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Los Angeles

Transnational Rebellion:

The Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy  
in History

by

Reem Bailony

2015

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Transnational Rebellion:

The Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927

by

Reem Bailony

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2015

Professor James L. Gelvin, Chair

This dissertation explores the transnational dimensions of the Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927. By including the activities of Syrian migrants in Egypt, Europe and the Americas, this study moves away from state-centric histories of the anti-French rebellion. Though they lived far away from the battlefields of Syria and Lebanon, migrants championed, contested, debated, and imagined the rebellion from all corners of the *mahjar* (or diaspora). Skeptics and supporters organized petition campaigns, solicited financial aid for rebels and civilians alike, and partook in various meetings and conferences abroad. Syrians abroad also clandestinely coordinated with rebel leaders for the transfer of weapons and funds, as well as offered strategic advice based on the political climates in Paris and Geneva. Moreover, key émigré figures played a significant role in defining the revolt, determining its goals, and formulating its program. By situating the revolt in the broader internationalism of the 1920s, this study brings to life the hitherto neglected role migrants played in bridging the local and global, the national and international.

Starting with the Ottoman reforms of 1908, this study first explores the evolving political consciousness of the *mahjar* in relationship to the growth of international society and institutions. From the late Ottoman period to the Paris Peace Conference and the establishment of the League of Nations, Syrian and Lebanese communities abroad sought to impact the political climate of homeland through the writing of petitions, and the formation of societies and associations. With the bombardment of Damascus in October of 1925, the study shifts its lens to Geneva. Syrians lobbied the League of Nations through numerous petitions calling for justice and intervention. By virtue of residing outside the mandated territories, diaspora groups were able to bypass the censorship of the French mandatory government. Consequently, groups such as the Geneva-based Syro-Palestinian Congress acted as the external representatives of nationalists within Syria. By petitioning the League, Syrian émigrés partook in a civic order that was particular to local concerns within Syria, but which played out in the international circles of Geneva and Paris. In studying the connections between the local and global, the dissertation goes on to consider how the philanthropic engagement of the *mahjar* in 1925 shaped the civic discourse in south Lebanon. Detractors of the rebellion utilized diasporic networks abroad to wage a campaign for compensation that hinged on the mandate government's need to protect Lebanon's Christian minority. While previous histories of the revolt have depicted it as crucial to a popular Syrian nationalism, this study argues that it was also equally meaningful for the assertion of a Lebanese, confessional republic. Even as Syrians and Lebanese mobilized around the League of Nations and French mandate, émigrés also coordinated with various liberal, Pan-Islamist, and Communist networks that operated across state borders. Though the system of nation-states ultimately prevailed, the dissertation highlights how the concerted efforts of divergent networks in connection with the revolt complicate our understanding of the postwar

international system. Lastly, the project considers the aftermath of the revolt, and the exile of rebel leaders to Transjordan. As migrants, rebel refugees challenged the borders and states of the interwar period.

The dissertation of Reem Bailony is approved.

Lynn A. Hunt

Michael Provence

Roger Waldinger

James L. Gelvin, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2015

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My research has spanned three continents, and in each there reside archivists, librarians, researchers, and scholars who I give credit for facilitating my work. In Geneva, I would like to thank Jacques Oberson and the staff at the League of Nations Archive. In France, I am indebted to historian Sandrine Mansour-Merien, as well as the staff at the *Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes*, the archives of *Ministère des Affaires Étrangères* in Paris, the *Archives Nationales de France*, and the *Bibliothèque Nationale de France*. In London, I was

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follow in his footsteps. For seven years, they patiently stood by me, even when my studies took the better part of my time and attention. I dedicate this work to them.

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## Introduction

Among the Syrian immigrants in this country are those who, whenever they witness Syria's apparition crying for help, turn away; for that fraught apparition reminds them of their duty towards their mother country, and they hate remembering this duty...

...They declare: What have we do with Syria?! Let the dead bury the dead! We are Americans! <sup>1</sup>

The above lines, published in November 1925, opened an editorial in the New York-based Arabic language periodical, *Mir'at al-Gharb* ("Mirror of the West"). The article continued: "Indeed, they are Americans, and that is what they should be so long as they seek refuge under the stars and stripes." Yet, opined the author, was it necessary for Syrians in the United States to forgo their old sense of allegiance in order to adopt a new one? The Irish were also Americans, but when "Ireland rose up for independence, and its green lands were stained with spilt blood, Irish immigrants did not fail to champion her with all their might." The author penned his editorial in the context of an ongoing rebellion in Syria and Lebanon that had ignited in late summer of 1925. Unlike the Irish, however, the Syrians the author described were only Syrian when it came to business, cuisine, and cultural traditions.

In 1920, in the wake of the Ottoman Empire's dissolution, French military forces occupied the city of Damascus. The newly created League of Nations conferred mandatory rule over the territories that would later become Syria and Lebanon to France; the territories that would later become Palestine and Iraq were assigned to the British. The French initiated their first two years administrating the mandate by employing a "policy of divide and rule," splitting

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<sup>1</sup> "La tatanasalu min suriyatikum," *Mir'at al-Gharb* (7 November 1925).

the region into two larger proto-states: Syria and Greater Lebanon. They further divided the proto-state of Syria into five smaller units: the states of Damascus, Aleppo, the Alawite state, Jabal Druze, and the semi-autonomous state of Alexandretta (which would be annexed by Turkey).<sup>2</sup> These divisions—not all of which lasted the duration of the French presence in Syria—to a certain degree reflected former Ottoman provinces, but also a French sectarian understanding of the region.

In line with their policy of divide and rule, the French sought to foster a direct relationship with the southern region of Syria. Known as the Hawran, the region was home to much of the country's minority Druze population.<sup>3</sup> In 1921, the French signed a treaty with the leaders of the Jabal Druze (or "Druze Mountain"), establishing it as a separate, semi-autonomous state. In return for their acceptance of the French mandate, a Druze governor and representative council would administer the region. This not only aimed to isolate the Druze power structure from Damascus, but was also intended to break down traditional patriarchal bonds.<sup>4</sup> In 1922, the French arrested a man by the name of Adham Khanjar, provoking a brief and localized rebellion led by the Druze leader, Sultan Pasha al-Atrash. Following this incident, French Captain Gabriel Carbillet became temporary governor of the Jabal Druze.

Carbillet attempted to rule with an iron fist. He set out to modernize the Jabal Druze according to the norms of the French *mission civilisatrice*, with disregard to local political

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Provence, "Liberal Colonialism and Martial Law in French Mandate Syria," in *Liberal Thought in the Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Christoph Schumann (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 59-61.

<sup>3</sup> For a study on the evolution of the category of "minority" during the mandate period, see Benjamin Thomas White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920—1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 153.

traditions, earning the distrust of a significant portion of the population. Residents of the region had recently endured low-crop yields, their hardships exacerbated by increased taxes and the heavy-handedness of Carbillet's reforms. In July 1925, Sultan Pasha al-Atrash sent a delegation to Beirut to complain to High Commissioner Maurice Sarrail. Sarrail received the delegation by having them imprisoned. In August, after failed attempts to negotiate peace, Sultan Pasha al-Atrash—with the backing of certain members of the newly created oppositional People's Party in Damascus—declared a revolt against the French.<sup>5</sup> Pamphlets distributed around Damascus agitated against “the “imperialists,” and urged the Syrians to arm themselves in order to realize their “national aspirations and sacred hopes.”<sup>6</sup> Specific demands included the complete independence and unity of Syria, the free election of a constituent assembly, the framing of a constitution, the evacuation of foreign military, the creation of a national army, and finally “the application of the principles of the French Revolution and the Rights of Man: liberty, equality, fraternity.”<sup>7</sup>

Despite its local Druze origins, the insurrection in Jabal Druze struck a chord with nationalists in the urban centers of Syria. Spreading across the country, the uprising came to take the form of a widespread anticolonial rebellion fortified by the use of a secular nationalist rhetoric and calls for independence that made their way through the press, political pamphlets, and various public gatherings. Rebels hailed from every cross-section of Syrian society. Druze, Muslims and a number of Christians joined the ranks of the opposition, representing both rural

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<sup>5</sup> See Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas, 2005), 80-82.

<sup>6</sup> Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*, 82-83. Also see Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (henceforth CADN), Syrie-Liban, Carton 1704, Bulletin des Renseignements 155, “Tract répandu à Damas” (28 August 1925).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

and urban classes. The revolt, however, was not embraced by all sectors of society. Minority Christian groups, the Maronites in Lebanon especially, were at best ambivalent about the revolt given their privileged status under the French. Thus the revolt went to the heart of an ongoing debate over the advantages and disadvantages of French colonial rule. In doing so, it also took up questions concerning the new international order set up by the League of Nations.

Partly inspired by the dissemination of Wilson's Fourteen Points, the revolt provoked a host of ongoing questions concerning the meaning of the mandate, sovereignty and independence. Were Syrians and Lebanese capable of self-rule? Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant stipulated that the choice of the mandatory power should reflect the wishes of the governed. Yet, were the French capable of administering a mandate given their history of colonial entanglements? Indeed, was the mandates system altogether nothing but veiled colonialism? The revolt increased the stakes for questions concerning the future political and economic organization of the Syrian state, especially as it related to neighboring Lebanon and its large number of Christian inhabitants. In doing so, it also conjured debates about the nation—what it meant to be Syrian or Lebanese, as well as what role religious identity played in the nation and nationalism. Consequently, the 1925 revolt became a site wherein competing visions of the contemporary and future Syrian nation and state played out. Such competing visions and the mobilizations around them, however, were not confined to the borders of the French mandate. As the above editorial indicates, they included the participation of Syrian émigrés in various parts of the region and world that together formed an important set of transnational circuits.

This dissertation studies the Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927 as a transnational rebellion that emanated from within Syria, but tapped into Syrian diasporic networks in Egypt, Europe, and the

Americas.<sup>8</sup> A principle contribution of this project is therefore to demonstrate how migrants played a decisive role in conditioning the discourse and outcome of the rebellion. As the above excerpt from *Mir'at al-Gharb* suggests, Syrian migrant communities diligently followed the events back home through the pages of a robust migrant press. Though they lived far away from the battlefields of Syria and Lebanon, migrants championed, contested, debated and imagined the rebellion from all corners of the *mahjar*—an Arabic term connoting the spatial realm in which Syrian migrants settled.<sup>9</sup> Skeptics and supporters organized petition campaigns, solicited financial aid for rebels and civilians alike, and partook in various meetings and conferences abroad. Key émigrés also clandestinely coordinated with rebel leaders for the transfer of weapons and funds, as well as offered strategic advice based on the political climates in Paris and Geneva.

More importantly, émigré groups played a significant role in defining the revolt, determining its goals and formulating its program. Sultan Pasha al-Atrash entrusted the exiled Druze notable Amir Shakib Arslan with the task of presenting the nature and objectives of the

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<sup>8</sup> The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries witnessed increased Ottoman migration. The integration and peripheralization of Middle Eastern economies into the global capitalist economy played a significant role in inducing mobility. Emigration from Syrian and Lebanon occurred for a number of reasons. In particular, the collapse of the silk-farming industry in Mt. Lebanon and its environs as a result of global competition pushed less well-off farmers to the coasts in search of a better livelihood. From there, they embarked upon their journeys west, many ending up in Egypt and the Americas. Though a large majority of Syrian-Lebanese migrants were Christians, recent studies have brought to light the important early Druze and Muslim migrants. By the 1920s and 30s one could come across a number of well-established Syrian-Lebanese communities in Egypt, Africa, Europe and the Americas. These communities boasted self-established businesses, social organizations, and a lively network of journalists and activists.

<sup>9</sup> I utilize the terms *mahjar* and “diaspora” interchangeably. When referring to émigrés, the term “Syrian” generally refers to all those who left the “Greater Syrian” provinces of the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century. However, in some instances where the distinction between Syrian and Lebanese is important, I refer to both “Syrian-Lebanese” migrants.

revolt to the outside world.<sup>10</sup> Groups like the Syro-Palestinian Congress, based in Cairo and Geneva, thus served as the outside representatives of the Syrian nationalists, directly negotiating with the high commissioner from Paris and Cairo. From their positions abroad, they were also well suited to lobby the League of Nations, particularly since they could avoid the censorship of the mandatory power. Amir Shakib Arslan traveled to various parts of the *mahjar*—to Cairo, New York, Detroit, and Buenos Aires—to establish links with various communities, and to call for international support for the cause of Syrian independence. For Arslan, who envisioned a “Greater Syria” uniting Syria and Lebanon, the success of the revolt was a crucial step in the crystallization of this vision.<sup>11</sup>

All of this took place in the midst of the refashioning of the Westphalian model to create an international system intended to promote long-lasting peace by preserving the sovereignty and equality of nation-states. The resulting creation of the League of Nations and the mandates system seemed to strike a compromise between liberal Wilsonianism and colonial ambition. Yet, ambiguity remained over whether the mandates were truly sovereign. The principle of “self-determination,” espoused first by Lenin, came to be largely associated with the American president. This call for self-determination became a rallying cry for independence movements across the globe. Yet, it was unclear how the mandates system would honor such an ideal. The Syrian Revolt of 1925 was just one response to the failure of the mandates system to embody the spirit of anti-imperialism that the League of Nations ostensibly represented. If such egalitarian values came to be associated with the League, it was not due to the League’s creators, but to the

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<sup>10</sup> See letter from Sultan Pasha al-Atrash to Amir Shakib Arslan in Hasan Amin al-Bi‘ayni, *Sultan Pasha al-Atrash: masirat qa’id fi tarikh umma* (Lajnat al-i‘lam, al-idara al-madaniya fil jabal, 1985), 185-186.

<sup>11</sup> For more on Amir Shakib Arslan, see William Cleveland, *Islam Against the West: Shakib Arslan and the Campaign for Islamic Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas, 1985).

advocacy of subaltern voices such as those belonging to Syrians within and beyond the mandate.<sup>12</sup> By situating the revolt in the broader internationalism of the 1920s, this study brings to life the hitherto neglected role migrants played in bridging the local and global, the national and international.

A principal question animating this project is the following: how did Syrian and Lebanese national politics play out in a transnational space? The dissertation examines the participation of migrant communities in the deterritorialization of local politics and civil society. Furthermore, it asks how émigrés enhanced (or perhaps subdued) the voice of Syrian nationalists from abroad. Identifying the workings of such transnationalization is particularly important to completing our understanding of the revolt in Syria given the disproportionate size of the *mahjar* and the significance of emigration to the political economy and cultural mediations of the both local and diasporic Syrians and Lebanese.<sup>13</sup> Thus, by shedding light on this neglected transnational story, this project makes an important contribution to the history of the Syrian Revolt 1925. Whereas previous histories of the revolt have been mainly limited to the borders of mandate Syria, this work moves away from state-centric histories of the revolt to include the *mahjar*. Although the study of Syrian-Lebanese migrants has received attention in the fields of Arab-American or diaspora studies, historians of the Middle East have—until recently—assigned the *mahjar* only peripheral significance.

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<sup>12</sup> For the use of the term “subaltern” outside of the Indian colonial context, see Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> For more on late nineteenth century migrations from the region see Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi eds. *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration* (Oxford: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1992). See also, Kemal H. Karpat, “The Ottoman Emigration to America, 1860-1914,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (1985), 175.

Early monographs of the rebellion focused either on its place within the overall history of the Arab or Syrian nationalist struggle, or its role in the history of the Druze population of Syria.<sup>14</sup> With the independence of the Syrian state after World War II, the revolt was canonized in the nationalist narrative of the urban elite, often neglecting the role of its Druze and rural leadership.<sup>15</sup> The secular Ba‘thist government for its part situated the rebellion as one in a series of revolts leading up to the establishment of the Ba‘th party and their rightful place in Syrian leadership and politics.<sup>16</sup> Such nationalist-driven accounts anachronistically inserted the uprising into grander narratives that suited the present political climate. With the waning of Arab nationalist sentiment in the 1970s, scholarly studies of the rebellion slowed. The revolt did not feature as prominently in Lebanese scholarship, despite crucial battles across the Lebanese border. Particularist narratives championed the Druze in Lebanese nationalist historiography on the one hand, or situated it within the history of the region’s sectarian violence.<sup>17</sup>

The Anglo-American historiography has shed light on the revolt within an overall renewed interest in the history of the mandates. These accounts placed the revolt within a wider history of the formation of the Syrian state. Early accounts, influenced by a prior generation immersed in structural-functionalism, situated the rebellion within the “politics of the

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<sup>14</sup> For an overview of this literature, see Birgit Schaebler, “Coming to Terms with Failed Revolutions: Historiography in Syria, Germany and France,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, 35: 1 (Jan. 1999), 17-44.

<sup>15</sup> Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*, 15. See for example, Zafir al-Qasimi, *Watha’iq jadida ‘an al-thawra al-Suriyah al-kubra* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Jadid, 1965).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 16. See in particular the works of the Lebanese Druze scholar, Hasan Amin al-Bi‘ayni. Hasan al-Bi‘ayni, *Sultan Basha Al-Atrash wa-al-thawrah al-Suriyah al-kubra* (London: Mu’assasat al-Turath al-Durzi, 2008).



notables” model, focusing largely on the urban elite.<sup>18</sup> A later Marxist reading situated the rebellion within the wider history of Syria’s rural class.<sup>19</sup> The only English language monograph to focus specifically on the rebellion, Michael Provence’s work, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (2005) analyzes the revolt by investigating the relationship of the countryside to the urban centers of Damascus. Provence’s study contests elite approaches to nationalism by highlighting the modest and rural origins of rebel leaders. Much of these leaders inherited a common Ottoman military education and culture, facilitating their mobilization and resistance under the French mandate. Provence’s study further challenges the sectarian narratives of the revolt, particularly stressed in French accounts, by elucidating the secular, nationalist rhetoric employed by Sultan Pasha al-Atrash.

Important as these contributions are, their scope of inquiry has been limited to the geographic boundaries of the Syrian mandate. Exploring these various mobilizations outside of Syria demonstrates that that *mahjar* not only played a role in events as they unfolded, but also contributed to the articulation of an “imagined community” back home. The Syrian rebellion had far more contested and multifaceted roots beyond the region itself, revealed most clearly in the pages of the *mahjar*’s press. By decentering the study of the revolt, one finds that pleas for or against the rebellion went hand in hand with the long-distance creation of particular nationalist understandings (the focus here being on a Greater Syrian or Greater Lebanese nation-state). Activists and intellectuals in the *mahjar* played an integral role in the construction of nationalist

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<sup>18</sup> See Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: the Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987).

<sup>19</sup> See for example Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

mythologies by contesting and debating the 1925 revolt, thereby helping shape and reinforce the boundaries of future nation-states from farther afield.<sup>20</sup>

By employing a transnational lens, this dissertation also addresses a gap in the wider scholarship on the Middle East that has neglected the pivotal role of migrants in developments back home. Born out of a postcolonial scholarship and an interest in globalization, the move towards transnational studies has questioned the bounded investigations of area studies scholarship.<sup>21</sup> In this vein, anthropologists, sociologists, and cultural studies scholars have only recently—in the wake of 9/11—reconsidered the role of Arab migrants not only in their host environments, but also in their continued connections to homeland.<sup>22</sup> Yet, scholars of the Middle East in general have been slow to embrace the “transnational turn.”<sup>23</sup> Indeed, historians of the Middle East have only recently begun to explore this diasporic connection. These recent studies

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<sup>20</sup> Parts of this sub-section have been previously published in Reem Bailony, "Transnationalism and the Syrian Migrant Public: The Case of the 1925 Syrian Revolt" *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East Migration Studies* 1.1 (2013).

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Arsan, John Karam, and Akram Khater, "On Forgotten Shores: Migration in Middle East Studies and the Middle East in Migration Studies" *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East Migration Studies* 1.1 (2013).

<sup>22</sup> Many works on the diaspora, particularly those that fall under the category of “Arab-American studies” have been influenced by the question of Syrian inclusion into the racial category of “white,” on the one hand, or (owing to events before and after 9/11) have celebrated the presence of Arabs in America on the other. See for example: Darcy A. Zabel, ed., *Arabs in the Americas: Interdisciplinary Essays on the Arab Diaspora* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006) 1-3. For a critical discussion on race and Arab Americans see Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber, eds. *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008).

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Arsan, John Karam, and Akram Khater, "On Forgotten Shores," 3-4. See for example, Akira Iriye for an overview of the global and transnational turn in: Akira Iriye, *Global and Transnational History: The Past, Present, and Future* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

have expanded the field by looking at the questions of self and subjectivity amongst migrants, as well as questions of modernity, gender, and the effects of return migration on the homeland.<sup>24</sup>

Scholars of migration and transnationalism have debated the meaning and usefulness of “transnationalism” as a phenomenon and concept. The term developed as concept to understand migrants’ “multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state.”<sup>25</sup> In general, transnationalism as an analytical tool has been framed in two ways. The first approach depicts transnationalism as a set of horizontal, cross-border relationships that ultimately “de-territorialize or extend (rather than undermine) the nation-states they link.”<sup>26</sup> The second treats transnationalism as a vertical shift over “accustomed territorial state-level memberships, state-bound national identities, and civic-political claims.”<sup>27</sup> For such scholars, transnationalism is a

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<sup>24</sup> Consulted works include: Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Andrew Arsan, *Interlopers of Empire: The Lebanese Diaspora in Colonial French West Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Christina Civantos, *Between Argentines and Arabs: Argentine Orientalism, Arab Immigrants, and the Writing of Identity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006); Ilham Khuri Makdisi *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010); Lily Balloffet, *Mahjar Maps: Argentina in the Global Arab Diaspora* (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of California, Davis, 2015); María del Mar Logroño Narbona. *The Development of Nationalist Identities in French Syria and Lebanon: A Transnational Dialogue with Arab Immigrants to Argentina and Brazil, 1915—1929* (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of California, Santa Barbara, 2007); Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009); Stacy Fahrenthold, "Transnational Modes and Media: The Syrian Press in the Mahjar and Emigrant Activism during World War I" *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East Migration Studies* 1.1 (2013); Steven Hyland Jr., “‘Arisen from Deep Slumber’: Transnational Politics and Competing Nationalisms among Syrian Immigrants in Argentina, 1900-1922,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 43, no. 1 (2011).

