharecropper [ṣharīk], Shahin Abi Najm, who managed the Patriarchate’s holdings in Hazmiya and had polluted the well (fed by the lower entrance to the spring). Fear of infectious disease, which “threatens us from every side,” prompted special concern among the petitioners.45 Water-borne illness had been on the rise since the beginning of the war, making the value of spring water that much greater relative to typhoid-infested wells or cisterns. Rivers and their flood plains provided the venue for many diseases, and especially malaria, which had badly afflicted the area around Hazmiyya.46 In an attempt to alleviate their predicament by increasing flow from the spring and avoiding reliance on disease-contaminated river water, the townspeople of Hazmiyya deepened their well an extra three meters without properly placing clay [ṯīn] around the edges, letting water escape. Or so maintained the sharecropper, Shahin Abi Najm who relied on the upper entrance to the spring to irrigate the land he and his family tilled for the Patriarchate. If his claim was correct, desperation on the part of the townspeople drove them to damage the well, increasing short-term flow but undermining long-term viability.48 The townspeople’s letter to the Patriarch claimed that such pressure on water resources was a general condition in 1915. Harissa’s well went dry shortly thereafter, in March 1916.49

47 Shahin Abi Najm to Maronite Patriarch, 18 October 1915, Huwayyik 17/149, Bkirki.
48 Their letter to the Patriarchate contains an explanation of work they did on the well, evidently a response to the allegation of damage. The Inhabitants of al-Hazmiyya [Ahl al-Hazmiyya] to the Maronite Patriarch, 13 October 1915, Huwayyik 17/148, Bkirki.
The conflict at Hazmiya reveals much more than the ecological inheritance of the silk boom. Diminished flow from the town’s spring threatened sharecropper Shahin Abi Najm’s livelihood and one of the Maronite Patriarchate’s most lucrative streams of income. Scarcity also presented Abi Najm and the Patriarchate with an opportunity, but only if he had water to irrigate his crops. Food was scarce, and so even crops with limited commercial importance in normal circumstances became lucrative. Carob trees [kharrūb] furnished a sweetener [dibs al- kharrūb] to replace sugar during the war. Abi Najm capitalized on the yield of his carob trees during the crisis to the chagrin of the Patriarchate’s representatives.  

50 Najm opted to irrigate his subbair, or prickly pears [opuntia ficus-indica], despite their known drought resistance, to increase their yield and his profit. He also used the spring’s water to plant a summer wheat crop, which had superseded all others in economic importance in 1915. Additional spring water irrigated grapes and provided water for his cattle.  

51 Profitable in normal years, Abi Najm’s sharecropping operation faced challenges (locusts seem to have destroyed the year’s olive crop) but also found opportunities in the crisis of the war. To ensure that water resources would be available for his crops, Abi Najm had polluted the spring water to prevent others from using it. The townspeople charged that the well had collected enough trash “to disgust any observer.” A general outcry temporarily chastened Abi Najm, and the townspeople repaired the broken pipes. Soon after, however, “[Abi Najm] returned to his earlier tune.” He and his family began to distribute clean water, “only to certain people,” leaving, “the public made up of women, girls, men and strangers waiting to quench their thirst under the hot sun for two or three hours.” Abi

50 Fr. Elias al-Risha to Maronite Patriarch, 13 December 1915, Huwayyik 33/43, Bkirkī.
Najm’s wife (Abi Najm himself was absent), unnamed in the townspeople’s complaint, “responded to their entreaties with insults while [deliberately] wasting the water.”  

Ottoman troops intervened against Abi Najm and his family, placing him in a nearby jail and confiscating his German rifle and its ammunition.  

As famine gripped the Lebanese ahali, Shahin Abi Najm harnessed the ecological resources at his disposal for profit. The Maronite Patriarchate had delegated sharecroppers such as Abi Najm to orient church lands toward commercial production and not subsistence crops. The church’s waqf lands, just like privately held tracts in Mount Lebanon, had not primarily hosted subsistence crops for generations. Lebanon’s agricultural resources had been geared to supply global markets with and, to a lesser extent, fruits and vegetables to Beiruti consumers. During the war, many fields even lay fallow, as credit became impossible to obtain and the agricultural labor force starved (see below). No central authority had the power to reorient wartime agricultural production toward subsistence crops to combat famine. Lebanon’s peasantry, left to its own devices, had little experience producing grain crops that they had become accustomed to importing but could no longer.  

Meanwhile, wartime conditions also accelerated the degradation of Lebanon’s forests. Villagers in the Matn region cut down as many as 1,000 pine trees in February 1915 which they provided to the Ottoman Army. Their lumber furnished poles for telegraph lines. In June 1915, the train authority of the Hijaz railroad called for the Lebanese to bring lumber, “olive, oak, apricot, mulberry, sycamore [dulb], elm, pine, or

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53 Shahin Abi Najm to the Maronite Patriarch, 18 October 1915, Huwayyik 17/149, Bkirk.  
equivalent varieties,” to the closest station where “its price would be paid,” by the relevant official.\footnote{\textit{Al-Ittihad al-`Uthmani}, 14 June 1915.} Forests and orchards suffered alike. Perhaps a third of mulberry trees were uprooted during the war, especially in areas near the railroad (see below). Salim al-Asfar estimated in late 1917 that 25 percent of Lebanon was forested before the onset of the war, but that if the pace of wartime deforestation continued, Mount Lebanon would be totally denuded of forest cover.\footnote{Al-Asfar, “Al-Zira’a fi Lubnan [Agriculture in Lebanon],” 21. Celal estimated that pine and oak forests covered as much as 1,300 square kilometers of Lebanon’s total 3,200. That estimate of 40.63 percent is likely too high. See Celal, “Al-Ahwal,” 86.}

Al-Asfar, who hailed from one of Lebanon’s most prosperous families, couched his discussion of Lebanon’s rapidly receding forest cover in an analysis of the economic and ecological importance of the country’s forest cover. Citing scientific research in regards to the infiltration of water, he noted that forested landscapes were critical to preserving groundwater resources. For the same reason that trees slowed the flow of water, allowing it to soak into the soil, they also prevented soil erosion. Al-Asfar proceeded to note another salient economic incentive for the preservation of forests: “Nobody ignores the impact forests have […] on the climate and the improvement of Lebanon as a center of summer tourism with what it yields in terms of various sources of profit.”\footnote{Al-Asfar, “Al-Zira’a fi Lubnan [Agriculture in Lebanon],” 21.} Al-Asfar concluded his discussion by asking that forests and tree crops, which were suffering dearly as he was writing in late 1917, be accorded “first importance,” as they represented the country’s most precious economic asset. He asked that they be protected and their exploitation be organized.\footnote{Al-Asfar, “Al-Zira’a fi Lubnan [Agriculture in Lebanon],” 22.} Lebanon’s first post-war governing body concurred with Al-Asfar, and prioritized the management and protection of Lebanon’s

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55 \textit{Al-Ittihad al-`Uthmani}, 14 June 1915.
58 Al-Asfar, “Al-Zira’a fi Lubnan [Agriculture in Lebanon],” 22.
\end{flushright}
forests. When Lebanon’s *Commission Administrative* met between 1920 and 1922, perhaps the most ubiquitous concern of its members was establishing protections for the country’s forests. These were Lebanon’s most wealthy men, recognizing the stress on the country’s landscape and the need for environmental protection.\(^{59}\)

The war intensified the harvesting of lumber at the expense of Lebanon’s tree cover. As Al-Asfar observed, the wartime removal of trees likely enhanced erosion and the depletion of the country’s groundwater. Wartime degradation was deleterious, ultimately, to the interests of peasants and capitalists alike. The former made their living off the land, and the latter relied on Lebanon’s soil to produce a surplus they could extract. If seen as part of the longer trajectory of capitalism and the environment in Lebanon, the intensive exploitation of Lebanon’s forests for fuel ultimately damaged the ecosystem’s ability to produce crops that were competitive on a global market, a theme we will revisit in the conclusion.

**CLASS, GENDER, AND FAMINE IN MOUNT LEBANON**

So many Lebanese starved during the war period that famine appears as an overarching experience that transcended all segments of society. The Lebanese experience was by no means monolithic, however, and distinctions of gender and class inherited from the silk boom mediated the population’s experience. The most basic and troubling fact for the lower classes was that silk provided 72 percent of the peasantry’s income from the production of goods.\(^{60}\) Those reliant on silk suffered first and most, followed by

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\(^{59}\) See, for instance the *Compte Rendu de Séance* for 21 December 1920; 4 January 1921; 8 January 1921; 10 January 1921; 3 November 1921; 15 November 1921; Commission administrative, État du Grand Liban, Daoud Ammoun Collection, Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik (USEK).

\(^{60}\) Khater, *Inventing Home*, 57.
Lebanese reliant upon remittances from the Americas. Intersections of gender and class can be most clearly demonstrated for the literate middle class, whose correspondence survives, at least in part. For the class of illiterate fellahin, much less detail germane to questions of gender and class is available, inhibiting a granular analysis of their fate during the war.

Nevertheless, we can surmise the outlines of the environmental and social processes that affected agricultural workers during WWI. The first phase of the famine impacted the poor and those who worked the land, who lost access to credit and the ability to crop the land they owned or to which they had usufruct rights. Locusts devastated the summer crops peasants ordinarily sold in exchange for foodstuffs and other goods. A higher class of Lebanese who could rely on saved capital, or money transfers from abroad, fended off starvation until 1917 when the value of Ottoman currency became totally unpredictable and remittances from the Americas no longer arrived.

Each year the fellahin took an advance on the May-June silk cocoon season to pay for their expenses, including the worm eggs and seeds for grains and vegetables to intercrop with mulberry trees. A decline in the price of silk for the 1915 season undercut their ability to repay that year’s advance, or any other debts. A priest, Sa’adalla, sent by the Maronite Patriarchate to check on overdue payments by sharecroppers on its waqf lands around Batrun was himself in debt to the Patriarchate, unable to pay the *badal* for land he had used in 1915. Head of a family of twelve members, all of whom, he claimed, were infirm, he was in desperate need of cash. Silk prices had been too low in 1915 and
locusts had consumed his olive and tobacco crops.\textsuperscript{61} The Maronite Patriarchate had evidently made plans to sell the land to which he had usufruct rights; he begged the Patriarch not to do so, “out of mercy for [his] children.”\textsuperscript{62} In another case, the Maronite Patriarchate’s waqf lands in the town of Bisha‘la had not been plowed in August 1916, two of its emissaries reported. The local agent (\textit{wakil}), was withholding grain from the \textit{ahāli}, demanding they work in exchange for alms. Three \textit{qinṭārs} of wheat (768 kilograms) remained from the previous year’s harvest, undistributed.\textsuperscript{63} Another waqf of the Patriarchate at Dayr Shuwah also had unplowed fields, and terrace walls in disrepair.\textsuperscript{64} In both cases, the emissaries of the Patriarch sent to investigate blamed those charged with care of the \textit{awqāf} (sing. \textit{waqf}) for their unproductive state. In the case of Bisha‘la, a lack of investment was the issue. The interruption of agricultural credit caused by the war was fatal to an economy that relied on cash flows. Mount Lebanon’s famine did not stem only from population pressure, a dearth of arable land, and environmental degradation, but also the particular ways in which capitalism had shaped land ownership, credit, and usufruct rights (the role of Church ownership of land will explored further in Chapter 3).\textsuperscript{65}

The aforementioned Brother Yusuf, in his daily notes, described how the famine progressed along class lines. His monastery was perched above the Mediterranean less

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{61} Fr. Sa‘adallah to Maronite Patriarch, 13 September 1916, Huwayyik 54/271, Bkirki.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Fr. Sa‘adallah to Maronite Patriarch, 11 September 1916, Huwayyik 54/272, Bkirki.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Frs. Yusuf Daghir and Yuhanna Al-Badawi to Maronite Patriarch, 21 August 1916, Huwayyik 54/270, Bkirki. Of the 647 residents of Bisha‘la, 184 (or 28.4) percent perished during the war. My calculation, based on Jean Nakhl, “Bilad al-Batrun fi al-Harb [The Region of Batrun in the War],” in \textit{Lubnan fi al-Harb}, vol 2, 858.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Fr. Sa‘adallah to Maronite Patriarch, 13 September 1916, Huwayyik 54/271, Bkirki.
\item \textsuperscript{65} The plight of Lebanon’s \textit{fellahin} appears to conform to Amartya Sen’s entitlement thesis, wherein they lost usufruct rights to the land and capital on which they relied to make enough profit to afford staple grains. The existence of ample grain in the interior and unused land in Mount Lebanon corroborates Sen’s contention that food availability decline does not account for starvation. Amartya Sen, \textit{Poverty and Famines: an Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).
\end{itemize}
than a kilometer inland but 750 meters above sea level, affording its seven monks a sweeping view of the Mediterranean and the town of Juniyah below. Brother Yusuf rejected out of hand the notion, already prevalent at the time, that the Ottoman regime sought to harm the whole of the Christian population. Contrary to the rumors prevalent in early 1915, he wrote, “Christians are completely safe.” Meanwhile, “hunger has begun to injure the people with its sharp claws […] Especially the poor and middle classes are finding difficulty purchasing grain.”

A year later, in July 1916, “nothing was cheap except people, who were dying, not by the tens, but by the hundreds” The lack of work and the inflation in the price of grain—due to corrupt and ineffectual relief efforts—resulted in 500 deaths a day in Mount Lebanon by August 1916. By November 1916, “all the poor people have died,” according to al-Sayigh’s observations. At year’s end, they estimated that 80,000 individuals, 18% of the province’s total population, had perished. In 1917-1918, famine impacted nearly all sectors of the population, along with the rest of Syria. According to the estimates of the Paulist monks, at the end of 1917, 150,000 Lebanese had succumbed. And yet, the suffering was not over. A spike in grain prices in early 1918, due to the German Army’s grain purchases and the unstable value of Ottoman paper currency, was “tantamount to a death sentence for the middle class.”

While Brother Yusuf’s claim that “all” of the poor had died by the end of 1916 no doubt contained some exaggeration, the famine nevertheless impacted a substantial number of agricultural laborers early in the war. That fact is not only notable as a moral

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question: without skilled laborers, who was to work in Lebanon’s stratified society? Brother Yusuf wondered how the authorities planned to expand the road next to their monastery in October 1916, in light of the fact that, “All the men have left, died or are too weakened by famine.” \(^{72}\) The demise of agricultural laborers severely hampered the wartime production of foodstuffs. Jesuit Louis Cheikho, while searching for field hands to grow food crops on the Jesuits’ tracts of land on the outskirts of Beirut, complained that “One finds no workers to sow \([\text{cultiver}]\) the fields; certain villages resemble cemeteries and if the winter [of 1917-18] brings no change in our situation, Lebanon is entirely lost. It is what the Turks hoped.” \(^{73}\) He blamed the “Turks” for the wartime crisis. Nevertheless, the class realities of starvation to which he referred were, albeit less perceptibly than the immediate impact of Ottoman policy, the inheritance of a social process long underway in Lebanon: Lebanon’s agricultural workers relied on a cash wage, or the production of a cash crop for their sustenance. Thus, they had little recourse once the war imperiled their access to that cash income. Once their ranks had been thinned through starvation, their vulnerability extended to the whole society, as there were too few capable hands to restart the agricultural economy during or after the war. Commercial agriculture struggled in Mount Lebanon during the Mandate, in large part because the famine undermined the population density that had made it an attractive destination for capital before the war.

In addition to class, the war wrought salient gendered consequences in Mount Lebanon. Women’s particular experience during the war emerged from biological facts as well as the gendered social realities. Anecdotal evidence suggests that women survived


\(^{73}\) Cheikho, \textit{Diare}, 10 August 1917, Compagnie de Jésus, Province du Proche Orient Curie Provinciale, Beirut (CDJ).
the initial stages of famine in Mount Lebanon at higher rates than men. In August 1916, the Greek Catholic monastery at Harissa reported, “most of the 500 deaths a day were men.” In the northern village of Surat during the war’s final months, two priests found “women and children begging but only a few men.” In Beirut after the war, references to “around a thousand women without work or family” housed and employed by French-sponsored relief suggest that these women survived the famine at higher rates than their male relatives.

Some statistical evidence exists to corroborate differential mortality between the sexes for the period of the war. In the wake of the typhus outbreak of 1916-1917, the Ottoman Health Ministry began to collect statistics tracking new infections and deaths. Women contracted typhus at much lower rates than men: during the period between 1 March-30 November 1917, officials recorded 1,473 new infections in men, and only 964 among women. Men’s broader mobility likely accounts for their greater rates of infection. Female and male bodies, once infected with typhus, died at similar rates: 19.43 percent of men infected perished, a rate almost identical to the 19.37 percent of women. Typhoid produced a bigger differential in deaths, 18.93 percent of infected men perished as opposed to 15.44 percent of women. Total recorded deaths during the period evince a marked gender differential: 1,708 men versus 1,265 women. Those statistics badly underestimate total mortality during the period and thus are an imperfect testament to the gendered question at hand. Nevertheless, the above statistics, published by the Ottoman

75 Frs. Louis and Butrus, “A Visit to the Villages and Distribution of Charity [Ziyarat al-Qura wa Tawzi’ Ihsanat],” Huwayyik 32/270, Bkirki.
77 Husni Bey, “Al-Umur al-Sihiyya [Health Conditions in Mount Lebanon],” 263.
Ministry of Health appear to corroborate anecdotal evidence, strongly suggesting that men died earlier in the war, and in great numbers than women. In times of famine, women’s bodies tend to survive longer than men’s because of relatively higher proportion of fat to muscle, a benefit during times of extreme scarcity.\(^7\)

Women’s particular experience during the war cannot only be comprehended in biological terms. Once life had become untenable in Lebanese villages due to loss of livelihood, many men sought work and food elsewhere. In some cases, whole families left rural Mount Lebanon for districts less ravaged by shortage, such as Jabal ‘Amil to the south.\(^7\) More often, however, women stayed behind. A portion of a register published from the town of Mtain reveals that of those from the village who died, “outside the homeland,” in the Bekaa valley and the coast, nineteen were men and only two were women.\(^8\) The Ottoman authorities required all citizens of Mount Lebanon to help participate in the summer harvest, but excluded women from having to leave their villages, reflecting the Ottoman authorities’ wish to respect gendered prohibitions on women’s travel.\(^8\)

The conditions of the war extended the gendered social transformation of late Ottoman Lebanon, wherein women had taken on particularly visible roles in the labor force outside the home before the war. One striking aspect of the conflicts involving Shahin Abi Najm’s family (above) and the ‘Abdallah Yunus clan (chapter three) was that

\(^7\) A recent synthesis has concluded that, contrary to some of biological determinism, “the evidence that females survive famines better than males is by now overwhelming.” Cormac Ó Gráda, *Famine: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 101.

\(^7\) The Inhabitants of Ma’alaqat al-Damur to Patriarch, 4 March 1917, Huwayyik 32/7, Bkirk.  
\(^8\) See the Interior Ministry’s order to this effect printed in *al-Ittihad al-Uthmani*, 14 May 1915.
women, in both cases, appeared to be managing the financial affairs of their respective families. As men disappeared, women shouldered an increased burden during the war, raising children and running the financial affairs of the family unit. That reality reflected an Ottoman, and broader wartime trend on the one hand. However, women in Lebanon had a peculiar experience. The pronounced reliance of its economy on remittances had created vulnerabilities for individual women before the war: women were more likely than men to be reliant on cash flows from relatives in the Americas, as will be seen.

An additional vulnerability stemmed from the fact that Lebanese women could not demand support from the Ottoman government, as could the Empire’s Muslim women. Lebanese men, Christian and Druze, generally avoided conscription into the Ottoman military. Women could not claim to be wives of soldiers because Lebanon maintained its exemption from Ottoman conscription throughout the conflict. In light of the absence of support from the Ottoman imperial, provincial, or municipal governments, many women requested support from the U.S. government, which operated its consulate in Beirut throughout the war. Albeit fitfully, remittances from the Americas continued to arrive through the consulate until April 1917, when it became nearly impossible to cash checks drawn on U.S. banks.

Resident in the Matn town of Duhur al-Shuwayr with her daughter, Farida Nimr Haykal had stopped receiving remittances from her husband sometime in 1916. She wrote the U.S. consulate in Beirut at least two times that summer to implore they contact

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Nimr Haykal on her behalf. Ottoman censorship restrictions and the Entente blockade prevented her letters from reaching the United States, but the consulate in Beirut telegraphed Nimr to inform him of his wife’s desperate situation by way of the embassy in Constantinople. With no money or response forthcoming, Farida’s situation grew more desperate. Her solution to “work the cocoon season” suggests she probably was not normally employed as an agricultural laborer and likely owned the mulberry trees she aimed to harvest. A professor at Syrian Protestant College donated money so that she could purchase silk cocoons, but she lacked “baskets [tibāq] and ladders [sqāla]” to store and harvest mulberry leaves. In pencil on the back of the consulate’s response, Farida wrote a desperate plea in her colloquial Lebanese dialect: “We have become, my daughter and I, in need of clothes. We are totally naked. I don’t need to explain more \textit{[fahmik kifāya]}. My daughter has a fever and constant attacks \textit{[al-bint msākhni ‘ammāl yiji’ha daur]} so she cannot come down \textit{[to Beirut in person]}.” She implored “Miss Nixon” of the American consulate, “for God’s sake \textit{[karmāl allah]}, send me ten lira,” but her pleas fell on deaf ears. U.S. consular documents from 1918 listing Lebanese requesting funds from relatives in the United States make no mention of Farida and her daughter.

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84 Farida had written on 29 August 1916, and the consulate’s response indicates she had initially contacted the embassy sometime before 26 July. Hollis to Farida Nimr Haykal al-Khuri, 5 September 1916, Beirut Consulate 194, RG 84, NARA.
85 Professor George Patch was also working as President of Beirut’s Red Cross society. Bayard Dodge to C.H. Dodge, “Relief Work in Syria During the Period of the War: a Brief and Unofficial Account,” n.d., A.A. 2.3.3.18.3, AUB.
86 Farida Nimr Haikal al-Khuri to Amy Nixon, 14 Nuwwār [May 1917], Beirut Consulate 194, RG 84, NARA.
87 See, for instance, Acting [American] Consul General [Hotz, Dutch Consul, Beirut] to Swedish Minister [Constantinople], “List of People Requesting Funds from Relatives in America and Addresses of Relatives,” 9 July 1918, Beirut Consulate 194, RG 84, NARA.
The timeline of Farida’s misfortune suggests those who had worked the land succumbed before she did. The famine had already devastated those Lebanese who had long spent time climbing ladders to harvest mulberry leaves. Farida and her daughter intended to resort to farm work only out of desperation in 1917. Agricultural laborers were less likely than Farida to be able to write letters to the American consulate, or anybody else for that matter. By consequence, their voices are largely absent from the documentary record.

Some men abdicated their familial responsibilities even without the excuse of an ocean separating them from their dependents. A “young girl,” Blanka Salmouny lost her mother in February 1918, along with all of her younger siblings except a twelve-year old brother, George, “all of them to hunger.” Her mother’s relatives, she believed, had sent a large sum of 300 lira from the United States which would have seen her and George through the war and longer. Blanka and her brother resided at an orphanage in the town of Zuq Mikhayil. Administered by nuns of the Soeurs de la Charité order, the orphanage was running out of relief funds in early 1918.88 Blanka’s hope of receiving “the money for me and my brother that would save us from death” rested on her father not intervening to acquire the money for himself. “My father, always wasteful and ungrateful in regard to us, is doing his utmost to acquire the sum in question [mon père, toujours gaspilleur et ingrat à notre égard fait tout son possible pour posséder la somme en question].”89 Many men undoubtedly did their utmost for their families. Others, such as Blanka Saloumny’s father, and probably Farida Nimr Haykal’s husband, shirked their

88 Cheikho, “February 1918,” Diare, CDJ.
89 She did not state her age, but it is likely that she required the Sisters’ help to pen the letter. Blanka Salmouny (Maison de Charité, Zouk) to Consul General, 14 May 1918, Vol. 194, Beirut Consulate, RG 84, NARA.
responsibilities. Lebanese families which relied on cash wages made by men in the Americas were particularly exposed to the disruption in funds caused by WWI. The silk economy and migration had put women in novel roles with increased autonomy for decades, however that autonomy became the stuff of horror during the war as many women were left alone with their children in the face of the dwindling incomes and savings.

By 1918, severe hunger impacted all but the wealthiest classes. Money transfers from the Americas became all but impossible after the United States entered the war in April 1917. Justina Georges Jacob’s husband was in the United States and had been sending money to her throughout the war. Having “spared no method attempting to send money” for his children’s livelihood, Georges Jacob had authorized the consulate to provide whatever amount necessary for his wife and children’s maintenance. The consulate declined to extend him credit, however. Writing in French, she claimed to be a “citoyenne americaine.” The consulate’s correspondence neither confirmed nor denied her claim in that regard. “Abandoned with my children without any resources […] having only some hectares of land I cannot use,” she demanded the American consulate save her and her children, “from hunger followed by certain death.” Her reference to ‘hectares’ of land holdings she could not use is telling. She and her children were likely not equipped with the skills necessary to farm the land they owned. Nor could they hope to employ agricultural laborers to do so—they had largely perished or disappeared by that time.

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91 Justina Georges Jacob (née Justina Jabour Bitar) to Consul General of the Netherlands, 14 May 1918, vol 194, Beirut Consulate, RG 84, NARA.
Mary Modi of Bayt Meri, near Beirut, also had been receiving money from her husband in the United States. Born in Mannington, West Virginia, where her husband remained, she had come to Lebanon for a “change of climate,” and to “visit relatives” with her five children. Considering the circumstances, she “was doing her best as a woman,” but was in desperate need of money in early 1918. Her fate is unknown.\(^{92}\)

Juharé Mattar, of Beirut, also had the misfortune to have come back to the old country shortly before the war: “We left America before the war to arrange our affairs here and return, and therefore we extend our hand to you to help us in our misery. My family is composed of eight people […] we are dying of hunger.” Sometime in the past year, her husband had “gone to Damascus in search of work,” but had not, since that time, “given any sign of life [il ne donne pas signe de vie].”\(^{93}\) No indication in the consul’s documentation indicates that they were afforded help. With full acknowledgement of the essential futility of comparing human different forms of human suffering, Juharé’s fate to watch her eight children starve could easily be taken as more savage than her husband’s, probable death, alone, searching for work and food somewhere between Mount Lebanon and Damascus.

Adma Razook\(^{94}\) began writing letters to the American consul in November 1917. Her husband was in the United States and unable to send funds to her and her four children. She had “returned to Syria some [short] period before the war [b-muda].”\(^{95}\) The consul had remitted to her ten pounds, via the American missionary, Rev. George

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\(^{92}\) Mary Modi to American Consulate 4 February 1918, vol 194, RG 84, NARA.
\(^{93}\) Juharé Mattar to Consul General, 28 January 1918, vol 194, RG 84, NARA.
\(^{94}\) Of Jdaïdat Marjayoun, admittedly just outside the borders of Mount Lebanon. Her story is nevertheless quite reflective of the experience of many of the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon.
\(^{95}\) Adma Razook [Razzuq] to Consul General, 8 November 1917, vol 194, RG 84, NARA. She wrote two additional Arabic letters: Adma Razook to Consul General, 20 January 1918; Adma Razook to Consul General 13 March 1918, vol 194, RG 84, NARA.
Doolittle of Sidon. That sum had afforded her only “temporary relief,” however. Her husband’s remittances had sustained her, “before America declared war,” but was forced to beg the consulate for “any aid or loan that might be advanced to me in such hard times to save me and my family from starvation,” which she insisted, “will be paid, in due time, by my husband who is faithful always to discharge his obligation with thanks.” The consulate declined to extend her further assistance, noting it had “no funds for the relief of American citizens.” Edma Feisal, of Ain Anoub, met an untimely death awaiting funds from her husband sometime in 1917 and her children went to live with one of “their grandmothers.” Another woman, Adèle Abusafi of Dbayeh, her husband dead of illness during the war, deigned to contact the American embassy and request assistance until after the end of the conflict. Her comfortable social position saw her through the war without having to make claims for charity based on her American citizenship. She had a Swedish acquaintance write a letter on her behalf. Those Lebanese who had the means to travel back and forth from the mahjar and relied on remittances for their livelihood mostly survived into the latter two years of the war, suffering once the financial system stopped functioning. Had the war ended in 1916, they likely would have survived, no worse for the war. Their dependence on remittances became a liability only once the U.S.

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96 One of the American missionaries based in Sidon likely helped her pen this letter in English. Adma Razook to Consul General, 1 August 1918, vol 194, RG 84, NARA.
97 Acting Consul General to Adma Razook, 5 September 1918, vol 194, RG 84, NARA.
98 Acting [American] Consul General [Hotz, Dutch Consul, Beirut] to Swedish Minister [Constantinople], “List of People Requesting Funds from Relatives in America and Addresses of Relatives,” 9 July 1918, vol 194, RG 84, NARA.
99 Mary von Heidenstam to Hotz [Acting American Consul General] on behalf of Adèle Abusafi, 31 October 1918, vol 194, RG 84, NARA.
100 Men, too, sought to contact relatives in the United States on behalf of their families. Salim Jawahiri of Zuq Mikhail, Kisrawan, sent word to his two brothers in the United States via the U.S. consulate in Beirut, from whom he had often received funds, which evidently lasted them until something shortly before May 1918. “We have become, recently, the victims of hunger.” Jawahiri referred to a family, composed of his wife, four daughters, and a sick, infirm sister [ukht marūda ‘ājizat]. Salim Jawahiri to American Consul, 14 May 1918, vol 192, RG 84, NARA.
consulate could no longer facilitate the transfer of funds, and the Ottoman currency experienced massive inflation.

The experiences of Lebanese women during the war varied, and the vulnerability exposed by war sometimes pushed families to extremes. Compelled to rear children or siblings on their own, women of various classes were suddenly driven towards sex work as a survival strategy. Anecdotal evidence characterizes this phenomenon as widespread. “During the dark days of starvation, the most terrible fact to face was not death, but the demoralization of the people […] The presence of soldiers and officers offered a never-ending temptation to thousands of starving and despairing girls.”\textsuperscript{101} Another American source echoed the same theme of moral decline, “Not least among the evils brought to Syria by the war was the moral evil. Under the regime of terror and hunger the usual sanctions too often failed. Truth, honesty, chastity—all were imperiled […] Worst of all \textit{sic}, girls in this land of traditional virginal purity sold themselves for a loaf of bread.”\textsuperscript{102} Soon after the war’s end, a Lebanese commentator, sympathetic with the women and angry at their exploiters, invited the newly arrived French commander Gouraud, on a virtual tour of Beirut:

\begin{quote}
[…] You will meet an underage girl who will shock you with her \textit{air de prostituée}; If you ask her about her family, that suggestive smile will disappear from her face and be replaced by tears, she will tell you sadly that she comes from this village in Mount Lebanon or that neighborhood in Beirut, and that after her parents mortgaged their home and fields for a morsel of bread […] and then died of hunger. Then she became prey for the same monopolist murderers of her family that she sees promenading in their rich carriages and to whom the French and English now extend their hands and whose invitations they accept.\textsuperscript{103}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{101} Bayard Dodge, “Report on the `Abeih and Suk-el-Gharb Soup Kitchens,” n.d. A.A. 2.3.3.18.3, Jafet Library, American University of Beirut Archive (AUB).
\textsuperscript{102} Fredrick Bliss, “Retrospect 1914-1919,” n.d, A.A. 2.3.3.18.3, AUB.
\textsuperscript{103} J.Tabet “Lettre Ouverte au Général Gourad,” \textit{La revue phénicienne}, Noel 1919.
The women who had saved themselves or their siblings by resorting to sex work had lost nearly everything they had in material terms, exposed themselves to disease, abuse, and social exile while their exploiters, as a class, prospered (see chapter 2).

Much like other women who took on extraordinary wartime duties, an unequal burden of labor fell to female Catholic orders during WWI. Charity work was no doubt gendered before the war, but the disparity between men’s and women’s labor became even more striking during the famine. CUP officials seized most of the infrastructure of “foreign” religious orders, limited their ability to travel, and expelled those who were citizens of France and Britain. Nevertheless, the Jesuits, Franciscans, and most indigenous monks survived the war, able to draw on their resources, political and material to ensure their access to food. Jesuit Father Louis Cheikho appeared to be complaining, in his daily notes, about changes to the order’s diet:

> It is not only the poor who are suffering. In the morning we content ourselves with a piece of bread and some olives or a little piece of cheese and occasionally, a vegetable soup; no more café au lait. At noon only a serving [un plat] of meat and a serving of vegetables; no wine. In the evening no more meat […]"\(^{104}\)

By his own admission, “cadavers, everywhere, especially of poor people,” were ubiquitous in Beirut’s streets at that point in 1916.\(^ {105}\) The differential lot of male and female religious orders was also striking.

The CUP had hoped to sideline both, but ultimately had no recourse but to rely on nuns to administer orphanages and hospices. Thus, while Cheikho spent the war maintaining St. Joseph University’s Oriental Library and producing research, the Jesuit’s sister mission les Soeurs de la Charité spent their days administering hospices for orphans. On top of the daily stress of feeding hundreds of malnourished children with

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\(^{104}\) Cheikho, *Diare*, 5 October 1916, CDJ.

\(^{105}\) Cheikho, *Diare*, 3 June 1916, CDJ.
dwindling food supplies, the sisters were exposed to infectious diseases, especially typhus. Azmi Bey, the vali of Beirut province, accused the sisters of spending too much, and reduced the daily ration given to the children to 150 grams a day, along with, “a small amount of soup at noon.”\textsuperscript{106} If the forced conversion of Christian children was a barbaric reality of the war,\textsuperscript{107} the nuns—in secret, no doubt—also had the “consolation of sending some [of the Muslim children they converted] to heaven [sic].”\textsuperscript{108} Much like the mothers who were left alone to fend for themselves and their children, the nuns who operated the hospices had to care for children they could barely afford to feed. The gendered realities of the war speak to how the unequal burdens shouldered by women become amplified during times of crisis.