<sup>25</sup> Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, Cristina Szanton Blanc, “From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transnational Migration,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 68: 1 (Jan. 1995), 48.

<sup>26</sup> Ewa Morawska, “Immigrants, Transnationalism, and Ethnicization: a Comparison of this Great Wave and the Last,” in *E Pluribus Unum? Contemporary and Historical Perspectives on Immigrant Political Incorporation* (Russel Sage Foundation: New York, 2001), 176.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

distinctly twenty-first century phenomenon linked to globalization's purported corrosive effects on the nation-state.<sup>28</sup>

This dissertation questions the trend towards conceptualizing transnational ties and practices as supranational phenomena that extend above or beyond the nation. Syrian-Lebanese migrants exhibited a “multiplicity of imagined communities, organized along different, often conflicting principles.”<sup>29</sup> Such conflicting national understandings in turn reflected an emerging nation-state system that operated along universalistic assumptions but which produced ‘isomorphic’ nationalist movements.<sup>30</sup> In the wake of the Ottoman Empire, émigré activists were particularly suited to mobilizing around the dominant framework set up by the League of Nations. Long after the Paris Peace Conference, Syrians made their presence felt in numerous circles in Geneva and Paris. Petitions from Syrians across the diaspora flooded the League of Nations. The Syro-Palestinian Congress in particular set up a permanent delegation in Geneva in order to put pressure on the Permanent Mandates Commission. Yet, studies on the League of Nations and interwar internationalism in general have been overwhelming Eurocentric.<sup>31</sup> This study thus adds a much-needed subaltern voice to scholarship on the internationalism of the interwar period.

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<sup>28</sup> Steven Vertovec, *Transnationalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Roger D. Waldinger and David Fitzgerald, “Transnationalism in Question” *American Journal of Sociology* 109.5 (2004), 1177-95. I also build upon the critical insight of Rogers Brubaker’s work on transnationalism. See Rogers Brubaker, “Migration, Membership, and the Modern Nation-State: Internal and External Dimensions of the Politics of Belonging Migration and Membership” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 41 (2010), 61-78.

<sup>30</sup> James Gelvin, “‘Arab Nationalism’: Has a New Framework Emerged?” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41 (2009).

<sup>31</sup> For more on the internationalism of the interwar period see for example: Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

This is not to detract from the contingency of the nation-state system; rather, this study also aims to acknowledge the volatility of the postwar era by highlighting the contradictions of the postwar setup.<sup>32</sup> The interwar period witnessed the uneasy classification of nationality and citizenship categories. In this fluid and ambiguous process, mobile individuals in particular evaded and defied simple categorization.<sup>33</sup> Mobility also facilitated the coordination of various anti-imperialist and liberal activist networks that operated across state borders.<sup>34</sup> Despite their efforts towards a nation-state, Syrians were not impervious to various alternative “internationalist” and transnational networks that operated—to differing degrees—outside the logic of the League of Nations framework. Such alternative paths were envisioned by Pan-Islamic and Communist networks leading up to the Second World War.<sup>35</sup> A common anti-imperialist agenda strategically brought together nationalists and supra-nationalists even when their ideologies stood at odds with one another.<sup>36</sup> Though the system of nation-states ultimately

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<sup>32</sup> See for example Will Hanley, “Papers for Going, Papers for Staying: Identification and Subject Formation in the Eastern Mediterranean,” in *A Global Middle East: Mobility, Materiality and Culture in the Modern Age, 1880-1940*, eds. Liat Kozma, Cyrus Schayegh and Avner Wishnitzer (London: IB Tauris, 2015). See also Lauren Banko, “Imperial Questions and Social Identities: The ‘marvel’ of Nationality and Citizenship in Interwar Palestine” *Revue des mondes musulmans et de la Méditerranée* 137 (2015), 95-114.

<sup>33</sup> See for example Devi Mays, *Transplanting cosmopolitans: The Migrations of Sephardic Jews to Mexico, 1900—1934* (Ph.D. Dissertation: Indiana University, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Such networks mobilized around various causes: human rights, women’s rights, etc. within the framework of liberal internationalism. Others mobilized around anti-imperialism more broadly. See for example: Leila Rupp, “Constructing internationalism: The case of transnational women's organizations, 1888-1945,” *The American Historical Review* (1994): 1571-1600; Fredrik Petersson, “Hub of the Anti-Imperialist Movement: The League against Imperialism and Berlin, 1927–1933,” *Interventions* 16.1 (2014), 49-71.

<sup>35</sup> Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

<sup>36</sup> Noor-Aiman Khan, *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration and the British Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

prevailed, the concerted efforts of various networks in connection with the revolt complicate our understanding of the postwar international system.

### **Outline of the Study**

This dissertation unearths previously hidden stories connected to the Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927. These stories take us across oceans, and acknowledge that the Middle East was not an isolated place in the international moment and history of the 1920s. Chapter One, entitled “The Roots of Syrian Transnational Activism,” traces this history back to the reforms of the late Ottoman period. International pleas concerning reforms affecting the Arab provinces were crucially tied to the significant wave of late nineteenth century emigration from Mount Lebanon and its surrounding areas. Everywhere, Syrians and Lebanese partook in global civil society institutions—crafting petitions, forming associations, and holding conferences intended for an international audience. In 1919, calls for reform gave way to more explicit nationalist projects as people mobilized around the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, and Wilson’s Fourteen Points. The stakes raised in 1919 created two distinct projects: that of a Greater Syria stretching from the Mediterranean to the Arabian peninsula, and that of a Greater Lebanon to include the former Ottoman province of Mount Lebanon, plus the ports of Sidon, Beirut and Tripoli, as well as the valley of the Biqa’. Questions over the geographical makeup of Syria and Lebanon would therefore continue to play a decisive role during the 1925 revolt. In 1920, the French occupied Syria and declared the state of Greater Lebanon. The year of 1920 also marked the creation of the League of Nations, and the mandates system. Based in Cairo and Geneva, the Syro-Palestinian Congress was created to address local concerns with the French mandate over Syria and Lebanon. The organization was unique in that it rallied specifically around the League of Nations, juxtaposing its claims to represent the Syrian people against the official representative

status of the French delegate. As the chapter demonstrates, the Syro-Palestinian Congress would play a pivotal role in the external mobilizations linked to the rebellion of 1925.

Chapter Two, “The Bombardment of Damascus: an International Affair,” addresses the question of the internationalization of the Syrian Revolt by looking at petitions to the League of Nations surrounding the French bombardment of Damascus in October 1925. The bombardment of the ancient city triggered waves of controversy throughout the global press. Editorials called into question not only France’s administration of Syria, but also the logic of the mandates system in general. Migrants played a crucial role in this regard, for procedures determined that petitions emanating from within the mandated territories and destined for the League of Nations would have to be received firstly by the mandate power. Petitions coming from outside the territories thereby evaded the censorship of the mandatory government. The recourse by petitioners to the discourse of international law and humanitarianism challenged the civilizational discourse asserted in the debates and procedures of the Permanent Mandates Commission. In doing so, Syrian émigrés partook in a civic order that was particular to local concerns within Syria, but which played out in the international circles of Geneva and Paris.

Though the 1925 revolt has been described as a wide reaching, popular uprising, not all Syrians and Lebanese embraced it. As rebels crossed the borders into south Lebanon, minority Christian groups were often caught in the crossfire. While previous histories of the revolt have depicted it as crucial to the development of a popular Syrian nationalism, Chapter Three, “The Local and Global in South Lebanon,” argues that it was also equally meaningful for the crystallization of a Lebanese, confessional republic. More specifically, the chapter broadens the geography of the revolt by focusing on the aftermath of a crucial battle town in the demographically mixed town of Rashaya, lying to the west of Mount Hermon. Christian refugees

from Rashaya reached out to their compatriots abroad, asking for material support to rebuild their town. Rashayans thus launched a transnational campaign that pressured the French government to take seriously their demands for compensation. In turn, the flow of donations prompted a lively a debate over the colonial civic order—raising questions over Lebanon’s borders, what it meant to be Lebanese, and what role the French mandate served in these various articulations.<sup>37</sup>

Whereas the first three chapters address Syrian and Lebanese mobilizations around the League of Nations and the French mandate, Chapter Four, “Transnational Rebellion: Wilsonian, Pan-Islamist and Communist Anti-Imperialism,” considers the transnational coordination of Syrian nationalists within and outside of Syria with networks that were ostensibly at odds with Eurocentric internationalism. Syrian émigrés played a crucial role in liaising with various anti-imperialist networks, not all of which lined up ideologically with one another. Nevertheless, the mere presence of these differing groups in the same circles stoked the fears of the French government, leading French intelligence reports to paint ominous political forecasts predicting region wide rebellions. Rather than Wilsonianism giving way to the popularity of Leninism, as Erez Manela has argued, this chapter highlights the simultaneity of Wilsonianism, Pan-Islamism, and Communism as alternative visions of the world order during the 1920s.<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, Syrians utilized such networks to advocate for their own nation-state. Nevertheless, the operation of such networks in defiance of postwar arrangements hints at the ambiguities of the nationalist project.

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<sup>37</sup> The term “colonial civic order” is borrowed from Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

<sup>38</sup> Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).



## Concluding Thoughts

A present day uprising brought me to this project. In March 2011, peaceful protests broke out in the rural town of Dar‘a, located in the Hawran plain only 50 kilometers from where the 1925 revolt began. Protesters responded to the government arrest and torture of local children who had been accused of scrawling, “Down with the regime” across a wall. They had undoubtedly picked up the slogan as they watched anti-government protests unfold in Egypt.<sup>39</sup> The regime met protesters with fatal brutality. Soon, protests spread to other rural centers across the country. As demonstrations grew larger, demands for governmental reform soon turned into a call for the regime to step down. With each day, protester deaths and detentions mounted; it would not be long before a civil war ensued. Syrians abroad closely followed the news on social media sites. In August 2011, the Syrian National Council, composed mostly of expatriates, was formed in Istanbul to represent the interests of Syrian factions to the outside world. The Syrian opposition eventually adopted an independence flag originally dating back to 1932.

For obvious reasons, my preliminary research trip to Syria, planned for the summer of 2011, had been derailed. I had hoped to explore early twentieth century women’s periodicals for a project on gender and women’s education in the late Ottoman period. Instead, I flew to Washington D.C. to investigate the impressive collection of Arabic journals at the Library of Congress. There, I stumbled upon a number of Syrian-American journals from the early twentieth century. As I flipped through the issues of the mid-1920s, I noticed that page after page delved into the topic of the 1925 revolt. Arabic journals in New York fiercely debated the events. What role should those in the *mahjar* play? Was the mandate necessary? What relationship did

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<sup>39</sup> James Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 127.

the revolt in Syria have to nearby Lebanon? Was this a local uprising representing the agenda of the Druze population, or a legitimate nationalist struggle for independence? How could the diaspora help? And how could they demonstrate their patriotism to their compatriots whom they left behind? By the time my three-week research trip had concluded, I knew that there was no escaping the topic of the 1925 revolt.

As I advanced in my research, I continued to notice obvious parallels between the mobilization of Syrian émigrés in 1925 and the diaspora of the present day. Such parallels confirmed the importance of including the diaspora in my study of the 1925 revolt. Their voices and actions allow us to ask how claims to national representation are enacted, and tested, from a distance. How far does the nation extend? Does time or space discredit diaspora intervention? Much like the émigrés of 1925, the diaspora of today—reflecting a broad array of religious and communal identities—engages Syrian politics through a myriad of transnational and cross-border practices. Such actions include the collection of donations, the organization of meetings and protests, the drafting of petitions, and most importantly, an attempt to sway Syria’s political trajectory by appealing to the international community, with the United Nations at its head. As in 1925, debates continue to take place over the usefulness of this diasporic connection. While some rely on the voice and political clout of diaspora groups, many question their loyalty, as well as ability to truly gage the situation inside Syria given their number of years abroad. After the failure of the Syrian National Council to achieve recognition, the Syrian National Coalition was formed in Qatar in 2012. The National Coalition was founded with the aim of uniting the opposition’s voice, facilitating the coordination of exiled politicians with the military opposition on the ground, as well as allowing foreign powers to assist moderate Syrian forces.<sup>40</sup> This further

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<sup>40</sup> Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings*, 132.

complicated the transnational layers of the Syrian conflict, not to mention the intervention of foreign militias on both sides. Despite widespread diplomatic recognition as a legitimate representative of the Syrian people, the Syrian National Coalition continues to struggle in its bid to act as Syria's government in exile, and has achieved little influence within Syria. As this study will demonstrate, the diaspora's bid for representation in 1925 was also fraught with burdensome complications.

As the events in Syria continue to unravel, it becomes more difficult to identify heroes in the Syrian conflict. In the early stages of my dissertation research, I watched my family fear for the safety of their loved ones in Aleppo. I hoped for their sake that the will of the Syrian people could triumph over oppression. I realized that my sentiments probably reflected the equally quixotic hopes of much the Syrian diaspora in 1925. As the situation in Syria worsens, I have ceased to wish for any specific outcome. Instead, I conclude that it is the heroism of everyday people—in the thick of war, and who endure despite insurmountable odds—which matters most. Ironically, their voice is also the hardest to record. It is to them that I dedicate this work.

## Chapter 1: The Roots of Syrian Transnational Activism

### Introduction

In December 1925, Alexandria resident and Lebanese lawyer Yusuf al-Sawda published an in Na‘um Mukarzil’s New York periodical, *al-Huda* (The Guidance).<sup>1</sup> A Maronite, Sawda was once leader of the dormant *Alliance Libanaise (al-Ittihad al-Lubnani)*, the first Lebanese émigré group to advocate for Ottoman reform and Lebanese autonomy from its headquarters in Cairo and Alexandria.<sup>2</sup> In the article, Sawda described the current state of the Syrian insurrection that had ignited in July of that year. By November, Druze rebels of the neighboring Hawran region crossed the border that since 1920 had demarcated southern Syria from southern Lebanon. The controversial push into towns west of Mount Hermon riled local and diasporic Lebanese Christian communities, as they found themselves recalling reprisal attacks against Christians during World War I, and even the 1860 civil war.

Sawda pondered the motivations behind the rebel passage into Lebanese territory in the south, and advanced two possibilities. In the first scenario, the rebels crossed into Lebanon for military and strategic reasons, with no intention of altering the borders. Sawda likened this scenario to the German invasion and violation of Belgian neutrality during the First World War. In the second scenario, the rebels sought to return Lebanon to its 1861-*mutasarrifiyya* borders (i.e. a Mount Lebanon that excluded the main ports of Beirut, Tripoli, and Saida). If true, then

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<sup>1</sup> Yusuf al-Sawda, “Junun al-Harb al-Ahliya,” *al-Huda* (14 December 1925).

<sup>2</sup> Stacy Fahrenthold, “Transnational Modes and Media: the Syrian Press in the Mahjar and Emigrant Activism During World War I,” *Mashriq & Mahjar : Journal of Middle East Migration Studies* 1 (2013), 37.

the Lebanese would have to approach the "Syrian" rebels as enemies, and would surely arm themselves in defense of their borders. Sawda justified this position based upon geographical necessity; Lebanon in 1861 was geo-politically strangled, cut off from its ports and hinterland. If the Syrian rebels truly wished to retake the south, then they also sought demise for their Lebanese brothers and neighbors, further perpetuating Lebanese emigration. Having lived in Alexandria a number of years before finally returning to Lebanon, Sawda paid special attention to the role of Lebanese migrants in the 1925 revolt:

...Overseas there are hundreds of thousands of Lebanese whose mention of Lebanon shakes them, and whereupon any mention of injustice in their homes transforms their sentiments towards the Syrian cause into enmity, and who shake the opinion of the civilized world.<sup>3</sup>

Another émigré organization, the Cairo-based Executive Committee of the Syro-Palestinian Congress wrote to the League of Nations in 1926 to defend the Syrian rebellion underway. Highlighting the historical origins of the rebellion, they began by asserting that Syria was one "geographical unit" that naturally stretched from the shores of the Mediterranean to the Arabian Desert to the east.<sup>4</sup> Taking a stance opposite that of Sawda, they consequently insisted that the Syrian people within these natural geographic boundaries were one race, who all shared a common language and history. Attesting to the independent nature of the Syrian people, the authors highlighted a long history of insurrection against foreign rule in Syria, especially noting the important role of the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, whence the idea of "independence became widespread," and when "patriotic societies were founded in large numbers, in Syria and

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<sup>3</sup> Sawda, "Junun al-Harb al-Ahliya," *al-Huda* (14 December 1925).

<sup>4</sup> Archives Nationales de France (henceforth AN), 615AP/1, Fonds Bruhnes, Address by the Executive Committee of the Syro-Palestinian Congress to the Seventh General Assembly of the League of Nations (14 September 1926).

the centers of emigration.” The tract continued, “In Egypt and the two Americas, journals published articles demanding independence for Syria, and books and pamphlets were profusely distributed throughout Egypt, America, and Europe.” When World War I broke out, Syrians in the diaspora, “acting in the hope of independence” ultimately “rose up like one man, in their centers of emigration, and stood by the side of the Allies.” From their vantage point in 1926, they were, however, severely disappointed, for the country was “divided, colonized, and oppressed instead of being liberated and enjoying independence.”<sup>5</sup>

At the heart of the 1925 rebellion was not only widespread dissatisfaction with the administration of the mandate, but an ongoing debate over the future of Syria and Lebanon that began with the First World War. Sawda’s piece in *al-Huda* is revealing on a number of levels. It demonstrates that the Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927, often depicted as a nationalist rebellion, was with the crossing into Lebanon, far more contested. For many Christians of the region and abroad, the revolt acted as an arena wherein past communal ruptures were revisited. The Syrian Revolt provoked international discussions concerning the nature of the French mandate; it also forced new discussions about the future political makeup of the region. Supporters and detractors of the 1925 revolt debated a number of questions related to the meaning of sovereignty and independence, the place of French power and control within those meanings, the geographic boundaries of the Syrian state (particularly as it related to Lebanon and its large number of Christian inhabitants), as well as the nature of political and economic organization within the state. Such debates thus highlighted both the fact of multiple interpretations among Syrians of Wilson’s Fourteen Points, as well as the discordance between many of these interpretations and the practice and logic of French colonial rule. Such debates and the mobilizations around them,

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

however, were not confined to the borders of the French mandate. In fact, they featured the participation of Syrian émigrés in Egypt, Europe, and the Americas.

The experience of migration, of settlement in a foreign place, encouraged Syrians and Lebanese living abroad to question their identities, and to imagine their homeland. As the tract by the Syro-Palestinian Congress suggested, the politicization of diaspora identity had its beginnings with the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. In this pre-World War I period, the long-distance organizing of Syrian émigrés was part of a broader “international turn,” in which the new technologies of the period produced an infrastructure that encouraged individuals everywhere to imagine a world beyond their own.<sup>6</sup> By the same token, the press and telegraph afforded migrant communities the opportunity to remain in touch with their birthplaces. Moreover, the globalization of the nineteenth century had fostered civil society institutions across the world, whose “members increasingly thought, and acted, globally.”<sup>7</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, the growth of national and international spaces, institutions, and projects grew in tandem with, and reinforced, one another. This “fascination with the novelty of internationality” reflected a “self-consciousness with which an increasingly literate and mobile mainly middle-class public heaped their own ambitions for change onto the material changes in their everyday lives, and how they imagined those lives.”<sup>8</sup>

The goal of this chapter is two-fold. It simultaneously examines the evolving relationship of émigré Syrians and Lebanese to twentieth-century international politics and spaces, as well as

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<sup>6</sup> Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 5.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Arsan, Su Lin Lewis, and Anne-Isabelle Richard, "Editorial—the roots of global civil society and the interwar moment," *Journal of Global History* 7.02 (2012), 158.

<sup>8</sup> Sluga, 11.

the various nationalist visions that emerged in tandem with this increasingly international consciousness. This chapter will therefore consider the debates and origins of the “long-distance nationalism” that pre-dated the Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927 by exploring the intellectual and political endeavors of Syrian and Lebanese diaspora groups as they organized “in search of the nation” in Egypt and beyond.<sup>9</sup> In response to the challenges that the 1908 revolution posed to the Ottoman provinces of Syria and Lebanon, two differing reform movements emerged. The first of these, Lebanism, sought to protect the special privileges of Mount Lebanon from the encroaching power of the state. Syrianism too emerged in response to the centralizing and Turkifying agenda of Istanbul, but advanced a much broader geo-cultural construct for the region, one which aimed to unite the Arab provinces on the basis of their shared common language and heritage. This chapter demonstrates that advocates of these two groups often tactically conspired and overlapped, but by the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 steered in two distinct political directions at odds with one another. As the overall dissertation will illustrate, this struggle over the geographic unity and composition of the former Syrian-Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire would come to be a hallmark of the Syrian Revolt of 1925.

The First World War raised the stakes for Syrian and Lebanese living in the *mahjar*, as questions over sovereignty, political representation and citizenship of new postwar states came to the fore. During the war, Syria and Lebanon were effectively cut off from communication with the outside world. Émigrés in Cairo, Alexandria, Paris, New York and elsewhere consequently saw a window of opportunity to assert their presence in postwar arrangements. Although the

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<sup>9</sup> Benedict Anderson, "Long-distance nationalism," *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World* (1998), 58-74. See also Nina Schiller and Georges Fouron, *Georges woke up laughing: Long-distance nationalism and the search for home* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001). “In search of nation,” is the title of a section in Kais Firro’s book *Inventing Lebanon: Nationalism and the State under the Mandate* (London, IB Tauris: 2002).



transnational organizing of Syrians predated the First World War, the prevailing political climate around the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 was one of a new international order symbolized by the League of Nations. This chapter makes the case that Syrian nationalist hopefuls and their attendant diaspora communities very much saw themselves participating in this new order. In doing so, it sets the stage for the diasporic mobilizations around the Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927. More specifically, this chapter will trace the origins of Syrian transnational organizing from the diasporic civic-consciousness of the late-Ottoman period, to the more thoroughgoing and conscientious nationalist projects of World War I. Everywhere, Syrians and Lebanese asserted their right to representation through the formation of associations and the organizing of public gatherings in which they drafted resolutions, voted, and made their voices heard. Newspapers, telegrams, tracts and petitions became the tools by which they disseminated their opinions, developed, and demonstrated their national and international presence.

The chapter opens with a focus on the *Alliance Libanaise*, exploring the ways in which the questions of emigration and homeland politics became intertwined in the late Ottoman period. The local concerns of the Arab provinces were taken up and manifested in transnational ways by migrant associations, producing the linked movements of Lebanism and Syrianism. The discussion then transitions to the politicization of migrant groups around World War I and the “Wilsonian Moment,” when Syrian and Lebanese groups abroad mobilized around divergent geo-political agendas. Finally, the chapter will focus on the establishment of the Syro-Palestinian Congress in 1921 in relationship to the League of Nations, and its eventual role as a critical interlocutor on behalf of the rebels during the 1925 revolt.

### **A Strewn Population**

In 1908, news of the restoration of the Ottoman constitution reverberated throughout the heartland of the Ottoman Empire. Syrian and Lebanese societies in Egypt celebrated the news, holding demonstrations, meetings and parties.<sup>10</sup> What came to be called the Young Turk Revolution, however, was read in a myriad of ways. For some, it ushered in the possibility of a unified and cohesive empire. Others mobilized around the revolution in order to preserve the autonomous privileges and culture of the Arab provinces.<sup>11</sup> A sizable contingent of educated Lebanese in Egypt, Yusuf al-Sawda included, were alarmed at rumors suggesting that the new governor (*mutasarraf*) of Mount Lebanon was willing to part with the special privileges the region had gained with the *Règlement Organique* of 1861. Accompanied by Antoine al-Jumayil, Yusuf al-Sawda traveled back to his home country in the summer of 1909 to assess the situation.<sup>12</sup> His fears seemed to be confirmed. Consequently, Yusuf al-Sawda requested a meeting with the Maronite Patriarch, Elias Huwayik in Bkirké in order to discuss with him “the fears of the Lebanese in Egypt concerning the schemes of the Ottoman state.”<sup>13</sup> As the Patriarch was out of town, Sawda met with Bishop Abu Najm, who apparently instructed him to create an organization in Egypt for the defense of Lebanon’s rights. Although Egypt was replete with Syrian and Lebanese philanthropic, social and cultural clubs, it lacked a political organization to

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<sup>10</sup> Faris Birjis al-Jumayil, *Hizb al-Ittihad al-Lubnani wa Lubnan al-Kabir 1909-1922* (Beirut: al-markaz al-istishari lil i‘lam wal tawthiq al-madrasi, 1996), 100-105.

<sup>11</sup> On the topic of the Young Turks, see Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997). Also see Bedross der Matossian, *Shattered Dreams of Revolution: From Liberty to Violence in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> Jumayil, 103.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

mobilize around the cause of the motherland.<sup>14</sup> Using two early examples of Lebanese and Syrian reformist mobilizations (first, the *Alliance Libanaise*, and secondly, the Arab Congress of 1913), this chapter seeks to demonstrate the ways in which the diasporic condition of their members was an essential element in their growing civic consciousness.

During the long nineteenth century, societies, associations, clubs and leagues were formed across the globe, facilitated by the burst in new print, communication and transportation technologies. Everywhere, "literati, campaigners, and reformers" adopted global outlooks.<sup>15</sup> The *Alliance Libanaise*, established in Egypt in 1909, was one such organization. While the Syrian community of Egypt had always been active—plugged into a network of journalists, radicals, and social activists—the *Alliance Libanaise* is thought to be one of the first groups in the *mahjar* to organize around a political platform aimed at the homeland.<sup>16</sup> From their base in Egypt, Lebanese reformists hoped to affect the political and economic situation in Mount Lebanon. Egypt had long had a sizable Syrian community, and by the end of the nineteenth century had become a safe haven for Syrians and Lebanese, Christians in particular, wishing to evade the censorship of the Ottoman state. As Andrew Arsan has demonstrated, the *Alliance Libanaise* was part of this larger reform network, which included other groups like the Paris-based *Comité Libanais* and the New York-based *Lebanon League of Progress*.<sup>17</sup> By 1919 these groups would

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 105. Also recounted in Yusuf al-Sawda, *Istiqlal Lubnan wal-Ittihad al-Lubnani fi al-Iskandariya* (Alexandria: Matba'ait al-Hilal, 1922), 29.

<sup>15</sup> Arsan Lewis, and Richard, "Editorial—the roots of global civil society and the interwar moment," 158.

<sup>16</sup> For more on the radicalism of the Eastern Mediterranean, see Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Arsan, "‘This age is the age of associations’: committees, petitions, and the roots of interwar Middle Eastern internationalism," *Journal of Global History* 7.02 (2012), 168.

come to differ on their designs for the future of Syria and Lebanon, but they each grew out of the momentum for reform stemming from the 1908 Young Turk Revolution. Thus, the roots of the interwar internationalism that came to enmesh the Syrian Revolt of the 1925-1927 are more properly located in the Ottoman period. Civil society measures specific to the Ottoman imperial context, such as the tradition of petitioning the sultan, paved the way for the transnational campaigns of Syrian migrants.<sup>18</sup>

Yet, as Arsan astutely points out, two qualities shaped and distinguished transnational campaigns that focused on Mount Lebanon. The first of these was their reliance on a "mechanisms of shared sovereignty."<sup>19</sup> The *Règlement Organique* of 1861-1864 ensured the "international guarantee" of Mount Lebanon's *mutasarrifiyya*. Those seeking to defend Mount Lebanon's special status could bypass Ottoman authority by addressing their grievances to European powers. For example, the *Alliance Libanaise* addressed its concerns to three sources of authority. It appealed to the Sublime Porte, the five European powers who guaranteed Lebanon's *mutasarrifiyya*, and the local Lebanese government. Such transnational organizing was further enhanced by the fact of Lebanese migration. The country's sizable migrant population meant that such mobilizations had an "increasingly transnational character."<sup>20</sup> By the turn of the century, the unique history of Mount Lebanon and the surrounding region reinforced its local-global connections.

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<sup>18</sup> Arsan, 173.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

Writing from Egypt, the *Alliance Libanaise* observed that migration had “strewn the Lebanese people all over the world,” draining the country of its livelihood.<sup>21</sup> Whereas the intellectually motivated youth of Lebanon headed towards the *mahjar* those left behind quibbled over religious and internal disputes, reflecting the “sectarian” (confessional) system put in place after the religious fighting that broke out in 1860.<sup>22</sup> It would thus have to be the migrants themselves, detached as they were from the infighting, who would organize a “movement” to bring about reform and autonomy for Lebanon. At its inception, the *Alliance Libanaise* tapped into the well-established networks of the *mahjar* to spread its bylaws and political agenda, reaching out to émigrés in Europe and the Americas. Sawda himself colluded with Na’um Mukarzil in New York, the publisher of one of the leading Arabic language periodicals of the United States, to encourage him to establish a like-minded association.<sup>23</sup> In his letter to Mukarzil, dated 1910, Sawda wrote: “As you know, we the Lebanese are scattered in four corners of the world, we appear strong as individuals, but weak as a group.”<sup>24</sup> Sawda’s incentive to organize across borders thus stemmed from a problem that he saw as a lack of group power among the sizeable Lebanese migrant public. If the “scattered” Lebanese could work as one they could assert enough power to implement change back home, and in the case of the skeptical *Alliance Libanaise*, protect Mount Lebanon’s autonomy from the encroaching authority of the new Ottoman government. In other letters, Sawda expounded upon the reasons why the *muhajirun*, or emigrants, needed to take the lead on reforms in the motherland; the local Lebanese government

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<sup>21</sup> Sawda, *Istiqlal Lubnan*, 29.

<sup>22</sup> Sawda, *Istiqlal Lubnan*, 15.

<sup>23</sup> Université Saint-Esprit de Kaslik, the Phoenix Center for Lebanese Studies (henceforth PCLS), Yusuf Sawda Collection (henceforth YS), 3B-044, Letter from Sawda to Mukarzil (15 November 1910).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

was powerless to defend the special regime of the Mount Lebanon *mutasarrifiyya*.<sup>25</sup> Other reasons to form such émigré organizations included inspiring young Lebanese abroad to touch base with their lost identities.<sup>26</sup>

Though the *Alliance Libanaise* grew out of the momentum of late Ottoman reforms, it nevertheless cautiously eyed the efforts of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) in Mount Lebanon. In its first few years, the *Alliance Libanaise* sought to protect the autonomous privileges of the mountain from the centralizing policies of the government. Yet the agenda of the organization also went beyond a simple defense of Mount Lebanon's status. They would soon also agitate for the expansion of Mount Lebanon's borders. In the minds of the *Alliance Libanaise*, migration was a double-edge sword, exacerbated by the 1861 boundaries of the Mount Lebanon *mutasarrifiyya*.<sup>27</sup> As Beirut grew into a booming port city, groups like the *Alliance Libanaise* began to assert that the borders of the *mutasarrifiyya* cut it off from important coastal trade routes. Without a port city of its own, Lebanon's body was figuratively severed of its limbs, and therefore incapacitated both economically and politically. Consequently, Lebanese youth were forced to look elsewhere for their livelihoods. The *Alliance Libanaise* thereby argued that the extension of Lebanon's autonomous borders would create the necessary conditions to lure migrants back to Lebanon. Though it isn't clear if the organization had promoted the extension of Mount Lebanon as early as 1909, "What is certain is that more than any other

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<sup>25</sup> PCLS, YS 3B-48, Letter from Sawda to Philip Khazin (20 August 1910).

<sup>26</sup> PCLS, YS 3B-70, Letter from Sawda to Najib 'Izet and Khalil Bayk (24 August 1910).

<sup>27</sup> In response to the civil war in 1860, foreign powers had pressured the Ottoman government to reorganize the administration of Mount Lebanon, giving it autonomous status as a *mutasarrifiyya* overseen by a non-Lebanese Ottoman Christian, and a council representing Mount Lebanon's religious communities. Beirut, on the other hand, remained a part of the Ottoman province (vilayet) of Syria, until 1888 at which point it became a separate *vilayet* of its own.

Lebanese society, from 1912 and notably 1919, al-Ittihad al-Lubnani carried the expansion of Lebanon as its banner."<sup>28</sup> The rationale of the *Alliance Libanaise* was not singular or unique, but part of a growing Ottoman-Arab dissident movement pushing for decentralization in the Arab provinces.

The *Alliance Libanaise* did not act in a vacuum. Its actions paralleled those of other groups both inside and outside the Ottoman Empire, although it is important to note that they represented only a small minority of Syria and Lebanon's educated elite. An intellectual movement predating the *Alliance Libanaise* and their push for a "Greater Lebanon," advanced the idea of a Greater Syria. This "Syrianism" had two currents: one that unified around the idea of a common Arab culture and history, and another that distinguished Syrians from the Arabs ethnically, locating their roots in the ancient Phoenicians or Aramaic people.<sup>29</sup> By 1912, numerous open and secret Arab societies were established in Istanbul, Beirut, Damascus, and beyond, including the Ottoman Arab Fraternity (1908) and the Arab Literary Club (1909) in Istanbul, the Young Arab Society (1909) in Paris, the Beirut Reform Society (1912), and the Decentralization Party (1912) in Cairo. Though these groups differed regarding certain goals and tactics, many shared a common displeasure with the centralizing, and Turkifying, agenda of some members of Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). They pushed for more local administration of the Arab provinces, defended the use of Arabic as an official language in schools and courts, and sought to enhance the economic opportunities of the region. Though the traditional historiography has treated these efforts as precursors to a burgeoning Arab

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<sup>28</sup> Kais Firro, "Lebanese Nationalism versus Arabism: From Bulus Nujaym to Michel Chiha," *Middle Eastern Studies* 40.5 (2004), 17.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

nationalism, revisionist histories have rather located these attempts in a broader empire-wide modernization process.<sup>30</sup> Syrians groups thus pushed for decentralization and reform in specifically modern ways—forming societies, petitioning their local and central governments, debating in journals, and holding public protests.<sup>31</sup> In other words, they were partaking in a growing civil society, characterized by the broadening of social, political and economic horizons.<sup>32</sup>

In 1913, Syrians residing in Paris reached out to Cairo’s Decentralization Party, as well as the Beirut Reform Society, to organize what would come to be called the Arab Congress. They praised the efforts of the Decentralization Party, and sought to play their part in Paris, through “debates in newspapers,” holding speeches, and more importantly, by shining an international spotlight on the situation in the Arab lands.<sup>33</sup> The meeting took place at the Geographical Society in Paris, and aimed to pressure the Ottoman government to implement a policy of decentralization in the Arab provinces. The choice to hold the congress in Paris was at once an attempt to internationalize their campaign, as well as a reflection of the worldview of the attendees. They sought to place their demands and opinions before Europe, whose “interests in the Ottoman lands increased by the day.”<sup>34</sup> But they also sought to build a bridge between “East and West,” and Paris was chosen for its sizable Arab population. Moreover, the fact of migration

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<sup>30</sup> For more on the Congress see Ceren Abi, "Modern Expectations: Demands for Reform by the Arabs in the Late Ottoman Empire," *Tarih: Graduate History Journal*, 2 (Istanbul: Boğaziçi University, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> *Al mu'tamar al-'arabi al-awwal: al-mun'aqid fi al-qa'ah al-kubra lil-jam'iyah al-jughrafiyah bi shari' san jarmin fi Paris min yawm al-arbi'a' 13 rajab sanat 1331/18 Hhaziran sanat 1913 ila yawm al ithnayn 18 rajab sanat 1331/23 haziran sanat 1913* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Busfur, 1913).

<sup>32</sup> See the discussion in the “Introduction” in James Gelvin and Nile Green, eds., *Global Muslims in the Age of Steam and Print* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

<sup>33</sup> *Al mu'tamar al-'arabi*, Ibid., 6.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 19.



was on their minds, and given the number of emigrants from the Arab provinces was significant, they sought to send delegates to the Paris congress to represent them.

Nevertheless, the congress organizers spoke not in the name of the Syrian people, but in the name of the “*mutanawirrun*,” or the “enlightened” class of Syrians. The mobility of the congress-goers attested to their detachment from the broader Syrian population. Attending the congress were heads of reform societies, notables, publishers, lawyers, and representatives from Beirut, Ba‘albak, Cairo, Paris, New York, and Mexico (in addition to Iraqi students residing in Paris). This list notably included: Iskandar ‘Ammun (who in addition to founding the Alliance Libanaise also joined the Decentralization Party), Na‘um Mukarzil (the leader of the Lebanon League of Progress in New York, and the editor of the New York periodical *al-Huda*), and Najib Diab (the publisher of *Mir‘at al-Gharb* also in New York).<sup>35</sup> For the most part, the agenda of the conference focused on decentralization and the preservation of Arab rights, but its fourth and final topic centered on “migration to and from Syria.” Leading this discussion was Shaykh Ahmad al-Tabbarah, proprietor of the Beirut periodical, *al-Islah*, and a member of the Beirut Reform Society. Defining Syria as the *vilayets* of Damascus, Aleppo, Beirut, as well as the *mutasarrifiyas* of Lebanon and Jerusalem, Tabbarah estimated the number of emigrants from Syria at the time to be a little over half a million. He rhetorically wondered how the “Syrian who loved his homeland,” could possibly risk treacherous waters to leave it. Tabbarah blamed emigration on cramped living conditions and narrow opportunities, which he considered to be a byproduct of maladministration. Elaborating upon the progress and intellect of the Syrians, Tabbarah went on to proclaim that had the Syrians been offered enough freedom to procure “a real political life,” they would better contribute to the progress and civilization of the Ottoman

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 14-15.

Empire.<sup>36</sup> Tabarrah hence asserted that the progress of the Syrians was essential to the success of the Ottoman Empire. Nevertheless, this progress was impossible if Syria remained isolated.

Tabarrah elaborated:

How can we preserve our political life if we are completely secluded from the world? For are we from one Adam, and they from another? Or do they have two hearts, two minds, and we only have one heart and one mind. Nay, the world is one, and our minds are the same. When the West was lost in the abyss of ignorance, the East was flourishing in its knowledge, exceeding in its civilization. Then the planet turned, and the situation reversed. The teacher became the student, and the student the teacher.<sup>37</sup>

In a further demonstration of their global outlook, every session of the congress began with the reading of telegrams of support from groups, societies, and individuals—men and women—from around the world. Conference attendees gave numerous speeches about the important role of the *muhajirun* in homeland politics. Hailing from New York, Najib Diab pronounced upon the hopes of the *muhajirun* who were compelled to leave their home country. They wished to join the voices of the homeland in their calls for reform. According to Diab, immigrants had “tasted freedom, and knew of the blessings of decentralization.” They dwelled in lands of “justice,” “equality,” and “progress.” They had mingled with civilized people, and had first-hand knowledge of the benefits of constitutional governments. Diab pronounced:

Reform is our desired aim, so let us stand up and call for reform, our hands clasped in yours. You in Greater Syria (*bilad al-sham*) and we in the land of Uncle Sam, let's raise our voices to ask for our rights, not for mercy, but to seek reform under the banner of the Crescent.<sup>38</sup>

By holding their meeting in Paris, and by projecting their grievances to a European, international audience, members of the congress sidestepped the authority of the Ottoman

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 67.

government. Nevertheless, while some were clear about their desire for European help, most were careful to call themselves Ottomans, while stating their desire to work within the framework of the Ottoman nation. These disagreements ultimately hindered the achievements of the meeting. In negotiating Arab demands for reform, CUP officials divided their attention between more loyal factions in Istanbul, and the conference organizers in Paris. Though an agreement in Paris met most of the demands, it was ultimately never fully implemented, and produced little change. Furthermore, with the start of the First World War, the Ottoman state publicly executed a few of its attendees in 1915—Shaykh Ahmad Tabarrah included—due to their alleged collaboration with the French and British powers.

Regardless, the Paris Congress of 1913 can be regarded as an important milestone in the politicization of a specifically Syrian civic consciousness.<sup>39</sup> As the examples of the *Alliance Libanaise* and the Arab Congress illustrate, the global outlook of Syrian and Lebanese preceded the “Wilsonian moment” on the eve of 1919. Prior to the nationalist projects of the Wilsonian era, Syrian and Lebanese understood themselves to be part of a community that extended beyond the borders of the Ottoman Empire. Syrian migrants felt entitled to speak to the issues of their homeland, and, at times, saw themselves better suited to take on the task of reform; their experiences abroad endowed them with the tools necessary to act as interlocutors between their homeland and the outside world. Through their ability to engage the Syrian as well as global press, through the capacity to circumvent the state, through their nearness to whom they came to perceive as international figures, migrants felt that they could also affect the political landscape back home.

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<sup>39</sup> See the discussion in Maria del Mar Logroño Narbona, *The Development of Nationalist Identities in French Syria and Lebanon: A Transnational Dialogue with Arab Immigrants to Argentina and Brazil, 1915--1929*. (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of California, Santa Barbara, 2007), 40-43.

## Émigré Activism in 1919: A Wilsonian Moment?

After the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, European powers vied for the control of its former territories. Conflicting wartime arrangements slated Amir Faysal, the son of the Sharif Husayn, against France to rule over Syria. The Bolshevik publication of secret negotiations between Britain and France over the future of the former Arab provinces of the Ottoman confirmed Syrian suspicions of colonial designs for the region. Such secret agreements went against the ostensible ideals of the Paris Peace Conference, as well as the widely popular Wilsonian rhetoric of self-determination. In response, Syrian notables in Cairo of the newly formed Party of Syrian Unity anonymously addressed a memorandum to the British government, questioning their desire to facilitate the establishment of an independent state in the region. In response, the British issued a “Declaration to the Seven” on June 16, 1918, which recognized the “complete and sovereign independence of the Arabs in areas in Arabia which were free and independent before the war,” as well as in areas “emancipated from Turkish control by the actions of the Arabs themselves during the present war.” Former Ottoman territories under Allied occupation should be free to form a future government “based on the principle of the consent of the governed.”<sup>40</sup> Though its language was ambiguous, the Declaration could be read in contradiction to the separate agreements between Sharif Hussein and Sir Henry McMahon, as well as the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and the Balfour Declaration.

In a similar vein, Britain and France issued a joint declaration on November 7, 1918, stating that the two powers would help bring about the establishment in the region of “national

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<sup>40</sup> As quoted in Timothy Paris, *Britain, the Hashemites and Arab Rule: The Sherifian Solution* (London: Routledge, 2004), 47.

governments and administrations deriving their authority from the initiative and free choice of the indigenous populations.”<sup>41</sup> The caveat, however, was that this would be undertaken with the assistance and advice of Britain and France. Headquartered in Damascus, Amir Faysal henceforth ruled over the first Arab state of the postwar period between October 1918 and July 1920. While a number of Syrian elites initially supported Faysal’s rule over Syria, his authority quickly unraveled. Not only was a pan-Arab government realistically ill fated against French plans for the region, but the Faysal’s government had little popular support from the start.<sup>42</sup> More importantly, for all the French, British, and Hashemite designs for the region, there were as many if not more Syrian-Lebanese hopes and schemes.

With the close of the war, Syrians everywhere clamored to have their voices heard, and mobilized in accordance with the Anglo-French Joint Declaration as well as Wilson’s Fourteen Points. Groups far beyond the reaches of power nevertheless went to great lengths to have their opinions counted and represented through telegrams, private meetings with European and American officials, and the holding of public meetings throughout the diaspora. The French minister in Cuba, for example, warned that Syrians there were receiving English and Arabic postcards, circulars, and pamphlets from the “New Syria National League” in New York, calling upon Syrians to seek the protection of the United States.<sup>43</sup> On October 14, 1918, the Syrians of Sydney, Australia—who were mainly “Orthodox and Melkite”—gathered together at the Redfern Town-Hall in the presence of the local mayor to issue a “resolution of gratitude and

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<sup>41</sup> J.C. Hurewitz. *The Middle East and North Africa in World Politics: a Documentary Record* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 112.