This analysis has attempted to reveal the intersections of gender and class that mediated the experience of the Lebanese population during the war. Close attention to antebellum social transformations renders the war’s tragic developments substantially more legible. If the prewar dynamism of Lebanon’s economy had created labor and capital mobilities that might be seen as liberating for women, the experience of WWI casts Lebanese capitalism in quite a different light. By no means is the latter point a repudiation of the former. It is, rather, a testament to the complexity of the Lebanese experience, and the key role migration had in shaping Lebanon’s volatile social history.

Finally, the differential experience of women during the war cannot be easily attributed to either “gendered” variables produced by cultural, socially constructed factors, cultural factors on the one hand, or to biological “sex,” on the other. If we

\textsuperscript{106} Cheikho, \textit{Diare}, 11 May 1917, CDJ.
\textsuperscript{108} Cheikho, \textit{Diare}, 10 September 1917, CDJ.
maintain that binary between nature and culture, one can only conclude that both played a role in shaping women’s particular experience, and it would be nigh impossible to quantify the impact of the one versus the other: female humans’ bodies are more resilient in times of extreme scarcity, as are other female populations of mammals. Equally, however, women survived longer during the famine because they were less mobile, and therefore not exposed to infectious disease at the same rate as men. They also had other gendered “entitlements” they could rely on to survive, such as marriage and sex work. By no means was the wartime experience of the women of Mount Lebanon homogeneous, however, nor was it necessarily easier than men’s. In some cases, such as the division of labor in Catholic religious orders, women faced more trying, dangerous conditions than their male counterparts. As noted above, even if women survived longer in the war, it was not clearly an advantage to have to stay at home, unable to care for starving and sick children. More than any other factor, class dictated which women would outlive the war, and which would not. The above analysis reveals that the distinction between nature and culture to be unhelpful, that human and non-human nature was inextricably entwined with material and social relations constituted amidst Lebanon’s incorporation into the global capitalist economy.

CONCLUSION: “NOTHING GOOD EVER CAME FROM THIS LAND”

In contrast to the prevailing paradigm that highlights the war as rupture, this chapter examined how the war amplified and accelerated processes underway during the Ottoman period. The continuities between the pre-colonial period, the French Mandate (1918-1946), and Lebanon’s independence, although more subtle than the ruptures, can be just
as instructive. Silk production had shaped every aspect of Lebanese existence from the water table and soil, to the social and gender relationships between Lebanese, as well as their political and economic linkages with the rest of the world. Its rise was the animating force for the migration of Lebanese abroad, and the dynamism of the country’s peasantry. This study of the food crisis of WWI has aimed to explicate the impact of the silk economy and migration on the food crisis, and the demise of the silk industry. The crisis of the war appears to be an extension of ongoing processes, and an exacerbation of social, political, and environmental instabilities.

Throughout the war, French capitalists had lobbied their government to occupy Syria and Lebanon so that they could profit under a French colonial regime. The war’s events, and the long-term demise of the silk industry, had imperiled their ability to do so. According to the Lyon Chamber of Commerce, which had played a decisive role in coordinating the rise of the silk economy, Ottoman Mount Lebanon’s “relatively dense population and above, all poverty,” had made the province particularly “well suited [tout à fait apte] for silk production.”¹⁰⁹ In the war’s aftermath, France’s agent charged with rehabilitating the silk industry described empty villages with houses of “smashed roofs, crumbling walls, where sometimes [only] ruins testify to barbarity that ought to have been abolished.” Famine had “decimated the peasant class,” which had either sold, uprooted, or neglected its only resources: “small fields of mulberries.” Perhaps a third of the country’s mulberry trees had been destroyed for fuel, and another third suffered from a “lack of care.”¹¹⁰ The war had devastated an ailing industry, which would never recover.

its prewar production levels. For French colonialists, the spectacular destruction of the war provided a cogent explanation for the woes of the silk industry in Lebanon in the early 1920s but silk’s demise in Lebanon grew from a broader crisis of Lebanese capitalism, intensified and made evident by the war.

Lebanon’s environmental vulnerabilities were not lost on those charged with wartime governance. In fact Lebanon’s wartime administrators latched on to a structural explanation for Lebanon’s crisis. Tasked with producing an exhaustive “social and scientific” study of “every aspect” of life in Lebanon, Turkish and Arabic-speaking elites, in their discussions of the Lebanon’s economy and ecology implicitly and explicitly diagnosed the food crisis as the product of Lebanon’s dependence on outside sources of income. Istanbul-born agronomist Hüseyin Kazım Bek (1870-1934), who coordinated the study, chastised the Lebanese for not having developed “scientific agriculture,” and a lack of self-reliance. He also condemned Lebanon’s soil as infertile. In the introduction to the detailed economic analysis of the 600-page volume, his anger at the shortcomings of the Lebanese and their “infertile” mountainsides was palpable:

The traveler who glanced at the marvelously unique villages of Lebanon, who […] saw those villages laid out one after another as if they were eagles' nests would surely have stood amazed at the […] natural munificence […] he cannot but […] judge that in the soil and rocks, mountains and valleys some relationship to the fineness of its inhabitants and their good fortune whether that be accurate or deception […] However, appearances, in this regard, are deceiving, as they often are. Therefore what one sees in Lebanon of sights of luxury, comfort, civilization and abundance does not have the slightest relationship with Lebanon's soil or mountains […] The fact is that everything that exists on the

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111 The war’s damaged an industry that was already in decline before the war, and was not sure to survive in any event. Synthetic fabrics and East Asian competition would force Lebanon out of the global silk market entirely during the 1930s. U.S. diplomats, relatively impartial observers, estimated that Mount Lebanon produced 4.5 million kilograms of silk cocoons before WWI. In 1928, the high water mark of post-war production in Lebanon, a territory three times larger than the Ottoman province, produced no more than 2.65 million kilograms. J.H. Keeley, “Crop Prospects in Syria: Cocoons,” 23 June 1929, Box 473, Entry 5, Narrative Reports (1904-1939) Syria, RG 166, NARA.
Mountain in terms of luxury was not put there by the soil and the mountains [...] but was gathered by the son of Lebanon in the economies of the mahjar. Therefore life and luxury on the mountain are borrowed. Its people, who cannot realize their potential from the hard rocky land and the sterile soil, have become used to following waves and waves into the mahjar traveling through North and South America as well as the cities of Australia, and Africa where they live for long years far away from their country and family searching for their fortune before returning with what they made. Thus, the signs of civilization in regions of Lebanon, they are the result of money made in the mahjar, as noted above. Therefore all of the civilization that one sees in it, is the result of that endeavor.

Recent events, which give so much pause, have shown us that every people is sometimes forced, to make its life and living on its own, and from its own land [...] And so during times like these, these dreadful days, there is no choice but for the population to seek bountiful harvests from their own land.

Kazım then notes that "America" may one day close its doors to the Lebanese, “as they have done to the Japanese, and for that reason, the Lebanese will have to focus on making their own land flourish.” Kazım portrayed the infertility of Lebanon’s soil as static and ignored how the silk economy had enabled Lebanese migration to the Americas. The country’s soil had, of course, been the source of great prosperity and had propelled the Lebanese to the American mahjar where they arrived, on average, with more money in their pockets than immigrants from Poland or Greece. Nonetheless, Kazım indicated what was an obvious fact during the war: Lebanon’s reliance on international commerce became a fatal liability during World War I.

Kazım’s investment in a structural explanation for the famine was perhaps not only an intellectual choice on his part. It worked to absolve the wartime administration of blame for the catastrophe. As susceptible as Lebanon was to a cessation in commerce, the Ottoman regime could well have devoted more resources to provisioning the civilian population and averted the catastrophe. They did not. That fact led many observers,

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113 Khater, Inventing Home, 209.
during the war itself and in retrospect, to compare the wartime fate of the Lebanese with the genocide of Armenians. The chapter that follows will test that claim, still prevalent in Lebanon, and explore proximate human agency in fomenting the food crisis.
CHAPTER 2

GRAIN AND A WAR FOR EMPIRE: FAMINE AND THE CREATION OF LEBANON

Just as Armenians and Assyrians were massacred in the most barbaric fashion by the Germano-Turks […] the Lebanese were also treated by them, without the slightest pity […] Attempting to delicately heal Lebanon’s cruel wounds, France has been shown worthy of its old reputation and long and glorious past; she has proved that, though badly wounded herself, she does not cease to consider others, and especially those who suffered for her.

-Comité de l’Asie française, 1922

The explanation for the famine that killed one in three Lebanese between 1915 and 1918, in its simplest incarnation, is that World War I interfered with the provisioning of grain to Beirut and Mount Lebanon. In August 1914, Ottoman mobilization destabilized the empire’s economy and the ensuing food crisis struck Mount Lebanon before any other Ottoman province. The blockade imposed by the Entente powers severely constricted the ability of the Ottoman Empire to transport foodstuffs, reliant as it was on maritime transport to link its internal grain market. Well apprised of the famine conditions prevailing in Syria and Lebanon, France and Britain refused to allow any interruption of their blockade to stem the tide of hunger. The French ability to resolve the famine by distributing grain facilitated their bid to colonize Lebanon after 1918.

The clash of empires which determined Lebanon’s future hinged on the French capacity to feed Lebanon’s population, and the Ottoman inability to do so. In that sense,

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Lebanon’s experience conforms to the environmental history of WWI more broadly: the Entente distributed grain effectively and prevented the Central Powers and the Ottoman Empire from doing so through a policy of blockade. Avner Offer’s influential thesis has maintained that Germany’s inability to mobilize primary commodities to compete with the Entente was the decisive factor in its defeat: “Germany did not run out of rifles or shells. It suffered badly from shortages of food. Likewise the Allies: their agrarian resources decided the war. So not only a war of steel and gold, but a war of bread and potatoes.”

In that regard, the Ottoman Empire was extremely vulnerable and experienced severe disruptions to its food distribution networks before its German and Austro-Hungarian allies. The Entente nations simply had superior capability to provision their armies and populations and the naval power to prevent their adversaries from doing so.

The Lebanese became the first victims of the naval cordon imposed by the British and French navies. In Europe, France and Britain compromised and allowed relief to pass through their blockade. Belgium, in particular, received food shipments from the United States aimed at relieving the population’s hunger. In all likelihood, the war would have caused a famine in Belgium had not the Entente governments made an exception to their blockade policy. France and Britain never seriously entertained the possibility of relieving the famine in Lebanon and Syria. What accounted for the divergence in policy? Were the lives of Belgians, Serbians, and Poles more worthwhile than those of the Lebanese? Did racism motivate France and Britain to prevent the passage of a relief ship destined for Beirut in January 1917? Quite possibly, although proving that racism was the

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decisive factor motivating Britain and France to continue their blockade in the face of mass starvation of the Lebanese would be difficult. This chapter will aim to show that French and British policymakers came to view the famine as useful for the purposes of colonizing the Eastern Mediterranean after the war’s end. France’s colonial designs on Lebanon dated back at least a century and the war, and particularly the famine, would enable France to formally annex Lebanon. Crucial to the imposition of French colonialism was the demise of Ottoman authority. The Ottoman Empire’s inability to manipulate the wartime grain supply led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of its citizens and decisively undermined the empire’s legitimacy in Lebanon and elsewhere.

In retrospect, the Ottoman decision to fight a war against France, Britain and Russia appears foolish. However, in joining the Central Powers, the Ottoman Empire saw “a great opportunity,” as Mustafa Aksakal has argued. World War I enabled Ottoman plans to fully colonize Mount Lebanon by cancelling its autonomy and extirpating French political and economic influence. Mount Lebanon’s political status had been the source of dispute between France and the Ottoman Empire since at least the 1840s. World War I witnessed the culmination of that conflict. The first weapon employed by the Ottoman authorities against Lebanon’s autonomy was the limiting of grain shipments to a population existentially reliant on the import of staple foodstuffs. That policy of grain limitation accounts for the initial bout of scarcity between August 1914 and April 1915 but does not account for the famine. As the reality of extreme scarcity became evident in the spring of 1915, the Ottoman administration attempted to provision Beirut and Mount Lebanon with grain, but failed (see Chapter 3).

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3 Mustafa Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War: The Ottoman Empire and the First World War* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 152.
Indeed, no evidence suggests that any party anticipated or planned the mass starvation that took place, contrary to prevalent narratives in Lebanon that charge the Ottoman government with having planned the catastrophe (see introduction). The famine was an externality of a military clash between empires. Lebanon, imperfectly colonized by either the French or Ottoman empires, saw the welfare of its civilian population fall victim to its relative lack of importance *vis-à-vis* their wartime military goals. France had hampered the Ottoman ability to wage war by denying it access to sea-lanes and when the civilian population of Lebanon became collateral damage of that policy, French officials saw a political opportunity in the starvation. France’s role in contributing to the famine, as well as genuine concern among Lebanese notables that they avoid another catastrophic famine, rendered the idea of an expanded Lebanon possible.

The salience of the famine for the creation of Lebanon in its current borders should not be underestimated. Carol Hakim has recently argued that there was no consensus among Maronite elites as to the need for the creation of an entity resembling Lebanon in its current borders until “the eleventh hour” before the declaration of Greater Lebanon in September 1920. The famine, as will be seen, was likely the decisive motivating factor for the French government and Lebanese nationalists to include surrounding grain-producing districts to create a nation three times the size of the Ottoman province of Mount Lebanon.

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THE IDEA OF LEBANON

Mount Lebanon had deep ties with the rest of the Syrian region that were cultural, political, economic, and ecological in nature. Those ties became stronger as population growth and economic integration reduced the Mountain’s autonomy by creating an increasing need for imported foodstuffs from the surrounding hinterlands. The mountain’s economic integration with France did not interrupt linkages with the Syrian interior, but rather intensified them. The agrarian economy of the Bekaa valley increasingly specialized in the production of foodstuffs destined for Mount Lebanon (wheat and sheep in particular) over the course of the nineteenth century.\(^5\) The salience of those connections, and Lebanese investment in the Bekaa, convinced some French diplomats and Lebanese elites that the province of Mount Lebanon should be expanded to include the agricultural hinterlands it was increasingly dependent upon for the import of staples.

That plan implied an important contradiction, however. An expanded Lebanon would include Muslim-majority regions and frustrate plans for the establishment of an autonomous Catholic-dominated political entity in Mount Lebanon. In May 1840, amidst the tumult entailed by the looming withdrawal of the Egyptian army from Syria and Lebanon,\(^6\) the French consul at Beirut, Prosper Bourée headed to visit the Amir of Mount Lebanon, Bashir Shihab II (1767-1850). France had supported Muhammad Ali’s occupation of Syria and Lebanon (1831-1841) but once the Maronite population rebelled

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\(^5\) The growth of the town of Zahla from a backwater into a commercial center testifies to this fact. Its inhabitants became prosperous by coordinating the production and sale of foodstuffs to the markets of Mount Lebanon. Dayr al-Qamar in the Shuf mountains, equally, benefitted from a similar role. See Alixa Naff, “A Social History of Zahle, the Principal Market Town in Nineteenth-Century Lebanon,” (PhD dissertation, UCLA, 1972), 40.

\(^6\) Mehmet Ali sent an army under the command of his son, Ibrahim Pasha to invade Syria in 1831. They defeated the Ottoman Army and occupied the region until 1841 when the British navy cut off the maritime connection between Egypt and Ibrahim Pasha’s forces.
against mass conscription into the Egyptian army, France’s two proxies turned against
one another. Bourée’s solution to France’s diplomatic quandary was to suggest to Bashir
that Mount Lebanon become “an independent Catholic principality.” Bourée’s superiors
in Paris thought this a bad idea. They hoped that Egyptian sovereignty would be
reestablished. Bashir, too, thought Bourée’s proposal unfeasible. Without a port, or the
Bekaa valley to supply grain, an independent political entity in the Mountain would be
moribund, Bashir told Bourée. Bourée’s superiors in Paris thought this a bad idea. They hoped that Egyptian sovereignty would be
reestablished. Bashir, too, thought Bourée’s proposal unfeasible. Without a port, or the
Bekaa valley to supply grain, an independent political entity in the Mountain would be
moribund, Bashir told Bourée. An “independent” Lebanon reliant on France would have
to await more auspicious circumstances.

The Maronite clergy initially took up the idea of an independent Lebanon with
enlarged borders between 1840 and 1860. After a period of dormancy, the idea of a
Greater Lebanon including the Bekaa resurfaced as rising population and the declining
fortunes of the silk economy threw Lebanon into disarray in the late nineteenth century
(see Chapter 2). At the beginning of the twentieth century, calls for an expansion of
Lebanon’s borders emanated from diverse quarters. Muzaffer Pasha, Ottoman governor
of Mount Lebanon between 1902 and 1907, attempted to convince the provincial
authorities in Damascus to cede the West Bekaa to Mount Lebanon, citing a dearth of
land as the main reason behind Lebanese emigration. Beirut-based Jesuit Father Henri
Lammens (1862-1937) first referred to Lebanon’s “natural borders,” in 1902, which
included the agricultural districts of the Bekaa, Akkar, and the coastal port cities of
Beirut, Tripoli, and Sidon. His view became broadly influential to Lebanese intellectuals
who argued that the Lebanese needed a land frontier to expand their capitalist agricultural

9 Engin Akarli, The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon, 1861-1920 (Berkeley: University of California Press,
1993), 64.
In his capacity as French consul at Beirut, François-Georges Picot also adopted the idea that the Lebanese did not have enough land to survive. According to him, Mount Lebanon produced only one-fourth of its own grain needs in July 1914, and that percentage “diminished everyday.”\(^{11}\) He lamented that the Lebanese were forced to cultivate plots of land that were only “two meters in width” meanwhile “a few kilometers away, in the neighboring province, with modern machines, a man can work a large piece of land in one day.” He noted that Lebanon in 1914, despite its rocky landscape, hosted a population of 161 persons per square kilometer while France had 73.\(^{12}\) He ultimately predicted, with more prescience than he realized, that ultimately “the crisis will become more painful […] and will only be overcome, with outside help.”\(^{13}\) The war was to open an opportunity to realize that objective and extend Lebanese territory. From the 1840s, the potential for the realization of the Lebanese national idea thus became tied to an expanded polity that was to be economically and ecologically sustainable. The material and political conditions for such an expansion did not come to be but through the famine. The wartime suffering of the Lebanese became a powerful testament to the narrative that Lebanon needed more land to survive.

The Ottoman Empire’s ruling clique entered World War I, in part, to forestall exactly such schemes as the Lebanese nationalist plan to expand their territory and gain more autonomy. Their wartime occupation of Lebanon aimed to rectify the

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\(^{11}\) Picot was significantly overestimating the amount of grain produced in Mount Lebanon. See Chapter 2.

\(^{12}\) If this calculation were correct, that would mean autonomous Lebanon contained 515,200 inhabitants \([161 \times 3,200 \text{ km}^2 = 515,200]\), a number which would have to include tax-paying immigrants residing outside of Lebanon to be correct. It is thus likely a significant exaggeration produced to capture the reality of demographic crisis in the Mountain.

\(^{13}\) Picot to Bompard, 19 July 1914, Constantinople Ambassade 275, Centre des Archives diplomatiques, Nantes, France (CADN).
decentralization of the Empire, and reorient the province back towards Istanbul and away from France. Lebanese nationalism, nurtured as it was by France and opposed by the Ottoman government, was an expression of a century-old conflict between France and the Ottoman Empire that reached its apogee during World War I. The next section will discuss the general wartime performance of the Ottoman economy to provide context for the analysis of Lebanon’s particular experience that follows.

THE OTTOMAN WARTIME ECONOMY

The World War I Ottoman economy presents the historian with the same difficulty faced by the wartime administration in Istanbul in 1914: the opaque and pre-industrial attributes that hampered mobilization also prevent systematic economic analysis in retrospect. The quantitative information that underpins studies of Germany’s wartime economy simply does not exist for the Ottoman case. In 1914, the Ottoman economy lacked the legibility necessary for effective central planning. Celal Bey, Minister of Forests and Agriculture in Mount Lebanon, noted in 1917 that the Ottoman Empire was unable to compete, “in the battles of this world,” without better statistics: “We are as he who gathers firewood in the dark.” [fa nahnu kā khāṭīb al-layl].”¹⁴ Celal based his observation on three years of experience watching the Ottoman war effort struggle to cope with the pressures of industrial warfare.

The Ottoman economy was capable of adequately supporting the defense of its territory against three years of Russian and British onslaught, but could not support offensives against those same powers, or sustain the Empire’s defense through a fourth

year, 1918. Not only was it insufficiently equipped for the “battles of this world,” the
Ottoman economy could not even be relied upon to provide the basic grain requirements
of its inhabitants. As the agricultural labor force became conscripted into the military,
“both land under cultivation and yields began to decline from the first year of the war. By
1916, total wheat production had declined by nearly 30 percent.”\(^{15}\) Unlike the more
capital-rich belligerents such as Great Britain and Germany, the Ottoman Empire did not
have a mechanized agricultural sector where one input could serve in the place of
another. Labor was irreplaceable in the absence of machinery and fertilizer.\(^{16}\) In another
consequence of its shallow coffers, the Ottoman government needed to pay
agriculturalists less during the war (much like Russia and Austria-Hungary), whereas rich
countries could afford to pay farmers more. In turn, grain-producers hid their stocks and
produced less.\(^{17}\) Famine spread amongst civilian populations from 1915. The war ended
for the Ottomans in October 1918 with significant portions of the Ottoman population,
including soldiers, dead or dying from hunger.

Scarcity hobbled the Ottoman economy more quickly than its allies but ultimately
Germany too succumbed from a lack of resources, surrendering when it could no longer
provide grain to its inhabitants or furnish enough solders for the battlefield.\(^{18}\) Thus,
economics determined the ultimate outcome of the war, and the defeat of the Ottoman
Empire along with its allies. Based on the prolonged nature of the conflict, “resources
counted for almost everything. The greater Allied capacity for taking risks, absorbing the

\(^{15}\) Şevket Pamuk, “The Ottoman Economy in World War I,” in *The Economics of World War I*, eds.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Broadberry and Harrison make a broad comparison in this regard between the “richer” and “poorer”
countries. See Stephen Broadberry and Mark Harrison, *The Economics of World War I* (Cambridge:

cost of mistakes, replacing losses, and accumulating overwhelming quantitative superiority eventually turned the balance against Germany;”\textsuperscript{19} as well as the Ottoman Empire. The Entente pressed this quantitative superiority by limiting their adversaries’ ability to transport foodstuffs. A couple of years before scarcity tore Germany and Austria-Hungary’s war effort asunder, the Ottoman Empire had already succumbed. In terms of the final outcome, the Ottoman experience does not differ greatly from that of their allies: they lacked the resources to compete with the British and French war machine.

Much has been made of the exceptional nature of the Ottoman state among European powers: for three generations of European diplomats, the Ottoman Empire was a ‘sick man,’ its existence more precarious than any other European state. Historians recycled this characterization at some length to suggest the inevitability of Ottoman collapse. Contrary to its depiction as exceptional, the mobilization of the Ottoman economy for war in 1914 quite resembled the initial stages of other powers’ economic preparations. Namely, the novel scale of coordination meant that as in Britain, France, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Germany, chaos reigned as preparations for total war required mobilization of maximum resources. Politicians in London, Paris, Berlin and Vienna were equally unaware that the war would involve a series of protracted campaigns over several years. Their economic planning met similarly steep challenges.

Contrasts between the Ottoman experience and that of the other major belligerents are as revealing as the similarities. The Ottoman Empire’s vulnerabilities were, in hindsight, numerous. The presence of a large peasantry represented a stark disadvantage

\textsuperscript{19} Broadberry and Harrison, \textit{The Economics of World War I}, 4-5.
Even more than Austria-Hungary and Russia, the Ottoman Empire’s agricultural orientation made it the least prepared to mobilize for total war. Despite that fact, the Ottoman leadership embarked on dual offensive campaigns on either end of their Empire believing that only through offensive action could they avenge territorial losses suffered in the years before the war.\(^\text{21}\)

Despite all the weaknesses in the Ottoman Empire’s ability to mobilize resources for war, it proved adept at fighting defensive battles. At Gallipoli, most famously, but also in Iraq and Gaza, the Ottoman Army held its ground against better-equipped British forces. Successes in defensive warfare suggest the counterfactual proposition that had the Empire stuck to defending its borders, it could well have survived the war. Requisitioning to support Cemal’s campaign against Suez sparked the famine that began in Mount Lebanon and spread to the rest of the Syrian provinces, spreading disease throughout the ranks of the Ottoman Army and the civilian population. Not only did the famine thus undermine the Ottoman ability to keep a healthy and well-supplied army in the field, it fatally wounded the regime’s legitimacy among the populace.

In terms of industrial capacity, the Ottoman Empire was the least equipped among the belligerents to prosecute a major war. At the outbreak of war, the Ottoman military effort could only rely on “a single cannon and small arms foundry, a single shell and bullet factory, and a single gunpowder factory,” all located in the environs of Istanbul.\(^\text{22}\) War materiel would have to be imported for the duration of the conflict and German

\(^{20}\) Broadberry and Harrison, *The Economics of World War I*, 18.
\(^{21}\) Aksakal, *The Ottoman Road to War in 1914*, 15.
economic aid helped fund the purchase of arms and ammunition.\textsuperscript{23} Unfavorable treaties with Western powers had limited the Ottoman State’s ability to industrialize. The Ottoman Empire had fewer than sixty enterprises with more than 100 employees and only 600 with more than ten workers.\textsuperscript{24} The import of manufactured goods, stipulated by treaties with European powers, had undermined artisanal production and left the Empire dependent on trade. In light of the abrogation of trade agreements with Entente powers and the blockade, the war saw a small but significant expansion of industrial production for building materials, foodstuffs and textiles.\textsuperscript{25}

Coal production plummeted during the war, slipping 40 percent by 1916 and a full 75 percent by 1918.\textsuperscript{26} The Empire could rely on 5,759 kilometers of railways in 1914. No railway could supply the eastern front against Russia, however, as the Czarist government had successfully prevented rail construction in northeastern Anatolia through diplomatic pressure. Moreover, Enver Pasha’s campaign against Russia suffered from a dependence on roads insufficient to move the required men and materiel. The railways connecting Istanbul with Cemal Pasha’s armies attacking Suez were incomplete. In part because of these transportation difficulties, Enver and Cemal Pasha’s offensives met with disastrous failure.

Railways in the Ottoman Empire generally connected agricultural hinterlands with coastal ports. For instance, the Adana plain relied on rail connections with the port at Mersin from where cotton, wheat and other commodities found markets \textit{via} the Mediterranean. The Beirut-Damascus line, and other ancillary railways connected the

\textsuperscript{23} Pamuk, “The Ottoman Economy in World War I,” 117.
\textsuperscript{24} Pamuk, “The Ottoman Economy in World War I,” 113.
\textsuperscript{25} Ahmet Yalman Emin, \textit{Turkey in the World War} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1930), 92.
\textsuperscript{26} Pamuk, “The Ottoman Economy in World War I,” 119.
Syrian interior with the port at Beirut. At the beginning of the war, no railway connected
the empire’s Anatolian and Syrian provinces. Shipments to Syria had to be unloaded,
carried over mountain passes, and then reloaded until 1917.\textsuperscript{27} Geared to interface with
maritime transport, not to foster internal mobility, the Ottoman railway system became
impotent in the face of the Entente blockade that interdicted maritime transportation for
foodstuffs.\textsuperscript{28}

The Ottoman agricultural sector had generally not been mechanized. As Şevket
Pamuk has noted, this left it unable to cope with the rapid disappearance of men from the
dominion’s agricultural fields. In countries with mechanized capabilities, machines could
replace men and output need not suffer. As the Ottoman Empire conscripted widely
among the peasant masses, no other input could be substituted. This lack of flexibility
hampered Ottoman food production amidst the reality of scarce labor in the
countryside.\textsuperscript{29}

Ottoman officials outsourced the provisioning of foodstuffs to consortiums of
merchants, lacking the administrative capacity to enact an empire-wide system. In
Anatolia, this policy aimed at rewarding Muslim merchants loyal to the CUP ruling
clique. In Lebanon and Syria, Cemal entrusted an inter-sect group of Christian and
Muslim merchants with ensuring the civilian food supply. Limited shortfalls in grain
harvests morphed into a catastrophic decline in market release of wheat, amidst the strain
and uncertainty of wartime conditions. The consortium of merchants charged with
feeding civilian populations with grain in Syrian and Lebanon sought profits instead of

\textsuperscript{27} Until the completion of the Amanus tunnel in January 1917. See Emin, \textit{Turkey in the World War}, 85-86.
\textsuperscript{28} Pamuk, “The Ottoman Economy in World War I,” 115.
\textsuperscript{29} Pamuk, “The Ottoman Economy in World War I,” 121.
the public good. The military prioritized the welfare of its soldiers and “loyal populations” above Arabic-speaking civilians. Military requisitioning of draft animals hampered the ability of farmers to plow and fertilize their land. Meanwhile, the likelihood that the Army would seize grain in excess of a producer’s subsistence needs convinced many to sow less acreage. Lastly, the government’s introduction of paper money, with uncertain value, created additional chaos in the agricultural economy by limiting the regime’s ability to purchase foodstuffs.

Alone among the belligerents, the Ottoman administration attempted a scheme of large-scale social engineering during the war—despite being the least equipped of the warring parties to do so. The sheer transportation requirements of the deportation of Armenians strained Ottoman roads and railways during a critical period of mobilization for war. Armenians represented nearly ten percent of Anatolia’s population, and a disproportionately large percentage of skilled laborers. Expulsions were intended to create lethal circumstances for the Armenian deportees and little was done to treat the epidemics of typhus and other diseases that raged in their ranks. Conversely, the spread of epidemic disease from the Armenians to other populations and Ottoman soldiers was one unexpected outcome of the expulsions. Another deleterious economic consequence of the genocide was the Armenian refugees clogging the main arteries of commerce between the Syrian provinces and Anatolia in 1915. If, to some extent, the Ottoman Armenian policy intended to secure some immediate or future “security” for Anatolia, the

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31 See Chapter 5.
short term economic consequences of the expulsion hindered the government’s ability to optimize the functioning of its war economy.

Mount Lebanon suffered from the wartime economic catastrophe before any other region of the Ottoman Empire. Its misfortune was not only the product of a series of ecological vulnerabilities (explored in Chapter 2), but also a result of Lebanon’s place in the clash between the French and Ottoman empires. Many in the Committee of Union and Progress saw the Lebanese population as disloyal and feared they would take the opportunity of the war to revolt with military support from France. In turn, they limited grain shipments to Beirut and Mount Lebanon to deny provisions to a rebel or invading military force. Thus, as will be seen in the following section, an Ottoman military calculation first catalyzed the scarcity that would morph into a full-fledged famine over the course of 1915.

THE COMMITTEE OF UNION AND PROGRESS TAKEOVER OF MOUNT LEBANON AND THE ORIGINS OF THE FAMINE

Food scarcity in Beirut and Mount Lebanon first emerged as a consequence of the CUP’s war preparations. Ottoman officials began curtailing grain shipments to Beirut and Mount Lebanon on the Beirut-Damascus train line in August 1914, according to the dispatches of the French diplomats who remained at their posts until the beginning of November. France’s consul in Damascus reported on 29 August that French officials had received the order not to export any grains or flour, “in the direction of Lebanon” which confirmed a days-old rumor to that effect32 which Ottoman officials felt obliged to deny in print.33 In late September, governor of Mount Lebanon Ohannes Pasha complained to George-
Picot confidentially that “the military commander in Damascus persists in prohibiting the importation of grains and stocks are falling meanwhile contraband increases, along with population’s disquiet.” In April 1915, France’s envoy in Cairo would describe a policy whereby Ottoman officials had for several months “limited” the number of grain-laden train cars destined for Lebanon in order to deny the population or a potential invading force grain stores they might use to fight against the Ottoman army. Other wartime restrictions, such as a ban on fishing, also curtailed the ability of the Lebanese to feed themselves.

During that time, there was no total blockade preventing the Lebanese from importing grain by means other than the train, however. “Beasts of burden” could still transport grain to the mountain. Soon, however, the requisitioning of draft animals by the Ottoman army would also make that route of importing grain as unfeasible as the train. The Ottoman military was also hoarding grain to prepare for its Suez offensive and other military occupations. The proposed invasion of Egypt was a poorly-kept secret. Perhaps most critically, the Ottoman army commandeered “scanty stocks of grain” for the purpose of what the U.S. consul at Beirut gauged to be “aimlessly carrying large bodies of troops by rail.” In turn, only a very few trains were available to transport wheat from the grain producing regions of the interior. By April 1915, grain scarcity in Beirut and Mount Lebanon was no longer clearly a product of an Ottoman policy to

34 S.N. [sans nom] Beirut, to Constantinople, 22 September 1914, Constantinople Ambassade 275, CADN. Picot was almost certainly the correspondent.
35 Defrance to Declassé, 24 April 1915, Série Guerre 868, Centre des Archives diplomatiques de La Courneuve, France (MAE).
36 200 families resident at Damur who relied on fishing for their livelihood were prevented from doing so by a military order that aimed at preventing them from passing information to the French navy. Al-Ittihad al-Uthmani, 21 January 1915.
37 Ottavi to Bompard, 18 September 1914, Constantinople Ambassade 275, CADN.
38 Hollis to Secretary of State, 21 April 1915, RG 59 Microcopy no. 353, Roll 51, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland (NARA).
prevent a revolt but rather an expression of an empire-wide food crisis that struck first
and hardest at Beirut and Mount Lebanon.