<sup>42</sup> For more on the Faysali period, see James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>43</sup> Archives de Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Henceforth MAE-La Courneuve) Syrie-Liban, Vol. 9, Carton 313, French Minister (Havana) to MAE (Paris), “Affaires Syriennes” (12 February 1919).

loyalty” to the Allied forces on their victory in Palestine and Asia.<sup>44</sup> Sydney’s “Maronite colony” for their part gathered in a public meeting and “passed a vote of congratulations and fidelity to France.”<sup>45</sup> “In view of the approaching Peace Conference in which the future of Syria will no doubt be discussed and determined,” the Manchester Syrian Association of the United Kingdom wrote a letter to Stephan Pichon, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, stating in a matter-of-fact manner that Syria comprised “the tract border North by the Taurus range, East by the River Euphrates South East by the confines of Arabia, South by Sinai and the Hijaz, and West by Sinai and the Mediterranean.” It was the “earnest desire” of the organization “to see the unity of Syria respected and her federation with her Arab neighbors established in the near future.”<sup>46</sup> Inspired by the coming Paris Peace Conference of 1919, Syrian-Lebanese around the world thus mobilized and performed their nationalism in tandem with the happenings in Paris, at once illustrating to the Great Powers that their voices ought to be included with those of their compatriots back home. In such a way, they also asserted their place within the nation, though it was physically out of reach.

Erez Manela has defined the eve of the Paris Peace Conference as a “Wilsonian moment,” when the ideas of the American leader captured the hearts and minds of people across the world, spurring a wave of transnational and international mobilizations.<sup>47</sup> Along the lines of

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<sup>44</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 7, Carton 313, “Affaires Libanaises,” Consul General of France (Sydney) to MAE (Paris) (3 January 1919).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 7, Carton 313, Letter by the Manchester Syrian Association to MAE (Paris) (9 January 1919). This group notably included among its members the father of historian Albert Hourani.

<sup>47</sup> Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

Arsan's arguments, however, the previous section has attempted to illustrate that Syrian-Lebanese transnational organizing was not unique to the interwar period, but had roots in the late Ottoman period. The creation of diaspora associations, the use of petitions, and claims to representation, were uniquely born of a history specific to Mount Lebanon and the surrounding region's relationship to the outside world. Nevertheless, 1919 did mark a seminal moment in world history, and in the diaspora activism of Syrian émigrés more specifically. The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire encouraged the reformists of the pre-war period to think of their localities in nationalist terms. It is in this period that émigrés began popularizing and politicizing nationalist myths: for the *Alliance Libanaise* it was Phoenicianism; Shukri Ghanim of the Paris-based *Comité Central Syrien* advocated a non-Arab Syrian nationalism; meanwhile, Amir Faysal espoused pan-Arab nationalism linking the Levant and the Hijaz. Not only did politically active elites have to account the absence of the Sublime Porte, but the League of Nations further introduced a new organizing logic for European international relations.<sup>48</sup> The presence of the League created a novel forum for the articulation of nationalist concerns, and in the case of the Syro-Palestinian Congress (which will be the later focus of this chapter), additionally acted as a new site for the performance of internationality, as well as an arena in which the conclusions of the Peace Conference could be contested.<sup>49</sup>

On the other hand, the "Wilsonian" ideal of self-determination, and the goal of immediate independence in particular, were not universally appropriated by Syrian-Lebanese. Many worked within, and sought to preserve, an imperial (particularly French) logic, that often went hand in hand with the goal of protecting minorities in the region. This is to say that Wilsonianism was

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<sup>48</sup> See Susan Pedersen, "Back to the League of Nations," *The American historical review* 112.4 (2007).

<sup>49</sup> See Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism*.

not the only authoritative or meaningful political option available to non-Europeans on the eve of the Paris Peace Conference. Yet, the organizing principle of self-determined nation-states continued to hold sway, and the end of the so-called "Wilsonian moment" also signaled the slow demise of European colonialism.<sup>50</sup>

As Syrians and Lebanese acted globally, French colonial agents sought to counteract their designs in kind. Even before the establishment of the French mandate, French diplomatic and military officers in Egypt and elsewhere beyond their colonial territories paid keen attention to the political maneuverings of Syrian-Lebanese émigré groups. With a sense of urgency, French officials in Egypt noted the effect of Syrian affairs on émigrés, and on Egypt as a whole.<sup>51</sup> The French believed that the “Syrian colony constitute[d] the intellectual elite of the country,” who were nevertheless passionate about the affairs of their homeland. More importantly, however, by the close of 1918 the French believed that the “center of anti-French politics” was in Cairo.<sup>52</sup> Propaganda emanating from Egypt spread to Syria, influencing the intellectual and notable communities there. In particular, the French suspected that former Syrian officials of the Anglo-Egyptian government were the conduits for “Anglo-Sharifian” agitation in Syria. Such propaganda worked against French designs in Syria by instead assigning favor to Britain and the

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<sup>50</sup> Manela, 5.

<sup>51</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 7, Carton 313, “Rapport du Chef de Bataillon Sarrou—à la suite de sa tournée au Caire et à Alexandrie (26-30 novembre 1918)” (2 December 1918).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.



United States.<sup>53</sup> The French also noted the activities of Syrians in Europe, as well as North and South America, identifying newspapers and individuals that campaigned for or against them.<sup>54</sup>

Émigré activism thus burgeoned with the start of the First World War. Diaspora associations came to see the fight for the future of Syria and Lebanon as one that rested upon the active participation of Syrians across the world. Three differing political visions defined the political aspirations of the wartime period. There were those who envisioned a sovereign and independent Lebanon, those who advocated for a federated Greater Syria, and those who supported Amir Faysal's Arab kingdom. The divisions between these groups, however, did not fall neatly along these lines, but rather on the basis of support for or against foreign aegis over the region once the war ended. Moreover, only three groups were actually heard at the Paris Peace Conference: the members of the Lebanese Administrative Council, Amir Faysal, and Shukri Ghanim of the Paris based *Comité Central Syrien*.

As it became clear that the tide was turning in favor of the Allied forces, groups like the *Alliance Libanaise* began asserting their political agendas on an international scale. By 1918, the *Alliance Libanaise* had bolstered its political platform, and began reaching out to foreign powers regarding its hopes for Lebanon's future. As the war came to a close, the *Alliance* pushed harder for the international guarantee of an independent and expanded "Lebanon in its natural

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 7, Carton 313, French Minister (Buenos Aires) to MAE (Paris), "Syriens d'Argentine," (1 January 1919). Also see MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 7, Carton 313, French Minister (Beunos Aires) to MAE (Paris), "Buenos Ayres" (2 January 1919). In Argentina, for example, the French Legation countered the pro-independence activities of the Party of Arab Independence" by encouraging groups to publish articles in favor of the French mandate in Syria. Moreover, the French Minister there collaborated with pro-Allied groups like the "Union Siria" to convince them to become a "sole supporter of France," and even encouraged them to send telegrams to President Wilson denouncing Syria's attachment to the Hijaz, and demanding independence under "French hegemony."

frontiers.”<sup>55</sup> These “natural frontiers” would include the districts of Tripoli to ‘Akkar, the city of Beirut and the districts of Sayda, Sour, and Marj’ayun, as well as the districts of Hasbaya, Rashaya of the Biqa‘, and Ba‘albak. Influenced by the nationalist movement in Egypt, Yusuf al-Sawda and others came to narrativize Lebanon’s autonomy by adopting Phoenicianism as a means of reinforcing Lebanese exceptionalism.<sup>56</sup> In a 1918 memorandum, the group declared that the Lebanese had historically enjoyed “full administrative autonomy.” A simple glance to their ancient Phoenician ancestors—“whose civilization had spread in all parts of the known world”—revealed their proclivity for self-rule, as well as their distinguished them from their Arab and Turkish neighbors. The memorandum continued:

One might recall that before the Arab conquest, the inhabitants of Lebanon’s mountains were grouped into autonomous communities governed by their princes according to their laws, their customs and traditions, and subject to the suzerainty of Rome and Byzantium. These communities maintained their autonomy throughout the centuries under the Arabs, the Crusaders, the sultans of Egypt and the Ottoman Turks.<sup>57</sup>

To the annoyance of the French, the group also advanced this narrative in order to justify their rejection of a French protectorate. Moreover, according to a French agent in Cairo, the group alternatively exploited “the declarations of Mr. Wilson, and the Joint Declaration by the French and British governments,” “in order to convince the “entire Syrian opinion that it should not count on France.”<sup>58</sup> The French considered this to be a “serious inconvenience,” as it went

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<sup>55</sup> The British National Archives (henceforth TNA) Foreign Office (henceforth FO) 141/526, “Mémorandum sur les aspirations des Libanais” (8 January 1918).

<sup>56</sup> Kaufmann, 59.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol.7, Carton 313, “Rapport du Chef de Bataillon Sarrou—à la suite de sa tournée au Caire et à Alexandrie (26-30 novembre 1918)” (2 December 1918).

against prior agreements between France and Britain.<sup>59</sup> At first, the *Alliance Libanaise* had the support of the Maronite Patriarchate in Lebanon for its championing of the Lebanese cause. However, the anti-imperialist stance of the group would eventually contradict the strategic alliance of the Patriarch with the French in his bid to achieve an independent Lebanon that would act as a safe-haven for its significant Christian population. As the following pages of this chapter shall illustrate, ultimately the Patriarch, and not the *Alliance Libanaise*, would come to have the most influence in the creation of a Greater Lebanon in the fall of 1920.

Rivaling the *Alliance Libanaise* and its agenda for an independent, Greater Lebanon was the *Comité Central Syrien*, established in Paris in 1917 by Shukri Ghanim and Georges Samneh. A Maronite from Beirut, Shukri Ghanim was a long time resident of France, and was one of the organizers of the Arab Congress in Paris in 1913.<sup>60</sup> Under French patronage, Ghanim and Samneh, promoted the idea of a federated Syria under French protection. With the start of Faysal's rule in Syria in 1918, Ghanim and Samneh "sharpened their advocacy for a non-Arab Greater Syria."<sup>61</sup> They disseminated their support for France in their journal, the *Correspondance d'Orient*, and played an instrumental role in the creation and recruitment of Syrian volunteers to fight for the *Legion d'Orient* during the First World War.<sup>62</sup> Ghanim and Samneh further asserted that Syrians differed both culturally and racially from the people of the

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<sup>59</sup> TNA, FO 144/526/1, Agence Diplomatique et Consul Général de France en Egypte, "Note Verbale" (12 August 1918).

<sup>60</sup> Kaufman, 83. Zamir, 48. It is important to note that a *Comité Central Syrien* was founded in Paris in 1909 by Rashid Mutran which called for the independence of the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. However, it is not clear whether this organization was directly linked to Ghanim's activities in 1917. See Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks*, for information on the activities of the committee in 1909.

<sup>61</sup> Kaufman, 83.

<sup>62</sup> Farenthold, "Transnational Modes and Media" 40.

Arabian Peninsula.<sup>63</sup> Samneh in particular traced the ethnic origins of the Syrians to the Aramaic people, while Ghanim tended towards Phoenicianism.<sup>64</sup> The group worked closely with and had the support of an organization based in Egypt, the *Comité Libano-Syrien*, under the leadership of Maronite notable, ‘Abdullah Sfeir.

The *Comité Libano-Syrien* was formed upon the announcement of the Anglo-French Joint Declaration in 1918, and claimed to have nearly 700 members in Cairo, Alexandria, Tanta and Mansourah. The French diplomatic agency had established good relations with a number of its members, including the Maronite Bishop Yusuf Daryan.<sup>65</sup> Like their coconspirators in Paris, the group also sought to separate the Syrian question from the Arab one by asserting that although the Arabic language was spoken in Syria, Syrians were not totally of the Arab race, and had in any case “reached a fairly advanced stage of modern Western civilization,” as well as “a higher degree of culture than that of Arabia.”<sup>66</sup> To this end, the group advocated for “a federative system of autonomous provinces,” leaving Lebanon, already autonomous, the right to develop its legitimate aspirations.<sup>67</sup>

Perhaps the group to inspire the most paranoia among French agents in Egypt was the Party of Syrian Union (*Hizb al-Ittihad al-Suri*), also based in Cairo. Many of the founding members of the Syrian Union had been active in the Ottoman-era Decentralization Party. This

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<sup>63</sup> Kaufman, 83.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 7, Carton 313, French Minister Lefèvre-Pontalis (Cairo) to MAE (Paris), “A.S. des Comités Syriens d’Egypte” (9 January 1919).

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban 7, “Association des Comités Libano-Syriens d’Egypte” (1919).

included the Greek Orthodox Michel Lutfallah, the Muslim scholar Rashid Rida, and the Arab nationalist ‘Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar.<sup>68</sup> Though this faction was “more concerned with a Greater Syria union scheme,” they initially banded together in 1918 with the intention of backing Amir Faysal and his short-lived Arab government in Syria (1918-1920).<sup>69</sup> With the imposition of the French mandatory regime, the Syrian Union offered to coordinate the activities of Syrian and Palestinian nationalist organizations that were now curtailed. Yet, it was not long before the group began to reflect the disaffection of a number of Syrian notables with the increasingly complicated and unfeasible Arab agenda initiated by the Arab Revolt of 1916-1918. With a newfound focus on “Syria for the Syrians” program, the party aimed to present its vision to the international commission to Syria in 1919. The president elect, Michel Lutfallah, was the son of wealthy Greek-Orthodox landowner from Syria who had done well for himself in Egypt. With its financial weight, the family took on various financial and political projects in Egypt, which included the ownership of a number of hotels and journals, as well as a shortlived attempt to create an Arabian National Bank of the Hijaz.<sup>70</sup> So vast was the fortune of the Lutfallahs that Sharif Husayn had bestowed the title of “Amir” on father Habib Lutfallah Pasha, “owing to the Lutfallah family’s financial and diplomatic services to the Hashemites during the Arab Revolt.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: the Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton University Press, 1987), 221. Also see Muhannad Salhi, *Palestine in the Evolution of Syrian Nationalism, 1918-1920* (Chicago: the Middle East Documentation Center, 2008), 116-117.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> See Philip S. Khoury, “‘Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar: An Independence Leader of Interwar Syria,” in *Transformed Landscapes: Essays on Palestine and the Middle East in Honor of Walid Khalidi*, Ed. Leila Tarazi Fawaz (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 2009).

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 39.

Despite their focus on Syria, the Syrian Union located its aspirations in a nationalist agenda that asserted that as whole Syria constituted “an Arab national group.”<sup>72</sup> It hoped to avoid the fate of colonial and Hashemite entanglements by achieving independence for Syria, Lebanon and Palestine as a federated entity. To this end, they sent their desiderata to the Paris Peace Conference, on the behalf of views expressed by Syrians “in Egypt, Europe, and other countries of emigration, as well as Syria itself.”<sup>73</sup> The program of the Syrian Union outlined a state that stretched “from the Taurus to the north; the Kharbour and Euphrates to the east; the desert of Arabia and Mada’in Saleh in the South; and the Red Sea, the line of Akaba-Rafah and Mediterranean Sea to the West.”<sup>74</sup> Unlike other Syrian unity schemes, which called upon the assistance or guarantee of one European power or another, the group demanded independence under the guarantee of the League of Nations, desired a democratic, decentralized and federated government, and sought a constitution that guaranteed the rights of minorities.<sup>75</sup> As far as a wider Arab unity scheme was concerned, this would remain a future goal.

The nationalist agendas of activists both inside and outside of Syria necessarily involved an outlook that extended beyond the borders of the nation—to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. Syrians everywhere came to view Paris (and later Geneva) as a space to assert their national and international presence. To this end, groups like *Alliance Libanaise*, the Syrian

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<sup>72</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 7, Carton 313, “Programme du Parti Central de l’Union Syrienne” (1919).

<sup>73</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 7, Carton 313, Letter from Syrian Union (Cairo) to MAE (Paris) (10 January 1919).

<sup>74</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 7, Carton 313, “Programme du Parti Central de l’Union Syrienne au Caire” (1919).

<sup>75</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 7, Carton 313, Letter from Syrian Union (Cairo) to MAE (Paris) (10 January 1919).

Union, and the *Comité Libano-Syrien* sent numerous telegrams, letters, and tracts to delegates of the conference, outlining their hopes for the region, while also soliciting the right to attend the conference. Ultimately, however, only three Syrian delegations were allowed to appear before the Peace Conference to speak to the question of Syria: a delegation headed by Faysal bin Husayn, members of the Lebanese Administrative Council, and lastly Shukri Ghanim of the Paris-based *Comité Central Syrien*.<sup>76</sup> Those who were not granted permission to attend, or otherwise did not possess the luxury of mobility, nevertheless remained in contact with Syrian and Lebanese delegates in Paris via telegrams. Syrians and Lebanese at home and in diaspora, in dialogue with one another and with European leaders, thereby attempted to shape the proceedings of the conference.

Only a few months into his rule, Amir Faysal left Damascus for Paris in November 1918, seeking to defend the arrangements the British had made with his father. Faysal first hoped to attain British support in London, but soon realized Britain intended to uphold its alliance with France. Faysal consequently sought refuge in Wilson's Fourteen Points. Addressing the conference, Faysal pled his case for an independent "Arab Asia," urged the Allies to follow up on their promises, defended the capabilities of Arab civilization towards self-rule, and finally asserted that the "Arab national demands conform completely to the principles enunciated by

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<sup>76</sup> The State Department also asked Dr. Howard Bliss, the American president of the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut to present a formal report on Syria. Like Faysal, Bliss also drew from Wilsonian ideals, and addressed an "impassioned plea for a commission of inquiry to ascertain the views of the people of Syria." Bliss further suggested that the Syrian people would likely pick the United States as their first choice as a mandatory power in Syria. His prediction signaled the growing popularity of the United States in the region. Those who were particularly averse to France's favoritism towards Catholic populations saw in the United States a more benevolent power. Many nationalist activists who were graduates of the Syrian Protestant College in Beirut also looked favorably upon the legacies of American missionary work, which imparted them with a secular and liberal education. Consequently, they readily adopted Wilson's proclamations

President Wilson, and which were agreed to by all the states of the world.”<sup>77</sup> Lastly, Faysal asked for an independent commission to be sent to the region to assess the desires of the people.

On the other hand, the members of the Lebanese Administrative Council traveled to Paris with the goal of thwarting Faysal’s designs for the region. In December 1918, the Administrative Council of Lebanon passed a resolution that advocated for the expansion of Lebanon’s borders, and called for an autonomous Lebanon under French protection. Soon after, select representatives of the Council traveled to Paris with this agenda in mind, even as it garnered protest from various groups for its support for France, the *Alliance Libanaise* being one such group. Though the *Alliance* was content that the Administrative Council had officially gotten on board with the idea of extending Lebanon’s borders, it was irked that the Council had called for France’s support. The *Alliance* based its opposition on the fact that Lebanese émigrés had not been consulted, nor afforded the chance “to return to their homes to join their voices to those of their citizens.”<sup>78</sup> The group further declared that the Council had no jurisdiction to take such a decision without the full consultation of the Lebanese people.

The link between delegates from Lebanon and activists in Paris proved to be decisive for their initial phase of the Conference when it opened in January 1919. Upon their arrival in Paris, members of the Lebanese delegation met with Shukri Ghanim “who was coordinating the various Syrian and Lebanese groups on behalf of the Quai d’Orsay to support a French mandate over Syria.”<sup>79</sup> Ghanim convinced the Lebanese delegation to throw their weight behind his

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<sup>77</sup> This excerpt is quoted in A.A. Allawi, *Faisal I of Iraq* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 200.

<sup>78</sup> MAE-La Courneuve Vol. 7, Carton 313, “Traduction de la protestation adressée par l’Alliance Libanaise aux membres du Conseil Administratif du Liban” (5 January 1919).

<sup>79</sup> Zamir, 53.



program, signaling to the “Council of Ten that Lebanon was willing to be part of a Syrian federation, on condition that Syria, like Lebanon, be placed under a French mandate.”<sup>80</sup> The fluidity of these various agendas demonstrated their tenuous nature, while also reflecting the dialogical relationship of diaspora activists to their compatriots back home.

A man well known on the French scene, Shukri Ghanim of the *Comité Central Syrien* presented the conference with his plan for a Greater Syria under French tutelage. Careful to illustrate his claim to represent the aspirations of the Syrian people, Ghanim tactfully backed his pleas at the Conference by collecting and forwarding numerous telegrams of support from Syrian-Lebanese throughout the diaspora.<sup>81</sup> In a speech that carried on for two hours (bringing embarrassment to his French backers), Ghanim addressed the conference, suggesting that the Arab movement under Faysal’s charge was religious and not “national.” He went to great lengths to differentiate between the Arabs of the Hijaz and the Syrians. Syrian “nationality,” he argued, was “just as clearly defined as its frontiers. The race is as distinct as it could possibly be in this theatre of invasion.”<sup>82</sup> If the Syrian nation was clear-cut, its preparedness for statehood was less so. According to Ghanim, under centuries of foreign rule, Syrians were torn apart by the “various religions” that its inhabitants professed, and moreover, Syria also required economic assistance. Only under the guidance of France could the country live up to its true potential, for France had

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid. Nevertheless, councilmember Da’ud ‘Ammun’s pronouncements at the conference stressed the importance of extending Mount Lebanon’s borders.

<sup>81</sup> These petitions can be found in MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 7, Carton 313.

<sup>82</sup> TNA, FO 608/105, “Speech by Chekri Ghanem before Members of the Peace Conference” (22 February 1919).

experience both as “Moslem Power, numbering 20 to 25 millions of Moslems amongst her subjects, and as age-long protectress of the Christians of the East.”<sup>83</sup>

After all that was said and done, the French were not prepared to give into Faysal’s demands for Arab self-determination. At most, they would allow Faysal to retain control of the interior Eastern zone, leaving France to control the coastal area. Yet, France fluctuated between its ambition to control a Greater Syria (to include Lebanon), and its support for an independent Lebanon as a means to achieve a bargaining strategy with Faysal. In April 1919, Clemenceau came to an arrangement with Faysal, “in which he agreed to recognize Syria’s independence ‘in the form of a federation of local communities,’ in return for Faysal’s approval of a French mandate over Syria.”<sup>84</sup> This agreement angered factions within Lebanon, the Maronite Patriarch in particular. In a show of displeasure, the Administrative Council renounced its support for France, and called for the complete independence of Lebanon.<sup>85</sup>

The British, too, were conflicted about their support for Faysal. Had it not been for President Wilson, Faysal’s appeal to the principle of self-determination would have fallen upon deaf ears. After hearing the Syrian delegations, Wilson suggested that an Inter-Allied Commission be sent to the region to ascertain the wishes of the people. Americans Henry Churchill King and Charles Crane conducted the mission in the summer of 1919.<sup>86</sup> In the meantime, the Paris Peace Conference hashed out the details of the League of Nations Covenant. While Wilson played an instrumental role in the founding of the League of Nations, the final

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Zamir, *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>86</sup> In reality, this was an American mission since no others agreed to join.

shape of the organization only ambiguously matched his anti-imperialist rhetoric. Jan Smuts, the prime minister of South Africa, was largely responsible for the idea behind the mandates system, which he conceived as a way of "internationalizing the control of the strategically-significant" former Ottoman territories.<sup>87</sup> Wilson on the other hand pushed to avoid direct imperial annexation. A resulting compromise produced Article 22 of the League of Nations charter, which established the mandates system to administer the former territories of the Ottoman Empire deemed unprepared for self-rule. The mandatory power would be selected according to the wishes of the communities in question. The ambiguous meaning and function of the mandate therefore made it liable to various interpretations by Syrian groups around the world.