As will be seen in the section below, claims that the famine stemmed from a
conflict between Unionist Turkish nationalism and a nascent Lebanese national
consciousness have some basis in fact. They do not, however, provide a full explanation
for the famine. Lebanon was particularly vulnerable to the disruptions in grain supply
entailed by the war and scarcity. Ottoman attempts to ensure the provisioning of the
civilian population, albeit without sacrificing its war aims, came to naught as widespread
corruption undermined famine relief.39

War raged in Europe for more than three months before the Ottoman Empire formally
joined the Central Powers. That interval between 28 July and 28 October 1914 was
nevertheless fraught with instability and foreboding in Mount Lebanon and elsewhere in
the Ottoman Empire. A tussle broke out in the Lebanese mountain resort of Suq al-Gharb,
overlooking Beirut, on 12 September. Ottoman flags had been raised all over the town to
commemorate the Sultan’s birthday, one of which covered the entrance to “poor man”
Najib Shuwayfati’s small shop. According to the memoir of a senior functionary of
Mount Lebanon’s government, Yusuf al-Hakim, Shuwayfati sold non-alcoholic
refreshments [muraṭṭībāt].40 However, then governor of Mount Lebanon Ohannes

39 Mustafa Aksakal suggested this interpretation to me, which my own research confirms. Chapter 3 more
fully explores the question of Ottoman policy and corruption.
Pasha’s contemporary recounting described him as a *liquoriste* who had been imbibing some of his own merchandise. Shuwayfati attempted to remove the flag and a Lebanese gendarme tried to stop him; they fought, and the flag briefly fell to the ground. Ohannes’s memoir noted that the two men had clashed before and suggested that their differential religious affiliations (Shuwayfati was a Christian and the gendarme Druze) might have contributed to the tension between them. The event had no apparent political significance in Ohannes Pasha’s view.

This seemingly innocuous incident became quick fodder for Turkish-speaking Unionists wishing to portray the Lebanese as disloyal. Bekir Sami Bey, governor of Beirut province, had been summering in Suq al-Gharb when Shuwayfati and the gendarme fought. Although he did not have first-hand knowledge of the incident, he cabled Istanbul to report that the Ottoman flag “had become the object of derision in Mount Lebanon […]” and that Shuwayfati’s act “proved the overt and blatant hatred the people of Mount Lebanon harbor against the government.” In response, he believed that “the time has come to take the necessary measures against the Mountain,” by ending Lebanon’s autonomous status. Bekir Sami Bey hoped that Mount Lebanon would become part of Beirut province so as to increase the territory under his control. Bekir Sami, along with the *mushīr* of Damascus [Zaki Bey], “were acting as if they were direct superiors of Ohannes Pacha,” which, in theory, they were not.

Before the incident at Suq al-Gharb, Bekir Sami Bey had already accused the

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44 Picot to Bompard, 16 September 1914, Constantinople Ambassade 275, CADN.
Lebanese of sedition. Ohannes objected to Bekir Sami’s charge that the Lebanese “were secretly preparing an uprising,” in conjunction with foreign intelligence services, “using airplanes.” While maintaining that the accusation was “devoid of any foundation,” Ohannes nevertheless admitted that “it is incontestable that the entire population of Lebanon is animated by favorable sentiments for the Entente: the Maronites declaring loyalty [faisant des voeux] for France, the Orthodox for Russia, and the Druze for England.” He asserted that, the “understandable, from their perspective” admiration for the Entente was “certainly not of the nature to inspire them to acts of treason or revolt against the Ottoman Empire. The Lebanese are in any event totally satisfied by the advantages [accorded] by their distinctive administration.” Such was the uncomfortable position of Mount Lebanon amidst Unionist attempts to rid the Empire of foreign influence: the province’s extensive cultural, ecclesiastical, economic, and political connections with the outside, and especially France, were quite public. While Ohannes insisted that the above did not suggest overt disloyalty, Ottoman officials were not convinced.

A few days after the flag incident Zaki Pasha al-Faruqi, commander of the Fourth Army before Cemal, demanded that the cache of arms stored in the Christian-dominated Shuf mountain town of Dayr al-Qamar be immediately transferred to Damascus. Ohannes Pasha, then governor of Mount Lebanon, wrote him to protest that such a measure was unnecessary: “the arms you are requesting be transferred are unusable in light of their age and are stored […] as antiques therefore I see it as my duty to alert you that moving them from their location in the current conditions will arouse people’s suspicions by reminding

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them of the painful events of 1860.”\(^{46}\) The specter of massacre against the Christian population had remained since Lebanon’s Civil War, and Ohannes Pasha’s telegram revealed the fear among the population that the brewing global crisis could result in sectarian violence. Zaki Pasha continued to demand the disarmament of Mount Lebanon, a measure the French consul protested along with Ohannes Pasha.\(^ {47}\) For France’s consul in Beirut, and leading expert on the region, François Georges-Picot, Bekir Sami’s reaction to the ‘flag incident’ and the request for arms (which he stated were housed at Beiteddine, not Dayr al-Qamar) were part of a “suite of measures designed to exasperate the Lebanese and to create incidents from which they intend to profit.” Picot thought those provocations meant the “[…] situation was likely to become venomous.”\(^ {48}\)

Lebanese Quakers described “living under a heavy cloud” on the eve of the Ottoman occupation and “passing through an atmosphere of fear […] that they] hoped” but were not sure “to outlive.” Attacks, either by Ottoman troops, or other unnamed parties appeared imminent from the Quaker correspondent’s perspective: “We are afraid of being looted at any time,” and thus took precautions by selling their produce before it might be requisitioned. The mission school relied on donations from abroad that they could no longer expect to receive. “Please do not send us any money through the banks in Beirut,” they wrote to British supporters. “As far as we can tell, it is not safe to do so just now.” More threatening than their financial situation was the potential for sectarian violence,

There are many things said in the Arabic papers but we do not know what to believe. Some are trying to rouse the people up for a holy war, and of course this means much to the Christians, so many of us are passing a life of fear and

\(^{46}\) In 1860, during the events of the civil war, Christians were massacred in the Shuf mountains. Ohannes Pasha to Zaki Bey Faruqi, n.d, quoted in Al-Hakim, Bayrut wa Lubnan, 143.

\(^{47}\) Ottavi (Damascus) to Bompard, 29 September 1914, Constantinople Ambassade 275, CADN.

\(^{48}\) Picot to Bompard, 16 September 1914, Constantinople Ambassade 275, CADN.
trembling. We do not know much of the interior, you may know more than us. No-one is allowed to leave Beirut unless he has a pass.49

The new restrictions on movement, flows of capital, and censorship, contributed to the foreboding of the populace, which drew the majority of its income from remittances, followed by the export of silk (see Chapter 2). Christians, in particular, appeared to fear what the nationalist narrative would indicate in retrospect, that the coming war would entail wholesale attacks on the Christian population. Apprehension that they might face systematic requisitioning impacted their behavior, but never came to pass. Nevertheless, the last letters to be sent from the Mountain read like the above and created the impression, amongst Lebanese and their supporters abroad, that massacre was imminent.

The next news they received, of massive death by starvation, created the effect that the Lebanese Christian population had been intentionally targeted for annihilation. The latter inference was not outlandish, from the perspective of Lebanese in New York, Paris, or Cairo. Reports of the plight of Armenians appeared to confirm that the CUP was attempting the systematic destruction of its Christian populations. By no means was the Ottoman policy in regards to the Lebanese comparable to their genocidal intentions towards the Armenians, however. Although CUP officials regarded both populations as disloyal, the misfortune of the Lebanese did not arise from a concerted plan for their starvation; the famine was an accident, unlike the 1915-1916 deportations of Armenians that aimed to expose them to lethal conditions and ultimately eliminate their people’s millennial presence in Anatolia. In Lebanon, the Ottoman authorities were guilty of

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49 Previous letters posted to Quakers in Britain had to be written in French, Arabic, or Turkish according to censorship regulations (the censors presumably could not read English) but the departure of the U.S.S. North Carolina had presented the opportunity to post the letter directly, in English. A.J. Manasseh to Hodgkin, 18 November 1914, Box 1, File 1 1911-1914, Brummana Quaker Meeting, Near East School of Theology, Beirut (NEST).
negligence, but the tragedy with befell the Lebanese should not be considered a crime of the same magnitude as the Armenian genocide.

The following section will aim to surmise the Ottoman policy toward Lebanon at the beginning of the war, and will confirm the enmity between many Lebanese and the CUP depicted by the Lebanese nationalist narratives but will not, crucially, reveal a concerted Ottoman plan to starve the Lebanese—contrary to the way the famine was viewed by Lebanese diaspora communities at the time, and has been widely understood in Lebanon since (see introduction).

Ottoman troops occupied Mount Lebanon on 22 November 1914 abrogating the province’s autonomy in practice, even if it formally retained its special status. Before the war, Mount Lebanon hosted only a token detachment of Ottoman cavalry. The manner in which the Ottoman troops occupied Mount Lebanon reveals they maneuvered to avoid potential resistance. Instead of taking the comfortable Beirut-Damascus road on from Zahla, or the train to Beirut, they elected to cross at a higher pass to the north, with the aim of arriving at Bikfaya. The residents of Zahla had informed them that in bad weather that route could be treacherous, but the detachment’s commander paid no heed.

Halfway to their destination, a snowstorm blew in and they lost their way. Unsafe staying where they were, they sought shelter in the neighboring farms, whose inhabitants kindly provided them shelter, and later they accompanied them, after the storm had calmed, to Duhur al-Shuwayr, from which they descended [the Mountain] well-received and in affluence, in the houses and summer palaces [then] empty of inhabitants, and all of the [available] health treatments.
The detachment suffered more than 100 casualties due to the snow. One in ten died from exposure.\textsuperscript{50} Lebanese villagers saved them from incurring greater casualties, making their precautions against a potential ambush by “disloyal” Lebanese appear unnecessary and reckless. The request to remove arms from Dayr al-Qamar, the route the Ottoman army took into Lebanon, Bekir Sami’s statements, along with limitation of grain shipments all reveal CUP mistrust of the Lebanese population, and specific preparations to preempt an uprising.

Young Turk officials had some basis for their portrayal of Lebanese disloyalty. Many Lebanese had, in fact, cultivated political relationships with France in the years leading up to the war. In turn, French diplomats discursively constructed a Lebanese nation loyal, in its entirety, to France. According to Picot, “All the Lebanese feel […] the war is their war [\textit{sic}].” He described “volunteers rushing from the depths of the mountains ready to defend us.” By 17 August, “a certain number have reached France and should have by now began their military training, young men graduated from our collèges, a supérior of a Maronite convent, bishop of the Mountain, etc. Many others who wished to join were not able [\textit{ont dû y renoncer}] due to lack of resources.”\textsuperscript{51} A small number of Lebanese did fight on the side of France in the European theater, as did some from the diaspora community.\textsuperscript{52} Picot’s idea that the entire Lebanese nation was motivated to do so was, however, fanciful.


\textsuperscript{51} Picot to Bompard, 17 August 1914, Constantinople Ambassade 275, CADN.

Some in Mount Lebanon did consider an uprising, albeit before the Ottoman entrance into the war. A letter posted to the Maronite Patriarch noted that many Maronite men were interested in joining the French army. Rumored as well, was that two French ships laden with arms – requested by the Patriarch – were en route to Lebanon. The correspondent, a Father Sima’an, reported, from his first-hand observation, that military authorities in Tripoli were preparing “something against the mountain.” The French consul told Sima’an that while their army did not then require volunteers, they should be prepared to defend the Mount Lebanon against an Ottoman assault.53 While Huwayyik did contact the French Foreign Ministry on 21 August 1914 to discuss the possibility of a revolt,54 no evidence exists that the Patriarch actually did import arms, or support an uprising against Ottoman rule.

French diplomats working in the region, however, did lobbied for armed resistance. The French envoy in Cairo, Defrance, implored Paris: “an uprising must take place before Lebanon can be occupied.”55 Picot, who left Beirut on 2 November 1914 in the immediate wake of the Ottoman declaration of war, exhorted Paris to send arms or to “liberate” Lebanon directly upon arriving in Egypt.56 The Greek consul had already offered 10,000 rifles in September, which the French consul in Damascus counseled could not be accepted before the Ottoman Empire entered the war, because it would provide a pretext for the revocation of Mount Lebanon’s privileges. In the case of war,

53 Fr. Sima’an to Maronite Patriarch, 16 August 1916, Huwayyik 32/44, Archive of the Maronite Patriarchate, Bkiri, Lebanon (Bkiri). That Patriarch Huwwayik had ties with France was no secret. In April 1890, France advocated for the appointment of Huwayyik who had only recently been appointed bishop and was considered too young. The Porte along the Vatican preferred [Yuhanna] al-Hajj and successfully lobbied against Huwayyik’s appointment. The latter would become Patriarch in 1898.
55 Defrance to MAE, 9 November 1914, Série Guerre 867, MAE.
56 Defrance to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 4 November 1914, Série Guerre 867, MAE.
however, the consul believed that France should not “leave to others the privilege of offering the support the Montagnards have always expected from France.”\(^{57}\) The French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, paid little attention to these entreaties, also rejecting the offer of the Greek king to arm the Lebanese with rifles and ammunition. Not only did the central government in Paris not intend on launching its own attack, they reckoned, not unreasonably, that an uprising would go badly for their proxies in Lebanon.\(^{58}\) Ultimately, then, a military confrontation between Lebanese revolutionaries and the Ottoman regime existed only in the fears of the CUP, and the hopes of regional French diplomats and isolated and exiled Lebanese nationalists. In a tragic irony, the Ottoman preemptive response against this phantom threat – limiting the number of train cars that could leave for Beirut and Lebanon laden with grain—likely catalyzed the famine. Whatever the Ottoman plan for Lebanon was, the CUP harbored grave suspicion as to the loyalty of its inhabitants, and took steps to combat an armed uprising. It is possible that Ottoman state intelligence intercepted the agitations of Picot and his colleagues, and fully expected France to actively support a revolt even though Paris ignored their entreaties to that effect.

However overstated the threat, Cemal nevertheless took the perceived separatism of some Syrian notables quite seriously. In December 1914, he established a military tribunal [\(al-diwān\ al-\(^{c}\)urfi\)] at ‘Alayh in Mount Lebanon to try those accused of sedition.\(^{59}\) Even historians sympathetic to the CUP acknowledge that the tribunal’s activities aimed

\(^{57}\) Ottavi to Bompard, 29 September 1914, Constantinople Ambassade 275, CADN.

\(^{58}\) British Embassy (Paris) to MAE, 18 December 1914, Série Guerre 867, MAE.

\(^{59}\) The tribunal had jurisdiction over Beirut and Mount Lebanon. See Ajay, “The War Years,” (PhD Dissertation, Georgetown University, 1971), 64-65.
to “terrorize the population” into not collaborating with the Entente. A Maronite priest, Yusuf al-Hayik, was the first victim of Cemal’s “justice”: he was hanged on 22 March 1915, convicted based on letters uncovered by the censor. On 20 August 1915, eleven men were transferred from ‘Alayh to Beirut and hanged in Beirut’s central square, which has since been renamed Martyr’s Square. The tribunal had convicted them of membership in “underground Arab societies,” and Cemal had approved their sentences. On 20 August 1915, eleven men were transferred from ‘Alayh to Beirut and hanged in Beirut’s central square, which has since been renamed Martyr’s Square. The tribunal had convicted them of membership in “underground Arab societies,” and Cemal had approved their sentences. On 20 August 1915, eleven men were transferred from ‘Alayh to Beirut and hanged in Beirut’s central square, which has since been renamed Martyr’s Square. The tribunal had convicted them of membership in “underground Arab societies,” and Cemal had approved their sentences. On 20 August 1915, eleven men were transferred from ‘Alayh to Beirut and hanged in Beirut’s central square, which has since been renamed Martyr’s Square. The tribunal had convicted them of membership in “underground Arab societies,” and Cemal had approved their sentences. On 20 August 1915, eleven men were transferred from ‘Alayh to Beirut and hanged in Beirut’s central square, which has since been renamed Martyr’s Square. The tribunal had convicted them of membership in “underground Arab societies,” and Cemal had approved their sentences. On 20 August 1915, eleven men were transferred from ‘Alayh to Beirut and hanged in Beirut’s central square, which has since been renamed Martyr’s Square. The tribunal had convicted them of membership in “underground Arab societies,” and Cemal had approved their sentences. On 20 August 1915, eleven men were transferred from ‘Alayh to Beirut and hanged in Beirut’s central square, which has since been renamed Martyr’s Square. The tribunal had convicted them of membership in “underground Arab societies,” and Cemal had approved their sentences. On 20 August 1915, eleven men were transferred from ‘Alayh to Beirut and hanged in Beirut’s central square, which has since been renamed Martyr’s Square. The tribunal had convicted them of membership in “underground Arab societies,” and Cemal had approved their sentences. On 20 August 1915, eleven men were transferred from ‘Alayh to Beirut and hanged in Beirut’s central square, which has since been renamed Martyr’s Square. The tribunal had convicted them of membership in “underground Arab societies,” and Cemal had approved their sentences. On 20 August 1915, eleven men were transferred from ‘Alayh to Beirut and hanged in Beirut’s central square, which has since been renamed Martyr’s Square. The tribunal had convicted them of membership in “underground Arab societies,” and Cemal had approved their sentences.

On 6 May 1916, another fourteen met their end in the same place. To substantiate the legality of the proceedings that had led to their convictions, Cemal published the evidence used to convict the men. Among those documents was a 19 August 1914 request from one of the underground societies to a Lebanese émigré in Paris asking him to assess the potential for an armed movement. Most of the evidence used to convict the “martyrs” dated from before 1914 however, and was discovered in the papers of the French consulate. Cemal’s execution of the notables, and general antagonism with the populace, along with the policy of limiting grain shipments to Mount Lebanon inspired a narrative wherein he had intentionally starved the populace (see introduction).

The historical record appears to contradict the extermination thesis, however. By the time scarcity threatened to turn into famine in early April 1915, Cemal came to Beirut promising thirty train cars of grain weekly. A week later, al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani goaded Cemal: “We still do not know the reason grain has not shipped from Aleppo after Cemal,

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63 Commandant de la Quatrième Armée [Cemal Pasha], *La vérité sur la question syrienne* (Istanbul: Imprimerie Tanine, 1916), 125.
64 Al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani, 3 April 1915.
whose orders are followed in every regard, ordered it to be so.”

In response to Ohannes Pasha’s continued complaints about looming famine, Talat’s Interior Ministry had already promised two trains of provisions a week in early May. Grain promised by Cemal and the Interior Ministry did not reach consumers because the merchants who controlled the Beirut municipality monopolized its supply (see chapter 3). Their ability to do so stemmed from a bottleneck created by the war. The Entente blockade had denied the population of Beirut and Mount Lebanon access to their primary source of grain: coastal transport. The Ottoman Army requisitioned the relevant alternatives, the Beirut-Damascus train line and draft animals. While grain scarcity reflected the general Ottoman crisis of provisioning, Lebanon was the most vulnerable Ottoman province to a cessation in commerce (see Chapter 2).

Despite its embellishments and elisions, the nationalist narrative has some basis in fact. French imperialists and indigenous elites did not simply conjure the “extermination thesis” out of thin air. In fact, the Ottoman administration did carry significant blame for the food crisis. Substantial enmity existed between the CUP and elements of the Lebanese elite. The perception of impending conflict, however fanciful, catalyzed the grain crisis. For the CUP, the Lebanese were particularly disloyal Ottoman subjects, poised to use WWI as an opportunity to revolt. French diplomats were active in encouraging a rebellion and had close relationships with some members of the Lebanese and Beiruti elite. In turn, Ottoman authorities limited grain shipments to Beirut and Mount Lebanon in the first six months of the war, wishing to deny provisions to a potential rebel or invading force.

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65 *Al-Ittihad al-Uthmani*, 14 April 1915.
The clash of empires and its subplot, a confrontation of local nationalisms with the CUP’s centralizing policy, thus caused the initial bout of food scarcity in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Subsequent chapters will further explore the local dynamics of famine, and the following section will document the role of the Entente blockade in fomenting scarcity.

THE BLOCKADE

The British Navy received orders “to commence hostilities at once against Turkey” on 31 October 1914. Within a month, they were attacking all Ottoman shipping along the Eastern Mediterranean coast. The Entente blockade against the Ottoman coast would not be officially declared until August 1915 but in practice Britain was interdicting Ottoman shipping from December 1914. The French Navy took over responsibility for patrolling the Syrian coast in March 1915, a duty it would maintain for the remainder of the war.

Several years before the outbreak of WWI, the British government developed the blockade policy as a contingency in the event of war against Germany.

The naval blockade plan [was] prepared in secret in the Admiralty and the Committee of Imperial Defence between circa 1906 and 1914. This was a project for total war. If Britain was to be a combatant, the naval blockade plan brooked no restraint. It proscribed any form of trading with the enemy. And by taking the civilian population as its target, it repudiated the distinction between combatants and noncombatants, which is a fundamental principle of the conventions of war.

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News of the famine trickled out of Lebanon via Cairo’s Syrian and Lebanese émigré community. The French charge d’affaires in Cairo, Jules-Albert Defrance maintained close relations with the community of politically minded exiles, many of whom had fled on the eve of the war. He championed their cause, and in November 1914, advocated French intervention in Lebanon before Ottoman troops could occupy the country. His office served as a main conduit for intelligence, only some of which was reliable, about conditions inside the Arabic-speaking Ottoman territories. Defrance was fully apprised of the famine conditions in early 1916, as was the government in Paris. Quickly, the same news reached the global press and an international outcry began. Defrance reported “increasingly alarming reports” detailing the famine conditions in Lebanon. Many political exiles had fled to Cairo to avoid the repression of Cemal Pasha’s regime. “L’émotion chez les Syriens est intense […] Here the Syrians are discussing a plan to send a delegation to Paris to implore France to send relief and influence the public opinion [in that regard].” The French diplomat did not see the need for them to make the voyage, however, and had assured the worried exiles that “the government of the Republic is informed le plus exactement possible as to the situation in Syria.” Faced with his Lebanese contacts on a daily basis, Defrance implored Paris to act, by forwarding letters from diaspora Lebanese recalling France’s own claims to be “protectrice séculaire du Liban.” Defrance echoed their criticisms, noting France’s “material and moral obligations [toward Lebanon…] as the partial, involuntary cause of the distress and suffering of the Lebanese population: it is certain that the blockade of the coast,

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Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (New York, Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press), 171. In the Declaration of London (1910), the British government had confirmed the rights of neutral nations to trade during conflict. The blockade, which actively interdicted neutral trading, therefore directly contravened an accord the British government had sponsored less than four years before the outbreak of war.
established and maintained by a French squadron, is an obstacle to the provisioning of Lebanon.” Picot would also press the government of France to intervene. In the absence of decisive action, the reputation of France as the protector of Christians might suffer irreparable damage, he feared.

Instead of a liability, French Foreign Minister Jules Cambon saw in the famine a political opportunity to impose French colonialism: it would make the Ottoman Empire “hated in all of the Arab countries.” In Cairo, Defrance and Picot had to face Lebanese exiles lobbying for the country’s salvation. Meanwhile in Paris, Cambon could see the issue dispassionately. Picot’s call for military invasion ignored the absence of resources for such an adventure meanwhile Paris remained under threat of German advance. Not only was the French Foreign Minister unwilling to expend resources to save France’s erstwhile Lebanese charges, he also prevented neutral countries from furnishing relief.

In April 1916, U.S. Secretary of State Robert Lansing reported that Britain and France, “[…] decline permission for America to send provisions and food to blockaded coast.” Lansing doubted “large sums can be raised here as American people feel it is duty of Germany to feed her allies.” Lansing did not count on the capacity of Syrian and Lebanese immigrants to lobby relevant governments, raise money, and garner support in the general American population for a relief mission. By June, Lansing acknowledged

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70 He still sought to exculpate France by noting that any relief arriving through the blockade would be confiscated by the Ottoman Army, and would not reach civilians in any event. Defrance to MAE, 25 May 1916, Série Guerre 873, MAE.
71 François Georges-Picot (memorandum), 26 July 1916, Série Guerre 873, MAE.
72 Jules Cambon (memorandum), 4 July 1916, Série Guerre 873, MAE.
73 Secretary of State (Lansing) to the Chargé in Turkey (Philip), 19 April 1916, FRUS: 1916, Supplement: The World War (Washington, D.C. 1929), 928.
“receiving numerous inquiries relative to this matter,” instructing U.S. diplomats to maneuver to secure permission for a relief expedition to be accepted.  

The plight of their homeland deeply moved the Lebanese who lobbied neutral and Allied governments. From the war’s outset, Lebanese immigrants had watched the events of the war with trepidation. The poet and novelist Khalil Gibran (1883-1931) wrote his companion, school principal Mary Haskell, in August 1914 to express his foreboding. “I have not been able to do my work […] war in Europe robs one’s soul of its winged silence and its quiet songs. The air is full of cries, Mary, and one cannot breathe without getting a taste of blood.” Soon after, on the very day the Ottoman Empire entered the war, Gibran had already had news of difficult conditions in his “Syrian” homeland: “Syria, too, is being shaken by the great storm. The poor little country is going through a terrible crisis and conditions there are as bad as any part of Europe.” By May 1916, he and other Syrians in New York had news of the famine that they believed had “been planned by the Turkish government.”

There was a general impression among Lebanese immigrants in the United States that their country faced grave danger. A Maronite group in Cleveland, Ohio wrote a frantic telegram to the French Ambassador in Washington, sent at 1.33 AM on 28 May 1916:

Your excellency we have reliable information that the Maronites in the Lebanon [sic] are about to be massacred and as in the past in our darkest hour we look to your beloved protection for succor realizing France is at war yet the band of sympathy is so great we feel she will find a way to save our people from such a

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74 “Prompt reply greatly desired. Call attention of Turkish Government to strong sympathy in United States for destitute in Syria.” The Secretary of State (Lansing) to the Chargé in Turkey (Phillip), 17 June 1916 in FRUS: 1916, 930.
75 Gibran to Haskell, 20 August 1914, Minnis Family Papers 269, SHC.
76 Gibran to Haskell, 1 November 1914, Minnis Family Papers 269, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (SHC).
77 Gibran to Haskell, 29 May 1916, Minnis Family Papers 271, SHC.
horrible fate trusting you will use your influence to help prevent the slaughter of
a defenseless people who love France as they do the Lebanon.
We are respectfully yours, St. Johns Marons Society, R.A. Alzar President

The news of worsening conditions in Syria reached the highest levels of the French
government. France encouraged the view that suffering of the population in Lebanon
resulted from a concerted plan of the “Turkish government,” which was “analogous to the
massacre of Armenians.” Not all Syrian and Lebanese exiles were convinced that the
famine was an intentional policy of the Turkish government; however, the Spanish
consul at Beirut told American diplomats, “he did not believe the Turkish Government is
carrying out a previously conceived plan of starving the inhabitants of the Lebanon, or
that the entry of food is prevented by a military cordon.”

For its part, in discussions with foreign diplomats, the Ottoman government
denied that starvation was happening at all. The Ottoman Minister of the Interior, Talat
Pasha demanded that Cemal send him information to refute the “rumors” in the American
press, insisting in July 1916 that “nobody has died from hunger in Syria [Suriyede hiç
kimsenin açıktan telef olmadığı]” in July 1916. Famine was, at that time, taking
hundreds of victims each day in Mount Lebanon.

As international diplomats debated the situation in Syria, Gibran and other
émigrés set about raising money for relief from their New York headquarters. Along with
the Red Cross, their efforts would help supply the U.S.S. Caesar, a transport ship, with

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78 Alzar to Jusserand, 28 May 1916, Washington Ambassade 240, CADN.
79 Briand (President du Conseil) to Jusserand (Ambassadeur Français, Washington), 17 May 1916,
Washington Ambassade 240, CADN.
80 Three leaders of the Lebanese immigrant community in New York indicated they had received
conflicting reports as to the famine’s cause. Syrian and Lebanonian Associated Press, signed Mokarzel,
Diab, Aswad (New York) to Woodrow Wilson, 31 May 1916, RG 59 Microcopy no. 353, Roll 51, NARA.
81 Lansing to Jusserand, 26 June 1916, Washington Ambassade 240, CADN.
82 See, Philip (Constantinople) to Sec State 5 July 1916, RG 59 Microcopy no. 353, Roll 51, NARA. See
also, Lansing to Jusserand, 26 June 1916, Washington Ambassade 240, CADN.
83 Talat to Cemal, 11 July 1916, DH.ŞFR  65/180, BOA.
nearly a hundred metric tons of grain as well as medicine, kerosene, cooking oil, condensed milk, and donated clothes.\textsuperscript{84} After some negotiation, both France\textsuperscript{85} and the Sublime Porte\textsuperscript{86} assented in principle for the \textit{Caesar} to carry aid to Beirut.

Paris and London never seriously considered a relief mission that might compromise the goals of their blockade, however, fearing it would “remedy the shortage of supplies which it is the very intention of the blockade to produce.”\textsuperscript{87} As soon as the relief mission appeared on the diplomatic cables the foreign ministers of France and Britain colluded to publicly entertain plans for a relief mission while privately courting a diplomatic dispute with the Ottoman administration over the details of distribution.\textsuperscript{88} Ottoman officials eventually agreed to the mission, and to let the American Red Cross distribute aid,\textsuperscript{89} thereby calling the Entente’s bluff. In January 1917, the Caesar reached Alexandria. Just as the \textit{Caesar} was poised to sail for Beirut on 29 January, the French Navy cabled U.S. diplomats in Egypt, denying it permission to pass.\textsuperscript{90} The French admiralty scuttled the mission in the final moment it could have possibly relieved the population of Beirut and Mount Lebanon. As was then already known, the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare by German U-boats and the consequent entrance of the United States into the war would signal the end of American neutrality.\textsuperscript{91} U.S. sponsored

\textsuperscript{84} Red Cross Acting Chairman, Washington, D.C. to Secretary of State (5 December 1916), RG 59 Microcopy no. 353, Roll 52, NARA.
\textsuperscript{85} The French Ambassador (Jusserand) to the Secretary of State, 25 November 1916, \textit{FRUS: 1916}, 939-940.
\textsuperscript{86} The Ambassador in Turkey (Elkus) to the Secretary of State, 23 November 1916, \textit{FRUS: 1916}, 940.
\textsuperscript{87} Bertie (British Embassy, Paris) to Margerie, 2 June 1916, Série Guerre 873, MAE.
\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{89} DeFrance to MAE, 29 September 1916, Série Guerre 874, MAE.
\textsuperscript{90} Garrels, Consul (Alexandria) to Secretary of State, 29 January 1917, Microcopy No. 353, Roll 52, RG 59 Records of the Department of State Relating to the Internal Affairs of Turkey, 1910-29, NARA.
\textsuperscript{91} By early January 1917, the United States government became aware of German plans to resume unrestricted submarine warfare as early as the “end of February [1917]” according to “the military attaché of a neutral power,” in Constantinople. “This the Germans state will be a breach of all their promises to such an extent that it will certainly bring about a rupture of diplomatic relations between the United States
relief missions would no longer be feasible as all shipping would again be the target of German torpedoes.

In other cases, the Entente made exceptions to its blockade policy. After Belgium’s August 1914 occupation, the United States had mobilized a relief effort by October and quickly received British and German approval that goods could be transported by neutral countries and would not be requisitioned by the German military. For the British, that concession meant allowing the German Army to requisition more of Belgium’s harvest for its own purposes thereby undermining the goals of its blockade. Valuable shipping tonnage also went to provision a population under German suzerainty. Belgium, much like Lebanon, imported nearly three-quarters of its food requirements and the cessation of global commerce spelled famine in the short term. Even after the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare in February 1917 and the accidental sinking of Commission for Relief in Belgium transport ships by the German navy, Allied governments and Germany did not flinch in their commitment to supplying Belgium with grain.

Why did Lebanon’s population not enjoy the same commitment to relief from the international community? Did Lebanese lives matter less to British, French, and American politicians? On the one hand, practical concerns made relief to Belgium more plausible. The North Sea allowed for a more porous blockade than the Eastern Mediterranean. Neutral Dutch territory allowed the Commission for Relief in Belgium to

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92 The Ambassador in Great Britain (Page) to the Secretary of State, 26 October 1914 (855.48.10), FRUS: 1914, Supplement: The World War (Washington: 1928), 813. The State Department had become aware of famine conditions in Belgium 20 days earlier. The Ambassador of Great Britain (Page) to the Secretary of State, 6 October 1914 (855.48/1), FRUS: 1914, 809-810.

funnel aid through territories adjacent to Belgium meanwhile the country’s proximity to Europe meant that information about famine conditions travelled quickly abroad. Despite the relative difficulty in sending relief to Lebanon as compared to Belgium, these practical obstacles could have been overcome. U.S. diplomats in Egypt believed the passage to Beirut possible, despite the risk of running into minefields. The decision to not provide relief to Lebanon likely related to France’s imperial intentions and not practical concerns. The French hoped that the ongoing famine would further reduce Ottoman legitimacy and ease the prospective colonization of the Eastern Mediterranean after the war. The May 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement testified to the imperial intentions of Britain and France.

French diplomats posted to the region, such as Picot and Defrance, lobbied for a direct military intervention to save the Lebanese. Paris never seriously entertained such a scheme, electing instead to wait for the ultimate military solution to the conflict: the British Army’s advance from Egypt. After that moment, plans for ‘saving’ the starving Lebanese and Syrians faded from the minds of French diplomats who had opposed Paris’ inaction. Instead of acting to relieve Lebanese suffering Paris and London crafted a narrative that blamed the Ottomans for the famine. Instructions had already been given to the French Ambassador in Washington that President Wilson should be “made to understand that the cause of famine was not a lack of resources but rather the intentional blockade of Lebanon by Cemal Pasha.”