In anticipation of their arrival, the Arab government in Damascus mobilized elite Syrian factions, and called upon a General Syrian Congress in June of 1919. The Congress called for the complete independence of Syria under the leadership of Amir Faysal, and voiced its opposition to mandatory rule. Desiring to signal intent towards "negotiation and compromise," the Congress did, however, state its preference for an American trusteeship in the event that the Peace Conference ignored their desire for independence.<sup>88</sup> After touring parts of Anatolia, Syria and Palestine, and interviewing members of the ruling and educated class, the King-Crane Commission came to similar conclusions. The people desired complete independence, with a majority opposed to French intervention.

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<sup>87</sup> Susan Pedersen, "The meaning of the mandates system: an argument." *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* (2006): 560.

<sup>88</sup> James Gelvin, "The Ironic Legacy of the King-Crane Commission," in *The Middle East and the United States: A Historical and Political Reassessment*, ed. David W. Lesch (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

Though the findings of the King-Crane Commission went unheeded, the initiative would have a lasting impact on the region and its people.<sup>89</sup> Emboldened by the commission, Faysal abandoned his negotiations with France. In turn, France strengthened its support for a Greater Lebanon. The Administrative Council passed yet another resolution in June granting Maronite Patriarch Elias Huwayik a mandate to represent “all Lebanese people” at the Paris Peace Conference.<sup>90</sup> With that, the Patriarch traveled to Paris to convince the French government to back an independent Lebanon. His initial attempts met with little success. In October 1919, he presented a memorandum to the Peace Conference, which called for the “complete independence of Lebanon within its historical and natural boundaries,” and further signaled his support for a French mandate as outlined by the League of Nations charter.<sup>91</sup> The following month, Clemenceau gave the Patriarch his encouragement, signaling France’s readiness to back an independent Lebanon. In April 1920, the Treaty of Sèvres assigned the French a mandate over Syria and Lebanon, and the British a mandate over Palestine. The region broke out into violent demonstrations, which were forcibly put down by British and French forces. Faced with an ultimatum, Faysal abdicated his position, and the loss of opposition forces at the Battle of Maysalun culminated in the French occupation of Syria in July 1920. Soon thereafter, a new pro-French government was ushered into power.

As the French mandate over Syria and Lebanon became a *fait accompli*, groups like the *Alliance Libanaise* and the *Comité Central Syrien* retreated into the backdrop. Though the organizations became dormant, individuals like Yusuf al-Sawda, Shukri Ghanim and others

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> Zamir, 70.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid. 71.

remained politically active, adjusting to the new political realities. Elite factions within Syria and Lebanon also adapted to the French reality, even as popular opposition to the mandate was widespread. French mandatory administration increasingly resembled direct, military rule, rather than the advisory role stipulated by the League of Nations covenant. Publications, newspapers, and telegrams were censored throughout Syria and Lebanon. Activists critical of the mandate were either jailed or fled the country. With the voices of opposition effectively silenced, the diaspora once again saw an opportunity to make themselves heard. The Syro-Palestinian Congress, based in Cairo, Geneva and Jerusalem would come to occupy its role as the leading organization in the *mahjar* to unveil French practices in Syria to the outside world.

### **“Our Independence is nothing but a vain word”: The Syro-Palestinian Congress and the League of Nations**

On the first of August 1921, the secretary of the Syrian Union in Cairo, Tawfiq al-Yaziji, addressed a letter to the Secretary General of the League of Nations, announcing that the organization had decided to send a delegation to Geneva under the presidency of Michel Lutfallah, in order to expose the Syrian question. In light of the fact that the Syrian issue had been subjected to “various interests and international factors,” that “had caused—and would—continue to cause bloodshed,” the Syrian Union requested an “opportunity to personally present the Syrian issue to the competent authorities of the League of Nations.”<sup>92</sup> The group buttressed its request by describing its work in terms that reflected the discourse of League. The Syrian Union claimed that it had “not stopped working—free from external influences—for the supreme

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<sup>92</sup> League of Nations Archive (Henceforth LNA), Carton R 39, 14361/14361, Letter from Tawfiq al-Yaziji to Secretary General of the League of Nations (1 August 1921).

interests of the country,” an interest which they asserted was “consistent with the spirit” of the League of Nations Covenant.<sup>93</sup>

The conference took place later that month in the Plainpalais Assembly Hall in Geneva.<sup>94</sup> The goal of the meeting was two-fold: to create an organization that could bring together the various agendas swirling around the question of Syria and Palestine, and to put pressure on the League of Nations to reconsider the French mandate by exposing the “true voice of the [Syrian] population.”<sup>95</sup> The resulting organization was called the Syro-Palestinian Congress, apparently upon the insistence of the Palestinian attendants who desired separate recognition of their cause.<sup>96</sup> As far as exile organizations of the mandate period went, the Syro-Palestinian Congress was indeed the “first manifestation of organized Arab protest following the imposition of the French mandate in Syria,” and which mobilized around the League of Nations in particular.<sup>97</sup> Michel Lutfallah was appointed president of the organization, Rashid Rida acted as its vice-president, and the exiled Druze notable, Amir Shakib Arslan, was chosen as its secretary-general. Others groups represented at the first meeting included the Palestinian Committee of Egypt, exiled representatives of the Lebanese Administrative Council, the Arab National Party of Buenos Aires, the Independence and Unity of Syria of Santiago, the New York-based National

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> “Le Congrès syrio-palestinien (25 août-21 septembre 1921)” *Le Correspondance d’Orient: Revue économique, politique et littéraire* 14, 273 (15 November 1921), 783.

<sup>95</sup> LNA, Carton R 39, 15298/15122, Letter from Michel Lutfallah to Sir Eric Drummond (31 August 1921).

<sup>96</sup> FO 141/552/1, “The Syro-Palestinian Congress” (21 November 1921).

<sup>97</sup> Cleveland, 49.

League for Liberating Syria, and the Syrian National Society based in Boston.<sup>98</sup> The Congress claimed to “represent the great majority of Syrian public opinion in Syria-Palestine, and abroad.”<sup>99</sup> Thus the Syro-Palestinian Congress came into existence. The Congress was unique its mobilization around the League of Nations, mirroring the sovereignty and authority of the League of Nations members. With a delegation permanently set up in Geneva, the Syro-Palestinian Congress carved an unofficial niche for itself in the heart of postwar internationalism. Using the League as an international forum to demonstrate its national concerns, the members of Congress thereby also demonstrated their capacity to act as international figures.

The Congress’ first plan of action included sending telegrams to various international and diplomatic figures—to members of the League of Nations Council; the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Aristide Briand; the former French president, Raymond Poincaré; various members of the French parliament and leftist politicians; U.S. president Warren Harding; Italian politicians; British politicians; Syrian organizations in the United States; and lastly, various international newspapers and journals.<sup>100</sup> At the conclusion of the meeting, the Congress formulated a lengthy appeal to the Second Assembly of the League of Nations, signed by the various Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian representatives from Egypt, Europe, the United States, Argentina and Chile. In this address, dated August to September 1921, the Syro-Palestinian

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<sup>98</sup> “Le Congrès syrio-palestinien (25 août-21 septembre 1921),” 783-784. The individuals present were fifteen: Michel Lutfallah (Syrian Union), Rashid Rida (Syrian Union), Wahba Elisa (Palestinian Committee), Tawfik Hamad, Amin Tamimi, Shibly Jamal (Palestinian delegation), Shakib Arslan, Riyad al-Sulh, Najib Shuqayr, Ihsan al-Jabiri (representing the Arab Independence party), Sulayman Kan’an (representing the Lebanese Representative Council), Tawfik al-Yaziji (representing the Independence and Unity of Syria party), Georges Youssef Salem (National League for Liberating Syria), and Salah ‘Iz al-Din (Syrian National Society of Boston).

<sup>99</sup> LNA, Carton R 39, 15433/15122, Statement by SPC to Secretary General Eric Drummond, 3 September 1921.

<sup>100</sup> Marie-Renée Mouton, “Le Congrès syro-palestinien de Genève (1921),” *Société d’études historiques des relations internationales contemporaines*, 19 (automne 1979), 322.

Congress outlined its desires. Their desiderata included: 1) The recognition of the sovereignty and independence of Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine; 2) The right of these countries to unite and form a civil and parliamentary government, and to federate with other Arab states; 3) The immediate cessation of the mandate; 4) The evacuation of Franco-British troops of occupation from Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine; 5) And lastly, the annulment of the Balfour Declaration of 1917.

Aside from these demands, the appeal asserted the rights of the Syrian people to self-determination, and legitimized this right by referencing Wilson's Fourteen Points. It paralleled the situation in Syria to other territories like Armenia and the Hijaz, which in contrast, were not subjected to a mandatory power. The Congress further outlined the reasons why Syria deserved independence: they were bound together by a strong national sentiment, a shared culture, history, and language; they had a rich political and cultural history dating pre-modern times; and more recently, they had obtained prior political and governmental experience under the Ottomans; and in a gesture towards émigrés such as themselves, the Syrian people had prosperous migrant communities throughout the world.

In addition to this, the Congress took it upon itself to interpret the logic and spirit of the League of Nations, concluding that the mandates system was nothing but veiled colonialism. Reminding the League of the principles upon which it was founded—"justice and honor in international relations, the repudiation of any policy of conquest, and scrupulous respect of treaties"—they were confident that the League would address their concerns.<sup>101</sup> Addressing the President of the Council of the League, Dr. V.K. Wellington Koo, Shakib Arslan assertively

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<sup>101</sup> LNA, Carton R 39, 16083, 15122, "Appel adressé a 2me assemblée générale de la société des nations" (24 aout-21 septembre 1921)".



interpreted the function of the League: “The question of mandates was placed in the hands of the League which is composed of independent States and which appoints mandatories and alone has the right to question their fulfillment of those conditions on which the mandates were given.”<sup>102</sup> They described the near military rule of the French in Syria, outlined the secret treaties that led to their acquisition of the mandate, and asserted that French practices in Syria went against the advisory role of the mandate. Along this line, Arslan further argued that, “We are, however, firmly convinced that should the League accept the terms of the mandates which are submitted to it by these two Powers it will have failed of fulfilling its sacred trust, and of carrying out its own decree that mandatories should have no personal interest in the mandated territories.”<sup>103</sup> Moreover, in Arslan’s opinion, the annual reports submitted by the mandatories were meaningless under these conditions: He continued:

On the other hand the peoples of these mandated territories will not be allowed to submit any complaints they may have to the League, as happened recently to delegates from Beirut who were prevented by France to attend our Congress at Geneva. This is similar to the case of one adversary preventing, by sheer force, his opponent from appearing before the court, which, in its turn, is unable to release that opponent and give him the chance of stating his case.<sup>104</sup>

In fact, the Congress insisted that it was these repressive policies of the mandate that obliged the Congress to thereby speak on behalf of the Syrian people. Arslan asserted that:

In fine, the system of mandate that is in keeping the with the spirit of the League is that the peoples of territories A and B should be free to create their own national government whose independence should recognized by the League. These governments would then submit to the League the kind and duration of the assistance they need, as well as the

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<sup>102</sup> LNA, Carton R39, 16461/16448, Letter from Shakib Arslan to President of the Council (29 September 1921).

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

name of the state of which they would ask assistance. The League will have the right to supervise the operations of these mandates.

In concluding their first congress in Geneva, the Executive Committee of the organization in Egypt decided to convene a second meeting “to be held at the same place where the League of Nations will hold its next meeting, and to send an invitation to all Syrian, Palestinian and Lebanese parties and societies, who are claiming the independence of their country.” Furthermore, it also decided to: “Send a deputation to Genoa, with a view to pushing on national activities while the International Congress is being held there.”<sup>105</sup>

The Congress came to function through a network of Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian activists both inside and outside of the mandates in question. The center of this network was Cairo, which housed the Executive Committee of the Congress. Under the leadership of its main financier, Michel Lutfallah, the executive committee attended to the finances of the organization, and played an important role in collecting donations from abroad during the 1925 revolt. The Cairo committee was also in charge of a robust propaganda network run by a Syrian Information Bureau, which received messages from within the mandated territories via telegrams dispatched from Haifa. This information bureau was also in charge of taking minutes, preparing internal reports and memos, as well as disseminating propaganda against the French mandate. In 1922, for example, the Syrian Information Bureau in Cairo collected and disseminated telegrams of protests from Syrians via Haifa regarding the French crackdown on Syria-wide protests against the mandate, which led to the arrest of a number of nationalist leaders.<sup>106</sup> Also, in 1922, the

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<sup>105</sup> LNA, Carton R39, 19271/15122, Note from Director of the Mandates Section to Secretary General (28 February 1922).

<sup>106</sup> al-Lajna al-Tanfithiya lil-Mu'tamar al-Suri al-Filastini, *A'mal al-Wafd al-Suri al-Filastini Min Ayar 1922 ila Tishrin 1922* (Cairo: Al-Matba'a al-Salafiya, 1922), 47.

Congress collected Palestinian protests against Zionism, the Balfour declaration, and the British mandate, in order to publish them throughout Egyptian newspapers.<sup>107</sup>

The Jerusalem branch was run by the Palestinian notable, Haj Amin al-Husayni. It acted as an important linkage between the activists within Syria, and those in Cairo and Europe. Because of its proximity to Syria and Lebanon, the Jerusalem branch could readily receive messages that might otherwise be censored by the French mandate authorities via direct telegraph or post. More importantly, the Jerusalem committee acted as an important gathering point for subsidies intended for Syria. When the revolt began in 1925, this branch also crucially funneled donations and supplies to rebels within Syria through its channels in Transjordan. The controversy that stemmed from the collection and distribution of these donations would also lead to its undoing, as will be later illustrated.

Yet it was the Geneva branch of the Congress that received the most international attention. During their first few years, the delegation focused on renouncing the mandate before it was officially ratified by the League of Nations in 1923. The delegation did this through writing petitions, sending telegrams, and visiting European political figures. In 1922, for example, the Syrian delegation focused on lobbying various Italian political and social factions to the cause of Syrian independence. In August 1922, Shakib Arslan also apparently “appeared in Rome seeking Italian support at the League of Nations.”<sup>108</sup> In its initial years, the Geneva delegation consisted of exiles who could not return to the mandated territories: Amir Shakib Arslan, the Aleppan notable Ihsan al-Jabiri, and the Lebanese Maronite notable Sulayman Kan‘an. All three served civil and administrative positions during the Ottoman period: Shakib

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Cleveland, 51.

Arslan first as *qa'imaqam* of the Shuf, and then later as representative of the Hawran in the Ottoman parliament; al-Jabiri served as private secretary of two Ottoman sultans until the first World War, and then as mayor of Aleppo under Faysal's brief rule; lastly, hailing from Mount Lebanon, Sulayman Kan'an was a member of the Lebanese Administrative Council until he was forced into exile for being one of the key perpetrators of the decision of the council to briefly renounce the French mandate in July 1920.<sup>109</sup>

The conglomerate agendas of the Geneva delegation did not perfectly suit one another, and this would remain a thorn in the side of the organization throughout its political career. Even though the Syro-Palestinian Congress grew out of the Syrian Union, with Sulayman Kan'an among their ranks, one of the primary topics that they addressed to the League early on was the question of Lebanon. Thus, in late September 1921, Kan'an secured an interview with William Rappard, the Director of the Mandates Section, in which he plead for the independence of Lebanon and its admission to the League of Nations. In response, Rappard informed Kan'an that the "Council of the League was naturally bound by Article 22 of the Covenant, and would be bound by the Treaty of Sèvres, and by any other treaty which might be made in its stead." Kan'an reasoned that:

Even if the provision of articles 94 and 132 of the Treaty of Sèvres were to be applied to the Lebanon, its independence should be maintained. Turkey, he argued, was never the real master of the Lebanon, and she could, therefore renounce only those rights, which she herself possesses. As the Organic Law of the Lebanon was guaranteed by the six great powers of 1861, four of which were now members of the League and three

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<sup>109</sup> For information on Ihsan al-Jabiri, see Sami Moubayed, *Steel & Silk: Men and Women who Shaped Syria, 1900-200* (Seattle: Cune Press, 2006), 254-255. For information on Sulayman Kan'an see Carol Hakim, *The Origins of a Lebanese National Idea, 1840-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 256.

members of the council, he imagined that some arrangement, equally satisfactory to his countrymen and to the League, might be made.<sup>110</sup>

In such a way, Kan'an insisted that Lebanon's sovereignty was not a byproduct of postwar arrangements, but grounded in a much longer history. Like Arslan, Kan'an did not shirk from interpreting the logic of these settlements, demonstrating his ready adoption of the language of this new postwar reality. Kan'an's response seemed to strike a chord with Rappard, who he described as "an old man very much attached to his country." Furthermore, according to Rappard, Kan'an spoke only in the name of the "Small Lebanon." At the interview's conclusion, Kan'an requested that a commission of inquiry be sent to Lebanon to "examine itself how oppressive the French mandatory had shown itself, and how unpopular it had become."<sup>111</sup>

Kan'an's involvement in the Syro-Palestinian Congress symbolized an attempt by the organizers to gain the support of the Lebanese, even though it went against the vision of a Greater Syria many of them had espoused. Kan'an's involvement was regarded with both hope and suspicion by Yusuf al-Sawda and other former members of the *Alliance Libanaise*. By 1921, France's presence in Lebanon had become a *fait accompli*, but Kan'an's presence in Geneva signaled a glimmer of hope that there was yet a chance for complete independence. Still, Sawda commented that the news from Geneva regarding Lebanon was never clear-cut—sometimes they read that the Congress strived for Lebanon's independence, while at other times it seemed the Congress was working to include Lebanon in a federation with Syria.<sup>112</sup> Sawda was in communication with Kan'an, who apparently switched gears while in Geneva. Rather than

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<sup>110</sup> LNA, Carton R 41, 16128/16039, "Record of Interview with Mr. Soliman Kanaan, 'Membre du Conseil Administratif du Liban,'" (September 1921).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> PCLS, YS 7E-035B, Notes by Yusuf al-Sawda on the Syro-Palestinian Congress.

advocating for the independence of Greater Lebanon, as Sawda had hoped, Kan'an attempted to convince Sawda that a smaller Lebanon was the only way to procure a Christian Lebanese state, a goal that did not sit well with Sawda's firm belief that the expansion of Lebanon's borders was its only viable future.<sup>113</sup> Whether Kan'an's change of heart was due to his interaction with the other members of the Congress is uncertain. Regardless, Kan'an's involvement in the Congress did not last very long, and he was replaced by Riad al-Sulh, a Sunni from a prominent Lebanese family, whose allegiances no doubt better suited the broader agenda of the organization.

The tension regarding the question of Lebanon would come up again with start of the Syrian revolt in 1925, but it would not be the only source of discord to afflict the organization. Early on, there were crucial differences between Michel Lutfallah, who pursued a policy of independence but who was nevertheless oriented towards French culture, and the more anti-imperialist hardliners such as Rashid Rida and Amir Shakib Arslan. Furthermore, Lutfallah's link to the Hashemite's aroused suspicion from Arslan, who only a decade earlier was firmly against the Hashemite-led Arab revolt against the Ottoman Empire.<sup>114</sup> These differences would remain a sore spot for the Congress, eventually leading to their irreconcilable divorce as the revolt waned in 1927. In addition these disagreements, the organization would come to be composed of two competing parties that had originally emanated from Syria. The first of these was the Arab Independence Party (*Hizb al-Istiqlal al-'Arabi*) formed during the Faysali period, and exiled once the French came to power. The second, representing primarily by 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar, was the People's Party (*Hizb al-Sha'b*) formed in Syria in 1924.

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<sup>113</sup> PCLS, YS 7E-035F, Letter from Kan'an (Rome) to Sawda (26 August 1921).

<sup>114</sup> Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 221-227.

Despite claims to represent the Syrian people, it is no surprise that the Syro-Palestinian Congress did not have the universal consent of Syrians and Lebanese. The convening of the Congress in 1921 was accompanied by a torrent of protests. Diverse groups from within the territories under mandate addressed similarly worded objections to the Eric Drummond, the Secretary General of League of Nations. In general, the telegrams opposed the authenticity of the Congress. While much of these protests represented the opinions of Christian religious leaders in Aleppo and Damascus, other petitions spoke on behalf of Alawite leaders in Latakia, merchants of various religious backgrounds in Aleppo, the notables of Damascus, and the “religious populations of Greater Lebanon.” In more specific terms, the communications all denied the authority of the “alleged” Congress to represent the Syrian people.<sup>115</sup> Opposition to the Congress especially hinged on the personality of Michel Lutfallah in particular. The telegram claiming to represent various groups within Greater Lebanon, for example, asserted that the Congress had only been “created to serve the personal interests” of its founders. The members of the Aleppan Catholic community, for example, singled out Lutfallah on the basis that he had been “long absent from Syria.”<sup>116</sup> Opposition to Lutfallah in particular seemed to emanate from his family background, in particular his father’s ties to the Hashemites, as well as the willful adoption by Lutfallah of the title of “Amir,” handed down to him through his father.<sup>117</sup> Other telegrams made similar assertions; as residents of Egypt and Europe, they proclaimed that neither Lutfallah nor the other members were qualified to represent the Syrian people. On the other hand, the Syro-

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<sup>115</sup> LNA, Carton R 39, 16195/15122, Telegram from Najib ‘Abd al-Malik (Beirut) to Sir Eric Drummond (5 October 1921).