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94 The British government announced its intention to launch a January offensive against Al-Arish, and encouraged French participation, De la Panouse (Military Attaché, London) to French General Staff October 6, 1916, Série Guerre 874, MAE.
95 Margerie [MAE] to Washington, 25 September 1916, Série Guerre 874, MAE.
British and French attempts to deny their country’s role in the blockade suggest an awareness that their role in fomenting food scarcity could likely be a political liability. In February 1919, the Foreign Office denied that Britain should announce the lifting of a blockade it had never declared. France alone was responsible. For their part, French colonialists blamed the Ottoman Empire for starving the Lebanese, even suggesting that the Ottomans had themselves enforced the maritime blockade. Subsequently, the French government adopted the “extermination thesis” as their official interpretation of the food crisis (see introduction).

For his part, Khalil Gibran in New York remained unaware of French duplicity in regards to the plight of his homeland, much like many Lebanese exiles. He wrote Mary Haskell saying that he was helping to organize volunteers to join the French army which he believed was “almost ready to enter Syria” in April 1917. France’s propaganda against the Ottoman Empire had succeeded. “With the help of the Syrians in this city I have been able to organize a “Syrian-Mount Lebanon Volunteer Committee.” I had to do it Mary. The moral side of this movement is what the French government sees and cares for.”

Wartime French propaganda had served its purpose. Influential Lebanese ignored the blockade’s role in the famine. Equally, news of the awful conditions reigning in Lebanon further delegitimized the Ottoman regime in their eyes. Ultimately, France paid little political price for its blockade. Quite the contrary, in fact, the famine helped bolster

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98 Gibran to Haskell, 20 April 1917, Minnis Family Papers 272, SHC.
support among key constituencies of the Lebanese diaspora for the French colonial project in their homeland. 99

FRANCE AS “SAVIOR”: THE END OF THE BLOCKADE AND THE CREATION OF LEBANON

After it became clear that France would not intervene militarily to save their Lebanese proxies, Picot busied himself preparing for the relief efforts that would immediately follow the cessation of hostilities and ameliorate France’s position among the Lebanese. Grain distribution was to be his immediate priority, on top of enforcing the agreement he had signed with Mark Sykes to divide the Middle East. Picot became “High Commissioner in Syria and Palestine”; British and French diplomatic circles regarded him as the leading expert on the region.

French forces occupied Beirut on 8 October 1918 but would not control the rest of Syria for almost two years. With British help, Amir Faisal’s Arab movement occupied the Damascus and Bekaa valley, threatening the French hold over territory granted to it under the provisions of the Sykes-Picot accord of May 1916. Faisal, like the French, attempted to use grain as a political strategy to win the allegiance of a starving populace. 100 When Faisal travelled from Damascus to Beirut to embark for the Paris Peace Conference in November 1918, his followers made a show of distributing grain

99 Not everyone was fooled, however. Another Lebanese poet, Mikha’il Nu’aima wrote an oft-cited poem discouraging any sympathy with France: “Brother, if when the war is over / The west clamors for glory/And sanctifies its dead and glorifies its heroes, / Do not sing the praises of the victors / Or despise those who lost the war. / Instead, like me, kneel silently / And in reverence / To weep over our dead […] Brother, if when the war is over / Soldiers go home to shelter in loving arms, / Do not expect love when you go home. / For hunger has left us no friend to love / Other than the ghosts of our dead […] Brother, who are we? Without a home, alone / Grab a shovel and follow me / So we may bury our living.” Mikha’il Nu’aima, “1917,” cited and translated by 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, no. 4 (2014): 719.

100 Picot to MAE, 10 November 1918, Picot 2364, Petits fonds, CADN.
from carts along the road leading north from Beirut to Mount Lebanon. Faisal stumbled where Ottoman relief had also erred: he designated some of the notable families to distribute three train carloads of grain. Some part of those went to feed the populace, but the majority, “as usual,” went into “private pockets.”

France instead adopted a strategy of direct distribution to the poor. Unfavorable comparisons with Ottoman provisioning must have only been rhetorical. First of all, instead of relying on intermediaries as had the Ottomans, supplies were to pass directly from “the hands of soldiers to those of the consumers, reducing the risk of fraud to a minimum.” Meanwhile, the political impact of these operations loomed ubiquitously: “the free distribution of these [...] supplies as a welcome from France, indispensable to save 100,000 Lebanese affamés, will produce a great impression [...]”.

Twenty thousand relief cards were to be distributed to the “most needy families”, as adjudged by local authorities. Returning with the French Army to oversee the distribution of grain were Jesuit priests who had spent decades in Lebanon. They lent sophistication to French policy that allowed relief to be quickly effective in Beirut and rural districts of Lebanon.

The arrival of a second ship on 1 December 1918 decisively broke the conditions producing famine. The arrival of this second ship eased the market and the ‘monopolizers’ released their stocks. The military resolution of the conflict along with

102 Picot to MAE, 10 November 1918, Picot 2364, Petits fonds, CADN.
103 Coulondre to MAE, 29 October 1918, E-Levant 59, MAE.
105 Picot to MAE, 1 December 1918, E-Levant 59, MAE.
106 Picot to MAE, 18 December 1918, E-Levant 59, MAE.
French and British relief efforts undermined speculators by establishing renewed certainty in the supply of staple grains. Although a new ship would be needed, stocks from the *Edouard Shaki* were thought to suffice through January, reckoned Picot, who noted the political impact of the famine’s resolution: “Everyone in Beirut attests their lively acknowledgment of the initiative taken by the French government.”

The French aimed to remove the visible reminders of the horror of the famine from the public eye, providing shelter to orphans and gainful employment to women who had turned to prostitution.

France could rely on Mediterranean colonies to pursue an aggressive provisioning scheme in Lebanon. By January 1919, shipping lanes had reopened and the Ministry of War collected 800 tons of wheat from Algeria, 800 tons of potatoes and 200 tons of rice from warehouses in Marseille, salt from Tunisia and petroleum from Egypt to fulfill the monthly requirements of Syria. While awaiting that shipment, France’s High Commissioner in Syria and Palestine, Picot, wrote to France noting that he had been forced to source grain in the interior. The availability of grain in Hawran province and in Damascus is significant and confirms the willingness of producers there (still outside of French control at that point) to part with their grain. Commercial relations with the outside lagged, complained Picot, and their resumption would ensure the political position of France.

Responding to objections about the expense involved in relief, Picot noted that relief was a ‘political necessity of the first order’. By May 1919,

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107 Picot to MAE, 18 December 1918, E-Levant 59, MAE.
109 Président du Conseil, Ministère de la Guerre to MAE, 10 January 1918, E-Levant 59, MAE.
110 Picot to MAE, 1 February 1919, E-Levant 59, MAE.
111 MAE to Commissaire aux Transports Maritimes et la Marine Marchande, 3 February 1919, E-Levant 59, MAE.
112 Picot to MAE, 4 March 1919, E-Levant 59, MAE.
French officials on the ground perceived that further shipments from France loaded with grain for free distribution were unnecessary.\textsuperscript{113}

In the months following the end of the war, the (implicit) specter of French culpability for the famine provided a constant subtext to negotiations concerning the future of Lebanon. Lebanese nationalists persistently reminded their French counterparts of their wartime suffering, recalling France’s inability to fulfill its rhetoric as the country’s savior. In January 1918, Lebanese nationalist Yusuf Sawda was preparing his notes for a meeting with Picot in Cairo (where much of the nationalist leadership had spent the war), and crossed out a page of writing, replacing detailed talking points with a simple plea: “It was our hope that France would be the first line of defense for Lebanon […] in reverence for Lebanon’s sacrifice during this war during which half of its population was annihilated by hanging, exile and intentional starvation […] Is not France disturbed?”\textsuperscript{114} Sawda played on France’s purported role as protector of the Lebanese, implying that faith in France had been shaken by their inaction. Picot, evidently, was sensitive to the accusation. After returning to Beirut, in response to a desperate plea for news of their countrymen sent by the Lebanese émigré community of Buenos Aires, Picot cabled them back denying that thirty percent of the population – the figure they had heard in Argentina—perished during the war.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{113} Feer to MAE, 7 May 1919, E-Levant 59, MAE. Several relief ships had arrived from Marseille in the interim: the Bosphore on 28\textsuperscript{th} February, the Waldeck Rousseau on 17 March, Ispahan 20 March, San-Antaou, 29 March. Additionally, the French authorities sourced grain locally from Alexandretta, Latakia and Hawran. British authorities had also delivered grain to Beirut. Picot to Pichon, 7 July 1919, E-Levant 59, MAE.

\textsuperscript{114} Yusuf al-Sawda, notes, January 1918, Archive Yusuf al-Sawda YS-7A-039 a-e. Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik, Lebanon (USEK).

\textsuperscript{115} Goussen to Picot, 25 November 1918, E-Levant 59, MAE; Picot to MAE, 4 December 1918, E-Levant 59, MAE.
Picot knew better and was even willing to use Lebanese suffering to pursue political goals when convenient: a week after his denial to Buenos Aires he forwarded a petition suggesting that “half” the mountain had died from starvation during the war.⁠¹¹⁶ On the one hand, France’s inability to protect the Lebanese during the war proved a political liability for France. Picot felt he needed to hide it from “their [Lebanese] clients” abroad, yet at the same time an exaggeration of the scale of the tragedy bolstered claims for a country with extended borders the necessity for which appeared as a bulwark against another bout of starvation. Without those districts, Picot worried that France would run the risk of “disappoint[ing] their clients” in Lebanon and also that maintaining the current borders would “enclose Lebanon, as in 1860 in a ring of abrupt mountains where they will not be able to survive.”⁠¹¹⁷ The specter of starvation infused the debates over Lebanon’s future, and crucially bolstered Lebanese nationalist claims for extended borders.

Two groups primarily represented Lebanese nationalism: exiles in Cairo led by Sawda who worked in the context of the Alliance Libanaise and the Maronite Patriarch Elias al-Huwayik and his deputy, ‘Abdallah Khuri. The latter group led the three delegations to Paris until Prime Minister Millerand acceded to their demands. In the seminal tract of presenting their demands to the conference, “Les Revendications du Liban” the Maronite Patriarch systematically addressed this question of borders, staking Lebanon’s claim based on the existence of Lebanon in antiquity, its cultural difference from surrounding regions, resultant affinity with France, and suffering during the First World War. In his telling, “more than a third of the Lebanese population” died because

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¹¹⁶ The petition was eventually distributed to French delegates to the Peace Conference in February 1919. Conseil Administratif du Liban, petition, 19 December 1918, E-Levant 5, MAE.
¹¹⁷ Picot to Pichon, 22 Nov 1918, E-Levant 5, MAE.
of a ‘Turkish’ campaign of “terror and intentional starvation [affamement].” In turn, “Lebanon paid, during the war, the most formidable, the most bloody tribute that a people has ever paid for the defense of a cause.” Millerand also received similar entreaties from inside Lebanon: The Greek Catholic Archbishop of Zahla wrote him, "the interests of the Lebanese demand the annexation of the kazas and districts in question. In effect, without said annexation, Lebanon will be condemned to death by starvation." No document could substantiate that those pleas swayed the thinking of Millerand or Picot. Years of reports of starvation inside Lebanon, juxtaposed with French rhetoric advertising itself as “Lebanon’s protector”, and the reality of the blockade must have influenced French receptivity to Lebanese nationalist demands during the peace negotiations.

The French government did not confirm that Lebanon would be granted expanded borders to the Lebanese delegation in Paris until 19 August 1920. Events on the ground moved faster than the negotiations in Paris. General Gouraud, after defeating Faisal’s forces at the Battle of Maysalun on 24 July 1920, wrote Paris stating his intention to declare Greater Lebanon including the Bekaa weeks before. On 10 August, Gouraud declared the “reattachment” of the Bekaa to Lebanon a “fait accompli,” confidently pronouncing: “the question of Lebanon is settled.” On 1 September 1920, Gouraud declared the creation of Greater Lebanon in Beirut. Lebanese nationalists celebrated and

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118 Elias Hoyek [Huwayyik], “Les revendications du Liban. Mémoire de la délégation libanaise à la Conférence de la Paix,” La revue phénicienne, Noël 1919.
119 Mogabgab (Archevêque de Zahla) to Millerand (Président du Conseil Français), n.d., E-Levant 125, MAE.
121 Gouraud to MAE, 2 August 1920, SDN 565, MAE.
122 Gouraud to MAE, 10 August 1920, SDN 565, MAE.
one of their number summed up their reaction, “Everything is settled. It’s a total success,” even though they had acceded to French colonization. Not only had cities of the coast—Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon, Tyre (never part of the Ottoman province of Mount Lebanon)—been adjoined, but so had the fertile plains of ‘Akkar and the Biqa’ valley. The southern border was to include the well-watered agricultural districts in the shadow of Mount Hermon. The main journal of Lebanese nationalists carefully quantified these districts in terms of their agricultural contribution to the new territory, noting that they would facilitate Lebanese “independence” from the rest of the Syrian hinterland.124 The autonomous district of Lebanon had encompassed 3,200 square kilometers, Greater Lebanon, after 1920, expanded to more than 10,000.

France and Lebanese nationalists had reason to oppose the addition of territory to Lebanon. For the nascent French Mandate, the annexation of land presented an obvious political liability. Such a measure was enormously unpopular through Syria and especially in the territories to be annexed. Those territories also contained majority Muslim populations, thereby diluting the Christian majority. The Patriarchate aimed to create a Christian state and the liability that annexation would have presented for the Christian dominance of the country was a necessary evil; avoiding a repeat of the starvation of the war formed Lebanese nationalists’ main priority. To the extent that Lebanon was to be a haven for Christians, the decision to triple its land area was dubious: along with fertile, grain-producing plains and port cities came many Muslim

123 Sarhan al-Khoury to Yusuf al-Sawda, 8 September 1920, Archive Yusuf al-Sawda YS-12L-032 (-e), USEK.
inhabitants. The contradictions between the demographic realities of the country created in 1920 and the Maronite monopoly on political power would have fateful consequences for Lebanon in the 20th century.

CONCLUSION
Whereas scholars have emphasized the contingent and arbitrary aspect of the creation of Greater Lebanon in September 1920, this chapter began by noting the intensive ecological connections the Ottoman province of Mount Lebanon had developed with the Bekaa valley in the century preceding World War I. Once those are taken into account, it makes sense that the Lebanese fought so hard to annex the Bekaa valley before and after the war. Mount Lebanon, it had been clear since the early part of the nineteenth century, could not survive as an autonomous political entity without access to a seaport and control over its grain-producing hinterland. The famine confirmed Lebanon’s vulnerability in that regard beyond any semblance of a doubt.

The creation of Greater Lebanon was, of course, contingent on the proximate political circumstances of the war’s aftermath. By no means was it an inevitable consequence of World War I. Among French diplomats, the idea of an expanded Lebanon independent from the rest of Syria divided opinion, as it did among Maronites. Meir Zamir has shown how, contrary to the wishes of influential French colonialists such as Robert de Caix, the Lebanese delegations to Paris swayed the French government by rallying popular support, especially among conservative Catholic constituencies to

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Some key French diplomats appear to have been unaware of this fact, swayed by false statistics provided to them that overstated the Christian populations of the districts to be annexed to Lebanon. The French ambassador to Great Britain wrote the head of the Lebanese delegation to Europe in regards to the expansion of borders: “Nobody is more desirous than I am to see the creation of an independent and homogenous Lebanon.” Paul Cambon to Abdallah Khuri, 20 February 1920, Huwayyik 40/18, Bkirki.
support the creation of Greater Lebanon. What this chapter has hoped to prove—and what the relevant scholarly literature has referred to only in passing—is that the famine was decisive in convincing the Lebanese delegations to Paris, and ultimately the French government, that an expansion of borders was essential for Lebanon’s survival.

As has been seen, starvation also enabled the French colonial project. Historians have too often assumed that “the Maronites” represented a coherent community that relished being colonized by France. Patrick Seale’s recent tome, *The Struggle for Arab Independence*, presents Maronite Christians as unremitting allies of French imperialism. “The Christians of Lebanon—especially the Maronites among them—linked to Europe by generations of association, impregnated with French language and culture, fearful of the surrounding Muslim world, looked to Paris for protection.” This chapter has hoped to cast the Lebanese embrace of French colonialism in quite a different light. Through its policy of blockade, the French government helped create a need for the colonialism it had long sought to impose, by severing the economic connections essential for Lebanese survival. The Maronite community suffered more than any other during the war and their general acquiescence to the French colonial regime must be understood with reference to that fact.

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CHAPTER 3

‘COMMERCE IN SOULS’: THE FAMINE AS CLASS CONFLICT

I cannot understand how the French press dare to accuse me of murdering the people by starvation. Did I send the locusts in 1915? Did I withhold the rain in 1916? Did I impose the naval blockade that prevented the import of foodstuffs and money transfers from the mahjar? It was the Allies who suffocated the country.

-Ahmet Cemal Pasha, Wartime Governor of Syria and Commander of the Ottoman 4th Army as reported by Abdallah Khuri, Assistant to the Maronite Patriarch¹

As soon as he saw his face, Abdallah Khuri knew “how seriously,” Cemal Pasha “considered the issue.” French newspaper reports indicating that Ottoman policy aimed to “exterminate the Christian population by hunger” had incensed Syria’s wartime governor. In turn, Cemal summoned notables in early October 1916, demanding they issue statements refuting the accusation that he had intentionally caused the famine that was then taking hundreds of Lebanese lives each day. Khuri visited Cemal in the mountain resort town of Sofar on behalf of the Maronite Patriarch, meeting him at the palatial residence of merchant and parliamentarian Michel Ibrahim Sursock. Cemal pledged 100,000 kilos of wheat and money to the Patriarch’s anti-famine efforts. At that moment, he was attempting to reform the grain distribution system in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Despite overt machinations to clear his name, the charge that Cemal and the CUP had planned the famine has stuck until the present day.

Cemal “the Butcher,” has been a pantomime villain for the Lebanese (and Arab populations more generally). His “black legend” remains the sole matter of historical interpretation that unites the Lebanese.\(^2\) The Lebanese nationalist version of the war, which uses Cemal’s “policy of extermination” as a foil, understands the wartime experience of the Lebanese as an expression of a conflict between nascent Turkish and Lebanese nationalisms. That version of events, by design, conceals the fact of corruption at the local level in exacerbating food scarcity. In addition to vulnerable ecology inherited from the silk boom, Lebanon had seen political and economic power concentrate in the hands of an elite group of families who were well connected with the CUP elite. Those families gained concessions from the CUP for the provisioning of Beirut and Mount Lebanon’s lucrative grain market. Despite their self-presentation as civic-minded patriots, they pursued profit during the war, at the expense of the public interest. Not only did they never face justice for their crimes, their class retained its influence in Lebanon’s political and economic life, suggesting more continuity between the pre-and post-Ottoman social structure than has been recognized by scholars.

Since the war’s end, many have accused the Ottoman wartime regime of intentionally starving the population of Mount Lebanon. Political enmity between nascent Turkish and Lebanese nationalisms may have catalyzed the food crisis, but the famine is only partly legible in national political terms. Class, which available histories only hint at in passing, appears to provide a much more complete account of why some portions of the population but not others suffered starvation and why. A critical engagement with the constituent texts of the Lebanese national narrative, alongside newly available Lebanese

and Ottoman sources, reveals a systematic attempt by Lebanese elites and French imperialists to obscure their own complicity in the food crisis. From the unconvincing depiction of the famine in ideologically national terms emerges the antithesis of that view. A struggle between nations did not make the famine but the politics of emergent nationalism post-war made the ‘extermination thesis’ the predominant explanation for it. As local elites and French colonialists set about constructing the new state after the end of the war, it was essential that they conceal their complicity in mass starvation by deflecting blame toward the “Turks,” along with locusts, women, and the weather.

The accusation of a food blockade aimed at exterminating the Lebanese population is not necessarily outlandish. Enver, Talaat, and Cemal were pursuing the intentional destruction the Empire’s Armenian population when they were first accused of conspiring to eliminate the Lebanese. As many as 1,500,000 Armenians died during the genocide. At least one hundred thousand of Anatolia’s Greek Orthodox population also suffered violent deportations. The welfare of its Christian populations was not a priority for the CUP in the first two years of the war. However, unlike the Armenian genocide, the food crisis that killed at least 200,000 individuals in Beirut and Mount Lebanon was not the product of a concerted policy. While in Anatolia a class of “war rich” Muslim merchants affiliated with the CUP took charge of civilian provisioning, in Syria that same process lacked a sectarian tinge. Ahmet Cemal Paşa delegated the task of coordinating civilian provisioning to an eclectic mix of politicians and merchants, and above all to the Greek Orthodox Sursock family.

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3 See Nicholas Doumanis, Before the Nation: Muslim-Christian Coexistence and its Destruction in Late Ottoman Anatolia (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 154-155.
Fernand Braudel, in his oft-quoted definition of capitalism, confronted the conventional wisdom that it achieved its purest incarnation in unfettered market conditions. Instead, he argued, capital seeks “the zone of the anti-market, where the great predators roam and the law of the jungle operates. This—today as in the past, before and after the industrial revolution—is the real home of capitalism.”\(^4\) In this sense, capitalism is a social (and not purely economic) system wherein capitalists, oftentimes in conjunction with the state, seek to establish monopolies to control people and environments.\(^5\)

Such an understanding does much to clarify the experience of Lebanon during World War I. The silk boom had spawned a class of merchant capitalists in Beirut and Mount Lebanon who took the opportunity presented by the war to monopolize commerce in grain. Those merchants who enjoyed the closest relationships with the CUP profited most. As has been seen in previous chapters, wartime conditions created a bottleneck in the supply of grain, which offered the merchant class propitious circumstances to exploit the crisis for profit. Their activities in that regard were an extension of their peacetime attempts to ‘corner the market’ for foodstuffs through speculation\(^6\) from their offices at Beirut’s port.

Some observers went so far as to blame the merchant class in Lebanon for the famine. As Ottoman power was collapsing, a German diplomat observed, “the economic struggle inside the country led by the rich against poor was causing far more casualties than the war itself.” The same report acknowledged the link between the “rich” class of


Lebanese and the Ottoman Army, complaining that it “was completely incomprehensible why the officials do not do anything to stop speculation […] the forcing up and holding of high prices on grain set the levels for all other prices and is therefore ruining the country and sacrificing hundreds of thousands to starvation and disease.” 7 I uncovered no set of numeric data that would permit a quantitative study of the role of the merchant class in contributing to the famine. However, a substantial body of qualitative evidence appears to implicate prominent figures in the Beiruti and Lebanese elite in activities that severely exacerbated the food crisis, as will be seen below.

After WWI, Lebanese elites and the French colonial administration maneuvered for the extermination thesis to become the official interpretation of the famine. Father Antun Yamin wrote the most detailed history of the war’s events published in its immediate aftermath, in which he accused Cemal, along with Unionist Ali Munif Bey, the governor of Mount Lebanon (May 1915-April 1917) of trying to “kill us with starvation” while local administrators of the grain company “appeared to want to feed us.” 8 According to Yamin’s first volume, Cemal Pasha blockaded grain shipments bound for Beirut and Mount Lebanon in April 1915, but relented under pressure from local notables Salim Ali Salam and Michel Ibrahim Sursock [Sursūq] who convinced him to feed the starving city. Oddly, in the introduction to the second volume, published in Cairo the next year, Yamin named Salam, along with the Sursock family, first on the list of Lebanese responsible for

8 Antun Yamin, Lubnan fi al-Harb: aw Dhakira al-Hawadith wa-l-Mazalim fi Lubnan fi al-Harb al-
the famine, claiming that he moved to “the valley of the Nile,” because it had not been possible “to record the acts of some of our depraved countrymen” while writing in Lebanon. He appears to implicate the French Mandate administration in pressuring him (presumably along with Salim Ali Salam and the Sursock family, the direct beneficiaries of the fabrication) to change his narrative. The censorship endured by Yamin reveals a concerted plan to obfuscate the complicity of the Beiruti elite in creating famine conditions. That censorship campaign was largely effective. The binary explanation suggested in his first volume, wherein foreign Turkish-speaking administrators foisted the food crisis on a united and resistant population, proved more resilient than the correction he made in the second. Not only did powerful political interests align behind it, the extermination thesis made for a simple narrative to reduce the horror and complexity of the events of the war.

While the constituent texts of the nationalist narrative had allowed that “merchants” had some role in fomenting the grain crisis, that label does not accurately capture the role of men such as Salam and Michel Ibrahim Sursock, who were both members of the Ottoman parliament. They were indeed merchants but it would be misleading to conceive of their role in the famine as purely economic, meaning that they had pursued their financial interest as rational actors by purchasing grain on an open market and waiting for a particular price point to sell. In reality, they used their connections with the CUP to monopolize the flow of grain from the interior. Cemal

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9 “We are writing in the Nile valley because the hand of power broke our pen in our own country as if God wanted for the Lebanese to remain held in slavery enduring injustice in their own Lebanon.” Antun Yamin, *Lubnan fi al-Harb: aw Dhakira al-Hawadith wa-l-Mazalim fi Lubnan fi al-Harb al-Umumiyya 1914-1919*, vol. 2 (Cairo: 1920), 3-4. Fr. Yamin returned to Lebanon the next year and published a French version of his account of the war that jettisoned any critical references to the French government or the elite class. The pandering language he uses to describe the French Mandate authorities corroborates the idea that a critical account of the war would not have been publishable in Lebanon. Antoine Yammine, *Quatre ans de misère: Le Liban et la Syrie pendant la guerre* (Cairo: 1922), 1-5.
tasked them and their associates with providing foodstuffs for the civilian population, making them the sole supplier with access to the Beirut-Damascus train line other than the Ottoman Army. Salam, along with members of the Sursock family and others who committed crimes during the war, remained prominent figures in the political and economic life of postwar Lebanon. To maintain their position as elites, they needed to disseminate a persuasive account of the war’s events that obscured their complicity in the famine.

In addition to apparently pressuring historians such as Yamin into fabricating the history of the war, the families associated with hoarding also fashioned themselves as the leading purveyors of charity (before, during, and after WWI). A recent treatment of the war has pitted the hoarding activities of the Sursock family against their legacy of their charitable activities. Instead of weighing a balance sheet of good versus evil deeds, however, it is likely more apt to see charity—especially in its ostentatious form during and immediately after the war—as an assertion of philanthropic spirit aimed at deflecting accusations of corruption. In the conclusion of this chapter, I will suggest a more cynical relationship between corruption and charity than has been allowed by scholars.

Just as French government officials had encouraged the extermination thesis to deflect blame from the role of their blockade in creating famine conditions, Lebanese and Beirut elites had a stake in disseminating a version of the famine wherein they too had been victims of Turkish oppression. Enmity between nascent Turkish and Lebanese nationalisms did catalyze the grain crisis but the famine cannot be fully understood as the expression of a conflict between nations or empires. A reliance on memoirs and the

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diplomatic archives of the Entente has reified the nationalist account in scholarly studies. Too often, the families implicated in crimes have been allowed to present their own version of events. In contrast to what has been written to date, the analysis that follows will draw from correspondence and diaries written during the war itself.

Instead of directly coordinating the wartime provisioning of foodstuffs, the CUP delegated that task to a local consortium of merchants. What accounted for an alliance between CUP officials and local elites that led to the famine? Cemal’s administration needed to rely on local knowledge as he and other CUP members had little experience in the Syrian provinces. He did not speak or write Arabic (at least there is no evidence that he did). He and his officers understood little of the region’s economy from a statistical perspective, or even its basic geography (as evidenced by their mishap in navigating Lebanon’s mountain passes in Chapter 1). The Ottoman administration had only a vague idea of how much grain Lebanon produced, or how many people lived in the province. Local capitalists and intellectuals had a superior understanding of the functioning of Lebanon’s agricultural economy and geography. In order to rectify the gaps in knowledge that inhibited the wartime mobilization of resources, Cemal delegated Michel Ibrahim Sursock to produce a “strategic geography” of the region.

In turn, Sursock requested the help of Jesuit Louis Cheikho in the production of two book projects, one treating the province of Beirut, and the other Mount Lebanon. The Lebanon volume reflected a collaboration between Jesuit fathers, Lebanese

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11 Sursock had been a student at Beirut’s St. Joseph University, where he was the student of Father Louis Cheikho. The latter was an Anatolian-born Jesuit, a recognized scholar, and the director of St. Joseph’s impressive Bibliotheque Orientale. According to the detailed daily notes he kept throughout the war, Cheikho, felt like he could not refuse. Cheikho, Diare, 18 November 1918, CDJ.
nationalists, and CUP officials assigned to the region. At first glance, their partnership appears odd. After the war, the Jesuit order would denounce Ottoman rule in the strongest terms (see below). The CUP viewed the Jesuits as the vector of foreign, and particularly French, influence. Cemal’s army expropriated much of the Jesuit order’s core infrastructure and attempted to sideline the Jesuit Fathers altogether. Their ultimate reliance on erstwhile ideological enemies reveals their impotence to impose a new order and the imperative that they rely on local elites—even their detractors—to govern. In particular, the war’s conditions meant they needed to manipulate Lebanon’s opaque economies and ecologies in intensive and novel ways, something they were only able to achieve with local collaboration.

The name of Lebanon’s last governor, Ismaïl Hakkı Bey, graced the cover of *Lubnan*, but he had delegated its production to Hüseyin Kazim Bey, the former governor of Salonika. Kazim opened the volume by declaring that its purpose was to prove for posterity’s sake that, “the Lebanese government was aware of its responsibilities.” The CUP’s investment in producing a volume that has remained in print since 1918 is a testament to how Turkish and Lebanese speakers were intertwined in Lebanon’s administration. Although ultimately coordinated by Kazım, Cemal himself had conceived of the project soon after the war’s outset, and delegated his closest contact in Lebanon, Michel Ibrahim Sursock, to enlist Lebanon and Beirut’s literati for the task.

More importantly, Cemal chose Michel Ibrahim Sursock and his first cousins Alfred Musa and Michel Musa Sursock to coordinate the importation of grain to Beirut and Mount Lebanon. The relationship between the Sursock family and the Ottoman elite preceded the war. Michel Ibrahim had been in Istanbul as a representative of the *sancak*

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of Beirut in the Ottoman parliament. His first cousin Albert worked as an Ottoman
diplomat in Paris. Recognizing their proximity to the CUP, European merchants sought
out the Sursocks to sell military materiel. Once the war imperiled the material position
of Christians in Anatolia, those connections paid off handsomely. Amidst expropriations
of Christian property in the Adana region in 1915, Cemal intervened personally to ensure
that brothers Alfred Musa and Michel Musa Sursock maintained their plantations and real
estate in urban Mersin.

The Sursock family had emigrated from the Anatolian coast to Lebanon sometime
before the eighteenth century, coming to Beirut sometime in the early nineteenth. The
Sursock Frères concern, founded in the 1830s by Nicholas Dimitri Sursock and his
brother Musa made a fortune from a silk factory and in money changing. Investments in
silk and European banks positioned the family for the “most spectacular social climb in
the 19th century.” Alfred Musa Sursock (1870-1924), along with his brother Michel
Musa, inherited control of the family business. Alfred Musa and Michel Ibrahim both
claimed the distinction of having owned the first automobile in Beirut in 1905. The
Sursocks maintained quite good relations with the Ottoman military command during the
war, and Cemal Pasha in particular, to whom they gave gifts of silk shirts and cigars.

On his February 1916 visit to Mount Lebanon Enver Pasha, Ottoman Minister of War,

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15 A Paris merchant sought to use Michel Musa Sursock’s (Alfred’s brother and Michel Ibrahim’s first
cousin to sell airplanes to the Ottoman Ministry of War. G. Vinet (Paris) to Monsieur Sursock Bey, M.
Michel Sursock Beyrouth, 18 March 1912, Archive Sursock, Alfred 17895, USEK.
16 Sursock Frères to Dikran Durry, 9 April 1915, Archive Sursock 19249/188-190, USEK.
17 Leila Fawaz, Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard
18 Lorenzo Trombetta, “The Private Archive of the Sursuqs, a Beirut Family of Christian Notables: an Early
Investigation,” Rivista Degli Studi Orientali 82 (2009): 205 n.47.
19 Sursock Frères to Ottomanbank, 25 September 1917, Archive Sursock 18114/676, USEK.
20 Alfred Sursock to Mesrat Bey (Aide-de-camp de son excellence Jemal Pasha), 29 August 1917, Archive
Sursock 18114/668, USEK.
received a diamond worth 12,000 Ottoman lira, according to the diary of Louis Cheikho (who did not identify who exactly gave the Ottoman Minister of War such an expensive gift).  

After the war began, the Sursocks wasted little time taking advantage of their connections with the CUP. In October 1914, Sursock Frères received (evidently special) permission from “Istanbul” to move grain in search of profits. The Sursock Frères had amassed large tracts of land in Palestine and the Adana region by registering plots that were uncultivated, with the condition that they put them into production. A commission was investigating land acquired under this provision that remained uncultivated and therefore had not been legally registered. With news of the commission’s activities, the Sursocks encouraged their agent to till the land as soon as possible and acknowledged using their connections to frustrate the commission’s efforts for at least a year. Meanwhile, the Sursock family sought to reassert direct control over grain lands they had been leasing, in light of the war’s high prices. In 1917, they managed to decisively confirm their hold on their lands in northern Palestine based on intercession from “Istanbul,” meanwhile they could count on vali Azmi Bey’s intervention to “strike the

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21 Cheikho noted the gift had been given in 1916 in a note penned two years later. His source for this information was likely Huseyin Kazim. Cheikho, Diare, September 1918, CDJ.

22 They instructed their agent in Haifa that he could move his grain stores “outside” [ilā al-khārij] which is ambiguous in this context, and could mean to another sancak, province, or somewhere outside the Empire. Sursock Ikhwan to Joachim al-Inkiri [Haifa] 30 October 1914, Archive Sursock 19232/852, USEK.