<sup>116</sup> LNA, Carton R39, 16195/15122, Telegram from Georges Khayat (Aleppo) to Sir Eric Drummond (4 October 1921).

<sup>117</sup> As alluded to earlier, the Hashemites bestowed this title of “Prince” upon father Habib Lutfallah.

Palestinian Congress made the counter assertion that the French were censoring the Syrians by not allowing them to travel to Geneva to participate in the conference.<sup>118</sup>

Claims of censorship undoubtedly had a grain of truth to them. The only telegram of support for the Congress that actually made its way to the League of Nations in 1921 was, indeed, forwarded not from Syria but from Haifa. Rappard took note of this, stating that he believed it to be “the first instance of a protest against the Syrian regime sent by Syrians from a city in Palestine.”<sup>119</sup> The telegram, which expressed its support for the Congress, gave the Congress “full authority to protect the sacred right of the country.”<sup>120</sup> The message also added that this telegram was sent from Haifa due to the “impossibility” of it being sent from Beirut. The Syrian Information Bureau in Cairo also collected telegrams of protest from Syria and Lebanon during the 1922 crackdown on nationalists. Syrians stated that:

Despite the punishment by the occupying force in Syria to all those who participate in signing the telegrams sent to the League of Nations, and despite the ban on the acceptance there by telegraph offices of such telegrams, the people insisted on extending their voice to the civilized world, and they sent copies of the telegrams to Haifa and other places outside those areas under French occupation. Upon these telegrams are the thousands of signatures from diverse Syrian classes, announcing their rejection of the French mandate, and their support for the Syrian delegation in Europe defending the Syrian cause.<sup>121</sup>

Among these voices of support were, for example, former members of the General Syrian Congress of 1920, many of whom were “outside the area under French occupation, which forbid

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<sup>118</sup> LNA, Carton R 39, 15433, 15122, Letter from SPC to Eric Drummond (3 September 1921).

<sup>119</sup> LNA, Carton R39, 17209/15122, Minutes by William Rappard (8 November 1921).

<sup>120</sup> LNA, Carton R39, 17209/15122, Telegram from Haifa to League of Nations (7 November 1921).

<sup>121</sup> *A'mal al-Wafd al-Suri al-Filastini*, 60. It is important to note that the Syro-Palestinian Congress reproduced these telegrams in their book published in 1922. I have not seen these telegrams at the League of Nations Archive, and therefore assume that they never made their way there.



several freedoms, such as telegrams.”<sup>122</sup> Other voices of support included the Syrian feminist Nazik al-‘Abid, who spoke in the name of the women of Syria who supported the Congress’ capacity as a “representative of the nation.”<sup>123</sup> Similar telegrams reached the Congress from factions in Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan, Palestine, Egypt, and the Americas.

The French cautiously eyed the Syrian Union and their Geneva congress. On the one hand, they welcomed the move away from Amir Faysal, but were deeply suspicious of the anti-imperialist agenda of the organization. By 1921, the French agent in charge of collecting information about Egypt’s Syrians situated the work of the Syrian Union as one of the chief engineers of “xenophobic agitation” agitation against France in the East.<sup>124</sup> He was particularly concerned that the inclusion of the exiled Amir Shakib Arslan was “transposing the nationalist domain” of the organization into a “religious one” with a pan-Islamist agenda. As a case in point, through the transnational influence of Shakib Arslan, the group solicited the support of the “Indian Muslim Committee,” presumably the members of the Khilafat movement.<sup>125</sup> Further concerns over the organization included paranoid suspicions that the Syrian Union was liaising with English and German agents, as well as with numerous other groups including: “the Hugo Stinnes group, Zionists with pro-German tendencies, Bolshevists and even with Mr. Longuet.”<sup>126</sup> The French paranoia about transnational, anti-French activity is summed up with the prediction

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>124</sup> Centre des Archives Dipolomatique de Nantes (Henceforth CADN), Caire Ambassade-Carton 113, Note du Service de Renseignements (Cairo) (15 December 1921).

<sup>125</sup> This latter suspicion has the most evidence to support it. With the bombing of Damascus in 1925, the leaders of the Khilafat movement aided the Syro-Palestinian organization in collecting aid for the victims.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

that the Syrian Union would collude with these various anti-imperial organizations to spread “terror and insurgency” throughout the Muslim world, in Asia Minor, Egypt, Syria and India. A “Syrian rebellion,” would be organized in conjunction with the ongoing rebellions in North Africa and British India.<sup>127</sup>

Though such doomsday predictions were largely unfounded, the diasporic activities of the Syro-Palestinian Congress in its early years did coincide with increased attempts by the French to impose control in the south of Syria, especially in the autonomous state of Jabal Druze.<sup>128</sup> Amir Shakib Arslan had maintained important connections to his fellow Druze, Sultan Pasha al-Atrash who instigated a short-lived uprising in 1922, and again the longer-lasting revolt of 1925. Though there is little evidence to support involvement of the Syro-Palestinian Congress in the 1922 uprising, “Manifestations of the Druze opposition to the French mandate coincided and were probably also connected with the preparatory meetings of the Arab nationalists for the Syro-Palestinian Congress.”<sup>129</sup> This is undoubtedly the case for the uprising that began in the summer of 1925.

### **The Syro-Palestinian Congress and the Burden of Representation**

The Geneva delegation of the Syro-Palestinian Congress continued to send petitions, telegrams and letters of protest to the League of Nations, though it had slowed down in 1923.<sup>130</sup> With the start of the uprising in August of 1925, the Syro-Palestinian Congress gained a second

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> A treaty between the French and the Druze leaders had been reached in 1921.

<sup>129</sup> Kais Firro, *A History of the Druzes, Volume I* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1992), 263.

<sup>130</sup> One reason for this was Shakib Arslan’s departure for the port city of Mersin, in southeastern Turkey, where he resided temporarily in order to be closer to his family in Lebanon. See Cleveland, 53.

wind, as well as a newfound sense of authority for its activities in connection with the revolt. The Congress not only lobbied the League of Nations, but also negotiated with the French on behalf of the Syrians, collected donations for victims back home, as well as secured funds for the rebels from sympathetic Syrians throughout the world.

Factions that had previously been suspicious of the Congress had now roused to the brutality of French rule. Under the threat of martial law, Syrians in opposition to the French mandate counted on the diaspora to internationalize the rebellion, and to make their voices heard to the outside world. With the French bombardment of Damascus in October 1925 (to be discussed in the following chapter), the international gaze turned to France, in large part due to the propaganda and lobbying efforts of the Syro-Palestinian Congress. The French thus found themselves battling a rebellion on two fronts: one within the borders of the mandate, and one in the boundless realm of the diaspora. Despite the momentum gained from the rebellion, support for the Syro-Palestinian Congress was never unilateral, and as the revolt progressed, questions over representation emerged once more.

On the 19th of November 1925, the Executive Committee of the Syro-Palestinian Congress in Cairo received an important and time-sensitive telegram from Michel Lutfallah's brother, Georges, in Paris. It stated that the new High Commissioner Henry de Jouvenel was leaving from Marseille on the 24th of that month, and would stop in Egypt on his way to Syria. Jouvenel requested a meeting with the Executive Committee, as well as with members of the nascent Syrian "People's Party" (*Hizb al-Sha'b*) residing in Egypt. Georges alerted the Executive Committee that his companion Najib al-Armanazi was planning on arriving in Egypt on the 24<sup>th</sup> of that month with a more detailed account of the political climate in Paris. The Committee rushed to hold a meeting shortly after receiving the telegram, and decided that a delegation of

Syrian nationalists, most especially those who recently emigrated from Syria, should meet with the new high commissioner. In their description of the negotiations that ensued, the committee thought it important to note that it sought to avoid speaking to Jouvenel “alone,” and in the short time frame given to them, called upon Syrians in Cairo and Alexandria to participate. It also sought, with less success, to bring “nationalists from Syria” to weigh in on the matter.<sup>131</sup>

The Committee also took special care to note that the discussions carried out whether in Paris, Egypt or Syria “did not represent any specific party, but individuals representing numerous parties, societies,” as well as notables of the country who were unaffiliated with a single organization. The rhetorical caution employed by the Syro-Palestinian Congress answered, albeit demurely, to the controversy their initiatives had generated. Not only did their numerous round of negotiations with Jouvenel fail to bring about any immediate resolution to the conflict, but moderates in Damascus continued to challenge their bid to represent the Syrian people from abroad. Moreover, the efforts of the Congress also riled the factions in favor of Lebanese autonomy from Syria. Meanwhile, the French asserted pressure on Damascene notables as they tactfully positioned them against the Syro-Palestinian Congress, which was described as extremists collaborating with the rebels inside Syria.<sup>132</sup> As news of the failed negotiations echoed throughout the international press, the Syro-Palestinian Congress was weighed down by the complicated burden of representation.

In Paris, Armanazi lobbied members of the French parliament, particularly its leftist

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<sup>131</sup> *al-Lajnah al-Tanfidiyah lil-Mu'tamar al-Suri al-Filastini. al-Qaḍiyah al-Suriyah: Al-mufawadat ma'a al-Misyu Di Jufinal fi Baris wa-Misr wa-Bayrut, watha'iq muhimmah 'an al-ḥalah fi Suriyah* (Cairo: al-Matba'a al-'Arabiyah, 1926), 1.

<sup>132</sup> CADN, Syrie-Liban, Carton 1704, Bulletin de Renseignements-Damas “A/S. désaveu oppose aux déclarations syro-palestiniennes par les personnalités musulmans modérés de Damas” (9 December 1925).

factions, and was able to secure private meetings with major socialist figures in the government who were generally critical of French colonial policy. When Henry de Jouvenel was designated the new high commissioner, he called upon Najib al-Armanazi and others to meet him to discuss Syrian demands. During their initial meeting, they agreed that the mandatory government should enter into negotiations with Syrian leaders. According to Armanazi, they also agreed on a number of points from which to initiate discussions. These five points were the following: 1) To call upon a constituent assembly to meet to put together a constitution based on Syrian national sovereignty; 2) The need to specify relations between France and Syria with an agreement between the two that would realize the demands of Syria and its dignity; 3) Stipulating the question of Syrian unity in the future; 4) The establishment of a provisional national government based upon the country's trust; and finally, 5) The announcement of general amnesty without exception.<sup>133</sup> Armanazi then suggested a few personalities, such as Amir Shakib Arslan in Europe, and 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar who was currently inside alongside the rebels.

Arslan agreed to come to Paris only if directly invited by Jouvenel himself. The new high commissioner reluctantly sent a telegram to Shakib Arslan, inviting him to talk. Just before Jouvenel's departure for Cairo, Arslan presented him with a list of surprisingly moderate demands, and suggested that if France granted Syrian independence and unity, then Syrian nationalists would be willing to "concede to France exclusive economic and strategic advantages in Syria."<sup>134</sup> Syrian unity depended upon joining the Alawite territory to Syria, as well as conducting a plebiscite in the regions annexed to Greater Lebanon in 1920 to determine which

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<sup>133</sup> *Al-mufawadat ma'a al-Misyu Dii Jufinal*, 5.

<sup>134</sup> Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 231.

state—Syria or Lebanon—the residents wished to belong.<sup>135</sup> Also included in his demands was Syria’s right to representation in the outside world, its membership in the League of Nations as well as the stipulation of a fixed-term agreement between Syria and France. Jouvenel was apparently quite impressed with Arslan’s proposition, but could not take any decision based on their conversation alone. While Arslan’s diplomatic savvy appeared to please Jouvenel, it was not so welcomed by nationalist leaders in Egypt and Syria.

Michel Lutfallah in particular was quite irritated with Arslan’s initiative, believing that he should not have taken matters into his own hands without first consulting the Executive Committee in Cairo. By the time Jouvenel reached Cairo, the Executive Committee had decided to present to him a more hardline program for Syrian peace and independence, one that claimed to more closely resemble the demands of the tireless rebel factions. The Cairo Executive Committee demanded Syrian unity and independence, the establishment of a provisional government, the free and direct election of a constituent assembly, and the cancellation of the mandate to be replaced by a fixed-term agreement between France and Syria. It also asked for the withdrawal of French troops from Syria upon the formation of a provisional government, as well as its memberships in the League of Nations.

Though Jouvenel indicated to members of the Congress that he would consider their demands, he soon publicly rejected their proposal, with a terse but harsh statement, concluding that he would “not for a minute” allow the Congress to believe that France would renege on the commitments it made to Syria at the League of Nations. Finally, Jouvenel firmly placed the blame in court of the Executive Committee, stating: “I’m afraid you will take the responsibility

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<sup>135</sup> This specifically included the regions of Sayda, Sur, Marj’ayun, the Biqa’ (Rashaya and Hasbaya in particular), Ba’albak, and Tripoli.

for the hostilities and misfortune that your attitude will surely excite.”<sup>136</sup> Jouvenel’s statement brought embarrassment to the members of the Congress, as well as etched divisions between its members in Geneva and Cairo. The resulting failure of the committee to achieve a deal with the new high commissioner also proved to be a setback for the rebel factions within Syria.<sup>137</sup>

Yet, as historian Philip Khoury has suggested, the Executive Committee’s move was perhaps as much (if not more) motivated by a personal bid over power and representation, as it was about what the Syrian people truly desired. Lutfallah’s steadfast friendship to the increasingly unpopular Hashemite family in the Hijaz detracted from his popularity within his organization, while also putting him at odds with group members who leaned to the side of the exiled *Hizb al-Istiqlal*, or Party of Independence.<sup>138</sup> Dispersed members of the party in Transjordan and Egypt, such as the Damascene notable Shukri al-Quwatli were more prone to seek the alliance of the Hashemite rivals, the rising family of ibn Sa‘ud in the Najd. Under the pressure of this first round of failed negotiations in November 1925, factions within the Syro-Palestinian Congress first became apparent to the public eye. Two groups began solidifying around the personalities of Amir Shakib Arslan and his Independence Party allies on the one hand, and Michel Lutfallah and the dwindling few who clung to the waning power of the Hashemites.

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<sup>136</sup> “M. de Jouvenel rejette des propositions déraisonnables: Elles émanaient du comité syro-palestinien d’Egypte,” *Le Matin* (1 December 1925).

<sup>137</sup> Michael Provence argues that the workings of the Geneva delegation, Arslan in particular, “harmed the possibility for fruitful negotiations.” Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas, 2005), 144.

<sup>138</sup> Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 232. The *hizb al-istiqlal al-‘arabi* (The Arab Independence party, or Independence Party for short) was formed during Faysal’s short rule in Syria. Leading members of the organization were forced into once the French occupied Damascus in 1920. The party ideologically united around the cause of Arab unity and independence.

The rebel leader and nationalist, ‘Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar came to side with the Lutfallah faction, also because he too harbored ill feelings towards Arslan. A prominent Damascene and champion of Arab independence, Shahbandar fled the country in 1920, only to return a year later to resume anti-French activity in Syria. He was jailed in 1922, and his sentence sparked demonstrations throughout Damascus, popularizing his name throughout the country. Shahbandar was eventually exiled, whereupon he traveled to Egypt, Europe and the United States. While in Egypt, he joined the ranks of the Syro-Palestinian Congress. When Shahbandar was granted pardon in 1924, he returned to Syria where he secretly organized an opposition party called *Hizb al-Sha‘b*, or the People’s Party.<sup>139</sup> Members of the party eventually came to provide the Druze rebels the urban support needed to spark their local rebellion into a nationalist cause. During the revolt, Shahbandar and its Commander in Chief, Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, formed a provisional government in the rebellious Jabal Druze. With his credentials as a rebel leader, Shahbandar reproved Arslan for his meddling in Paris, and felt that his interference—as well as the resulting failure of negotiations in Cairo—had meant that “Jouvenel had decided, even before setting foot in Syria, that he would have no dealings with the revolt leadership.”<sup>140</sup> According to Khoury, Shahbandar later asserted that Arslan’s conversations with the high commissioner “threw dust in the eyes of the nation and dampened the force of the upsurging public opinion.”<sup>141</sup>

Arslan also had to contend with the objections of the rebel chief, Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, who believed that the military situation did not require such a conciliatory attitude towards the

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<sup>139</sup> For more on the role of the People’s Party see, Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*.

<sup>140</sup> Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 233.

<sup>141</sup> As quoted in Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 233. Originally from Edmond Rabbath’s unpublished manuscript, *Courte histoire du mandat en Syrie et au Liban*, 10.



French. The following month, in late December 1925, Arslan explained his position in a missive to his brother the rebel leader, 'Adil Arslan. Addressing his brother, Arslan wrote: "You find too moderate the proposals I submitted to M. Jouvenel, and say I was too conciliatory...The answer is very simple: Discard my proposal and tell M. de Jouvenel that the note presented by Shakib Arslan did not have your approval."<sup>142</sup> Nevertheless, Arslan stood his ground, believing that rebels did not have enough military or financial support to carry out the rebellion much longer. Arslan's realistic attitude did not signal his "acceptance of the mandate," but that "an alliance concluded by equals" was more suitable to the present circumstances.<sup>143</sup> On a final note, Arslan inquired whether the rebels had received the Syrian delegation's pamphlet printed in Geneva containing their petitions and protests regarding the bombardment of Damascus, and which was intended for the League of Nations. Arslan's postscript is significant, for though he could not succeed in coming to an agreement with Jouvenel, he was sure to note that he would continue to work tirelessly for the Syrian cause by petitioning the League of Nations against France.

## **Conclusion**

Jouvenel's time as high commissioner in Syria and Lebanon did not live up to the expectations of Syrian nationalist hopefuls. Upon his arrival, Jouvenel was informed that the Executive Committee in Cairo had been supplying Sultan Pasha al-Atrash with funds to support the Syrian rebels (As a result, funds were diverted to a committee in Jerusalem). Following the failure of this first round of negotiations, the Syro-Palestinian Congress was subsequently forced to answer to accusations of meddling and insincerity on the one hand, as well as extremism on

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<sup>142</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 211, Carton 414, Alype to High Commissioner (Beirut) (24 August 1926). The letter was most certainly written by Arslan, and found among the confiscated papers of Nasib al-Bakri. The original letter was written in Berlin and dated 21 December 1925.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

the other. To what extent did the Congress represent the aspirations of the Syrian people? To what extent did they act as a mouthpiece for the rebel factions within Syria? Although Jouvenel indicated that he would be willing to hold discussions with nationalists within Syria, he promised “war for those who wished war.”<sup>144</sup> Moreover, he dealt a blow to the Syrian nationalist demand for the unity of mandate territories by cooperating with the Lebanese towards a constitution almost immediately upon his arrival. In response, the Executive Committee of the Syro-Palestinian issued numerous press statements clarifying their nationalist position, asserting their role as peaceful mediators, and publicly denying their role as representatives of the rebels to French and Western audiences. They hoped to achieve peace in Syria through their diplomatic efforts with the French government, as well as the League of Nations.

In their failed attempts to make headway among members of the French government, the Syro-Palestinian Congress turned to the League of Nations as a main channel through which they could peacefully challenge the authority and legitimacy of the mandate government, though it was by no means the only tactic of opposition émigrés would utilize. However, as an international body, the League of Nations—through the mechanism of petitioning—could ostensibly act as a legal mechanism whereby Syrians in the diaspora could assert their presence as authoritative representatives of the Syrian nation, as well as carve a niche for Syrians in what was deemed to be a legitimate post-war space. The following chapter focuses on the efforts of the Syrian diaspora to internationalize the rebellion through the corridors of European power. In petitioning the League of Nations, Syrians endowed the organization with a discourse that emphasized the importance of humanitarianism and international law in the post-war period.

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<sup>144</sup> Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*, 126.

## Chapter 2:

### The Bombardment of Damascus: an International Affair

The screaming and bursting shells that spattered the streets of Damascus with the blood of innocent men, women and children sent a thrill of horror through the civilized world—a horror not lessened by the fact that the shells were fired from the guns of a Christian nation. And the work of the artillery was supplemented by bombing airplanes and by tanks that spit machine-gun fire as they lumbered through the historic streets of what is said to be the world's oldest inhabited city.<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

When the Druze uprising of the Hawran reached Damascus in the autumn of 1925, insurgent forces encamped in the now infamous Ghuta—a fertile greenbelt surrounding the city of Damascus. The Ghuta's forested terrain shielded opposition forces in 1925, allowing them to put pressure on French forces inside the city.<sup>2</sup> The French mandatory power responded to the encroachment of rebel fighters by cutting down trees, looting and burning surrounding villages, arresting numerous men, and “causing thousands to lose all their property [and come] to Damascus as refugees.”<sup>3</sup> Prisoners were then publicly executed in the famous Marjeh Square of central Damascus. In another crude display of power intended to stoke what the French perceived to be the fearful imagination of Syrians, mandate authorities “paraded a number of

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<sup>1</sup> “The Damascus Massacre,” *The Literary Digest* Vol. 87, No. 7 (14 November 1925).

<sup>2</sup> The Ghuta served the same role for rebels in August 2013, when the infamous chemical attack occurred.

<sup>3</sup> National Archives and Records Administration (henceforth NARA), Volume 58, RG 84, Report by Reverend Elias Newman “Destruction, Fire and Sword in Damascus” (5 November 1925).

camel loads of dead bodies down Straight Street,” and unloaded sixteen corpses to be left for display in the square.<sup>4</sup> The residents of the ancient city were at once horrified and enraged.

Though the rebel commander, Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, had instructed them to wait for reinforcements outside Damascus, they did not comply. Insurgent Damascene bands led by Nasib al-Bakri and Hasan al-Kharrat furtively entered the south gate of Damascus on the morning of October the eighteenth. Their entrance initiated a wave of popular support throughout the neighborhood.<sup>5</sup> Sweeping through the city, the rebels attacked a number of police stations, and also targeted an Armenian refugee camp. They accused the Armenians of volunteering for the French army, and killing several refugees there.<sup>6</sup> French troops were ordered to retreat, barricading themselves in the city’s main citadel. For a brief moment, it seemed as though the rebels had successfully occupied the heart of Damascus.