23 Some of their business partners, such as Iskandar Efendi Kasab, had departed for Egypt on the war’s eve. “When the grain harvest was on the threshing floor and the cotton almost ripe,” in October 1914, Kasab had left instructions with his agent Sulayman Nassif to send the harvest to Yusuf Sursock via Nuri Bey (who spent the war working as the agent of Michel Ibrahim Sursock, Yusuf’s nephew), which he did. The grain was sold in Juniyah and Sursock claimed not to have received the proceeds from the sale, however, and threatened to cancel Kasab’s contract [faskh al-damān] to usufruct rights of the land in case of nonpayment. Their recourse was limited by Kasab’s absence and his inability to communicate from Egypt or return to investigate the matter Sulayman Nassif to Iskandar Efendi Kasab, 6 June 1915, AA: 2.5.4, AUB. This correspondence appears in the archive of the American University of Beirut because what was then Syrian Protestant College had been collecting mail meant to be sent abroad, in this case to Egypt, aboard the U.S.S. North Carolina. Ottoman authorities allowed no correspondence to leave on American warships after May 1915 however.
hands,” of those “aggressors” against their interests. The Sursocks could count on special favors from Ottoman authorities before the war, but the war featured a suspension of normal avenues of recourse. Their family, and others, took advantage of that fact to act with impunity.

The Sursock’s descendants still defend the family’s wartime activities, highlighting the public works they carried out during the war. Little evidence from their family’s archive indicates that the Sursock Frères wartime activities were characterized by philanthropy. Their family relied on special dispensation from the authorities to transport wheat, barley, and corn throughout the war even as provincial governments prevented open traffic in grain. Instead of using their monopoly to provide grain at set prices, the Sursocks sought profits by moving grain to the most lucrative market. The Sursock Frères concern maintained exclusive access to the railroad in 1917, moving grain from Haifa to Damascus, and from Damascus to Beirut where they found the highest prices. Evidently responding to their agent’s concerns that the grain would not be allowed to pass by Ottoman military authorities, Alfred Sursock assured him that it would, as long the tax was paid. In late summer 1918, they furiously sent cables to Nazareth, 133 kilometers from Beirut, to ascertain the price of grain and instructed their agents to sell the grain in Palestine if the price reached one gold lira. They initially expected to send 80 camels to carry 100 qintārs [25 tons] of grain back to Beirut but ultimately, on 24 August 1918, they sent 170 camels from Beirut to Nazareth to bring

24 Sursock Frères to Philip Jahshan (Haifa), 4 September 1917, Archive Sursock 19235/115-117, USEK.
26 Sursock Frères to Philip Jahshan (Haifa), 4 September 1917, Archive Sursock 19235/115, USEK.
27 Alfred Sursock to Nuri Bey, 20 July 1918, Archive Sursock 18114/774, USEK.
28 Alfred Sursock to George Zakhia c/o ‘Aziz Rabaiz, 6 August 1918, Archive Sursock, 18114/783, USEK.
grain back to the city, such was the price difference between the two places. Despite the dire need of the civilian population and Ottoman army for provisions, the Sursocks’ ability to circumvent state controls on grain traffic in search of profits is a powerful testament to the influence of their class.

Sources have also implicated Salim Ali Salam in war profiteering, but his relationship with Cemal’s administration is more difficult to document than the Sursock’s. The latter family’s papers are now open but little documentary evidence exists to implicate Salam. He was a Sunni Arab notable from Beirut who, like the Sursocks, consolidated political power after the 1908 Young Turk revolution. The historian Kamal Salibi’s hagiographic portrait of Salam presents “Abu Ali” as a nationalist statesman who advocated for reform and confronted Cemal Pasha on behalf of Syrians. In Salibi’s article, Salam’s business activities merit only a short sentence: “From his office in the port area, Abu ‘Ali conducted a profitable business, mainly in staples; yet he did not lack the leisure to indulge in other activities.” Salibi has Salam away from Beirut during the war period: when Enver Pasha announced the general conscription order, Salam was in Istanbul arguing with him on behalf of Beirutis. In Damascus, he tried to convince Cemal Pasha to spare his nationalist comrades the hangman’s noose. Salibi thus distances him from the events of the famine, and paints Salam as a clever opponent of the CUP’s

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29 If those camels carried the same amount of grain as in the above case (312.5 kilos), 170 camels would have brought more than 53 tons of grain to Beirut. Alfred Sursock to Georges Zakhia, 24 August 1918, Archive Sursock 18114/794, USEK.
30 See, for instance Fawaz, A Land of Aching Hearts, 323. Salam faced arrest in Beirut by French authorities in early 1919, charged with “profiteering in connection with sale of goods for relief purposes prior to Allied occupation.” General Clayton (Cairo) to Foreign Office, 7 February 1919, FO 371/4210 [22264], BNA. Salam would later clash with the French administration until his death in 1938.
32 Ibid. 211.
wartime policies, who resisted from the inside. In an apparent contradiction with the idea that Salam was not involved in the events of Beirut during the war, Salibi had previously noted that, “Hardly anything happened in the city, the sancak, or the vilayet without his knowledge or participation.” He represented the sancak of Beirut in the Ottoman parliament, and had been elected on the same list as Michel Ibrahim Sursock. Previously, he had served as president of Beirut’s municipal council, and the President of the Sunni charitable organization, al-Maqasid. His closest associate was the wartime head of the Beirut municipality, Ahmad Mukhtar Bayhum. Salibi’s attempt to distance Salam from the wartime corruption in Beirut and Mount Lebanon is unconvincing, based on his own characterization of Salam as the most influential figure in Beirut during the period of the Young Turks. His treatment of Salam is nevertheless typical of how the literature has treated Lebanese notables. Not only does Salibi ignore Salam’s crimes, he actively tries to exculpate him while relying exclusively on Salam’s own memoirs to make his case. Precisely because of this soft treatment at the hands of historians, the role of the local elite in the famine has escaped proper notice.

Those Beiruti notables elected to the Ottoman parliament—close associates of the CUP—turned out to be the biggest wartime profiteers. Their proximity to the empire’s ruling clique is no accident. When the Ottoman government needed to mobilize the province’s resources for wartime provisioning, they looked to those local elites whom they knew. The relationship between local elites, the Sursocks and others, with the CUP was a mutually beneficial arrangement. In the end, however, the CUP’s goals in Syria came to naught—while the elite class who took advantage of the war’s conditions for profit largely maintained their wealth and status.

33 Ibid. 194.
CORRUPTION AND THE WAR

The role of Beirut and Mount Lebanon’s corrupt elite in fomenting famine, although now mostly forgotten, was no secret during the war itself. Beirut’s main Arabic-language daily newspaper, *Al-Ittihad al-Uthmani* [the Ottoman Union] repeatedly accused local authorities of complicity in grain hoarding until its editor, Shaykh Ahmad Hassan Tabbara, was executed in early 1916 for having been a member of a secret society. Tabbara’s criticism was published despite wartime censorship regulations. From the war’s outset he called for price controls to be set on basic necessities, mocking the municipality’s unwillingness to confront merchants, thanking them “in advance” for attempting to find a just solution that would balance the interests of consumers and merchants. 34 Tabbara alleged that a small group of men had monopolized grain commerce, and that “All of the gains […] were limited to a class of people making up not more than one in ten thousand inhabitants.” 35 In February 1915, an “anonymous Beiruti” wrote to complain that the reality of prices in the market diverged completely from the prices set by the municipality. “Nobody works to enforce the municipality’s price and it carries behind it no power which could make the merchants and sellers obey it.” 36 A month later, Tabbara indicted the cabal of merchants accused of hoarding: “More than commerce, their behavior resembles thievery.” 37 Prices would drop when grain was available, but not to their “natural level.” According to the newspaper, nothing prevented lower prices other than the “the merchant’s greed.” 38 Sensing the crisis, a judge issued an

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34 *Al-Ittihad al-Uthmani*, 3 December 1914.
35 *Al-Ittihad al-Uthmani*, 7 December 1914.
36 *Al-Ittihad al-Uthmani*, 3 February 1915.
37 *Al-Ittihad al-Uthmani*, 28 March 1915.
38 *Al-Ittihad al-Uthmani*, 17 March 1915.
order that grain be sent from the interior to Beirut but his order was not obeyed.\textsuperscript{39} 
Shipments capable of fulfilling the city’s needs arrived, but the grain did not reach the market. Grain sellers hoarded supplies, waiting for prices to hit their highest level.\textsuperscript{40} 

Ottoman authorities were aware of the famine as it developed, coded telegrams sent to Istanbul from the Syrian provinces reveal. On 28 November 1914, less than a month after the Ottoman entrance into the war, Celal Bey, the governor of Aleppo province alerted the Interior Ministry that “Mount Lebanon, Beirut [city], and Tripoli,” were experiencing “extraordinary demand for provisions [zahireye fevkalade ihtiyaç].” At that early moment in the war, Celal invoked the specter of a looming famine [gaht] if “the transportation of grain could not be secured.” Heavy snowfall had complicated the means of the transportation between the Syrian interior and the coastal locations indicated by Celal facing food shortages.\textsuperscript{41} 

Talat Pasha’s Interior Ministry evidently did not take measures to ensure Beirut and Mount Lebanon’s grain supply (Tripoli’s fate was better). Ohannes Pasha, governor of Mount Lebanon, raised an urgent alarm in April 1915:

The inhabitants of Mount Lebanon are facing all sorts of obstacles in procuring wheat from regions of Syria in order to meet their needs. Because the amount of wheat available thus far by rail between one procurement (celb) to the next is fundamentally insufficient to meet the needs of the population of the mountain [...] complaints continue to come in from everywhere. News has been reported that this time rail wagons are currently being used for military transport and therefore wheat has been cut off for a time. Cutting off wheat will doom Mount Lebanon and the people of the Syrian coast to famine and negatively impact the morale of the people. Whatever is necessary needs to be done.\textsuperscript{42} 

\textsuperscript{39} Al-İttihat al-Uthmani, 26 March 1915.  
\textsuperscript{40} Al-İttihat al-Uthmani. 24 April 1915.  
\textsuperscript{41} Celal Bey (Vali of Aleppo) to Interior Ministry, 16 Tişrin-i Sani (1)330 [29 November 1914], DH. ŞFR 450/116, BOA.  
In response to Ohannes’ telegram, the war ministry indicated the regime’s intention to divert only the bare minimum of resources. Two trains of provisions each week were to serve Beirut and Mount Lebanon’s needs, according to the orders given to the line commander of the Beirut-Damascus train. There was no policy of “blockade” barring the importation of grain to Mount Lebanon, however, nor was there a great willingness to expend precious foodstuffs or cargo space to relieve the brewing famine. Cemal himself had visited Beirut in early April and promised the city thirty train cars of grain weekly to address scarcity. On 30 June he went to Juniya, and gave a speech in French, a conciliatory gesture. If we take Cemal’s public posture at face value, he was trying to reassure the population about food supplies and his government’s good will.

Dispatches sent from the governors of Syria and Aleppo provinces indicate that more than enough grain was available but that distribution networks had faltered due to corruption and disruptions in markets. In fact, 1915 in Aleppo province was a bumper year for the grain crop. Aleppo’s governor described “abundance [feyz ve bereket]” not seen in “twenty or thirty years.” So much grain had become available that prices had dropped to a level where producers were unwilling to part with their grain. Meanwhile transportation to Beirut and Mount Lebanon—where prices were quite high—was all but impossible. Market release of grain dropped precipitously. The overabundance of grain in Aleppo province meant prices there had fallen so low that most merchants refused to sell their stores.

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44 Al-İttihad al-‘Uthmani, 3 April 1915.
46 Celal to Interior Ministry, 19 Nisan [1]331 [2 May 1915], DH. ŞFR 469/45, BOA. See also, Elizabeth Williams, “Economy, Environment, and Famine: World War I from the Perspective of the Syrian Interior,”
Merchants did not alone prevent the market release of grain, provincial governments prohibited the export of wheat from their jurisdictions so as to ensure foodstuffs were available at reasonable prices. In May 1915, the governor of Syria province, Hulusi Bey, banned the export of the harvest to Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Merchants in Damascus complained. High prices in Beirut and Mount Lebanon motivated the export of grain from Damascus and Hulusi wished to avoid inflated grain prices in his own city. Damascus, along with the other cities of the Syrian interior such as Hama and Aleppo, did avoid dangerous shortages for the first two years of the war. Hulusi had plenty of grain (as noted in Chapter 1): “as much grain as necessary for Beirut and Mount Lebanon,” a point he reiterated several times. He blamed “a clique in Beirut composed of five to ten individuals [Beyrut’ ta beş on zatdan mürekkeb bir klik],” which failed to put “public over private interests.” He warned the Interior Ministry that the “clique” in question would provide them with misinformation about grain crisis that he offered to remedy, if only the means of transport could be located:

If the military can provide the transport, I can make available as much grain as is needed, at the best prices [ehven fiyatla]. Because of those measures which obviously will meet the needs of the people of the aforementioned places with better prices, and violate the needs of these private interests, I kindly request that you not consider, honor, give attention to, the communications and false claims which may take place directly or indirectly of those people.47

Hulusi, while writing to the Interior Ministry, accused the recipient of his telegram of being complicit [kail] in the activities of “those people” who prevented the lowering of prices. His telegram appeared to be a response to an injunction to send grain to Beirut,

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47 Şam Valisi Hulusi [Governor of Damascus] to Dahiliyye Nazaretine [Interior Ministry] 4 Mayis 1331 [17 May 1915], DH, SFR 471/105, BOA. Beirut’s daily Al-İttihad al-‘Uthmani confirmed that the decision not to export grain from Damascus was taken at the level of the local government. Al-İttihad al-‘Uthmani, 11 April 1915.
something that he refused to do, he indicated, because the grain would be subject to a monopoly. His proposed solution to “catastrophic speculation,” was for an honest individual who “walks like he talks [özü sözü doğru bir zat]” be sent to Beirut to investigate the issue.48

The famine did not arise from the absence of foodstuffs but was, rather, the product of a wartime interruption of supply caused by Ottoman mobilization for war, which included the outsourcing of food provisioning to a group of men who turned out to be little more than war profiteers. Despite the plague of locusts that struck the region beginning in April 1915, and a downturn of twenty percent in the harvests in Beirut province,49 substantial amounts of grain existed in the Syrian interior, as attested by Hulusi and Celal above. The locusts struck after grain was safely harvested in their respective provinces. An absence of draft animals (and the likelihood they would be requisitioned at Army checkpoints) and wartime policies requiring permits to transport grain limited the ability of the populace to source grain independently. The Sursocks and their associates enjoyed a monopoly on civilian use of the train.

In those conditions, connections with producers and government authorities, not to mention capital, were necessary to secure grain in the Bekaa valley and the cities of the Syrian interior. One of the monks from the St. Paul Society, Brother Yusuf Klass, left his monastery at Harissa on a mission to procure grain on 25 May and returned from the Bekaa valley with 370 ṭaṭls [925 kilograms] on 18 June 1915.50 On 5 July the same monk headed back to the Bekaa, on foot. He returned on the night of 24 July 1915 having

48 Ibid.
had trouble crossing the mountains of Kisrawan. Muleteers refused to help him transport the grain out of fear they would be conscripted into a labor battalion [al-sukhra] at the town of Raifun. The St. Paul Society almost certainly relied on its Greek Catholic coreligionists, numerous in the Bekaa, to purchase grain. Yusuf Klass’s journeys of 24 and 19 days reflect the extreme difficulty of procuring grain in the summer of 1915. Despite its capital and connections, the St. Paul Society only provisioned their monastery with difficulty.51 By the end of the year, their only recourse for buying grain was to secure a permit from the Lebanese provincial seat of government in Ba‘abda that would entitle them to purchase a particular amount of wheat from Kisrawan’s kaymakam, Albert Abi al-Lama¯. The latter did not honor the permit, however, claiming he had no grain. They returned to Ba‘abda, where after “great effort [juhd jahid]” they were eventually able to secure grain from the government’s depot at the train junction of al-Hadath.52

The difficulty of other means of transportation increased the relative efficiency of the train connecting Damascus to Beirut and Mount Lebanon via the Bekaa valley. Once the railroad became the primary means of transporting grain to Beirut and Mount Lebanon, it was not difficult for those well placed to choke off the supply in the interest of enriching themselves. Beirut’s main daily featured an editorial on 13 October 1915, describing the difficulties of transporting grain from the Bekaa valley to Beirut. The anonymous editorialist, “a wheat merchant,” noted that it was not profitable to bring grain to the city using camels at the price set by the Beirut municipality. Grain brought by camels, according to his calculation, incurred as much as 20 percent more costs as grain

transported by the train. Bad conditions on the roads further hampered transport by draft animal. Hidden from the censor, perhaps, at the end of the article was an explanation which appeared to be at odds with the detailed discussion of transportation difficulties: “a more salient reason for the rise of wheat prices in Beirut and Mount Lebanon than transport, is a powerful ring of speculators enabled by some kind of monopoly [qutb dairat al-mudāraba al-mashfi‘a b-naw‘ min al–ihtikār].”

Unable to coordinate the purchase and distribution of grain on its own due to lack of cash and administrative expertise, Cemal’s administration tasked a consortium of merchants to oversee civilian and military provisioning. In May 1916, soon after his February meeting with the Patriarch, Cemal asked Michel Ibrahim Sursock to fund the purchase of grain from the Hauran province, Syria’s breadbasket, for the “company” charged with distributing grain under Najib Bey Asfar. Not enough grain was available on the markets of Beirut and Mount Lebanon to lower its price in the wake of the reform. The newspaper Al-Sharq, the official organ of the Ottoman Fourth Army, appeared to address the ongoing food crisis in September 1916 by promising that “twenty tons of cereals will be transported each day from Hauran to Mount Lebanon […] by any means other than the railroad.” That provisioning was supposed to happen “in the name of the government,” and with the protection of the army but with private capital of “capable men” who would be sent to the Hauran province to make the relevant purchases. This reform envisaged producers bringing their grain to government depots where they would pay the aforementioned private purchasers a price set by the government. The population

53 Al-Ittihad al-Uthmani, 13 October 1915.
54 Order of Ahmet Cemal Pasha, 29 September 1916 printed Al-Sharq (Damascus), 14 October 1916 translated in Defrance to Briand, 11 November 1916, SG 874, MAE. Leila Fawaz suggests that Michel Ibrahim Sursock had been sending agents to Hauran for this purpose already in May 1916. See Fawaz, A Land of Aching Hearts, 122.
of Hauran province was loath to part with their grain in exchange for the government’s paper currency, which was rapidly devaluing. Cemal’s army needed their grain, and he was not in a position to force them to part with it at the low prices set by the government. So, he left the civilian provisioning of grain to the region’s well-funded merchants, who bought and sold the grain at prices much higher than the theoretical price limits set by the government. Cemal tasked Michel Ibrahim Sursock with purchasing 300,000 qinṭars of grain in Hauran. Additionally, the head of Beirut’s municipality Mukhtar Bayhum and Beirut notable Abdul-Hamid Ghandur were to be responsible for 200,000 qinṭars each. They furnished their own capital to provision Beirut and Mount Lebanon, and enjoyed a government-enforced monopoly to do so.

Sources from the regions of Matn and Kisrawan confirm the inefficacy of the “company” designated to distribute grain. Father Yamin hailed from the Matn town of Bayt Shabab and recalled that Ali Munif’s June 1916 reorganization of the wheat company was directed by Najib al-Asfar from Beirut. Yamin describes the unequal distributions carried out by the company:

They announced the distribution of wheat to the villages, and to the hungry poor was sold six aqaṣ [eight kilograms, and to the well-fed rich man six qanāṭīr [1,500 kilograms]. They [the employees of the grain company] distributed grain to us only three times and to each member of the destitute public 18 aqaṣ [24 kilograms] while qanāṭīr piled up in the granaries of the powerful and rich who got their influence from the director of the company or from its influential employees.

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55 See Cheikho, Diare, 5 October 1916, CDJ. See also, Schilcher, “The Famine in Syria,” 246.
56 Al-Balagh (Beirut), 8 November 1916 translated in Série Guerre 874, MAE.
57 Yamin became sarcastic when describing his appointment, “Ali [Munif Bey] searched the four corners of Lebanon but could not find (according to his corrupted version [wa hadha fi za’ mīhī al-fūsīd]) someone deserving of managing the affairs of that company and so he appointed as director a man from Beirut.” Yamin, Lubnan fi al-Harb, vol. 1, 122.
58 Yamin, Lubnan fi al-Harb, vol. 1, 123
Further north, Brother Yusuf al-Sayigh in Harissa only reported two distributions of grain as of August 1916, the first on 9 August. By October, the government’s strategy had pivoted away from distribution under government auspices to a further reliance on church networks. Brother Yusuf’s St. Paul Society had begun receiving 20 qintars of grain directly, thereby bypassing the distribution of the civilian government of Kisrawan. That arrangement appears to have lasted only during October-November, after which the St. Paul Society ceased receiving grain altogether. In December 1916, a group of priests from the area (of Mt. Lebanon) immediately surrounding Beirut noted that there were “two ways, not three [tariqatun la-thalith],” to acquire grain. The first, to source grain from “outside Lebanon,” was “barred,” because of restrictions imposed by the “local government” on the import of grain, “requisition of grain everywhere, not to mention the lack of the means of transportation.” The second, the grain company, had not distributed grain in “two months.” By consequence, grain had become nearly impossible to source over the course of 1916. The “two ways” suggested by the priests’ letter were, by the end of year, almost totally barred by obstacles on the local level.

Beirut and Lebanon’s CUP administrators, instead of pursuing some genocidal plan, were instead implicated in varying levels of corruption related to the commerce of grain. Ali Munif, who oversaw the creation of the grain company along with Cemal in his capacity as governor of Mount Lebanon, was eventually deposed in April 1917, leaving the province with the enormous sum of 80,000 lira, according to Cheikho’s CUP sources. Ali Munif’s replacement, CUP-member Ismail Hakkı Bey promised to remedy

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61 Cheikho, Diare, 10 April 1917.
the food crisis. He did not, but nearly everyone—even those sources not disposed to complimenting Turkish administrators—attested to his honesty and good intentions. He devoted 14,000 lira monthly to “allay the distress of the Lebanese.” Cheikho surmised that money must have gone “into the pockets of functionaries,” tasked with providing relief to the starving population. In such instances, Cheikho did not see fit to note that those functionaries were indigenous Lebanese or Beirutis. After Ali Munif Bey’s departure in April 1917, Cemal Pasha attempted another reorganization of the system of grain provisioning, informing Interior Minister Talat Pasha that he was placing the responsibility for provisioning of Beirut and Mount Lebanon together with the military’s needs:

Despite all the good intentions and help of the Army and Government of Mount Lebanon, Mount Lebanon’s provisioning has brought upon us some difficulty, especially in the last year. It is known by your highness how much our enemies are doing to taking advantage of this […] In the end, I had delegated the provisioning of Mount Lebanon to the governor of Beirut, Azmi Bey, who has been nicely administering the provisioning of Beirut. The aforementioned ultimately combined distribution with the army’s supplies and succeeded in the good organization of the provisioning of Mount Lebanon.

Much like Ismail Hakkı, Azmi Bey, who replaced Bekir Sami in early July 1915 as governor of Beirut province, began his tenure promising to ensure the regular supply of grain to Beirut, “which unfortunately did not happen.” Throughout his tenure as governor of Beirut province, Azmi sponsored soup kitchens and orphanages. At first, Cheikho thought Azmi, “wanted the best for his province, and appears just.” But subsequently, his alliance with “some of the rich, with whom he colluded to sell grain,” at

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62 Cheikho, Diare, 6 July 1917.
63 Cemal to Talat, 9 Receb 1335 [1 May 1917], BEO 4467/33486, BOA.
64 Cheikho, Diare, 4 August 1915, CDJ.
65 Cheikho, Diare, 6 March 1917, CDJ.
high prices was not a genocidal sectarian scheme to starve the Lebanese but rather the product of his, “great vice […] insatiable greed.”

Profiteering funded an active social life during the war for Cemal Pasha, Azmi Bey and their local associates. Cemal Pasha came to Beirut in February 1917, where he did “not lack flatterers.” The diminutive Ottoman commander circulated between the houses of rich families who offered “feasts” in his honor. “To listen to them [Cemal’s flatterers], this is a golden age revived on earth since […] Cemal has come to Syria.” Cheikho criticized the “high live [sic]” atmosphere wherein Cemal consorted with women who had adopted low-cut dresses [décolletage] “as a fashion.” Salacious details testify to the extent of intimacy between the CUP and their Beiruti and Lebanese allies. Alfred Sursock exchanged love letters, and ostensibly had an illicit relationship with Seniha Azmi, the wife of the governor of Beirut province, Azmi Bey. She “assiduously courted” Alfred Sursock in 1916-1917. The Sursocks, along with Azmi Bey and Cemal, embarked on the construction of a racetrack and casino during 1916 on land owned by the Beirut municipality. In addition, the Sursock Frères concern had the use of the train to move building materials for their racetrack and casino. The Sursock palace was also constructed during the war on the same property, the Residence des Pins (see below).

Did Cemal anticipate that his local allies would neglect their duties to the point a famine would afflict the populace? Almost certainly not: particularly considering the fact that the famine reached nearly all Syria’s communities by the end of the war. It must not

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66 Cheikho, Diare, 2 September 1918, CDJ.
67 Cheikho, Diare, 6 March 1917, CDJ.
68 Linda Sursock, Alfred Musa Sursock’s niece and future wife of Michel Ibrahim Sursock (also his first cousin once removed), evidently consorted with Cemal Pasha during the war as well. Lorenzo Trombeta, “The Private Archive of the Sursuqs,” 22.
69 Sursock Frères to Bishara Asfar [Damascus], 11 October 1917, Archive Sursock 19235/131, USEK.
have been some genocidal plan directed at Christians. He did want to keep the population subservient by limiting food supplies but mass starvation could not have but undermined the legitimacy of his rule. No doubt Cemal, along with the Sursocks and Salim Ali Salam hoped that charitable organizations, to which they contributed, were going to feed the poor. Church organizations had traditionally provided charity in times of need to the Christian Lebanese, and Cemal turned toward the Maronite Patriarch as the most reliable arbiter of grain distribution in early 1916, once secular authorities had proved hopelessly corrupt. When the reality of famine became clear, however, those in a position of power were unwilling to sacrifice their goals to attempt to stem the tide of famine. Cemal and the Ottoman administration continued to privilege the Ottoman Empire’s offensive military operations while Salam and the Sursocks did not stop placing profits above the public good.

While the Sursocks engaged in corruption on the provincial level, some local officials abused their position to take advantage of the situation for material gain. The road connecting Beirut with the northern half of Mount Lebanon and Tripoli passed along the narrow ten kilometer wide coastal plain through Kisrawan province and its seat of Juniya, where the train line ended. That bottleneck enabled the Kisrawan’s kaymakam, along with the commander of the gendarmes, to enrich themselves through hoarding and extortion. Before the war, grain came to Kisrawan by diverse means: the port at Juniya, by rail, over the mountain passes from the Bekaa by cart and donkey, and from the road Tripoli to the north. None of those avenues were open except for the road and rail south to Beirut during the war. Brother Yusuf, whose monastery overlooked Juniya, reserved particular ire for the role of local strongmen in exploiting a vulnerable populace. He
wrote the following after the withdraw of Ottoman troops: Brother Yusuf also accused them of abetting “thieves” engaged in robbing innocent civilians. While he maintains a distinction between “Turks” and “Lebanese” as does the Lebanese national narrative, he inverts the equation, according the weight of blame instead to the Lebanese. That binary obscures the fact that the corruption that took advantage of scarcity, and created the famine, occurred in networks of power that included local and non-Lebanese Ottoman functionaries. Neither “Turks” nor “Lebanese” are to blame for mass starvation, but rather a merchant class in Beirut and Mount Lebanon and the officials from the CUP who colluded with them to establish a monopoly on the import of grain to Beirut and Mount Lebanon.

‘A TRUE GENTLEMAN’: DISSONANCE IN NARRATIVES ABOUT THE WAR
Jesuit Louis Cheikho was fully aware that local elites colluded with members of the CUP to profit off grain intended for the population’s relief. However, he avoided fashioning a narrative out of their complicity in the food crisis and continued to subscribe to the extermination thesis throughout most of the war, regardless of its dissonance with the reality he described. The complicity of local elites in monopolizing grain was a topic that Cheikho readily admitted to avoiding. “Up to now,” he wrote in August 1916, “I have been silent about these despicable things.” Evidence of malfeasance by indigenous politicians met with censure, but did not shake Cheikho’s conviction that the famine was caused by outside forces. When a hospice for children in Ghazir ran out of funds, the nuns who ran it sent the children in their charge back to their relatives. Forty of the

70 This passage is quoted at length in the introduction. Al-Sayigh, “2 October 1918,” Sijil al-Yawmiyyat, Harissa.
71 Cheikho, Diare, 31 August 1916, CDJ.
children had no living family; the Sisters sent them to the kaymakam of Kisrawan, who Cheikho left unnamed [he was, however, Amin Abi al-Lama’]. “Without even giving them a morsel of bread, he sent them back to Ghazir by foot. Six of them died on the way, the others succumbed in their turn.” 72 As for the grain hoarders, Cheikho characterized them as “Muslims [sic]”73 but later acknowledged that two Christians had been arrested for speculation, along with three others. All of the above were, in any event, released from jail after only a few days in exchange for handing Azmi Bey one hundred qinārs of grain (25,000 kilos).74 In some instances, according to Cheikho, corrupt officials fell victim to other opportunists who out-maneuvered them: Beirut’s police commissioner had pocketed 30,000 lira before being denounced by a competitor.75

In general, Cheikho withheld judgment against the Christians among the merchants because of sectarian allegiance and personal relationships. Michel Ibrahim Sursock had been Cheikho’s student at St. Joseph and in turn extended protection to some of the Jesuits schools, allowing them to remain open during the war.76

In an apparent contradiction with the above evidence that implicated local officials in the disruption of the supply of foodstuffs, plenty of evidence appeared to confirm Cheikho’s bias that the famine was a vindictive policy of the Ottoman government to punish the Lebanese people. He knew that grain abounded in the interior in 1916 but was not reaching Beirut and Mount Lebanon. He surmised, in turn, along with many others, that they were to be subjected to the same fate as the Armenians.

72 Cheikho, Diare, 10 August 1917, CDJ.
73 Cheikho, Diare, 1 January 1917, CDJ.
74 Cheikho, Diare, 31 March 1918, CDJ.
75 For this crime, the commissioner (surname al-Din) was condemned to death, “despite his powerful connections,” but committed suicide before the sentence was enforced. Cheikho, Diare, 31 August 1916, CDJ.
76 Cheikho, Diare, 27 July 1916, CDJ.
“Everywhere people are saying: ‘the government made the Armenians disappear by violence and massacres, they want to destroy [réduire] Syrians by killing them with famine.’” Cheikho, born in the Anatolian town of Mardin, was a recognized scholar and Ottoman officials knew him as the “sultan of the Arabic language.” He was not generally well disposed towards the Ottoman authorities however, and had a binary worldview that divided the world between Christianity and Islam. In many ways, the CUP’s actions fulfilled his expectations.

The Jesuit order had, since the beginning of the war, suffered materially at the hands of CUP policy. In April 1915, as Ottoman troops occupied coastal Mount Lebanon, Cheikho complained that Lebanon was being treated as a conquered country. Soldiers occupied their residence and the government announced its “reform” projects, especially the “Turkification” of Lebanese schools. Azmi Bey demanded that the nuns, members of the Jesuits ‘sister’ orders, were to change their habit. “They decided to kill the foreign religious orders for being infected with an anti-Turkish esprit.” Cheikho, not without cause, described Young Turk policy in Beirut and Lebanon as “religious persecution.”

The confiscation of their farms at Tanaïl and Ksara in the Bekaa valley, along with St. Joseph University in Beirut, was bitter for the Jesuits. Throughout the war, they would interpret Ottoman policy as direct persecution of their order. Cemal conscripted the printing press that had published their newspaper, *al-Bashir*, before the war for the production of the semi-official organ of Cemal’s administration, *al-Sharq*. To add insult

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77 Cheikho, *Diare*, 27 July 1916, CDJ.
79 Cheikho, *Diare*, 15 August 1915, CDJ.
80 Cheikho, *Diare*, 11 December 1915, CDJ.
81 Cheikho, *Diare*, 18 December 1915, CDJ.
to the requisition of their infrastructure, the Jesuits’ own printing press was used to publish an article accusing Tanaïl, a Jesuit model farm, of having been a “center of impiety and corruption.”

Cheikho’s opinion changed over the course of the war, however. When Cemal Pasha came to Beirut in November 1917 to say his goodbyes, Cheikho reckoned that “he showed himself to be a true gentleman [un vrai gentleman (sic)].” Cemal distributed grain, “eulogized the loyalty of the Beirutis […],” and invited 150 “personnes ecclésiastiques, Christians and Muslims” to a banquet where he blamed “Enver and the Germans” for the Ottoman defeat for not having given the Ottoman Army sufficient support. Hüseyin Kazım (see below), the Jesuits’ main contact in the CUP, was seated beside Cemal that night and asked him why the Jesuits had not been invited. Cemal responded that he did not know that there were Jesuits still in Beirut and the departing general gave Kazım a written order guaranteeing the Jesuits a stipend of food. For having collaborated in the production of the two-volume study of Lebanon, Cheikho and the others also received a qinṭār of grain [250 kilos] each. Kazım and Ismail Hakki intervened on their behalf in several instances. Cheikho, and the Jesuit order’s experience more broadly show how the war thrust elite groups together, regardless of their pre-war ideological commitments.