The French retreat was, however, but a prelude to a planned atrocity. With the approval of High Commissioner General Maurice Sarrail, the French began bombing the city on Sunday the eighteenth of October at approximately 4:30 in the afternoon. Little warning was given, and only the cursory evacuation of French citizens was attempted.<sup>7</sup> The Presbyterian missionary Reverend Elias Newman, among other foreigners residing in the Christian quarter of Damascus, depicted scenes of total abandonment by security forces. From his residence in the neighborhood

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<sup>4</sup> NARA, RG 84, Box 4, Volume 465, Report by American Dorinda Bowman, “The Bombardment of Damascus.” Also see Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt: and the Rise of Arab Nationalism*, (University of Texas Press, 2005), 101.

<sup>5</sup> Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*, 102-103.

<sup>6</sup> Reprisal attacks such as this weren’t necessarily endorsed by rebel leadership. Sultan Pacha al-Atrash would later actively try to distance himself from sectarian rhetoric and accusations, and made efforts to emphasize the rebellion in a secular and nationalist light. Blame for violence against civilians was rather cast upon French politics of divide-and-rule on the one hand, and on wayward bands on the other.

<sup>7</sup> Archives de Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (MAE-La Courneuve), "Les Etats-Unis et les evenements de Damas," MAE to the Minister of War, 27 October 1925.

of Bab Touma, Newman could hear the “the rat, tap, tap, tap, of machine guns.”<sup>8</sup> Shortly after the initial bombardment, Newman left his residence to assess the situation, whereupon he found “people running like mad in all directions, the wild dogs were howling and barking and Mueddins [sic] from their lofty minarets calling the people to prayer.”<sup>9</sup> According to Newman, “The whole Christian quarter was deserted by the French army and left to the mercy of the Druse [sic], Moslems, robbers or anyone else who might take it.”<sup>10</sup> Christian Syrians and Armenians sought the protection of the British consul, “but lest they provoke an attack, they were sent away.”<sup>11</sup>

In contrast, the local Damascene police remained “faithful in Bab Touma” the main Christian quarter,<sup>12</sup> and were bolstered by civilian Damascene Muslims who assisted in protecting the Christian quarter from possible attack. According to Newman, the British and American consuls further appealed to the Muslim leader, Amir Sa‘id al-Jazai’iri, to protect the Christians of the city, as his forefather, the famous Algerian leader Amir ‘Abd al-Qadir had once done during the sectarian riots of 1860.<sup>13</sup> The irony of the situation was difficult to escape. The French, who touted their role as protectors of Christian minorities in the region, had abandoned them; the would-be assailants—the Muslim Damascenes—took on this role instead. American

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<sup>8</sup> Elias Newman Papers, “The Most Exciting Episode in My Life.”

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> NARA, RG 84, Volume 58, Report by Reverend Elias Newman “Destruction, Fire and Sword in Damascus” (5 November 1925).

<sup>11</sup> NARA, Box 4, RG 84, Volume 465, Report by American Dorinda Bowman, “The Bombardment of Damascus.”

<sup>12</sup> NARA, RG 84, Volume 58, Report by Reverend Elias Newman “Destruction, Fire and Sword in Damascus” (5 November 1925).

<sup>13</sup> Elias Newman Papers, “The Most Exciting Episode in My Life.”

diplomats, as well as Syrian-Lebanese around the world, would later point to these incidents as proof of the mandatory government's failings.

The shelling lasted for two straight days. Numerous homes and historical sites lay in ruins, including the eighteenth-century 'Azm Palace—a grand masterpiece of Damascene architecture. Conservative estimations put the number of deaths at nearly 1,500.<sup>14</sup> The bombardment of Damascus signaled a crucial turning point in the revolt. In the months leading up to the attack, what began as a local Druze uprising was beginning to take on the trappings of a Syrian-wide popular and nationalist rebellion. Following the bombardment, the French had successfully coerced the Damascene government to pay a fine of “100,000 Turkish gold lira, and 3,000 rifles.”<sup>15</sup> A number of Damascene nationalists were either jailed or had fled, ending “direct elite engagement in the revolt.”<sup>16</sup> Captain Carbillet whose policies in Jebel Druze ignited the protests that culminated in the uprising, later wrote several reports on the situation in Syria, hoping to have them forwarded to the League of Nations for consideration.<sup>17</sup> One such report analyzed the negotiations following the bombing of Damascus as a lesson in how to avoid the same pitfalls in French negotiations with the Druze. Despite overwhelming criticism, Carbillet unabashedly declared that the “bombardment of the rebel districts of Damascus was a

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<sup>14</sup> Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*, 104.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 104-105.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 112.

<sup>17</sup> Namely, the imposition of heavy taxes and *corvée* labor. Carbillet, a former military intelligence officer, sought to impose direct rule on the Druze population of the region, despite an agreement between the Jabal Druze and the French in 1923, which granted the region semi-autonomous power.

necessity.”<sup>18</sup> He continued: “When the bombardment ceased, it was certain that we literally had Damascus in our hands.” And yet, in Carbillet’s opinion, the mandatory power had not done enough to quash the rebellion.<sup>19</sup>

Though the history of revolt would later be coopted by a Damascene elitist and nationalist narrative, the revisionist account by Michael Provence reveals the on-the-ground, popular support that sustained the uprising well beyond its initial months.<sup>20</sup> This popular support reached far beyond the ruins of Damascus, as news of the offensive trickled to members of the Syrian community abroad. For many Syrian-Lebanese émigrés, the events of Damascus signified a shift in their outlook regarding the rebellion. What had previously been described as a Druze-led uprising was—with tales of Muslims defending their Christian neighbors—now heralded as a nationalist cause.<sup>21</sup> Syrians and Lebanese in the diaspora wrote dutifully about the revolt, collected aid for the victims of the bombardment, and partook in a global awareness campaign concerning French actions in Syria. As news of the bombardment broke, the Syro-Palestinian Congress with its committees in Cairo, Geneva, and Jerusalem, employed a conscientious

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<sup>18</sup> AN 313AP-248, Captain Carbillet, “Les négociations qui suivirent le bombardement de Damas: comment nous ne sûmes pas exploiter notre succès les écueils à éviter dans des négociations avec les druzes” (February 1926).

<sup>19</sup> In Carbillet’s opinion, the French made three fatal errors in post-bombardment negotiations: 1) Rather than imposing a French governor in the city, they privileged an unpopular leader, Subhi Bey Barakat who did not fully represent the people; 2) They failed to fully disarm the city; and 3) The fines imposed on the city were not crippling enough. Moving forward with negotiations in Jebel Druze, Carbillet suggested total disarmament, a move away from privileging the leading Atrash clan, and was of the opinion that more direct rule (i.e. the imposition of French governor in the region) would suppress the rebellion.

<sup>20</sup> Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*.

<sup>21</sup> The Greek-Orthodox Syrian journal published in New York, *Mir’at al-Gharb* frequently came to the defense of the rebellion against accusations by other diasporic Syrian or Lebanese Christians that it was a cover for Druze and/or Muslims attempting to assert power over their Christian neighbors. While they acknowledged the incidents of violence against Christians, such as the one targeting Armenians, they nevertheless described this violence as aberrant in the wider context of French misrule and violence. Thus, they frequently referred to the Damascus incident as hope for a secular, nationalist future.

propaganda campaign to pressure the League of Nations to investigate the actions of the French mandatory regime. They reached out to media outlets, with specific instructions to the Jerusalem Committee to: 1) spread the news of the Damascus bombardment, and 2) collect money for the victims of Damascus.<sup>22</sup> Numerous telegrams, signed by the famous Palestinian activist Jamal al-Husayni, acting as secretary of the Jerusalem committee, appealed to "major news agencies," asking them to publish information regarding the extent of civilian casualties and structural damage.<sup>23</sup> According to French intelligence, a number of news agencies even wrote back, asking them to continue supplying information. The French found these circulating telegrams "to have deep impact," on global sentiment towards France.<sup>24</sup>

More importantly, the French had to reckon with the countless petitions of Syrian émigrés to the League of Nations. From the moment of its inception, Syrian-Lebanese groups in various parts of the world began addressing petitions of diverse concerns to the League of Nations. Perhaps more than any other topic, the French bombardment of Damascus in late October 1925 was a prominent feature in correspondences to the League over the course of its brief lifetime.<sup>25</sup> As news of the bombardment spread, the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations was flooded with petitions from Syrian-Lebanese expatriates around the world. These petitions protested French mandatory rule, beseeching the League to take a stand against injustice. Others alerted the League of the plight of Christian minorities caught in the crossfire. These petitions reveal the evolving articulations of competing nationalist discourses,

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<sup>22</sup> CADN, Syrie-Liban, Carton 1704, "Bulletin des Renseignements" (30 October 1925).

<sup>23</sup> CADN, Syrie-Liban, Carton 1704, "Bulletin des Renseignements" (3 November 1925).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Susan Pedersen, "Samoa on the World Stage: Petitions and Peoples before the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 2 (2012).



especially as they were addressed to an international audience. Petitions against the mandate often drew upon a secular, Syrian nationalist vision that extended beyond Damascus.

Altogether, these petitions speak to a moment where subalterns across the world attempted to assert their place in the post-war international order. Petitions by Syrian émigrés fit squarely in the internationalism of the 1920's, a moment wherein, as historian Daniel Gorman describes, “interwar experiments in international governance were premised on a deterritorialization of world politics.”<sup>26</sup> This chapter takes the bombardment of Damascus in 1925 as a case study in the investigation of the various international and transnational layers of the Syrian Revolt. Damascus stands out as the capital and center of Syria, but the bombardment of the city in 1925 also reveals the global interconnectedness that increasingly defined the historical landscape. The events in Syria featured in diverse news outlets and fueled intense debates in the United States, France, Egypt and all other places comprising the *mahjar*. These debates importantly revolved around broader questions concerning the nature and significance of the mandate, highlighting a circulating interest over the bombardment's legality within the realm of international relations.

While scholarly consensus holds that the League of Nations failed as an international peacekeeping body, Susan Pedersen's work argues that it is nevertheless constructive to look at the discursive practices that the League employed and enabled. Pedersen maintains that public oversight of the mandatory powers set in place an “internationalization” of norms concerning the governance of dependent territories.<sup>27</sup> By extension, the utilization of such evolving norms by peoples under mandate governance is a fruitful area of study. This chapter hence explores how

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<sup>26</sup> Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 9.

<sup>27</sup> Susan Pedersen, “Back to the League of Nations” *The American Historical Review* 112.4 (2007), 1104.

Syrian-Lebanese petitioners to the League were part of this broader story about changing international norms. Further, the bombardment of Damascus is thus a significant lens through which to draw new conclusions about the meaning and function of the League of Nations in 1925. However, petitions to the League of Nations must be read with certain qualifications that take into consideration the role of petitioning in underlining preexisting power relations, as well as shifts in power. While they should be read as cultural products endowed with specific meaning, petitions to the League should not be understood simply as byproducts of this novel international body. After all, residents of the former Ottoman territories were bequeathed a long history and tradition of petitioning the Ottoman sultan that stretched far back into Islamic history.<sup>28</sup> With the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, petitions were redirected to the League of Nations, and the international powers linked to it, reflecting shifts in who petitioners deemed having the authority capable of fulfilling their demands. The space of the League of Nations thus came to fill much of this vacuum. Yet, petitions—while investing authority in the League—did not necessarily translate into unreserved support for the organization. The final chapter follows up on this discussion by considering the ways in which Syrians simultaneously challenged the League of Nations system, even as they utilized the limited mechanisms the League provided them.

More specifically, beyond adding to a growing non-Eurocentric and decentered literature on the mandates, studying the revolt through debates and petitions surrounding the League and

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<sup>28</sup> See Yuval Ben-Bassat, *Petitioning the Sultan: Protests and Justice in Late Ottoman Palestine* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014).

formal obligations of the mandatory power can be instructive in several ways.<sup>29</sup> For one, although the existing literature heavily privileges dynamics confined to the mandate borders, the revolt was not confined to the battlefields of the Syrian countryside; the Syrian-Lebanese diaspora played a key role by appealing to great powers and international organizations like the League of Nations. As the following pages will illustrate, Syrian-Lebanese subjects everywhere struggled to influence the local civic order in the mandate territories by attempting to access and influence the realm of international relations. Additionally, the effect of the revolt (in its diasporic manifestations through such means as petition-writing) also has international implications in its broader assertion of a discourse and norms of international law, humanitarianism, and civilization.

### **Foreign Consuls in Damascus**

For fifty years, Syrian poets will still describe these atrocities in all their harrowing details. Even when the memory of the Damascus bombing in autumn of 1925 shall be erased in French memoirs, poems will relive the tragic days in the eyes of the children and grandchildren of their victims.

We cannot get an accurate picture of the particular atrocity of the bombing in Damascus if one does not know the narrowness of its streets, the crowding of houses in these kind of human anthills that are the neighborhoods of this city...

...These are terrible scenes of barbarity to try to break through and run away when seen from here; according to official reports, we imagine something similar to what happened in Paris when the projectiles of Berthas fell there...<sup>30</sup>

The man responsible for the above description of “blitz on Damascus” was Jules Gervais-Courtellemont, a famous photographer and Orientalist with a long history of traveling throughout the Middle East. The above excerpt is revelatory of the specific moment in history in which it

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example: Natasha Wheatley, “Mandatory Interpretation: Legal Hermeneutics and the New International Order in Arab and Jewish Petitions to the League of Nations,” *Past and Present* (May 2015).

<sup>30</sup> AN 313AP-248, Note to Painlevé, “Maintien ou Abandon Progressif du Mandat de la France en Syrie” (12 November 1925).

was written. In many ways, Europe was still reeling from the horrific realities of modern warfare brutally demonstrated in the First World War, and so had resolved to uphold the European balance of power, if not prevent future war. The Damascus bombardment acted as perturbing flashback, but more importantly demonstrated that the European powers had, indeed, been unable to secure a world free of war. In a 28-page memorandum to the French government entitled, “Continuation or Progressive phasing out of the French Mandate in Syria,” Gervais-Courtellemont saw the bombardment of Damascus as the culmination of the most barbaric aspects of France’s program abroad. Whereas certain French newspapers moved to downplay the damage that befell the city, he warned that the power of the “Syrian press” should not be underestimated. The “entire Muslim Press, the entire Syrian press abroad (so important in the U.S.) would likely unleash violent campaigns against French actions in Syria.” As a result, the Syrian rebels would surely receive “relief materials, in the form of remittances,” collected both privately and publicly abroad—“money with which the Syrians will buy what they will need in Europe and Russia.” He painted a far bleaker picture, one in which the current militarism of the French would lead to even more rebellions, pitting all of Asia and non-Europeans against imperial powers, and which would ultimately play into Bolshevik intrigues.

Immediately after the Damascus offensive, the French mandate came under significant international criticism, firstly among the foreign consuls in Syria. Diplomatic debates and press coverage questioned the capabilities, legality and methods of the French mandatory regime. These debates revealed significant tensions over the postwar international system. The Syrian Revolt significantly provoked these questions, thereby acting as just one site in an ongoing debate over the meaning and place of the League of Nations in the continuity of post-war forms

of colonialism.<sup>31</sup> On the one hand, other Western powers sought to enhance their respective images domestically and abroad by critiquing French methods in Syria. The British press, for example, reflected ambiguous feelings towards France's actions in Syria, but for reasons that aimed to absolve the British of their role as a neighboring mandatory power. The *Westminster Gazette* noted that, as a "colonizing power" France "governed with a light hand, and [had] done a notable civilizing work."<sup>32</sup> And yet, the bombardment of Damascus proved to be an enormous mistake. France, it further declared "will not govern Syria by bombarding the town of which she is the official guardian, and she will find a mandate a very ruinous responsibility if she is reduced to keeping order by aeroplanes and tanks." In contrast, the British could not but "feel it other than reassuring to know that we have at Jerusalem a cool and sensible man like Lord Palmer."<sup>33</sup> The British were especially concerned about the effect of the Syrian Revolt on the nearby British mandate in Palestine. Concerns over the infiltration of Druze forces across the Transjordanian border sparked fears of an uprising among the British mandate's Palestinian subjects.<sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, the bombing of Damascus spawned debates over internationalism, the purpose of mandates system, and humanitarianism. Such debates revealed various, and often conflicting, interpretations surrounding the purpose of the League of Nations in a postwar era. Likewise, the controversy also highlighted the precarious nature of international politics,

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<sup>31</sup> See Mark Mazower, *No enchanted palace: the end of empire and the ideological origins of the United Nations* (Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>32</sup> LNA Carton R 25, 48540/4284. C.P.M. 344, "Commentaires de Presse au sujet de la nomination et du programme de M. de Jouvenel; de la cooperation de la France et de la Grande-Bretagne dans la Proche Orient, etc." Extract from the *Westminster Gazette*, "Fellow Mandatories" (7 November 1925).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> TNA, British National Archives, FO 141/810/6, General Staff Intelligence (Cairo), "Syrian-Palestinian Committee" (5 February 1926).

revealing the pitfalls and shortcomings of the veiled colonialism. The Permanent Mandates Commission, charged with the responsibility of overseeing the work of the mandatory powers, thus faced two fronts with regard to public opinion: the press and petitions, which will be addressed later in this chapter. The Damascus events reverberated throughout the world, providing fodder for anti-imperialists. The press of the United States was especially critical of French measures in Syria. Tensions between the United States and France over the war debt were already quite noticeable, and played into debates in the press covering France's "blunders" in Syria.<sup>35</sup> The U.S. press described French military action in Syria and Morocco as "unusually cruel and relentless," pointing out that "ruthless action of this kind defies the mandate provisions."<sup>36</sup> The author of these words in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* opined that the Permanent Mandates Commission "should take its courage in both hands and order an inquiry," and that the League of Nations ought to frankly recognize its responsibility in Syria, "where intervention might check the rampant imperialism of France," thereby proving "to the world that the League recognizes no difference between friend or foe, great powers or small."<sup>37</sup>

The mandatory government's neglect to warn foreigners of the bombardment set diplomatic controversy in motion. The German Consul, acting as the doyen of the Consular Corps in Damascus, addressed a letter to the delegate of the high commissioner the morning after the bombardment. Consular officials and foreigners residing in Damascus were shocked that the French had not giving them any warning of the impending bombardment; instead French forces withdrew from the city leaving behind "unprotected foreigners, including women and children,

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<sup>35</sup> "French Blunders in Syria" *New York Times* (29 October 1925).

<sup>36</sup> "More Work for the League," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (28 October 1925).

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

as well as Christians and Jews of the indigenous population."<sup>38</sup> As a result, numerous European and American lives, homes and businesses were threatened or damaged. Drawing upon a common understanding of "humanitarianism," the Consular Corps also questioned the mandatory power's decision to shell Damascus. Could they have not resorted to such methods commonly "used in most cases of urban disorder," in which the guilty would be disciplined without harming the innocent? Instead, the French made room for the "humanitarianism" of the Muslim residents, who "benevolently" assumed the role of protecting local Christians, Jews and foreigners who the French had deserted.<sup>39</sup> The Consular Corps pushed the mandatory government to take responsibility for any foreign lives and goods lost in the recent events.

The British Consul in Damascus also sent word to foreign secretary Austen Chamberlain, complaining that French authorities had "lost their head."<sup>40</sup> The British were perturbed that the French had not afforded them the same warning they had given to French citizens residing in Damascus. Chamberlain warned the French that English residents in Damascus would likely reach out to foreign newspapers, and that he would be unable to prevent their publication. He also added that "the situation in Syria was fueling Bolshevik and perhaps Turkish intrigues," which would put them at risk of serious embarrassment.<sup>41</sup>

The U.S. Embassy was most vocal against French tactics during the course of the revolt. Shortly after the bombardment, the American ambassador sent his representative to pay a visit to

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<sup>38</sup> CADN, Caire Ambassade-353PO/2, Carton 117, "Rapport du Corps Consulaire de Damas adressé au délégué du Haut-Commissaire français concernant les evenements de cette ville" (21 October 21 1925).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> AN 313AP-248, Secret Telegram from Fleuriau (23 October 1925).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

the office of the high commissioner. Reiterating the same concerns as the Consular Corps, the American government held the French responsible for the safety of its citizens, reserving the right to request compensation for damage or losses.<sup>42</sup> A few weeks later, the United States sent "two destroyers" to Beirut's harbor "to take charge of American property."<sup>43</sup> The United States Consul Paul Knabenshue requested these destroyers out of fear that the escalating sentiment against the French would provoke a general uprising even in relatively quiet areas such as Beirut.<sup>44</sup> The presence of the destroyers in Beirut's harbor provoked French agitation, threatening their authority in the region while calling into question the mandatory power's ability to secure the region.

Although much of the United States' criticism of the mandate centered on France's responsibility to protect foreign nationals, American consular reports called into question France's authority as a mandatory power altogether.<sup>45</sup> In defending his decision to request the two destroyers, Knabenshue considered the implications of such a move. Since France was responsible to the League of Nations, it had both the duty of protecting the native inhabitants and of securing the lives and property of foreign nationals belonging to League of Nations member states. Although the United States had not joined the League, it nevertheless felt entitled to hold France responsible for the danger and damage caused to both its own and foreign citizens. U.S.

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<sup>42</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 210, Carton 411, Telegram from HC to MAE (28 October 1925).

<sup>43</sup> American University of Beirut (henceforth AUB), Bayard Dodge Collection, Box 8, File 3, Personal Letters, (15 November 1925).

<sup>44</sup> NARA, Box 4, RG 84, Volume 465, Special Report 4605 from N.A. Constantinople, "Subject: Present Situation in Syria" (17 December 1925).