The discrepancy between the Jesuit experience and that of al-Sayigh’s Melkite Greek Catholic order boils down to geography and the differential character of the two religious orders. In Beirut, Cheikho saw an active Ottoman security presence during the war and an intensification of administrative controls. In rural Mount Lebanon,

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82 Cheikho, Diare, 12 November 1916, CDJ.
83 Cheikho, Diare, 12 December 1917, CDJ.
meanwhile, Sayigh had little to report in the way of interference or expropriations by Ottoman troops. As we have seen, Cheikho watched relief efforts stumble and fail under the auspices of CUP administrators appointed to Beirut’s municipal and provincial governments. In al-Sayigh’s Kisrawan, conversely, relief faltered under the supervision of indigenous, Christian politicians who “sold the grain destined for the poor.”84 Cheikho already viewed the world in terms of a bifurcation between Christian and Islamic civilizations and at first the events of the war, and especially the persecution of his order, fit neatly into that mold. Al-Sayigh, meanwhile, was well acclimated to life in the Ottoman Empire and had good relationships with Ottoman officers. The Melkite Church and its Paulist order had evolved in the Syrian interior amidst an Ottoman-administered Muslim majority. Although friendly with Ottoman officers, Brother Yusuf feared throughout the war that Ottoman troops would seize their monastery, although his fears in that regard were unfounded.85 Despite Brother Yusuf’s relatively warm feelings towards Ottoman troops, he nevertheless feared requisition at their hands. For his part, Cheikho’s harbored relative distaste for the CUP and its projects, but ultimately became a direct beneficiary of Cemal Pasha and his administration. Both men hewed to a narrative that the reality of the war (as described in their own diaries) appeared to contradict.

In addition to class, geography dictated the variable experience of the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon during the war. Central regions of Mount Lebanon—especially the Matn—hosted more Ottoman troops and many monasteries there faced requisition. In the north, the region of Ihdin and Zgharta escaped direct Ottoman occupation altogether.86 Local studies have often highlighted the good behavior of Ottoman troops, in sharp

contrast to those histories that take the ‘nation’ as their unit of analysis, which emphasize the destructiveness of the Ottoman troops. The inhabitants of Jazzin in the Shuf mountain region fondly remembered the wartime commander of their town, Marcel Bey and the troops he commanded who hailed from around Homs and Hama.\textsuperscript{87}

Nationalist treatments included direct requisition of Lebanese property during the war among the famine’s main causes. A popular film, \textit{Safar Barlik} (1967) offers a story wherein the Lebanese, in their rural towns, faced constant deprivations at the hands of Ottoman troops. That impression likely stemmed from the directors’ reading of history books such as Yamin’s \textit{Lubnan fi al-Harb} (1919) as well as the prevalence of that narrative in the popular memory of Lebanese (see introduction). Tawfiq Awwad’s novel \textit{al-Raghif} (The Loaf) recounts countless stories of requisition at the hands of the Ottomans. Starvation, in those accounts, stemmed directly from scarcity produced by the stealing of foodstuffs by the Ottomans.\textsuperscript{88} Even the most recent scholarly studies, evidently generally lacking in nationalist commitments, have highlighted acts of ‘looting’ committed by Ottoman troops without attention to timeline or local context.\textsuperscript{89}

Contrary to the memory of a brutal occupation, however, manuscript sources from the period praised the good behavior of Ottoman troops throughout the war. Months after Ottoman troops first occupied Mount Lebanon in November 1914, much of rural Lebanon had not been subjected to military occupation. Troops from other provinces had not yet ventured into mountainous portions of Kisrawan, for instance, where their


\textsuperscript{88} Tawfiq ‘Awwad, \textit{Al-Raghif} (Beirut: Dar al-Makshuf, 1939).

\textsuperscript{89} Fawaz cites a report of looting from Iraq to characterize the relationship between Ottoman troops and the Arab populace throughout the war. Fawaz, \textit{A Land of Aching Hearts}, 92.
imminent arrival meant that “fear” was “engulfing the people.” But, contrary to the rumors of impending massacre, the superior of a Greek Catholic monastery insisted, “Christians are completely safe.” He held the Lebanese gendarmes in low-esteem, saying they were “the source of all of the riffraff [al-siflāt]” and that the soldiers from “the rest of the wilayāt were more honest [ashraf nafsān] and noble [arfaq qadrān] than the Lebanese.” Cheikho, less well disposed to the Ottoman occupation force than Brother Yusuf al-Sayigh, nevertheless confirmed that the regular Ottoman troops represented much less of a menace to the populace than did the Lebanese gendarmes. In the area of Damur, south of Beirut, the Ottoman commander had responded to the townspeople’s complaints and moved his garrison away from the Soeurs de Damour convent. That deferential behavior characterized the Ottoman troop presence more broadly: “In general the Turkish soldiers comport themselves well [se tiennent bien], we find them more decent and modest than the Lebanese soldiers, who have become very insolent.”

Taoutel and Wittouck have recently tried to extrapolate the broader Lebanese national experience from the wartime experience of the Jesuit order in Mount Lebanon and the Bekaa valley [which was at the time part of the province of Syria]. The Jesuits’ travails were peculiar, however, because many of their order were citizens of Entente nations, and the Ottoman administration justified the seizure of their property under the pretext that it was “French.” In contrast to the expropriations faced by the Jesuit order,

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91 Cheikho, Diare, 30 August 1915, CDJ.
93 Some religious orders escaped requisition, however. Talat Pasha reportedly claimed that while “he could” have seized the property of the Franciscan order, he chose not to do so. See, Paul Mattern, Diare, 15 April 1915, CDJ.
the Ottoman administration largely spared the Lebanese direct requisition, leaving entire regions of the province unoccupied and unmolested by the Ottoman army.

Wartime damages incurred by the Jesuits would become the sole fault of “the Turks,” and in that sense the Jesuit narrative of the war did reflect the production of the Lebanese nationalist narrative more broadly. The Jesuits sought to recoup some of their wartime losses when the French Mandate administration set up a commission to compensate for damages incurred under Ottoman rule. Joseph [Yusuf] Khalil wrote in an “Exposé des Dommages,” that:

Was the fire at Tanail of the main structure, which served as housing for the missionnaires, and a dormitory for orphans, the deed of the Turks, or should it be attributed to one of the villagers of the surrounding area?

I first believed […] the second hypothesis after numerous testimonies made to us when we returned to Tanail at the end of December 1918.

It appears the first hypothesis is correct.

In 1924, I had a visit from one of our orphans of 1914, originally from the neighboring village of Taalabeya. He returned from Marseille where he was employed in the merchant marine. He was a young man, who would have been around 16 or 17 years old in 1918. Being from the immediate vicinity of Tanail, he would have seen with his own eyes everything happening upon the departure of the Turcs-Allemands. And, over the course of the conversation, and without me eliciting his declarations [et sans que je provoque en rien ses déclarations] he affirmed that the fire was the deed of one Turk and one German, who arrived at nightfall, entered the house with the pretext of spending the night, and left before daybreak, after setting fire. 94

Significant evidence, available to Father Khalil, appeared to contradict the suggestion that Ottoman troops were the culprits. In addition to the Jesuit diaries from the period, letters from military and intelligence commanders in Faisal’s administration, which had occupied the Bekaa attested, that, “after the Turkish withdrawal, some ignorant people

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took the chance to loot Ta’nail farm of its instruments, tools, cattle, and furniture.”\textsuperscript{95} Burning the structure and subsequently blaming the act on the “Turks” might have been, for the locals involved, a concerted effort to conceal their act.

In other instances of property damage, the culpability of “Turks” was even less clear. The Jesuit’s supply of alcohol at their monastery at Bikfaya evidently disappeared during the war and “only Rashid Tohme had the key.”\textsuperscript{96} The latter was a local official, from whom the fathers hoped to recoup their supply after the war. In addition to resulting in the loss of private property, the war’s insecurity made food production quite difficult. Harissa’s monks had seen many of their fruit crops fall victim to “theft” \textit{sic} at the hands of their hungry sharecroppers (see Chapter 4). Crop-“stealing” became so severe by the end of the war that there was little incentive to plant corn in an area not totally protected, limiting cropped acreage in any area severely impacted by hunger. The desperation of the populace was the source of much “looting” subsequently attributed to the “Turks.”

In Beirut, Jesuit Paul Mattern believed that German forces were burning their grain reserves at Bekaa railroad junction of Riyaq in 1918. “The last German soldiers are departing after burning and destroying their provisions.”\textsuperscript{97} However, Jesuit sources from the Bekaa valley and even Louis Cheikho in Beirut contradicted Mattern’s account. British planes had bombed the German and Ottoman munitions depots in Riyaq on 29 September and again on 2 October, leaving them “in flames.”\textsuperscript{98} The German Army also left behind their arms and ammunition: “everyone was armed [with discarded German

\textsuperscript{95} Ali Rida al-Rikabi to Qaimaqam al-Biqa’, 30 November 1918, Dommages des Guerres 8.A.14, CDJ.
\textsuperscript{96} No author, “Reclamations à faire pour la maison de Bikfaïa,” 26 January 1919, Dommages des Guerres 8.A.14, CDJ.
\textsuperscript{97} Paul Mattern, \textit{Diare}, 1 October 1918, CDJ.
\textsuperscript{98} Zahlé (Jesuit Post), \textit{Diare}, 29 September, 1 October, CDJ.
materiel],” and shots rang out across the Bekaa. The local population of the Bekaa set upon the withdrawing troops: “At Zahlé they [les Allemands et les Turcs] were beaten, stripped of their uniforms, robbed of all their possessions.” A few days later, Cheikho reported renewed attacks by locals on fleeing troops motivated by “taking their arms, uniforms, and provisions,” in addition to “acts of savagery, even against those sick and wounded in the hospitals.” At least in the war’s very last moments, Ottoman troops became the victims of the populace, not vice-versa, as most secondary treatments have maintained.

If the Jesuits had a material incentive to “remember” that Turkish-speaking soldiers had looted their school, the Sursock family also had a vested interest in externalizing blame for the crisis. Debts were still owed to them from the period of the war during which they had also made significant land purchases. For their part, the Sursock family could deflect attention away from their wartime profiteering activities by deftly switching allegiances to the French occupation forces which arrived in October 1918. They secured French approval for their claim to property acquired during the war under the auspices of the Beirut Park Company. Quickly, the favor was repaid: the Sursocks gifted the choicest portion of the Beirut Park, the newly completed Residence des Pins to the High Commissioner, General Gouraud. The Sursock Frères concern also received legal sanction to press those who owed them money from the war for

99 Zahlé (Jesuit Post), Diare, 3 October, CDJ.
100 Cheikho, Diare, 5 October 1918.
101 Cheikho, Diare, 8 October 1918.
102 Copin (L’Administrateur en Chef – Territoires Ennemis Occupés, Zone Ouest), “Arrete N. 496,” Beirut, 6 July 1919, Archive Sursock Surs_47_52915_630, USEK.
103 Gouraud (Haut Commissaire) to Omar Beyhum (President de la Municipalité de Beyrouth), 29 September 1921, Archive Sursock 47_52915_749, USEK.
Alfred Sursock, who had been an Ottoman diplomat posted to Paris before the war, became a Lebanese delegate to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, remaining seamlessly on the highest rungs of power despite the transition from Ottoman to French rule. Those high-level connections, which allowed the family to secure their material position, must have also been crucial in enlisting Mandate authorities to censor Yamin’s first volume. In addition to applying direct political pressure, members of the Sursock family have emphasized their charitable activities to mitigate the blemish of war profiteering and to protect the family’s reputation.

Unlike the Sursocks, Salim Ali Salam took an Arab nationalist stance against the French Mandate. Similarly to the Sursocks, however, he used the new political landscape to disguise his proximity to the former regime and his complicity in war profiteering. Salam had been a member of the Ottoman parliament, and one of Beirut’s most influential men. In his memoir, he claimed to have been a champion of the national cause during the war, describing confrontations with Cemal Pasha to try and save fellow patriots. Leila Fawaz, among other historians, has taken his pronouncements in that regard at face value, even while acknowledging the public accusations in the war’s immediate aftermath calling for Salam’s prosecution for his wartime activities. Instead of seeing the charitable activities of the Sursocks, and the patriotic stance taken by Salam,

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104 Sursock Ikhwan v. Mahmud al-Ruas, 29 April 1919, Al-Mahkama al-Sulhiyya fi Bayrut [Beirut Arbitration Court], Archive Sursock Surs_28_53633_01, USEK.

105 Historian Leila Fawaz finds their attempts at wartime charity to be sincere: “Nevertheless [despite “catering” to Ottoman officials], upper-income families also turned their attention to the poor, and deployed their resources in the service of the needy. The Sursocks are one family who took an active interest in the plight of the needy, chartering a school for girls in the 1880s, upgrading infrastructure around Beirut during the Great War, and building the Beirut hippodrome, an equestrian arena initiated during the war which some family members believe helped employ the poor. Most directly, during the war they and other wealthy families distributed food to the needy,” Fawaz, A Land of Aching Hearts, 124.

106 She drew on the work of Kamal Salibi, Lebanon’s most influential historian, to argue that Salam became an Arab nationalist in 1916, once he became convinced that “Ottomanism and Arabism were [no longer] reconcilable.” Fawaz, A Land of Aching Hearts, 258-259. See Salibi, “Beirut under the Young Turks,” 214.

107 Fawaz, A Land of Aching Hearts, 123.
as mitigating factors for their wartime profiteering, might it not be more accurate to suggest a more direct relationship between the two, wherein a post-war political campaign to deflect blame away from local elites toward the Ottoman administration necessitated active self-invention on the part of elites?

Today, the Sursocks still make a show of their “public works” and Salam is remembered as a patriot who stood up to Cemal Pasha. The fallen Ottoman regime needed to be held responsible for the famine in order for their class to escape blame. Those families had already mobilized a propaganda effort to portray their wartime activities as charitable while the crisis itself was happening. The wife of Juniya’s kaymakam Amin Abi al-Lama wrote the Patriarch during the war indignant at the unpleasant sight of so many orphans (it was her husband, as noted above, who had refused to offer any help to the destitute orphans). During and after the French Mandate, the class of implicated in war profiteering projected an image of itself as charitable.

Even those with little obvious stake in obscuring the role of war profiteers played into the nationalist narrative, even though they knew it to be false. Initially, the Maronite Patriarch used the standard rhetoric of his position to account for the crisis, i.e. that whatever ill had befallen the people resulted from their sins. In 1912, the Patriarch had written in response to growing regional instability, “the source of all these difficult

\[\text{108} \text{ Hala Amin Abi al-Lama to Maronite Patriarch, 8 January 1918, Huwwayik 32/286, Bkirki.}\]
\[\text{109} \text{ A 1946 bulletin, “Au Secours de l’Enfant,” produced by a women’s charity reads as a veritable “who’s who” of families who profiteered during WWI. Mme Emilie Georges Sursock appeared as “one of the first Lebanese women to give an example of charitable activities.” Her relative, Isabelle Bustros, received plaudits for supporting “numerous needy families,” as did Linda Michel Sursock, Lyda Michel Bustros, Dona Maria A. Sursock, Mme Anis Trad, Eveline Bustros, Mme Alfred Skaf. Association de Garderie ou Refuge d’Enfants, } \text{Au secours de l’enfant (Beirut: 1946).}\]
circumstances is our sins [for which…] God allows disasters such as these.” In December 1915, he stressed the importance of repentance, and a year later, suggested that the crisis had not abated because the people had not sufficiently repented. Another year into the crisis, however, the Patriarch’s writing changed in tone, he no longer referred to sin in general, but to a very specific kind of transgression:

[Although] we have constantly called attention to this issue in our writings and speeches, some have persisted in their transgression- […] as for those who pocketed the money [destined as charity] for orphans and widows, we denounce their acts in the strongest terms, the prominent houses complicit in [corruption] will become empty, we call on our righteous children to not harden their hearts to the destitute but to work for the Lord who says, “Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”

Perhaps the most striking feature of the passage is the Patriarch’s mistaken citation of the Bible passage, a sign of the extraordinary stress of the time. The archive of the Patriarchate appears to be largely cleansed of such references to indigenous profiteers and the above passage represents a rare instance where the Patriarch implicated Lebanese in the making of the crisis.

After the collapse of Ottoman power in Lebanon in early October 1918, the Patriarch retained his critique of local greed with an important caveat. While he would, at length, blame the famine on a Turkish plan, he did still note, in December 1918, “the participation [qiṣām] of a group of local sons [abnāʾ al-bilād], however small, in helping them [the Turkish government] in assaulting their brothers [al-iyqāʾ b-ikhwānihim] and trading in their souls.” The motivation of those native sons, Huwayyik explained, was

112 Huwayyik [Maronite Patriarch] to ‘Children of the Maronite Sect,’ 15 December 1915, Huwayyik 31/20, Bkirkī.
114 Ibid. He cited Matthew 19:13, the quotation, however, comes from 5:42 of the same gospel.
“odious greed [tamaʾ mamqūt]” which “suffocated humanity by monopolizing all the necessities of survival, and not leaving even a trifling amount of income from the deprived people [al-shaʿb al-maskīn] not confiscated.” While al-Huwwayyik downplayed the number of those who participated in the “commerce in people’s souls,” he nevertheless acknowledged the role of the Lebanese in fomenting the crisis. Huwayyik would say publicly in 1919, while lobbying for the creation of a Greater Lebanon, that the famine had been “planned.”115 In his missive published immediately after the withdrawal of Ottoman forces, he had given evidence to the contrary, indicting the Ottoman regime for incompetence, rather than malevolence. Tellingly, he chastised the regime for its “apathy” in regards to the populace and for having entered the war, “without even a piaster in the bank.”116

In contrast to the wartime travails of the Armenian people, which were the product of a premeditated and systematic plan for their destruction (i.e. genocide) the Lebanese fell victim to the Ottoman Empire’s incapacity and incompetence. Hasan Kayali’s study of the Arab provinces’ relationship with the Ottoman regime in the empire’s last years equates the wartime experience of the Arab population—if only in passing—with that of the Armenians.117 Both suffered deportations, he argues, and massive excess mortality. His comparison is flawed, however. The number of families deported from Lebanon numbered in the hundreds and were almost exclusively from the elite class. Almost all returned from the various locales in Anatolia where they had been

115 Elias Hoyek [Huwayyik], “Les Révendications du Liban,” La revue phénicienne (Beirut), Noël 1919.
sent (for instance, Riad al-Sulh’s family). The systematic deportation of Armenians to concentration camps in Syria differs completely from the experience of those families. Furthermore, the Ottoman regime meted out oppression to the Armenian population directly. In Syria, Cemal governed the population via local elites. Unlike the Armenian communities, whose entire social structure was annihilated by a concerted CUP policy, the Lebanese (and to a lesser extent other Arab populations) had their misfortune mediated and amplified by their own elite class.

A nationalist perspective could never depict a reality wherein the Lebanese themselves had been responsible for the death and destruction in their homeland. The role of elite Lebanese in monopolizing grain was a basic fact of the war’s history. Even the nationalist accounts allow that merchants enriched themselves. Thus, embedded in the emergent nationalist version of the famine, were the seeds of its destruction: if grain meant for distribution to the poor was instead sold, does that not undermine the thesis that Mount Lebanon had been blockaded from importing grain by the Ottoman regime? Wartime desperation led to widespread looting and theft by locals, which was subsequently, blamed on the departed “Turks” and “Germans.”

These unpleasant aspects of the war have largely escaped mention by scholars. That neglect cannot be totally classed as benign. Many of the same families implicated in wartime corruption still today, at the time of writing, wield substantial political and economic power in the country. Lebanon’s current prime minister, Tamam Salam, is Salim Ali Salam’s grandson. In the 1940s, ‘Abdallah Beyhum and Petro Trad—themselves implicated in wartime profiteering—each served as prime minister during the French Mandate. The families implicated in war profiteering on a local level in Kisrawan,
especially the Abi al-Lama\textsuperscript{c}, remain prominent. Based on their commitment to obscuring their role in the famine, the Sursocks and Salams (among others) must have perceived the importance of disseminating a cleansed narrative of the past in the preservation of their status as elites in Lebanon.\textsuperscript{118}

CONCLUSION

In a critique of the class dynamics of the current trash crisis afflicting Lebanon, a Lebanese author has noted: "It is not a secret that those who hold power in Lebanon are corrupt. You would be hard-pressed to find a single Lebanese citizen who would deny it."\textsuperscript{119} That acknowledgement of systemic corruption has not, however, translated into political solutions to the monopoly the corrupt class wields over political and economic life in Lebanon. Since the establishment of Lebanon in its contemporary borders, the elite in Lebanon have waged an active campaign to conceal their complicity in crimes against the Lebanese population during the war. In that regard, they have been successful even despite widespread acknowledgement of elite corruption: one would be hard-pressed to find a Lebanese person in the street who would not reflexively put the blame for the suffering incurred during World War I squarely on the “Turks.” Perhaps holding the elite accountable for crimes of the past can help reframe the current struggle for accountability in Lebanon.


CHAPTER 4

‘THE WOUND LEBANON WILL DIE FROM’:
CHURCH AND STATE IN CAPITALIST LEBANON

And in this desperate state we have not seen from the men of Lebanon, and especially the clergy the slightest act that would indicate compassion or personal honor [‘izzat al-nafs]. The Bishops have disregarded their priests, their people and their flock, leaving them to die before their eyes meanwhile they could have, had they wished, staved off the ravages of death, by selling some of their possessions or loaning money. And, most of the secular Lebanese, if not to say all of them, who were tasked with selling wheat on the part of the government instead pursued a reprehensible commerce, keeping from the poor the small amount of barley-bread that would have saved them from death, instead selling it to others at exorbitant prices. And we have found out [...] that a group of the highest clergy are selling wheat received from the government destined for the poor [...].

-Brother Yusuf al-Sayigh, Superior of St. Paul Society of Missionaries, 1916

Throughout World War I, a Greek Catholic superior, Brother Yusuf al-Sayigh, railed against the greed that he saw as the famine’s root cause. His monastery, the St. Paul Society of Missionaries in Harissa, Lebanon provided relief to those in need throughout the war. Meanwhile he held “Lebanese” politicians and “the highest Maronite clergy,” responsible for the desperation engulfing the population. He accused them of selling wheat destined for poor relief. His own position was not so morally clear-cut, however. At the war’s outset the monastery had little in the way of land holdings. During the war, as will be seen, Brother Yusuf took advantage of St. Paul’s secure financial position to purchase land at low prices from neighboring villagers. By war’s end, they had

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2 Ibid.
accumulated a substantial portion of the surrounding agricultural land. The moral ambiguity of St. Paul’s local role in regards to its neighbors encapsulates the broader relationship of ecclesiastical institutions with Lebanese society. Tasked with providing relief to compensate for the dislocations wrought by capitalism, church institutions also expanded their moral, economic and political power because of market integration. World War I accelerated this dynamic. The Church became the main arbiter of relief in Mount Lebanon, meanwhile increasing land holdings and political power.

Brother Yusuf’s St. Paul Society in Harissa, Lebanon, like other church institutions, was the first bulwark against hunger for the poorest classes; its relief activities began in the early summer of 1915 and continued for more than a year, only ceasing when the monks at St. Paul were only left with “what was absolutely necessary for their own survival” in February 1917.\(^3\) Despite the contribution of the St. Paul society to relief, they also benefitted materially from the desperation of surrounding villagers. By the end of the war, its land holdings increased from “nothing”\(^4\) to a substantial portion of the surrounding area’s productive acreage. Church institutions provided crucial social welfare amidst the dislocations of Lebanon’s silk boom, robust population growth, and emigration. Some monks taught the children of villagers for free and gave charity to the needy while others exploited vulnerable segments of the population. Lebanese peasants who lost their land often sold their plots to the church before emigrating. Lebanon’s demographic instability mirrored a broader ecological process of overshoot and crash in

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\(^4\) Al-Sayigh’s summary of 1912 described their institution as “still poor because it lacks a dependable source of income [al-jamī‘ya ...la rizqa ta’tamidu ‘alayhi],” see Al-Sayigh, “Fadhlakat ma Jariat Sinat 1912 [A Summary of what Happened in 1912],” *Sijil al-Yawmiyyat*, Harissa.
Mediterranean mountain environments; but its response, the expansion of Church power, was particular.

World War I revealed the consequences of this long process and amplified them. Church institutions gained power in Lebanon over the long-nineteenth century politically, discursively, and materially. As the war demonstrated, old networks of relief no longer functioned: the patronage of elites and family networks was no more a failsafe for the hungry. Church institutions had become some kind of de facto government in the Mountain. They coordinated economic activity, strengthened their political power through capitalism, but were responsible for picking up the pieces of its creative destruction. In this sense, the power of the Church was not some vestige of tradition, but rather the consequence of Lebanon’s aggressive integration into the global industrial economy through the export of silk.

While emigration provided an external safety valve, an expanding network of monasteries helped Lebanese society acclimate to the opportunities and instabilities presented by market integration on an internal level. By 1914, church institutions owned one third of Mount Lebanon’s agricultural land. Elites had encouraged the expansion of Christian religious orders as a means of increasing the land area under production. Druze amirs of the Shuf mountain region, along with the Christian shaykhs of provinces to the north, saw the monks as a reliable means of increasing their tax base and providing services to the populace, such as alms and education. That process began in earnest around the middle of the eighteenth century. In the 1750s, Druze shaykh Kana'an Nakad

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established a monastery on valuable irrigated land, planted in mulberry trees, overlooking the Mediterranean at the town of al-Na‘ima.\(^7\) Maronite ecclesiastical authorities also purchased land from powerful Druze families. In turn, those families would authorize the construction of monasteries in areas under their political and financial control.\(^8\) Druze shaykhs, who held no stake in the ecclesiastical aims of Maronite institutions, perceived a social need for the establishment of monasteries. They hoped monasteries would further “the creation of a more organized, more consistent, and more productive tax base […]”\(^9\)

The monasteries also provided a stable existence to those sons of the fellahin who lacked other opportunities. Amidst the dislocations of Lebanon’s incorporation into global capitalist markets and rapid population growth, they provided social protection. They became so associated with the lower classes that those rich families that had endowed them came to complain that the poor had come to treat the monasteries as their own property. A Maronite shaykh complained in 1851: “we do not believe that these monasteries, [their] revenues and property, donated from those charitable children of the [Maronite] sect, should come to nothing because of those extravagant persons who entered […] because of their poverty and hunger and now treat them as their own inheritance.”\(^10\) Despite its evident class-angst, Shaykh Hanna Abi-Sa‘ab’s polemic

\(^7\)A deed available to the Maronite Patriarchate’s census of monasteries carried the hijri date of 1170 [1756/1757] for the establishment of the waqf. Dayr Mar Jirjis al-Na‘ima, Adiyar al-Rahbaniyya al-Lubnaniyya [Census of the Lebanese Maronite Order’s Monasteries], 1902, Huwayyik 109/71, Bkirki.
\(^10\)Hanna Abi Sa‘ab, “Afkar al-Shaykh Hanna Abi Sa‘ab b-Khusus al-Rahbaniyya [the thoughts of shaykh Hanna Abi Sa‘ab Regarding the Monastic Orders],” 1851, Yuhanna al-Hajj 17/73, Bkirki. The document appears in the drawer of Yuhanna al-Hajj, who was Patriarch between 1890 and 1898, much after Abi Sa‘ab wrote his polemic.
indicates the role monasteries played in social protection as well as the mobility the institution provided for the poor sons and daughters of peasants.

This chapter will consider the role of ecclesiastical institutions generally, and Catholic monasteries in particular, as purveyors of charity and beneficiaries of capital accumulation which took place before and during WWI. Much like the secular notables who had been charged with distributing relief to the poor, some of the region’s clergy exploited their position for profit. To the extent that relief did arrive to those in need in rural Mount Lebanon, however, ecclesiastical institutions were largely responsible.

THE CHURCH AS STATE IN CAPITALIST LEBANON

When extreme hunger appeared in Beirut in the late spring of 1915, the editor of Beirut’s main daily, al-’Ittihad al-Uthmani, compared German rationing with food distribution in Beirut province to highlight the deficiencies of the latter. Germany’s system, carried out with “all thoroughness and precision,” assured that “all of its citizens receive their daily bread without any disruption.” Meanwhile, price controls and rationing in Beirut faltered, and grain was unavailable or unaffordable for many. Analogy was a clever way to criticize the municipal and provincial authorities despite wartime censorship regulations. Editor Ahmad Tabbara’s comparison with Germany is revealing in another regard as well; it suggests the systemic relationship between effective provisioning in Germany and its failure in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Industrialization had provided Germany with the centralized administrative capacity to effectively distribute grain in times of scarcity; meanwhile Lebanon’s incorporation into the global industrial economy

11 Al-’Ittihad al-Uthmani, 2 May 1915. Provisioning in Germany was effective, but not without its flaws. Avner Offer has described the difficulties surrounding provisioning in wartime Germany. Avner Offer, The First World War: An Agrarian Interpretation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 28.
produced an opposing effect, wherein power diffused among the merchant class and church organizations. In response to the dislocations surrounding market integration, Lebanon (and other regions of the Ottoman Empire), had not developed social welfare systems at a national level such as those of Germany and England\textsuperscript{12} but rather ecclesiastical institutions and monasteries in particular had taken that role in the Lebanese case. That fact proved fatal for many Lebanese because neither the Maronite Patriarchate nor the orders of monks controlled a sufficient supply of grain to effect systematic relief for the population.

Unlike the Lebanese, European populations, by and large, benefitted from centralized coordination of the distribution of food resources. By October 1916, 1,457 public kitchens prepared two million daily meals in Germany.\textsuperscript{13} Alexander Watson’s recent study of the Central Powers in WWI has faulted the efficiency of wartime food distribution in the Habsburg Empire. By 1916, prices had doubled from their prewar levels in Austria. By 1917, official supply networks had become stressed to the point that German and Austrian women embarked on a practice called “hamstering” wherein they went directly to the countryside to purchase foodstuffs from producers, hiking through the woods, sewing hidden pockets in their dresses, and sometimes mailing foodstuffs to themselves from rural post offices.\textsuperscript{14} In post-war Europe, many remembered food scarcity as the defining aspect of the war. “Few, either during the war or afterwards, have found

\textsuperscript{12} Karl Polanyi posited that a ‘double movement’ characterized the interaction between society and market integration wherein civil society and state institutions cropped up to protect social structures threatened by the dislocations produced by market integration. Karl Polanyi, \textit{The Great Transformation: the Political and Economic Origins of our Time} (Beacon Press, 1944).

\textsuperscript{13} Alexander Watson, \textit{Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary in World War I} (Basic Books, 2014), 335.

\textsuperscript{14} Watson, \textit{Ring of Steel}, 331-336.
much to praise about German or Hapsburg food administration.” On the European “home front” standing in line was an iconic experience of the war. In part because of the wartime travails of their food economies, Alexander Watson has concluded that “no other societies sacrificed more or lost so much” as Austria and Germany.

In some ways, the wartime experience of the Central Powers was not totally different from that of Ottoman Lebanon: “[…] the channeling of resources to the military, the ever tightening Entente blockade, soil exhaustion and bureaucratic bungling brought terrible hardship. Above all, the home front’s year [1916] was defined by food shortage.” All of the above equally applies to the Ottoman Empire. However, when food scarcity threatened the livelihood of the civilian populations of Germany and Austria, governmental authorities acted decisively to set prices and distribute foodstuffs. The population of Lebanon would have certainly traded their lot for the discomfort of standing outside in the cold waiting in food lines to access one of Vienna’s 800 bakeries.

CHURCH WAQF LANDS AND CAPITALISM

Based on Eurocentric assumptions about economic development, many analysts have wrongly portrayed the extent of church land holdings in Lebanon as somehow at odds with capitalism. For them, ecclesiastical economic power was a holdover from a previous epoch, and an impediment to progress. In that regard, Lebanese nationalist thinker Paul Jouplain made an odd digression when discussing population pressure, the price of land, and the difficulty return migrants to Lebanon had in purchasing farmland in 1908. He

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15 Watson, Ring of Steel, 359.
16 Watson, Ring of Steel, 1.
17 Watson, Ring of Steel, 330.
18 Paul Jouplain was a pseudonym for Bulus Nujaym.
wrote a brief treatise on the history of monasticism in Lebanon, eventually charging that the expansion of the monks’ *waqf* lands were at the center of the country’s economic crisis:

Around each monastery, immense *domaines* have been constituted between the seventh century and today; therefore, since their beginnings, the Lebanese orders of monks have had one principal goal, which they have pursued with tireless perseverance: that of increasing their material power without cease. Today, they possess more than one third of cultivated and cultivatable land in the province of Lebanon. The property held in *waqf* [*main-morte*] comprises, thus, more than a third of the land, and the best.19

That accumulation of land by monasteries had increased around the turn of the twentieth century, according to Jouplain’s analysis. When difficult conditions had led to the indebtedness of the peasant class, they had been forced to sell their land. “Emigrants, each year, for the last century 20 did the same. It was the monasteries that bought the land […] To the poor *fellah* whose field they coveted, they offered money, which in his [the *fellah*’s] straits, he accepted.”21 Jouplain’s unkind view would be nearly impossible to corroborate quantitatively. The circumstances under which the orders of monks accumulated land remain sensitive, and the archives of the religious orders remain closed in this specific regard.22 While Jouplain saw the monasteries as a dangerous impediment to capitalism: “the wound Lebanon will die from,”23 a prominent Lebanese Marxist historian, Masʿud Dahir, has critiqued the expansion of monasteries’ land holdings as

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19 Paul Jouplain [Nujaym], *La question du Liban, étude d’histoire diplomatique et de droit international* (Beirut: 1961[1908]), 522.
20 Jouplain included those who left for other parts of the Syrian provinces in his analysis.
22 The Phoenix Center at USEK has collected the archives of monasteries pertaining to the Lebanese Maronite Order but did not, as of August 2015, allow access to their collection that would permit an analysis of how they accumulated land. The Maronite Patriarchate’s archive is open, but appears to be cleansed of information pertaining to land purchases. A separate, off-limits archive in Diman (the Patriarchal summer residence) houses information germane to land holdings.
23 Jouplain, *La question du Liban*, 524. He goes on to recommend an expropriation of the monasteries’ property.
oppressive for the rural populace and a source of migration. Diverse voices have portrayed the social and economic influence of monasteries as an obstacle to, and not a product of, the integration of Lebanon into the global industrial economy.

Richard Van Leeuven has argued, against the above views, that the landholdings of the Maronite Church had the potential to “be a dynamic element supporting economic development and a means of capital accumulation, integrated into the systems of surplus extraction and agriculture.” The landholding class, which donated significant amounts of land to monasteries so that they would increase the land area under production, certainly would have agreed with Van Leeuven about the potential for the monasteries to generate a surplus. At the same time, the monasteries provided education to Catholic children and charity to those in need, especially in times of crisis. The CUP hoped to sideline the prevailing ecclesiastical powers at the beginning of the war, in particular foreign orders such as the Jesuits. Their eventual reliance on the Maronite Patriarchate as the main funnel for grain to Mount Lebanon and on “foreign” Catholic orders of nuns to operate hospices in Beirut was a grudging acknowledgement that these represented the institutions most equipped to provide systematic charity. The case of WWI reveals that the role of monasteries resists any such one-dimensional characterization as has been proffered by their detractors. The expansion of ecclesiastical power in material terms was

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25 See also, Iliya Harik’s work, who believed that monasteries became part of the feudal system which promoted sectarianism and therefore was, in his analysis, anathema to modern political development. Iliya Harik, *Politics and Change in a Traditional Society Lebanon, 1711-1845* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 114.
a consequence of the silk bust that accelerated during the crisis of the war, as a case study from Brother Yusuf’s notes will suggest.

A THEFT AT THE MONASTERY
One morning in the final winter of the war, 9 January 1918, the Paulist monks discovered one of their number lurking in the storeroom and skipping out on prayer. “We had long noticed that we were little blessed with provisions [mūnitna fī al-dayr hiyyah qalīlat al-baraka],” but the monks had never suspected that something “so awful it made one’s hair stand up” had been happening in the monastery for a couple of years. Hearing a rumble, Brother Antun discovered Niqula, who had skipped mass “with the excuse that he was sick,” in the storeroom claiming that he was looking for an onion to cure his stomach pain. Antun assumed that the priest responsible for the key had left the door open. Niqula, who had previously been relieved of key duty because of irresponsibility, produced another copy. Noticing its recently cast appearance, Antun asked Niqula why he had an extra copy of the key and Niqula claimed to have retrieved it from the neighboring Franciscan monastery. Antun suspected nothing and went to the outhouse, where he found two-grain bags, partially filled. This discovery was “the sword that tore the veil blinding his eyes.” Immediately, he went to the storeroom and weighed the grain, which was 15 ṭafēṣ short, exactly the amount loaded into the bags. He called for Niqula, who had fled. Sending out deacons [shamāṣa] in every direction to find him, the priests tried in vain to discover the lost one of their number. A search of Niqula’s room revealed more evidence pointing to the “level of wickedness he had reached”: a coffee cup not from the monastery, several issues of a newspaper [Zahla al-fatat] hidden between the basin and
the wall, wool slippers, and an empty olive oil can. Weighing their supply of oil, the priests realized it had been robbed as well, along with the grain.\(^{28}\)

The monks knew immediately that whatever supplies he had taken out must have gone to the family of Elias 'Abdallah Yunus. Niqula did not have the “slightest relationship” with any “secular” individuals except for them.\(^{29}\) Elias ‘Abdallah Yunus’ two sons were employed at the monastery as cooks and received only food in payment; their mother washed the monk’s clothes. The family’s relationship with the monastery took on a new dimension during the war. Like much of Lebanon’s working rural majority, the family owned some of the land they worked.

The status of the ‘Abdallah Yunuses as landholders came under dire threat amidst the high prices of 1915. Short on cash to buy food, the family offered the St. Paul Society a tract of land planted in pine trees for 100 French lira. Brother Yusuf, sensing the family’s desperation, demurred and offered twenty instead, claiming that the monastery was having its own hard times. Having initially rejected the offer and tried to sell for twenty-seven lira, Elias ‘Abdallah Yunus, a month later, had become desperate enough to sell their land for twenty lira.\(^{30}\) In February 1916, the monastery purchased a tract adjacent to the above pines for 400 piastres, also from ‘Abdallah Yunus. At the same time, the monks bought another piece of land bordering the monastery from Mansur Yunus, Elias’ brother, for “two French lira.”\(^{31}\) On 23 May 1916, Mansur Yunus sold an additional tract of land to the monastery for twenty-four Ottoman paper lira. Shortly


\(^{29}\) Al-Sayigh, “Hadathat Sariqat al-Dayr [The Incident of Theft at the Monastery],” January 1918, Sijil al-Yawmiyyat, Harissa.


thereafter, from another individual, and for only four and a half Ottoman lira, Al-Sayigh purchased a tract that “exceeded 1,000 meters [in length],” some distance from their monastery in the interior of Kisrawan. They purchased an adjacent tract to the latter for seven Ottoman paper lira.\textsuperscript{32} In 1917, Al-Sayigh encountered some difficulty registering one of the plots purchased from ʿAbdallah Yunus because the latter carried debts that needed to be settled before the land could be transferred. In turn, Al-Sayigh had a bill of exchange [\textit{kambiyāla}] issued to charge him interest until the matter was settled.\textsuperscript{33}

When faced with the accusation that his family had been receiving the supplies Brother Niquula removed from the monastery, Elias ʿAbdallah Yunus protested his innocence and invited Yusuf al-Sayigh to search his house. Brother Yusuf had already confirmed that Philip ʿAbdallah Yunus, Elias’ son, had made the extra copy of the key to their storeroom at a blacksmith’s in Juniya. Philip subsequently fled, and his wife, sister, and daughter (all unnamed in the register) were left alone with Elias ʿAbdallah Yunus, who had been sick for some time, to face the accusation of theft.\textsuperscript{34} The search revealed men’s underwear and books belonging to St. Paul as well as olive oil, chickpeas, wheat, and lentils “all from the same varieties which are in the monastery.” Elias collapsed during the search and died shortly thereafter. A committee of notables was formed at Al-Sayigh’s request to confirm “the theft,” and quantified the stolen goods at 7,900 piastres. Next, Al-Sayigh went with a detachment of Ottoman troops to seize what remained of the foodstuffs at the ʿAbdallah Yunus household. The women insulted al-Sayigh and the

\textsuperscript{34} In noting the importance of signing an agreement with Elias ʿAbdallah Yunus quickly, Brother Yusuf had cited his illness. Al-Sayigh, “25 September 1917,” \textit{Sījīl al-Yawmīyyāt}, Harissa.
troops as they removed the family’s food supplies; offended, the local mudīr\(^{35}\) was “forced [sic]” to strike the daughter. On 20 January 1918, the family came to the monastery to agree on a final settlement. They had been fined 400 lira, which they could not pay, and were forced to mortgage the rest of their land as collateral. As restitution for the grain taken from the monastery, the authorities obliged the women to sign a document mortgaging the rest of their land.\(^{36}\)

Based on the above episode, one can see, without great difficulty, why some level of vitriol—whispered sometimes, or written in esoteric history books, is leveled at the Catholic orders of monks. Yusuf al-Sayigh and the monks in his charge not only all survived the war, but extended their productive landholdings. Charitable activities burnished their reputation among the populace; and the family that stole from them to survive, along with the priest who assisted them, were treated as criminals. Ironically, based on the above anecdote, Yusuf al-Sayigh had a keen eye for injustice, except, of course, in terms of his monastery’s relationship with the surrounding townspeople. He spent much of the war writing about the ways in which starvation in Lebanon stemmed from the corruption and greed of local politicians and a portion of the ‘highest’ clergy. The ‘Abdallah Yunus family’s forfeiture of their property to the St. Paul Society’s monastery must not have been an isolated case. In fact, it reflected a process that had been underway for some time. The increased accumulation of land by monasteries, and other individuals and institutions with capital, enhanced inequality by concentrating land in the hands of church and the elite.

\(^{35}\) Administrator of the local district.

As seen in the cases of Shahin Abi Najm and Father Saʿadallah in Chapter 1, and the ʿAbdallah Yunus family, the economic activities of the church had been geared for profit during the silk boom. During the war, the church maintained that commercial orientation, despite its good intentions and charitable activities. The quantity of the monastery’s grain purchases during the war attests to the monks’ secure material position. Land accumulation by monasteries must have been general during the war.

At the same time, efforts to relieve the suffering of the population on behalf of the Maronite Patriarchate and monasteries indicated their self-perception as the proper authority to distribute charity. A successful rationing policy would have required a centralized power with access to sufficient grain and the administrative capacity to ensure its distribution. Lebanon’s network of monasteries and other ecclesiastical institutions lacked both. That fact speaks to Lebanon’s position on the margins of global capitalism, and the decentralized institutional arrangements that resulted from its status as a producer of a primary commodity, silk.

The following section will briefly consider an ecological legacy of the Church’s landownership before a concluding section treating the legacy of the church’s relief activities during WWI.

CHURCH LAND: A GREEN LEGACY?

As has been seen, the accumulation of land by ecclesiastical institutions was a salient feature of the rise of capitalism in Lebanon that accelerated during the crisis of the war. Albeit a readily apparent feature of Lebanese history, the accumulation of land and capital by the church presents the historian with devilish obstacles to document
systematically. Even today, it would be nearly impossible to quantify the church’s landholdings in Lebanon. Any systematic study of land tenure in Lebanon, either historical or contemporary, would be impossible due to the absence of any archives attesting to land ownership. The cadastral survey conducted under the French Mandate was not preserved in French archives. Such was the sensitivity of the material contained within the land surveys conducted during the Mandate, that French authorities returned the cadaster itself to the governments of Lebanon and Syria, keeping only the documentation relevant to its production. As noted above, the Maronite Patriarchate maintains a separate archive for maps and documentation relevant to its landholdings. Forms of evidence other than archives will have to attest to the extent and legacy of the Church’s material expansion before, during, and after World War I.

Anecdotal evidence indicates that the Maronite Patriarchate, in recent years, has consistently resisted the aggressive attempts of developers to purchase its land. By consequence, substantial plots of land remain in agricultural production amidst the beach resorts and high-rise apartments surrounding the beach resort town of Byblos [Jubayl], remain impervious to the development engulfing them. White plastic greenhouses make these plots of land, largely devoted to growing tomatoes and cucumbers, easy to identify. Neither vegetable costs much more than one dollar a kilo at the retail point of sale. That fact puts the economic activities of the sharecroppers who farm them in stark contrast with the multi-million dollar commercial real estate surrounding them. Satellite imagery can provide a sense of the extent of the Patriarchate’s agricultural holding around Byblos (see Figure 1 below). The Patriarchate’s tenacious hold over its farmland acts as a rare

37 The finding aid for the Camille Duraffourd collection indicates this information. *Fonds Duraffourd*, 1 AE 118, CADN.
force for conservation in a country where the interests of capital have often dictated patterns of development without interference from the government. When concrete trucks pour their contents on farmland and construction crews erect apartments, the soil’s fertility is lost forever.

A recent controversy attests to the intense pressure for commercial real estate development around Byblos. In 2014, the Armenian Church leased one of the last undeveloped stretches of beachfront property around Byblos to a developer aiming to build an exclusive resort in place of the Bird’s Nest orphanage (Trchnotz Puyn in Armenian) and adjacent cemetery, which both served survivors of the Armenian genocide. The Near East Foundation first established a refugee camp on the site in 1920. 4,000 Armenians found refuge in the city of Byblos after WWI. The Bird’s Nest was the center of their community’s life. The proposed removal of the bodies buried in the cemetery and the conversion of the orphanage and its chapel into a boutique hotel have generated outrage. For its part, the Armenian Catholicosate of the Greater House of Cicilia has justified the lease of the property with reference to its current financial distress.

In contrast, the Maronite Patriarchate’s secure financial position has allowed it to avoid selling any of its extensive agricultural land holdings for the purposes of commercial development. The Patriarchate owns the majority of land in the Qadisha Valley, the largest of the five locations in Lebanon classified by the United Nations

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Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a World Heritage Site. UNESCO’s report on the site only acknowledges that the Patriarchate owns the “most important part” of the Qadisha Valley. Despite the detail of its report, UNESCO’s reticence to quantify the extent of the Patriarchate’s holdings indicates the sensitivity of surrounding the church’s extensive landholdings. Villagers from the towns of Blauza and Sar’al farm the Patriarchate’s land in Wadi Qannubin on Qadisha’s western end. While their portion of the valley has been the most resistant to development, the villagers have demanded outright ownership of the land their families have worked since before World War I. The Patriarchate’s refusal to change the terms of ownership, in part, has facilitated the existence of the Qadisha Valley as a zone for conservation in a country where few zoning restrictions normally interfere with development. The Maronite Patriarchate continues to play the role of governance. Equally, for some, the church remains the target of ire for those who perceive themselves as victims of its extensive land ownership.

To circumvent the archival blockade around questions of land tenure in Lebanon, researchers will have to resort to alternative sources. Satellite imagery interpreted with anecdotal information regarding land ownership is one potential avenue. Scholarship on the Lebanese environment will have to make due without the quantitative sets of evidence that underpin Geographical Information System (GIS) analysis of land use in other locales. In Lebanon, church and state institutions alike carefully guard access to such data sets, a reality that is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future. The St. Paul Society is the repository that proves the rule: the painful circumstances under which they

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acquired land indicate why the church hierarchy is hesitant to allow access to such information, lest aggrieved parties make claims for restitution.

By no means does this study intend to cast the role of the church in Lebanese society as predatory or negative, however. As has been seen, church institutions have equally been a force for conservation and social welfare. The concluding section will consider how the events of the famine allowed the Maronite Patriarchate to buttress its predominant political position in Lebanon based on the relative efficacy of its relief activities.

Figure 1. The blue shaded area reveals the remaining farmland around the area of Byblos owned by the Maronite Patriarchate. Source: Google Earth.
THE MARONITE PATRIARCH AND CEMAL PASHA

On 20 May 1918, Brother Yusuf al-Sayigh and the other monks from the St. Paul Society walked a few kilometers down the road to the Maronite Patriarch’s winter residence at Bkirkî. They had gone to wish him well before his trip to the Patriarchal summer residence located at Diman in the Qadisha valley: “There we found Bishop Bulus ‘Awwad, known for his wealth and avarice.” ‘Awwad then possessed a large amount of grain but offered no help to the hungry meanwhile “many in his diocese were dying of hunger.” As further evidence of the bishop’s corruption, Brother Yusuf described ‘Awwad’s “luxurious carriage [drawn by] horses eating barley” which was fit for human consumption.44 Brother Yusuf noted that, meanwhile, the most prominent ecclesiastical figure in the mountain, Maronite Patriarch Elias al-Huwayyik, did not have a carriage at all and was to travel in one loaned to him by the governor of Lebanon, Hakkî Bey.45 Huwayyik distinguished himself during the war for his honesty and leadership while secular and clerical figures alike abused their positions for profit.

In his seminal study of late Ottoman Lebanon, Engin Akarli has noted that Huwayyik emerged from the war having eclipsed “the secular Lebanonists” and secured “a victory of the Church over the secular government of Mount Lebanon […] and hence a victory of Maronite-Christian Lebanonism over a liberal- but interconfessionalist—Lebanonism.”46 That outcome has determined the shape of Lebanese politics until the present day. Huwayyik’s role in providing famine relief bolstered his political position relative to other ecclesiastical figures as well as the secular elite at the crucial moment.

when Lebanon’s political future was to be decided. Many of the latter were correctly associated with corruption and thus having contributed to the famine. Cemal Pasha had exiled some of the secular elite, and had attempted to secure the allegiance of another faction with lucrative concessions (see Chapter 3). As his schemes for provisioning Mount Lebanon with grain through a consortium of civilians faltered amidst widespread corruption and uncertainty in markets in early 1916, Cemal began to rely on the Patriarch to distribute relief to the Maronite community.

In many ways, his choice was odd. Cemal had suspected the Patriarch of colluding with France to organize an uprising against the CUP. The Patriarch had pledged his fealty to France “whatever Turkey’s position” in August 1914 (see Chapter 1). Cemal was aware of the Patriarch’s contacts with Picot and other French diplomats but ultimately decided to cultivate Huwayyik as a political ally rather than arrest or exile him. Cemal took no action against the Patriarch; however, scholars have suggested he wanted to exile him, but did not do so because of pressure from Austria and Papal emissaries in Istanbul. Cemal likely ignored Huwayyik’s dalliances with France for his own reasons, too; he had a greater project of co-opting local leaders to project power into Lebanon and elsewhere.47

The Patriarch attempted to intervene on behalf of prominent Lebanese and Beirutis convicted by the Military Tribunal. Cemal generally rebuffed his entreaties in this regard, but took the time to write the Patriarch detailed explanations as to why those

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matters were out of his control. Cemal resented outside pressure and explicitly objected to the idea that his policy had been influenced by outside pressure. France had highlighted the plight of the Maronite Church in its propaganda and the Papal administration in turn pressured the Ottoman administration to relax any restrictions placed on the Patriarch. Cemal objected to outside interference, and revealed that he had, on his own accord, already allowed the Patriarch to carry out his duties freely:

I had invited the Maronite Patriarch from his distant residence, for the purposes of meetings on the issues related to the status of subsistence of Mount Lebanon, to the central part of the Mount Lebanon. It is inappropriate, to me, that the Papal representative is concerned with this issue. The aforementioned, thankful and grateful to the freedom of movement granted to him, circulates [freely] in Juniya and Zahla.

Cemal’s telegram further indicates that he was actively coordinating the provisioning of Mount Lebanon with the Patriarch. That fact casts serious doubt on any account which suggests that Cemal Pasha, or the CUP more generally, was trying to destroy the Maronite Catholic presence in Lebanon.

The Ottoman government had not traditionally taken a keen interest in the internal affairs of the Maronite Church. Alone among the empires’ major churches, their Patriarch did not require a berat [deed of appointment] from Istanbul for his appointment. Maronite bishops maintained substantial autonomy in the appointment of their Patriarch. During the war, the CUP and Cemal attempted to exert more influence over the Maronite Church than the Ottoman Empire ever had previously. In the summer of 1915, Huwayyik

48 Cemal (Aleppo) to Maronite Patriarch, 21 November 1915, Huwayyik 29/38, Bkirki; Maronite Patriarch to Cemal, 15 May 1916, Huwayik 29/42, Bkirki.
49 Cemal to Interior Ministry, 10 October 1917, HR.SYS 2441/53, BOA.
50 See Akram Fouad Khater, Embracing the Divine: Passion and Politics in the Christian Middle East (Syracuse University Press, 2014).
accepted Cemal Pasha’s invitation to visit him at his mountain estate at Sofar.\textsuperscript{51} He asked for prisoners sentenced by the military tribunal to be released – to no avail. The meeting was tense and Cemal interrupted the Patriarch’s assertions of loyalty to the Porte, saying that he had documents demonstrating the opposite. No measures were taken against the Patriarch, however. A search was conducted of his residence at Bkirk, but no weapons were found.\textsuperscript{52} Cemal’s administration left the Patriarch unmolested, if under surveillance, and eventually facilitated his substantial relief activities.

Local monasteries, such as Brother Yusuf’s St. Paul Society preceded the Patriarchate in distributing grain.\textsuperscript{53} Relief had been a local matter until mass starvation became an undeniable reality in early 1916. In February of that year, the Maronite Patriarchate began distributing grain from Bkirk.\textsuperscript{54} The Patriarchate’s propaganda detailing its charitable activities revealed “some people are imagining that the clergy does not care about the poor and those in need,” citing a wave of accusations against the church institutions.\textsuperscript{55} In the period between February 1916 and October 1918, the Patriarchate took the lead in distributing grain among the Maronite communities of Mount Lebanon.

In order to acquire grain to carry out relief, Huwayyik had to coordinate with Cemal. Rumors of an impending May 1916 encounter between the two sparked fear in

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53 In January 1916, the St. Paul Society was purchasing wheat “from the [local] government” authorities and distributing twice a week to as many as 300 destitute inhabitants of Kisrawan, according to the daily notes of Brother Yusuf. Al-Sayigh, “Al-Hajiyat,” January 1916, \textit{Sijil al-Yawmiyat}, Harissa.


55 In turn, he asked that Maronite ecclesiastical institutions report back the Patriarchate to document their charitable activities. Elias Butrus al-Huwayyik [Maronite Patriarch] to Bishop Antun \textsuperscript{3} Arida, 18 February 1916, Report 1916, Bkirk.
\end{flushright}
the population: would Huwayyik be arrested and exiled? The enmity between the two
men was well known and their polite correspondence concealed a barely hidden tension.
It was rumored that Huwayyik was even “wanted” for arrest. Instead, as reported by
Brother Yusuf, the meeting between the Patriarch and Cemal was "most friendly.”
Huwayyik received more than forty-four tons of grain for distribution, 500 kilos of which

In February 1917, just as the \textit{U.S.S. Caesar} was supposed to have arrived with
one hundred metric tons of grain (see Chapter 1), Cemal sent the Patriarch 300 \textit{qintars}, or
about 75 metric tons of grain, with which he supplied the relief activities of Catholic
monasteries.\footnote{Al-Sayigh, “February 1917,” \textit{Sijil al-Yawmiyyat}, Harissa.} Shortly thereafter, in July 1917, the last meeting between the Patriarch and
Cemal took place in the mountain town of Bhamdoun. Cemal rushed to help the Patriarch
out of his carriage, putting his hand under the old man’s arm and helping him enter the
hotel where they were to meet at the resort in Sofar.\footnote{Al-Hakim, \textit{Bayrut wa Lubnan}, 272-273.} In the absence of other effective
avenues of relief, Cemal relied on the Maronite Patriarch, thereby further enhancing his
moral and material power in Mount Lebanon.

Six months later, Cemal would be gone, recalled in the wake of his defeats to
Allenby—a year later Huwayyik would set out for France to make a case for the creation
of a Greater Lebanon. In that task, he would succeed (see Chapter 1). Cemal was
assassinated in Tblisi, (modern-day) Georgia on 21 July 1922. Thus, the Patriarch
exercised predominant political power in Lebanon’s formative moment, over secular and
religious authorities because the Patriarchate, uniquely among Lebanon’s institutions, had
provided relief instead of exploiting catastrophe, or at least was widely perceived as
having done so. Contrary to the assertion that he was a victim of Cemal Pasha’s policy, the Patriarch’s sway over Lebanon stemmed from his relationship with the Ottoman commander. In turn, the Patriarch could ensure the creation of Greater Lebanon as a “Catholic” country independent from the rest of Syria once the Ottoman Empire had collapsed.

CONCLUSION
The Maronite Patriarchate and Catholic monasteries have been critical actors in twentieth-century Lebanon but material aspects of their relationship with the rest of Lebanese society have generally been the object of either positive or negative caricature. For their critics, church institutions are either opportunistic and predatory or a “traditional” artifact of a bygone era and therefore an obstacle to overcoming sectarianism. Official church histories, needless to say, take the opposite approach and cast the church’s social role in wholly positive terms. The superficiality of that treatment stems, in large part, from the inaccessibility of church archives.

Above, Brother Yusuf al-Sayigh’s daily notes allowed a rare documentary window into the material relationship between church institutions and Lebanese society more broadly. In quantifying and qualifying the terms of its wartime land accumulation, the St. Paul society’s daily register offers what has generally been cleansed from the few ecclesiastical archives that are open to researchers. In most cases, however, archives remain closed. In contrast to the silence surrounding church land ownership, its charitable activities have been well publicized. To overcome the archival obstacles involved in constructing an accurate picture of the church’s social and ecological role in Lebanese
society, creative solutions will be required. Inference will have to suffice where systematic study is impossible. The St. Paul Society must not have been the only monastery to have accelerated its accumulation of land during World War I but it is one of precious few monasteries in Lebanon which open financial records to researchers.

In addition to buttressing their material position, however, many ecclesiastical institutions bolstered their moral and political position because of their commitment to charity during the crisis. The Maronite Patriarch Elias Butrus al-Huwayyik stands out in this regard. This chapter has shown that he likely deserved his reputation for humility and charity. In that light, his leadership of the Lebanese national cause in the war’s aftermath becomes a logical consequence of the war’s events. Where other parties lacked legitimacy, Huwayyik survived the war with his reputation intact and could therefore claim political leadership of Mount Lebanon at the crucial moment when the country was made in its contemporary borders. Ironically, based on his supposed enmity with Cemal (and undying allegiance to France), Huwayyik maintained his political position based on his wartime alliance with the Ottoman commander.
CHAPTER 5

WAR AS THE VECTOR OF DISEASE: MALARIA, CAPITALISM, AND REFUGEES

Dr. Joseph Hitti, responsible for drafting newly independent Lebanon’s public health legislation in the late 1940s, told a Rockefeller Foundation official that malaria epidemics had only ever occurred, “due to the influx of Armenian refugees who scattered through the country and spread the parasite” in 1915-1918 and again in 1939.¹ Not only was Hitti’s formulation uncharitable to the deported Armenian populations, it ignored the reality of an ongoing malaria epidemic in the country, which still afflicted a broad swath of the rural population.² While acknowledging that malaria was the country’s “number one,” health problem, he downplayed the threat it represented, maintaining that the disease was only “moderately endemic” in Lebanon under normal conditions.³ Perhaps for affluent Beirutis such as Hitti, the disease’s rural character and proclivity for afflicting marginal populations made it easier to ignore.⁴ Malaria had been endemic for long

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¹ Daniel Milam, Diary, 28 August 1947, Box 326, Record Group 12, Rockefeller Foundation Archive (RF).
² According to the statistics of Lebanon’s health department, half of the country’s houses were potentially exposed to malaria, and there had been as many as 35,000 malaria infections during 1947, suggesting that 2.6% percent of the population had been infected by the parasite that causes malaria. The latter estimate was regarded to reflect perhaps 20% of the real number of infections, suggesting that in excess of 10 percent of the population suffered from malaria the disease. Milam, Diary, 30 August 1947, RF.
³ Milam, Diary, 28 August 1947, RF.
⁴ Malaria’s penchant for targeting the rural poor was a global phenomenon: “[…] malaria is essentially a rural disease, a disease that flourishes where mosquitoes can find unlimited breeding places, where enough children are born each year to provide fresh blood habitat for parasites, and where adults are so few and so poor that a collective effort of defense is unmanageable or seems prohibitively costly in real ton to the lives saved. The disease flourishes where settlement is scattered; defenses are practicable only where it is compact.” Gordon A. Harrison, Mosquitoes, Malaria, and Man: a History of the Hostilities since 1880 (New York: Dutton, 1978), 139.
centuries, and despite the claims of the French colonial administration to have transformed public health in the country, the plight of Armenian refugees, which the French Mandate (1920-46) had done little to relieve. Wartime outbreaks of malaria accentuated the limits of the state’s ability to contain the ecological fallout from war and the massive displacement of bodies it entailed. In this chapter, the experience of refugees, the population most vulnerable to epidemics, will illuminate the history of disease in modern Lebanon more broadly and show that while the concept of a modern public health regime existed in Beirut and Mount Lebanon for much of the nineteenth century, the material conditions were not adequate for its systematic insertion among the rural majority until after the French Mandate.

To date, scholarly discussion about the history of disease in Lebanon has focused on identifying when a modern public health system was inaugurated in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. One school of thought has maintained that World War I and the subsequent imposition of French colonialism heralded the transformation of disease control. While critical of the French colonial project, Elizabeth Thompson, a prominent scholar of the Mandate period, appears to take French claims as to the novelty of their public health schemes at face value. She quotes a French report suggesting that, “Hygiene wasn’t practiced under the Turks.” In her telling, French colonialism subsequently transformed public health in Mount Lebanon. Other scholars have taken an opposing view and gone to lengths to emphasize the complexity of Beirut’s health administration in the late Ottoman

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5 Lebanon’s toponyms in Arabic and Syriac appear to refer to the disease, especially the names of rivers. Beirut’s Nahr al-Mawt [The River of Death] is the most obvious example. See, Amin Gemayel, “La malaria en Syrie, Autrefois—aujourd’hui,” Presse Médicale, 17 February 1926.

period prior to World War I. Those scholars’ collective contribution has revealed that the purview of state activity in regards to disease expanded before, during, and after World War I, but does little to chronicle the efficacy of state interventions among the rural majority or refugee populations.

World War I set in motion hundreds of thousands of malnourished bodies throughout the Ottoman Empire. Soldiers, who lacked the means to clean their clothes and were thus apt to carry the lice that spread typhus, also camped in the tents or in the open, thereby intensifying outbreaks of malaria by providing blood meals to the anopheles mosquitoes that transmitted the disease. Armenian genocide victims, much less well provisioned than the poorly supplied Ottoman troops, also contracted diseases at a high rate. They too camped in the open or in hastily constructed shelters, and helped spur malaria epidemics. Survivors of the genocide ultimately inhabited a refugee camp built next to a swamp north of Beirut (which hosted as many as 20,000 Armenian refugees at the end of the war). Meanwhile, as famine set in, the population of Mount Lebanon became increasingly mobile, with the destitute leaving their mountain villages, and crowding into the more disease-prone lowlands in search of food and work.

Scholars have seen World War I as a watershed for public health in Lebanon, noting in particular the establishment of a Ministry of Health. That view correlates with French colonial discourse and Lebanon’s official nationalist version of the history of public health. Independent Lebanon’s first Minister of Health, Elias Khuri, maintained

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that modern public health was unknown in Lebanon before 1916: “In Lebanon before World War I there was not a level of [public] health worthy of taking as a baseline for the development which took place after the war, being that there was not […] an administration oriented towards prevention and healing.” As for the duties of Ottoman public health officials, Khuri maintains that their activities were limited to producing “official reports on health and inoculating for smallpox after the disease had appeared.” He marks the appointment of Husni Muyhi al-Din as Minister of Health in February 1916 as the inception of modern public health in Lebanon.¹⁰

The main source cited by scholars to indicate the scope and effectiveness of Husni Bek’s Ministry of Health is his own account, produced during the war itself.¹¹ Instead of novel disease control measures, however, perhaps the most striking feature of the history of disease during the war is the incapacity of the Ottoman state to cope with the epidemics unleashed by its policies. As historian of the war Nicholas Ajay put it, succinctly: “Whatever measures the authorities took to safeguard public health were totally inadequate.”¹²

The same point could be made for the Mandate period, indicating that the public health in Lebanon had not yet seen the modern transformation touted by scholars. Despite the myriad political and cultural changes ushered in by the French Mandate, Lebanon’s disease environments changed little between the wars. The tragic experience of Armenian refugees attests to the continued presence of malaria and other infectious diseases in rural

Lebanon. While the Ottoman government intended to expose Armenians to lethal conditions by expelling them from their homes in 1915, French colonial authorities responsible for resettling Armenians in 1939 no doubt intended for them to survive. Both waves of Armenians suffered high mortality and morbidity from disease, regardless of the intentions of the authorities responsible for their displacement. Before the proliferation of DDT, malaria was a near-inevitable consequence of living outdoors or in tents. Wartime flows of refugees exacerbated the malaria problem in the countryside by concentrating vulnerable human bodies in the lowland places most likely to host the anopheles mosquitoes that transmitted the malaria parasite between humans.

One such place was Ras al-‘Ayn in south Lebanon, where several springs, which furnished water to Tyre and its environs, bubbled to the surface. Ras al-‘Ayn remained uninhabited by humans in the late 1930s and was, “vacant for a good reason, namely malaria,” according to an agent of the Rockefeller Foundation. While the foothills directly inland and the coastal city of Tyre had been inhabited for millennia, humans did not need modern epidemiology to tell them to avoid Ras al-‘Ayn. The wastewater from the springs ran off “in slow little creeks ideal for breeding” mosquitoes. On another uninhabited patch of land just east of Tyre, at al-Bass, “a little creek from the irrigation fields meanders to the sea through sand dunes, frequently changing its course, and its sluggish pools making ideal anopheline breeding places.” French Mandate authorities had invested a substantial sum of money (20,000 Lebanese pounds or 400,000 French Francs) in a concrete channel to guide the water to the sea. Nevertheless, Rockefeller’s Daniel Milam observed in 1947 that “sand drifts […] buried these fine works and the creek meanders as before […] and breeds mosquitoes as before.” After the initial attempt to
engineer a solution to reduce malaria by draining al-Bass with a concrete channel, Mandate authorities allocated insufficient funds for maintenance. Effective malaria control was too expensive, its failure during the Mandate did not stem from a lack of knowledge, but rather from economic incapacity to maintain effective drainage. In an unfortunate departure from age-old settlement patterns, as many as 6,000 Armenian refugees from the Hatay province, ceded to Turkey by France, made their homes in refugee camps at al-Bas and Ras al-‘Ayn in late 1939. Perhaps the Mandate authorities believed their engineering works had, or could, control the breeding places for the anopheles mosquitoes that transmitted the malaria parasite between humans. As their own public reports to the League of Nations indicated, the Mandate administration consistently failed to devote sufficient resources to malaria control and the disease abounded in rural Lebanon throughout the period of formal French colonialism in the country that lasted between 1920 and 1946 (see below).

Before World War I, Beirut and Mount Lebanon were known for their relatively salubrious disease environments. Among the port cities of the Levantine coast, Beirut was probably the most insulated from epidemic disease in the late 19th and early 20th century. Clean drinking water pumped to the city in closed pipes helped the city prevent cholera epidemics. The other cities of the coast, much less the object of international capital investment, drew water from open rivers. From a city of 7,000 inhabitants in 1800, Beirut’s population grew to more than 100,000 by the turn of the twentieth century. Ideally placed to serve as a port for Mount Lebanon and Damascus, Beirut became the third-most important port in the Ottoman Empire, handling 11 percent of its trade before

13 Daniel Milam, *Diary*, 14 June 1947, RF.
World War I. Increasing European investment meant that the “economic stakes grew and large-scale foreign investment required stable health conditions.”

If Beirut’s peculiarly intensive relationship with capital had a salutary influence on the city’s public health, its economic growth may well have had the reverse effect on its hinterland. At least in terms of the spread of malaria, that fact is clear. Beirut’s demand for foodstuffs resulted in the extension of the irrigated area along the littoral adjacent to Beirut that in turn increased the habitat for anopheles mosquitoes at the mouth of the Kalb, Beirut, and Damur, and Ibrahim rivers. In the Bekaa valley, which exported grain and other crops to Mount Lebanon and Beirut, expanded irrigation schemes had also created a virulent malaria ecology. A 1919 British report maintained that large landowners around Riyaq (who likely did not inhabit the town itself) resisted measures for drainage aimed at reducing the incidence of malaria:

The very complex system of numerous irrigation channels with grassy margins and pools accounts for the bad malaria reputation of this place and makes effective action a most difficult problem. Here, as elsewhere, any attempt to control irrigation is strenuously resented by the agriculturists.

Not only did the demands of the Beiruti and Lebanese food markets create an environment where malaria could thrive, the “agriculturists” with enough political sway to stave off government intervention against malaria were no doubt the parties who benefitted from said market activity. Riyaq remained “intensely malarious” in 1941.

Mount Lebanon’s terraced slopes slowed the descent of water by design, and

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17 Mulligan (2 Malaria Field Laboratory), “Notes on the Incidence of Malaria in Syria in Places where Troops may be Stationed,” July 1941, WO 177/576, BNA.
farmers built catchments to have spare water for their crops. Unabsorbed into the landscape, or standing in reservoirs, water encouraged the propagation of mosquitoes. Lebanon’s human population more than doubled over the latter half of the nineteenth century from less than 200,000 to more that 400,000 and nearly all of the mountain’s arable land was cropped. That densely populated rural landscape, covered in irrigated crops, provided an ideal habitat for endemic malaria. Lebanon hosted three main vectors of anopheles mosquito that transmitted malaria. *A. sacharovi* and *a. claviger* abounded in lowlands and *a. superpictus* preferred the higher elevations and cleaner water of Lebanon’s mountains. Forty-four percent of malaria infections in Lebanon stemmed from *plasmodium falciparum*, the deadliest variety of the malaria parasite.\(^\text{18}\)

The expensive control measures that were possible in urban Beirut—enabled by the capital generated by its dynamic economy—were not practicable in the city’s rural Lebanese hinterland. No physical solution or feat of engineering could reasonably have solved the malaria issues on Lebanon’s terraces. In that regard, DDT would eventually offer an “immensely appealing,” solution to its endemic malaria.\(^\text{19}\)

WORLD WAR I, DISPLACEMENT, AND EPIDEMIC DISEASE IN LEBANON

“The exiled Armenians continue to be hunted down,” reported Jesuit Louis Cheikho in Beirut, in December 1915. Five Armenians entered the Bekaa valley, having fled the Syrian concentration camps to which they had been deported from Anatolia. They made it to the town of Riyaq, a railroad junction, but could find no respite. Stricken with


\(^{19}\) Milam, *Diary*, 15 April 1947, RF.
disease contracted on forced marches, they represented a threat to public health in the view of the Ottoman Turkish officer who ordered them buried alive. Epidemic disease, exacerbated by the war, then abounded in the Empire’s Syrian provinces. While reporting on the incident at Riyaq, Cheikho also noted that in Beirut, “contagious diseases are taking a large number of victims.”

Soldiers were (correctly) believed to be vectors of typhus, which became known as “military fever [الحمى_askariya].” The massive flows of humans entailed by mobilization for war and genocide proved a fertile ground for the epidemics that ultimately crippled the Ottoman war effort during World War I. Ottoman authorities had a scientific understanding of the etiology of typhus and malaria but lacked the administrative and economic capacity to prevent outbreaks of those diseases from reaching epidemic proportions.

Observers in Beirut recognized the connection between the deportation of Armenians and the spread of epidemic disease. The intentions of the Ottoman authorities to annihilate the Armenian population were equally clear. By the end of August 1915, the Jesuit fathers in Beirut had received detailed news of the deportations. Cheikho described the policy as revenge against those Armenians who had “made war with Russia against Turkey.” In turn, he reckoned that the CUP had taken out their anger on the Armenian civilian population who had nothing to do with the Russian war effort: “the innocents are

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20 Louis Cheikho, *Diare*, 11 December 1915, Compagnie de Jésus, Province du Proche Orient, Curie Provinciale, Beirut (CDJ). Cheikho was not wrong that Talat Pasha’s Interior Ministry intended to pursue exiled Armenians in Mount Lebanon. See, for instance, Talat to Mutasarrifate of Mount Lebanon, 15 Teşrinisani 1332 [28 November 1916], DH.$FR 70/127, Başbakanlık Osmanlı Arşivi (BOA). Cheikho reported that Ottoman authorities search the Armenian monastery located in Mount Lebanon at Bzommar, requisitioning goods and carrying out arrests in May 1915, as well as a general “suspicion” of Beirut’s Armenian population in the wake of the April deportation orders in Anatolia. Cheikho, *Diare*, 10 May 1915, CDJ.

21 “Le typhus, que les soldats colportent dans leur allées et venues, a fait pas mal de victimes à Beyrouth,” Cheikho, *Diare*, 30 April 1916, CDJ. The lice that inhabited the soldiers’ bodies and clothes were the non-human vector of disease.

22 Husni Bey “Al-Umur al-Sihiyya,” 276.
paying for the guilty.” The Jesuit scholar also guessed the extent of the Unionist plan, “they appear to want to annihilate the Armenian race in Turkey.”23 The director of German schools in Aleppo, Mr. Huber, “a good Catholic,” visited Louis Cheikho in Beirut in July 1916, and reported that epidemic disease was “raging” in Aleppo. Huber also told Cheikho that, according to his estimations, 1 million out of 1.25 million Anatolian Armenians “had been sacrificed to the furies of their enemies.” The school director noted that “destitution” had been the main cause of death and that Armenians could be found as far as Damascus and Beirut begging for food. Cheikho observed that, “this public misery favors contagious disease; the uncleanliness of soldiers who move everywhere contributes to the propagation of these epidemics. Typhoid and typhus are still taking victims all over.”24

Ottoman authorities do not appear to have fully considered the public health implications of the deportation of more than a million Armenians. Only a few months after the 24 April 1915 deportation order, Ottoman telegrams reveal that the waves of Armenian deportees had overwhelmed the transportation network, and represented a severe threat to public health. In July, on the eastern edge of Cemal Pasha’s governorate, the Fourth Army commander noticed the corpses of dead Armenians floating down the Euphrates that he assumed to be coming from Dr. Mehmed Reşid’s jurisdiction in Diyarbekir. Cemal complained to Reşid, who insisted that he was not responsible and that the corpses must have been from Erzurum or Mamuret-ul Aziz, because “those who were killed here are either being thrown into deep deserted caves or, as has been the case for the most part, are being burnt.” Talat Pasha also admonished Reşid for leaving the

23 Cheikho, Diare, 30 August 1915, CDJ.
24 Cheikho, Diare, 1 July 1916, CDJ.
corpses of Armenians in the open. Meanwhile the deportations of Armenians from western Anatolia south to Syria had caused a transportation bottleneck on the road to concentration camps on the Syrian plain and points south. Cemal warned Talat’s Interior Ministry in October 1915 that epidemic disease outbreaks among the 20,000 Armenian deportees would likely jump to his Fourth Army. Their complaints reveal that collateral ecological damage of the genocide was threatening the Ottoman war effort and spreading to the civilian populations of Syria and Lebanon.

A few of the scholars who acknowledged the role disease played in the deaths of Armenians during the war, have done so to absolve the Ottoman government of culpability for their deaths. That epidemic disease was an unintended consequence of the deportations need not undermine the thesis that the Ottoman government intended to kill the deportees, just that they did not anticipate the logistical difficulties involved in doing so. The portion of the genocide that occurred in Lebanon has not attracted much attention from scholars, and some recent literature has even suggested that Cemal Pasha did not share Talat and Enver’s zeal for annihilating the Armenian population. Louis Cheikho’s firsthand account of life in Beirut and Mount Lebanon during the war shows that Armenians were used for forced labor, and then left to die, in keeping with the broader policy of genocide elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire:

As regards expulsion and deportation, [the authorities] have just deported to the interior those Armenians who had been brought here from Cesarée [Kayseri] and Sivas to establish sewing [tapisserie] workshops. There were around sixty of them; they were given each day a sack of flour and nothing else. They were paired with Muslims who studied their trade; when the latter were sufficiently able, they began to deduct from the Armenian’s sack of grain. In response to their complaints, they were told they could not be given more unless they became Muslims. Some let themselves be shaken [in their faith] but soon changed their minds and declared they would rather die than renounce their religion. On the night of 22 July [1916], [the authorities] deported them to the interior where they will not tarry in perishing from misery.29

In this case, and others, the Ottoman plan to kill Armenians involved exposing them to lethal conditions of starvation and disease. The sixty Armenian weavers likely found themselves in the concentration camps that the unfortunate souls buried alive at Riyaq had fled.

In addition to the deportation of Armenians, the Ottoman government contributed to the spread of disease by hobbling the key institutions responsible for providing public health in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. In large part, the Committee for Union and Progress joined the Central Powers in November 1918 in a bid to extirpate French, British, and other “foreign” influence from the empire.30 What ensued was a wartime confrontation against institutions associated with Entente governments, which had salient consequences for the public health regimes of Beirut and Mount Lebanon. In his analysis, the historian Jens Hanssen has grouped medical establishments operating in Beirut, no matter the citizenship of the doctors staffing their clinics, under the rubric of “Ottoman Civilization.”31 The wartime CUP government had a less capacious view of what constituted a properly “Ottoman,” institution and closed the French faculty of medicine in

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29 He recorded another deportation of Gregorian Armenians “established” in Beirut, while noting that Catholic Armenians in Beirut “will be exempt from similar vexations.” Cheikho, Diare, 27 July 1916, CDJ.
30 See Chapter 1.
31 Hanssen, Fin de Siècle Beirut, 127.
the wake of its expulsion of French citizens, many of whom had worked in hospitals and clinics in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Several American doctors faced conscription into the Ottoman Army. They helped run Red Crescent clinics in Palestine during the Suez campaign. The vali of Beirut province, Azmi Bey, circumscribed the ability of “foreign” institutions to furnish aid to Beirut’s needy citizens during the war. That policy caused an interruption in the normal administration of public health at a time when the government was nonetheless keenly aware of the need to intensify its disease control efforts.

Another Ottoman policy, or rather the lack of an effective one, was a far more salient reason for the massive excess mortality during the war. The failure of food provisioning contributed to the rapid spread of epidemics. As food ran short in their villages, Lebanese left to try and find their salvation elsewhere in the mountain, or further afield, and the lucky returned to their villages with food supplies, but also, oftentimes, diseases. Typhus and malaria, in particular, spread as desperate conditions drove men and women away from their villages in search of food. The inhabitants of starving Lebanese mountain villages sought succor in the cities of the coast, reversing the normal reaction to epidemics, which would have been to flee cities and go to the Mountain. By April 1916, the famine had begun causing excess deaths throughout the region. Cheikho noted that “famine is causing terrible ravages everywhere, and especially in the Mountain. The victims each day are counted in the hundreds. At Juniya, a dozen die

33 Ajay, “The War Years,” 414.
34 One resident of the village of Hardin, at 1,300 meters of elevation, contacted the U.S. embassy pleading for help from the port at Tripoli. Kathur Daghir to U.S. Consulate, 24 February 1917, Beirut Consulate, 193, RG 84, NARA.
every day. There is no village that does not register [at least] a few deaths on a daily basis […] the streets [of Beirut] are teeming with the poor […] waiting for death on the corner of the road.”\textsuperscript{35} As time passed, the disease predicament only worsened. The paltry distribution of food carried out by the Beirut municipality drew some of the most desperate inhabitants of the Mountain to the city. “In the Mountain, famine victims number in the hundreds daily, many come to Beirut and die on every corner without anybody being able to come to their aid. The majority die without sacraments.”\textsuperscript{36} The presence of Ottoman soldiers in Beirut and Mount Lebanon also appears to have catalyzed outbreaks of disease. Cheikho identified the soldiers’ poor nutrition as a key cause of typhus. They received a “so-called soup that is nothing but water with a few vegetables.”\textsuperscript{37}

Ottoman authorities appear to have anticipated that the war might enhance vulnerabilities to epidemic disease (if not the role of Armenian genocide victims as a vector of disease for other populations).\textsuperscript{38} In turn, they pursued a newly intensive regime of public health. An outbreak of smallpox \textit{[jadari]} in four men resident in the Mar Mikhail district of Beirut caught the authorities’ attention quickly, who sent teams to carry out inoculations in East Beirut to prevent its spread.\textsuperscript{39} The Ottoman health ministry would carry out a massive inoculation scheme in Mount Lebanon. For the period of the war, the health ministry claimed to have inoculated on average 100,000 persons a year. Their own statistics acknowledged 51 deaths of smallpox for a nine-month period in 1917, giving the same number of deaths for typhoid over the same period. Meanwhile,

\textsuperscript{35} Cheikho, \textit{Diare}, 7 April 1916, CDJ.  
\textsuperscript{36} Cheikho, \textit{Diare}, 27 July 1916, CDJ.  
\textsuperscript{37} Cheikho, \textit{Diare}, 7 April 1916, CDJ.  
\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Ibid}.  
\textsuperscript{39} \textit{Al-Ittihad al-Uthmani}, 3 April 1915.
they noted 493 deaths from typhus. The above should be taken as incomplete. But those statistics nevertheless indicate of the relative effectiveness of Ottoman public health efforts: smallpox inoculation was effective, but the control of lice necessary to combat typhus was not.

The Ottoman government hashed plans to distribute food and combat epidemic disease but lacked the ability either effectively, however. After the outbreak of the war, critical health supplies went lacking. Lebanon had been an exporter of soap but sodium hydroxide (necessary for its production) was no longer accessible after the inception of the blockade. A thin olive harvest in 1915, victim of the locust plague, also contributed to the scarcity of soap. Hygiene lagged as war brought the pungent smell of unwashed bodies and clothes. Medical doctors present in Lebanon during the war would later attest that declining sanitation had left the population unable to combat the lice that functioned as the primary vector of the typhus epidemic. Quinine, used to treat malaria, disappeared from pharmacy shelves. In turn, “malaria cropped up everywhere,” even in the highest places in Lebanon. One doctor blamed troop movements from the “Southern [Suez] front,” for the increase of malaria during the war.

Although Ottoman authorities understood what was causing the epidemics ravaging the civilian population and hampering their war effort, they lacked the means to stop them. In particular, their capacity to manipulate the disease environments of rural areas where the state had little presence was quite limited. Nevertheless, historians have been tempted to mark the, “completely unprecedented,” insertion of state-mandated

40 Husni Bey, “Al-Umur al-Shiyya,” 276.
41 Interview with Nabih Shab in Ajay, “The War Years,” 410.
42 Interview with Dr. Ra’if Abi al-Lama’ in Ajay, “The War Years,” 409-410; interview with Nabih Shab in in Ajay, “The War Years,” 410.
43 Interview with Dr. Yenikoms’hian in Ajay, “The War Years,” 410-411.
health regulations into rural Lebanese life during WWI. The newly-appointed Health
Minister, Husni Bek Muyhi al-Din’s article detailing the activities of as own ministry has
served as the key primary source to substantiate the heightened wartime purview of
Mount Lebanon’s public health apparatus.\textsuperscript{44} At that time, health problems clearly
outweighed any solutions available to the authorities in Beirut. In fact, the hospitalization
efforts undertaken by the authorities were counterproductive, in the view of Louis
Cheikho: “The hospices established [by the authorities] in religious establishments were
created too late and did not treat but a precious few misères, the agglomeration of those
unlucky souls favors infectious disease.”\textsuperscript{45}

Meanwhile sources from rural Mount Lebanon have very little to report in terms
of state-sponsored public health interventions. Indeed, in Lebanon’s far-flung mountain
villages, the populace could not rely on having a priest to confess their sins to during the
height of the famine, much less a doctor to attend to their illness. Two priests, sent by the
Maronite Patriarchate, set out on a relief mission to the highest settlements of North
Lebanon in early 1917, reached one of Lebanon’s highest villages, Tanurin, where they
found villagers hoping to perform an abbreviated confession, so close were they to dying.
They had, according to the priests’ report,

\begin{quote}
arrived at the doors of eternity due to extreme scarcity […] the closure of their sources of
prosperity, and the death of many of them from hunger and infectious disease such as
smallpox, typhus, lice and dysentery fevers […] We tried to ascertain the number of
destitute poor, which was close to 800 in need of daily provisions and suddenly came to
us the sight of half [of that number] and the reality hit us and we couldn’t speak, because
we saw the poor in their paltry numbers and their desperate state… standing in the
freezing rain and storm winds …[that] which pains the heart, especially the sight of
the naked among them…. we comforted the sick, offered our condolences, but, due to the
destitution engulfing them, their ears do not hear, their eyes cannot see, and their hearts
will not understand.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{44}Tanielian, “The War of Famine,” 105.
\textsuperscript{45}Cheikho, \textit{Diare}, 2 February 1917, CDJ.
\textsuperscript{46}Frs. Louis and Butrus, “Ziyarat al-Qura wa Tawzi’ Ihsanat [A Visit to the Villages and Distribution of
Charity],” Huwayyik 32/270, Archive of the Maronite Patriarchate, Bkirki, Lebanon.
In noting the presence of “lice” fever \( [al\text{-}humm\text{"}{\acute{a}} al\text{-}qamaliya] \) along with typhus, the report made two maladies out of one. The priests, however (presumably along with Tanurin’s inhabitants), recognized lice as a dangerous vector of epidemic disease. For their part, the Ottoman authorities certainly sensed the danger posed by lice and pursued a campaign of fumigating clothes. While no scientist had yet discovered the disease’s precise etiology by World War I,\(^{47}\) but the benefits of lice-free clothes were as well-known in European laboratories as they were in Lebanese mountain villages. Beirut and Mount Lebanon lacked the basic necessities (soap, in particular) that would have aided the populace in preventing epidemic typhus. Ottoman industrial capacity did not support the production of the chemicals necessary to sustain wartime soap production at sufficient levels, nor could it carry out sufficient fumigation to stem the typhus epidemic.

In seeking to understand the Ottoman experience during World War I, scholars have increasingly looked to novel forms of government intervention as the war’s most significant development. The glaring fact of the war, however, is the lack of capacity for the Ottoman Empire to achieve its goals, whatever the aims of its intervention. Mobilization for the Suez campaign sparked an epidemic of typhus in 1916. Before that, however, the deportation of the Armenians caused unintended collateral damage by spreading disease throughout the Ottoman population. Modern industrial warfare and genocide entailed levels of coordination that eluded the Ottoman government. The war laid bare the limitations of state capacity to intervene in disease ecologies, despite the

\(^{47}\) Epidemic typhus is caused by the bacteria \textit{Rickettsia prowazekii} that infects the human body through the feces of lice, and not their bites as Charles Nicolle hypothesized in 1909. Nicolle would later receive the Nobel Prize in 1928 for having identified body lice as the vector of typhus. See Raoult, Didier, Woodward, and Dumler, "The History of Epidemic Typhus," \textit{Infectious Disease Clinics of North America} 18, no. 1 (2004): 130.
trappings of a modern administration. Ottoman public health functioned in the most privileged urban areas during peacetime. A consideration of wartime disease environments and a focus on rural Lebanon reveals the limitations of government interventions to overcome epidemic disease, a reality that twenty years of French Mandate rule would not alter.

MALARIA AND THE FRENCH MANDATE

In October 1918, French and British military forces arrived with a careful plan to stem the tide of starvation and establish their legitimacy as occupiers. Their ability to distribute food aid and restore the functioning of grain markets was critical in stemming the widespread epidemics raging at war’s end. Much of the population that had outlived the famine was infected with malaria.\(^{48}\)

Disease, starvation, and destruction provided a dramatic foil for the stability they had reestablished. In turn, French authorities legitimized their rule by claiming the Ottoman government had been “little bothered by those in need” leaving “the care of the poor,” to foreigners, especially France.\(^{49}\) Those claims were flawed in two regards: they disregarded the existence of a modern public health system in Ottoman Beirut, and oversold the reach of public health in the early Mandate period. Much in keeping with Ottoman public health measures, the French regime pursued malaria control by distributing quinine to individuals infected with the disease. Preventative control of


\(^{49}\) Emily (Inspecteur Général des Services de Santé) to MAE, 4 January 1922, Série E-Levant 382, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, La Courneuve, France (MAE).
malaria infections would have been too big a blow to the coffers of the Mandatory state and malaria control under French auspices closely resembled Ottoman efforts.

When French authorities described the benefits of expanding their anti-malaria activities, they did so in economic terms. The extension of commercial agriculture in the Bekaa was a key incentive for pursuing drainage projects: “The fight against malaria will culminate with the capitalization of all natural resources,” stated a 1926 report.\(^{50}\) That plan stumbled amidst the decimating global demand for agricultural products. The dream of including Lebanon’s hinterlands into production for global markets would have to wait. With no prospect of reclaiming land from malaria for profit, serious measures against the disease would await more auspicious economic conditions. During the Mandate, malaria control focused on urban centers (primarily Beirut) and Lebanon’s summer resorts. If the plight of its poor rural citizens did not unduly “bother” the Ottoman regime, the French were not more moved, the claims of their propaganda notwithstanding.

Six years after the establishment of French rule, plans for malaria control in rural Lebanon were still expressed in the future tense. More than a decade later, France stated that its drainage activities had caused a “noticeable downturn in malaria,”\(^{51}\) but the areas mentioned in that regard remained virulently infected with the disease during World War II.\(^{52}\) Not even the swamp adjacent to Beirut merited drainage. The population impacted by the mosquitoes which bred there was primarily the Armenian inhabitants of Bourj

\(^{50}\) Trabaud and Delmas, *Contribution à l’étude générale du paludisme en Syrie*, 32.


\(^{52}\) Torbol and the region around Tyre were particularly malarious zones according to H. S. Leeson, *Anopheles and Malaria in the Near East. Anopheline Surveys in Syria and Lebanon* (London: Lewis, 1950), 29.
Hammoud. Even in the litany of its accomplishments sent to the League of Nations the French authorities acknowledged that, “malaria is still widespread,” in 1937. “Long-term projects,” required to combat the disease were out of the question, “mainly because of their cost.” Even while downplaying the yearly mortality from malaria, the report’s author admitted the lack of statistics on infant mortality. Children are malaria’s most likely victims.53

Private initiatives, such as AUB’s Village Welfare Society and the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU), spearheaded rural sanitation efforts but high costs stymied their endeavor. Mechanical methods, such as damming and the reorientation of irrigation canals, required levels of capital investment and maintenance that could only realistically provided by the state. Larvicides (unlike DDT) required constant, and expensive reapplication.54 A sophisticated understanding of malaria transmission existed among scientists in Lebanon, and had since before World War I55 however knowledge of the sources of the country’s endemic malaria did not correspond with a cost-effective method of eradicating disease-carrying mosquitoes.

In September 1939, as many as 15,000 Armenians were resettled in three locations in Lebanon: Anjar in the Bekaa valley, the Tyre plain, and Burj Hammud. Their native Alexandretta province had been ceded from France to Turkey to help secure the latter’s allegiance in the coming war. The refugees hailed from the villages of Musa

54 An AUB study from 1939 prescribed a 4:1 concoction of kerosene and crude oil with the addition of 0.1 percent castor oil. Spraying ten cubic centimeters of the above per square meter was thought to be the most effective ‘oiling’ method to combat the mosquitoes that caused malaria. D.A. Berberian, “Suggested Methods for the Control of Mosquitoes and Malaria in Syria and the Lebanon,” Department of Parasitology, Village Welfare Service Year Book, 1939-40, vol. 2, Students and Activities, Civic Welfare League, 1939-40, AA.4.3.5, AUB.
Dagh that had become famous for their resistance to the Ottoman Army during WWI. Having weathered the genocide, the Armenians of Musa Dagh’s bid to remain in their native villages faltered amidst the diplomatic machinations of the French government, their erstwhile “protector.” Most elected to leave, fearing violence once Alexandretta became the Hatay province of Turkey.56 In Lebanon, the malaria parasite became as fierce an enemy as the Musa Dagh communities had faced.

They hailed from a mountainous region of Anatolia (Musa Dagh’s highest peak rises to 4,446 meters) the inaccessible terrain of which had helped them hold out against the Ottoman Army in 1915. Their mountain home was likely relatively free from malaria.57 Once in Lebanon, they suffered from malaria at a high indicating that they likely had little resistance to the falciparum malaria that killed so many of them. The local inhabitants of the Bekaa valley would have had some measure of resistance, considering the intensity of malaria in their villages. Genetics and acquired resistance aside, however, the Armenians need not have died of malaria, the tools to control the disease were already in the grasp of humanity. Those tools required complex coordination and significant investment to be effective, however, and Armenian lives were not valuable enough to justify the expenditure in the view of French Mandate authorities.

Only through a feat of enormous determination did the Armenian settlement at Anjar, enveloped by swamps, survive. During the 1941 malaria season after “about one quarter of the population died, mostly of malaria.”58 Dr. D.A. Berberian of AUB helped

57 Gratien, “The Mountains are Ours.”
58 Milam, Diary, 19 May 1947.
coordinate an anti-malaria campaign funded by the AGBU. Despite their efforts, in 1944, Anjar’s 3,000 remaining residents saw 247 infants perish. That year, Dr. Berberian’s campaign brought the epidemic under control, reducing the infected population from 70% to 5.4% percent. His ability to fight the disease was limited to curtailing epidemics, however, and malaria remained endemic in the village despite his efforts.\(^5^9\)

The Mandate authorities had been aware of the potential for a catastrophic epidemic, according to the research of Vahram Shemmassian. In anticipation of the 1940 malaria season (April-November), a French physician by the name of Martin, insisted on the “absolute necessity” of a systematic program of malaria prophylaxis for the inhabitants of Anjar. The French High Commissioner, Gabriel Puaux, requested that Martin reduce his requested budget of 174,636 FF to 126,160 FF.\(^6^0\) The high mortality rates which ensued from malaria and other diseases indicate that Martin did not receive the sums he requested for public health outreach at Anjar. Private Armenian initiatives (the Howard Karagheuzian Commemorative Corporation and AGBU) along with AUB’s village welfare society, attended to the health of the refugees instead. Despite their efforts, epidemics took the lives of as many as half of the 6,000 Armenians. With enough funds and medical personnel, their deaths could have been prevented.\(^6^1\)

The Armenians settled near Tyre (see above) succumbed to the epidemic and left the country. They had inhabited two different places near the city. On the south end of the peninsula where the city jutted out in to the Mediterranean, 264 families moved into one room houses in 1939. Another settlement accommodated 62 families a few miles south at

\(^{59}\) Ibid.


\(^{61}\) Milam, \textit{Diary}, 31 March 1947, RF.
Ras al-‘Ayn. After having endured epidemic malaria throughout WWI, two-thirds of the Armenian community now accepted an invitation from Moscow to resettle in Soviet Armenia in 1946. When Milam visited the remaining third in June 1947, the community was still “100 percent malarious.” Meanwhile, the city of Tyre escaped the ravages of malaria, revealing the disease’s hyper-local dynamics. No more than a kilometer distant from the closest Armenian settlement, Tyre’s inhabitants staved off the mosquito-borne illness. Piped from the “best of the springs at Ras al-‘Ayn,” the city’s water supply was clean and protected so as to provide no breeding ground for mosquito larvae. To the same end, its streets were “paved with concrete and central gutter,” reported Milam. Vector control was possible in urban areas pending the economic capacity to prevent stagnant water from allowing mosquitoes the opportunity to multiply. Such measures in rural areas were much more expensive and did not come to fruition under the Mandate. The disease’s rural bias, and its impact on socially marginal populations such as Armenian refugees, had much to do with the ability of those in centers of power to ignore it.

CONCLUSION
As the experience of Armenian refugees showed, despite the change of regime from Ottoman to Mandate French control, Lebanon’s disease environments remained the same: economic activity in Beirut demanded coordinated disease prevention and control, meanwhile disease, and especially malaria, remained hyperendemic in rural Lebanon. Increasingly peripheral to global capitalism during the Mandate, rural Lebanon offered

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62 Milam, Diary, 14 June 1947, RF.
63 Milam, Diary, 14 June 1947, RF.
little promise for investment and there was thus little incentive to combat malaria for Lebanese capitalists and French Mandate authorities. Only once it became cost effective to control malaria and Lebanon’s rural hinterlands offer the potential for profitable investment, did their disease environments fundamentally shift in the aftermath of World War II.65

The literature on disease in Lebanon evinces a marked preoccupation with ruptures in governmental practice and discourse. No doubt, Foucauldian paradigms hold much potential to shed light on the history of disease in the Middle East, as attested by the extant scholarship. Nevertheless, such a lens is insufficient to grasp the material flow of the ebb and flow of epidemic disease, which has obeyed cycles of capital accumulation more than discursive shifts. World War I revealed the limits of the Ottoman public health regime and the persistent reality of malaria during the Mandate exposed French colonial policy in similar fashion. Discourses and governmental strategies in regards to public health can change quickly. Much less apt to rupture, however, is the human relationship with nature.

CONCLUSION

More than anything else, the famine is conspicuous in its absence from the seminal treatments of Lebanese history. Kamal Salibi’s *Modern History of Lebanon* does not mention it once.\(^1\) At least one scholar has made the reasonable suggestion that, because of the trauma entailed by the war, it has been “preferable to forget.”\(^2\) It is also likely that a concerted set of interests, in addition to the psychoanalytic suppression of trauma, shaped the writing of the famine’s history. As Najwa al-Qattan has observed:

> the famine plays second fiddle to the resistance and tragic execution of the “martyrs,” the Arab nationalists in Beirut and Damascus who were imprisoned and hanged during the war by Jamal Pasha. Indeed, Syria and Lebanon still commemorate those heroes; their capital cities have public squares named for the martyrs and in both places “Martyrs’ Day” is observed each year on 6 May. In contrast, the civilian victims of the famine are not publicly mourned or memorialized.\(^3\)

Youssef Mouawad, writing in a short but exhaustive study of the famine in Lebanese historical memory, has attributed the outsized attention paid to their executions as result of Martyrs’ mixed-sectarian identities. Muslims and Christians hanging together, oppressed by “Turkish” despotism, made for a better nationalist narrative to unite Lebanese than did the story of famine that primarily impacted Christians.\(^4\) This dissertation has, at some length, attempted to proffer a different explanation for the famine’s mysterious disappearance from the core texts of Lebanese history. It is more

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\(^3\) Al-Qattan, “When Mothers Ate Their Children,” 723.

likely that the famine made for a poor choice as nationalist narrative because of the glaring complicity of the elite class in causing it.

Perhaps it is not revelatory to conclude that the working class endured more suffering during a crisis or that their plight has received less attention in retrospect. The wartime demise of the underclass undermined the rest of Lebanese society as well, once there “were no workers to sow” Lebanon’s fallow fields and therefore nobody to grow crops. Equally, starvation victims’ poor health caused disease epidemics that spread throughout the population, damaging the welfare of all classes of society and undermining the Ottoman war effort. The consequences of the demographic collapse of agricultural workers extended to the period after the war by undermining the profitability of commercial agriculture in Mandate Lebanon. The rural working class suffered first and most but their misfortune spread to the rest of society in the form of disruptions in food production and disease.

The famine revealed the vulnerabilities engendered by the rise of the silk economy over the long nineteenth century. As has been seen, silk production depleted the water table, forests, and soil of an overpopulated country with few resources to spare. Equally, Lebanon’s carrying capacity as an ecosystem had become existentially tied to the price of silk by the middle of the nineteenth century. Once silk’s price began to fall in the 1880s, many sought their fortunes elsewhere. The Lebanese in turn came to rely on remittances from their relatives abroad. With a livelihood subject to the vagaries of global economics, politics, and warfare, Lebanon was exposed to the possibility of a catastrophe in the event commercial links with global economy were severed. Silk had also fostered institutional arrangements that made Lebanon prone to crisis. The dynamism of the
Lebanese economy had empowered a merchant class that infiltrated the state at all levels and degraded its capacity to act in the public interest, as the events of the famine exposed.

This analysis does not intend to suggest a wholly tragic view of the rise of the silk economy or capitalism more generally. Silk created social mobility for the peasant class. Employment in silk factories lent opportunities to women, in particular. Silk’s bust also had the salutary consequence of catalyzing migration to the Americas. Emigration has become a definitive aspect of the Lebanese experience and the source of prosperity for millions of Lebanese living in the diaspora.

Migration’s formative impact on Lebanon confirms one of this dissertation’s main arguments: the environmental history of Lebanon’s long nineteenth century, and in particular the rise of a capitalist economy geared toward the export of silk, decisively shaped the country’s future. Only with reference to that fact can the unfolding of Lebanon’s history be fully grasped. In particular, as this dissertation has aimed to show, environmental history can help draw attention to the class dynamics that have often been obscured by scholarly emphasis on the colonial encounter between the Middle East and Europe.

Instead of seeing French colonialism as the animating force behind Lebanese history, this dissertation has hoped to decenter the imposition of the French Mandate in favor of an account that recognizes deeper historical tides. Critically, the Lebanese embrace of the Mandate—to the extent that the Lebanese did embrace it—can only be understood in reference to the desperation produced by the famine. The two most salient local political forces, the Church and the merchant elite, had already been in the ascendancy for most of the nineteenth century. The events of the war and the Mandate
period helped to cement their power. In that sense, the formal interval of French colonialism appears not to have transformed Lebanon’s social structure. As the case study of refugee disease ecology aimed to show, social and environmental realities remained largely stable from the late Ottoman period until after World War II.

While I have told the history of Lebanon as tragedy, that is not the only possible narrative. Originally conceived as a study that would, at least in part, celebrate Lebanon’s natural wealth and the diversity of its human ecology, this dissertation ultimately hewed closer to quite a different vision emphasizing conflict, starvation, and disease. An account highlighting Lebanon’s natural wealth would have been equally valid. That will have to be a project for another day.
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