<sup>45</sup> It is perhaps important to note here that although the United States had not signed onto the League of Nations, the initiatives of President Wilson strongly resonated throughout the former territories of the Ottoman Empire.



claims were supported by the fact that Syria and Lebanon were “theoretically independent states merely under the tutelage of France.”<sup>46</sup> Because this situation was a complex and ambiguous one, Knabenshue felt that the Americans “would be justified in assuming an attitude and following a policy somewhat more pronounced and direct than would probably be permissible in actual French territory.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, the United States sought to challenge French jurisdiction and authority in Syria. He continued on this tangent more assertively:

France through mal-administration and through following a policy more of colonization than of truly mandatory regime has brought on a revolution in the country which has caused the ruin of at least one hundred thousand of its inhabitants, the destruction of ancient and sacred landmarks, and has endangered the lives, property, and potential interests of foreigners.<sup>48</sup>

Under such circumstances, the United States could not “depend on French assurances.” Rather, “the presence alone” of the two destroyers in Beirut’s harbor had, in Knabenshue’s opinion, done more to give “a sense of security to the population.”<sup>49</sup>

Syrians in Damascus and abroad took heed of the actions of the United States in Syria. News of losses incurred by foreigners conveniently fed into anti-French narratives, singling out France in its obstruction of international norms. Syrians in New York learned of the abandonment of Damascus by American and other foreign officials, but also took note of the hundreds of naturalized Americans of Syrian descent who were also forced to flee to neighboring Beirut. The presence of the American destroyers likewise bolstered propaganda against the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Knabenshue most likely formed this assumption based upon the Covenant of the League of Nations. Later portions of this chapter highlight the ambiguity among members of the Mandates Commission regarding the sovereignty of nations under mandate.

<sup>47</sup> NARA, Box 4, RG 84, Volume 465, Beirut Consulate to Secretary of State, “Policy of the United States in Territory under Mandate” (8 November 1925).

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

mandate. Headlines spoke of French “resentment” against the presence of the American destroyers in Beirut’s waters. The destroyers signaled American might, while highlighting the mandatory government’s military shortages in the face of a spreading rebellion<sup>50</sup>

Just as predicted, foreign criticism surrounding the mandatory government's actions in Damascus forced the attention of the French government. The general secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the time, Phillipe Berthelot, sent a telegram to the high commissioner, concerned about the circulating allegations that the French mandatory power was breaking with international codes that required that foreign consuls and foreigners be forewarned and treated equally as the French.<sup>51</sup> General Sarrail indignantly replied that he was well aware of the international rules, but that they could not be applied to Damascus without the city succumbing to the rebels, who he added "ignore all conventions and international rules." Berthelot, seemingly unsatisfied with Sarrail’s response, reminded the high commissioner that he should "never forget that Syria is a country under mandate and that France has a double duty to protect foreigners."<sup>52</sup> There was no mention of France’s obligation to protect the local citizens of Syria.

By the end of October, Sarrail had been permanently recalled back to France to report on the situation in Syria. The bombardment of Damascus initiated an on-going debate in the French senate and chamber over Syria, deepening disagreements within the left. The leftist prime minister, Paul Painlevé had inherited anti-colonial uprisings in both Morocco and Syria—bringing to the fore doubts over France’s “*mission civilisatrice*,” but more specifically, its ability

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<sup>50</sup> “al-sulta al-muntadiba tasta’ min wujud al-mudamarat al-amrikiya fi bayrut,” *Mir’at al-Gharb* (9 November 1925).

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol.210, Carton 411, Telegram from MAE to HC (29 October 1925).

to free itself from its colonial tethers. Painlevé attempted his best to stave off a cabinet discussion concerning Syria until Sarrail returned to France. Such a discussion would likely initiate a departure of socialist support for a government that was already in financial debt. Many were anxious over France's image, fearing public comparisons between the 1925 bombardment of Damascus, and the German tactic of strategic bombing during World War I, succinctly summed up by one deputy who is reported to have said: "The world must know that France has nothing in common with those who bombed unprotected villages in 1914."<sup>53</sup>

A solitary voice in the French Chamber of Deputies advocating for the cancellation of the mandate was Jacques Doriot, a member of the French Communist Party. On December 20, 1925, Doriot gave a lengthy speech at a session of the chamber, accusing France of imperialist designs in Syria. Addressing the chamber, Doriot proclaimed: "We want to ask that we terminate the mandate, that we evacuate Syria, because we think that after the facts reported here this morning, this is the only conclusion that is currently required."<sup>54</sup> Though Doriot was noisily applauded by members of the far left, other members derided him for his fiery attack against France's actions in Syria. Doriot spared neither the leftists nor those on the right. He accused the left of complicity in their defense of leftist General Sarrail, while admonishing the right of encouraging French imperialism in Syria and Morocco. As for the League of Nations, Doriot described its function as: "accommodating, under a pacifist guise, the imperialist expeditions of France and England."<sup>55</sup> After demonstrating the illegality of the French mandate by article 22 of the League

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<sup>53</sup> "Painleve staves off fall: Collapse of cabinet postponed when question of Syria goes over until 20<sup>th</sup> inst.," *Los Angeles Times* (6 November 1925).

<sup>54</sup> Jacques Doriot, *La Syrie Aux Syriens!: Discours, Prononcé Par Doriot, À La Chambre Des Députés, Le 20 Décembre 1925* (Paris: L'Humanité, 1926), 6.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.* 9.

Covenant, Doriot asked how the League could seriously expect Syrians to send their complaints to the very government that had elected to bombard them.

Apart from Doriot's impassioned stance, however, the French government's chief complaint against Sarrail was simply his failure to fully inform the central government of the military situation in the mandate. Sarrail's heavy-handed approach, as well the mistreatment of Druze chiefs by Captain Carbillet was primarily to blame. There was little question that the next high commissioner should be a civilian. Henry de Jouvenel, a journalist and French politician, filled this spot in December 1925. The appointment of Jouvenel as the first civilian high commissioner signified a shift in French policy towards Syria, but only superficially.

Upon accepting his new post, Jouvenel set himself apart from his predecessor by inviting the nationalists to peace negotiations, and issuing a call for general amnesty.<sup>56</sup> As demonstrated in the previous chapter, negotiations with members of the Syro-Palestinian Congress in Paris and Cairo had failed. Moreover, upon his arrival in Syria, Jouvenel concluded that his liberal program could not be achieved until the rebellion was suppressed. As Jouvenel extended an olive branch to the nationalists with one hand, he intensified punitive security efforts with the other. The tactic of using artillery and aerial bombardment against insurgent forces was not abandoned but rather pushed to the countryside.<sup>57</sup> Henceforth, the high commissioner's personal staff would coordinate with the *Service des Renseignements* (Intelligence Service) "in a bid to match the rebels' knowledge of every locale. SR personnel were to submit fortnightly intelligence reports

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<sup>56</sup> Provenca, *The Great Syrian Revolt*, 109.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

about rebel movements, public opinion, and the prospects for peace.”<sup>58</sup> In this way, Jouvenel’s administration achieved closer cooperation between the civil cabinet and military officers of the mandatory government. A vote in the French senate, now under the premiership of Aristide Briand, confirmed a new policy towards Syria, while still refusing to give up on the mandate. In a speech to the cabinet, Briand evoked the enduring spirit of the mandates system, declaring:

Do you want France to say: ‘I who have gone through the terrible trials of war, I who have lifted my flag for the right and who, fallen upon my knees under terrible blows, rose again triumphant: I who, victorious, have yielded in Syria and let these things go on—I have quit because I cannot fulfill the mandate.’ Is that the role you wish France to play? No, gentlemen, never!<sup>59</sup>

It was precisely the rhetoric of the French fulfillment of the mandate that Syrian-Lebanese petitioners everywhere hoped to subvert and challenge.

### **The Politics of Petitioning: Syrian-Lebanese Petitioners and the League of Nations**

The history of the League of Nations and the mandates system, with few exceptions, has been largely Eurocentric, focusing primarily on the chief founders of postwar internationalism. While there is no denying that France’s policy change in Syria was, in large part, a response to diplomatic and domestic pressure, the following investigation of diasporic petitions considers how émigrés played a role in shaping world opinion. Aside from the physical and financial toll that the rebellion caused for French authorities within Syria, diasporic activism also constituted a conscious and organized attempt on the part of émigrés to change the political situation within the mandate, if only through propaganda and material support. Such cross-border activism

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<sup>58</sup> Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 160-161.

<sup>59</sup> “Briand triumphs in vote on Syria: After premier’s plea for France to duty the chamber adopts his policy, 300 to 29,” *New York Times* (21 December 1925).

played a key role in shaping the discourse and norms associated with the mandate and the League of Nations more broadly.

The relationship of Syrian-Lebanese petitioners to the League is crucially linked to the work of the Permanent Mandates Commission (PMC), a body whose foundations are found in Article 22 of the League Covenant. Ideally, the PMC would oversee the work of the mandate governments, making sure they lived up to their purported task of readying their territories for sovereignty and independence. The power of the Commission vis-à-vis the mandatory regimes, however, was never clearly defined. With the origins of the League inextricably tied to the history of European imperialism, it comes as no surprise that the PMC often facilitated the colonial policies of the mandate government. The PMC did not predict, however, that petitions would begin to pour in from various territories under mandate rule. The League suddenly found itself confronted with the question of what role these petitions would play in the mechanisms of the PMC as an overseeing body. In such a way, petitions came to fill a vacuum brought about by the new international order.

The ill-prepared PMC thus formulated ad hoc procedures as it went along. In the PMC's debates over petitions, it was noted that given the "disinterestedness" of mandatory powers, the Mandates Commission considered petitions to be a valuable source of leverage when weighing in on the annual reports drafted by the mandatory powers.<sup>60</sup> Yet it also sought to discourage "seditious or trivial petitions, by persons whose motives may be either culpable or frivolous."<sup>61</sup> It

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<sup>60</sup> LNA, Carton R 60, 25978/22099, "Procedure in respect of Petitions regarding Inhabitants of Mandated Territories: Report by M. Antonio Salandra" (31 January 1923).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

was hence up to the commission's "discretion" to determine the value of each petition.<sup>62</sup> In January of 1923, in accordance with suggestions originally made by the British government, the PMC adopted an official "Rules of Procedure," concerning petitions by inhabitants of mandated territories. In order for petitions to be determined eligible for consideration by the Secretariat of the League as well as the PMC, they should first be sent to the mandatory government in question. Any petitions not filtered through the mandatory power would be sent back.<sup>63</sup>

The Commission was subsequently confronted with the question of what to do about the significant number of petitions coming from émigré groups. In accordance with the third clause of the official Rules of Procedures, those petitions coming from sources other than the mandated territory did not have to go through the mandatory power, and would be forwarded directly to the chairman of the PMC.<sup>64</sup> "Obviously trivial" petitions received standard responses, justifying their dismissal.<sup>65</sup> Telegrams to the Commission were similarly dismissed as not constituting a petition with a specific set of demands. Meanwhile, the PMC examined petitions deemed by the Chairman to be worthy of attention, and conclusions were then forwarded to the Council of the League. If the Council approved of the conclusions, the Secretary-General then notified the petitioner concerning the fate of his appeal. Thus, by virtue of residing outside the mandate territories, Syrian-Lebanese petitioners abroad were able to bypass mandatory oversight, granting them more leverage among an international audience.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> LNA, Carton R 60, 25978/22099, CPM 38, "Rules of Procedure in respect of Petitions concerning Inhabitants of Mandated Territories (Adopted by the Council on January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1923.)"

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> LNA, Carton R60, 51407/22099, "Extract from the Minutes of the Fortieth Session of the Council: Fourth Meeting held on June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1926."

Such procedures, clearly partial to the mandatory powers, did not go unattested by petitioners. In a letter forwarded by the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Najib Armanazi secretary of the Association of Syrian Youth in Paris (*Association de la Jeunesse Syrienne*) and a law graduate of the Sorbonne, addressed the President of the Council of League. The new procedures, alleged Armanazi, do “violence to law and justice.”<sup>66</sup> By first sending them to the mandatory power, the petitions stood to escape the impartial jurisdiction of the League. Armanazi claimed that the League, based as it was upon the ideal of justice, was the sole means of defense against the mandatory power. He hoped that in the end, the law would prevail. For Armanazi and his contemporaries, the act of petitioning secured a legal spot for subjects of mandatory rule in the hierarchy of power set up by the new international system. Syrian and Lebanese activists used this new international space to attempt to influence the norms and terms of the mandates.

Syrian petitions to the League of Nations date back to its earliest years. The Geneva-based Syro-Palestinian Congress led the way in its opposition to the French mandate from outside its borders. Leading up to the 1925 uprising, the Congress had been sending lengthy reports to the League, responding to various assumptions made in the French annual reports, and cataloging French maladministration. With the start of the revolt, Syrians everywhere inundated the League with letters, telegrams and reports documenting alleged French abuses. Only a few weeks after the bombardment, *The New York Times* reported that the PMC received “twenty-five protests from Arab organizations against the actions of the French in Syria, especially the

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<sup>66</sup> LNA, Carton R 60, 2163/22029, Letter by N. Armanazi to the President of the League of Nations (5 February 1923).



bombardment of Damascus.”<sup>67</sup> Many petitions concerning the Damascus events reflected a secular, pan-Syrian nationalist vision framed within the Wilsonian language of self-determination and sovereignty. Others made use of normative understandings of international law, humanitarianism and civilizational progress to call attention to what they considered to be the illegality and callousness of French actions.

For the most part, telegrams shared a common message—strongly condemning French atrocities in Syria while demanding the League bring an end to French abuses. The most articulate of the telegrams framed their protest by using the post-war language of humanitarian intervention and international law. Syrian students in Berlin, writing on behalf of “Syrian colonies living in Germany,” wrote an especially eloquent petition to the League that went beyond a simple condemnation of the bombardment. Turning the logic of the mandates system against the League of Nations itself, the petitioners posed a series of contemptuous, rhetorical questions:

Does the League of Nations, in the full consciousness of its responsibility and duties, intend now to turn its attention to the Syrian situation and, since it authorized the French to give assistance to the Syrians, will it now call them to account for this brutal outrage? Or will it once more be satisfied with subterfuges and cleverly drafted reports by French representatives, and atone for what has been done in Syria by futile discussion at a conference?<sup>68</sup>

Once again coopting the discourse upon which the League was founded, the petition went on to point out the tragic state of European journalism on the bombardment of Damascus. While Britain worried about securing its position in the East, and France about whether it was gaining any benefit in Syria, European papers failed to make any serious references “to the staggering

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<sup>67</sup> “Twenty-five protests to League,” *New York Times* (2 November 1925).

<sup>68</sup> LNA, Carton 23, 47458/4284, C.P.M 334 “Appeal to the Council of the League of Nations on Behalf of the Syrian Colonies in Germany” (2 November 1925).

blow which France [has] dealt to world peace and international reconciliation.”<sup>69</sup> The appeal continued on this tangent, reminding the League of its presumed role in global governance. French blunders in Morocco and Syria proved that the French were “incapable of living with other nations in peace and justice, in accordance with the principles by which the world should be governed.” By not dissolving the mandate, the League was giving “oppressed peoples” the impression that it was simply a body of European powers, “banded together” to carry out their imperialist projects. These Syrians from Berlin concluded their petition by demanding, “in the name of international justice—which is the end and aim of the League—that Syria should be finally released from this unwanted mandate and that her complete independence be recognized.”<sup>70</sup>

Not all petitions or telegrams to the League called for the cancelation of the mandate—some questioned the wider system of which it was a part. The Syrian Society of America held not only France responsible for Damascus but also all “governments belonging to the League of Nations under whose auspices Syria was mandated to France.” The League of Nations, entrusted to guarantee the “self determination of the people of Syria,” should at the very least ensure their “life and property,” rights commonly agreed upon by all nations.<sup>71</sup> Similarly, a number of Syrian-Lebanese notables in Cairo, claiming that the French policy of shelling areas of rebel activity went against “all principles of international law,” sought an intervention in the form of an international commission to investigate French policies in Syria in accordance with the terms

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> LNA, Carton 23, 47459/4284, C.P.M 337, “Communications relatives a la situation en Syrie: Télégramme date de New York, le 8 Novembre 1925 du Comité exécutif de la Societé Syrienne d’Amérique” (8 November 1925).

of the mandate.<sup>72</sup> Telegrams from Syrian and Lebanese societies in the Americas also voiced similar demands.<sup>73</sup> At the heart of these communiqués was the proposition that the French were not living up to the “spirit” of the mandate system.

Writing shortly after the first shelling of Damascus, American political scientist and international relations expert Quincy Wright explored the legality of French measures, and whether by international law intervention was possible.<sup>74</sup> Taking into account the Hague conventions as well as customary law, Wright concluded that the mandatory government was out of line in their assault on Damascus. Not only did the events of late October 1925 go against international law, but against the spirit of the mandate. Recourse to intervention or compensation was less clear. Articles 9 and 10 of the League covenant, designed “to settle disputes or prevent war,” could only be initiated by a League member, and only considered to the extent that the affair at had affected international relations.<sup>75</sup> It seemed to Wright that the most viable option to remedy the situation in Syria was to fall back on Article 22 of the Covenant, thereby tapping into the powers of the Mandates Commission to oversee and enforce the mandate. The fact, however, that the League was responsible to ensure the mandate meant that it would ultimately support France’s efforts to quell the rebellion—and this is precisely what took place.

The Commission was holding its seventh session as the events in Damascus transpired, and it very quickly began receiving telegrams from concerned Syrians around the world. Yet, according to official procedures, the Commission was confined to discussing only what was

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<sup>72</sup> This petition was headed by Michel Lutfallah of the Executive Committee of the Syro-Palestinian Congress.

<sup>73</sup> Quincy Wright, "The Bombardment of Damascus" *The American Journal of International Law* 20.2 (1926).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

contained in the mandatory power's annual report of 1924. Discussing the annual report without mention of the current events taking place, however, "would run the risk before public opinion of taking a position very liable to criticism."<sup>76</sup> Indeed, as Wright noted, rather than calling for intervention the PMC concluded that the discussion of the annual report and the revolt would be delayed for an "extraordinary" session in Rome the following year. This eighth meeting would be wholly dedicated to reviewing the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon.

### **"As typewriters clatter sleepily": The Eighth Extraordinary Session of the Permanent Mandates Commission**

On the occasion of France's assault on Damascus, the leftist, Berlin-based *Allgemeine Zeitung*, published an article that was not only critical of French policy in Syria, but of the League of Nations in general. In asserting that "Damascus is not only one of the oldest and most sacred, it is also one of the most progressive communities of the past," the newspaper took issue with Article 22 of the League of Nations covenant, and called upon the League to consider terminating mandate rule in Syria. As "machine guns are sounding in Damascus," wrote the author, at the League of Nations "typewriters clatter sleepily." Such juxtaposition, highlighting the ironies of Western standards of progress, exposed the relativity with which civilization and progress were measured.<sup>77</sup>

Reading between the lines, the minutes of the eighth extraordinary session that took place in Rome in February 1926 reveal underlying idiosyncrasies and contentions that emerge among

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<sup>76</sup> League of Nations, Permanent Mandates Commission, *Minutes of the Seventh Session* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1925), 14.

<sup>77</sup> LNA Carton R 25, 48540/4284. C.P.M. 346 "Commentaires de la presse au sujet de la responsabilité de la Société des Nations, etc." Translated extract from article by "Morcator" in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* (30 October 1925).

members of the Commission on the one hand, and between the Commission the representative of mandatory power on the other. Debates over what order to discuss the topics at hand (whether the revolt should take precedence over the annual reports, for example) the procedures regarding petitions, and conceptions of the mandate, and so forth, revealed not only the concerns of the individual members who attended, but also reflected the concerns of the public at large, a public that ultimately endowed the Commission with its legitimation as a body overseeing the work of the mandates in a postwar world.<sup>78</sup> After all, the Chairman, the Marquis Theodoli, was “sure that all the members of the Commission were animated by an impartial spirit and wished to fulfill the expectation of the Council and even of public opinion.”<sup>79</sup>

At the outset of the eighth session, the consensus about the role of the Commission was defined not by the original ideas of self-determination that ostensibly inspired the League of Nations, but by the goal of supervising the territories under mandate. The claim by Syrians that they had not been consulted about the mandate (in accordance with Article 22 of the League’s Covenant) thus went beyond the scope of the Commission.<sup>80</sup> Consequently, any petitions “regarding either the attribution of the mandate or the desire of Syrians to be exempted from the

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<sup>78</sup>See League of Nations, Permanent Mandates Commission, “Minutes of the Eight Session (Extraordinary) held at Rome from February 16<sup>th</sup> to March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1926, including the Report of the Commission to the Council,” (Publications of the League of Nations, 1926), 13. In debating whether to follow the usual procedure of discussing the reports in order of the questionnaire, M. Van Rees, the representative from the Netherlands, was of the opinion that in light of the situation in Syria, the revolt should be discussed first and foremost. M. Freire d’Andrade (of Portugal), on the hand, wished to follow the normal procedure. Freire d’Andrade believed it that the primary role of the PMC was to assess the mandatory power as a whole, and by describing the revolt as just one incident, suggested that there was no reason to change the procedures. The Commission fell down on the side of following the procedures. They would first address the report of 1924, and then proceed to a discussion of the provisional report of 1925. Within the discussion of this report, the Commission resolved to address the causes of the rebellion through targeted questions, many of which drew from specific allegations found in the petitions. Thus, the petitions were not discussed separately, though the petition of the Syro-Palestinian Congress address to the Commission only a few weeks prior to the bombardment, received the most attention.

<sup>79</sup> *Minutes of the Eighth Session*, 10.

<sup>80</sup> This responsibility fell rather to the Council of the League.

application of any mandate” would automatically be disregarded.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, any claim that the countries “were provisionally independent” as a basis for complaints against the French mandate met the same fate. Another caveat to the Commission’s ability to handle petitions was that it was not “a political institution,” rather “its only duty was to consider complaints from a legal point of view.”<sup>82</sup> Consequently, the PMC could only assess the petitions in so far as they brought up questions regarding the method in which the French administered the mandate.

Even though the PMC would not officially consider petitions that called into question the mandate as a whole, the Commission did feel the need to begin its discussion about how it was the mandatory power understood its mission. Syrian émigrés--the Syrian-Palestinian Congress in particular--had been petitioning the League long before the bombing of Damascus. The incident itself had, however, called into question France's execution of the mandate more than ever before. Such petitions raised a plethora of concerns: the harsh military rule in Syria, the imposition of mixed civil and religious courts, the meddling of French authorities in religious foundations, the economic failings brought about by the Bank of Syria and the policy of pegging the Syrian pound to the franc, as well as French intervention and control of native politics. Syrians also complained about border arrangements, the division of the territories of Syria and Lebanon into several states, and the economic implications of this, arguing that the division of the territory went against the wishes of the people (and thus Article 22 of the Covenant), while implementing the French policy of divide-and-rule based upon sectarian divisions, all of which displayed shallow understanding of Syrian history and its people. Given that “a great many of these petitions allege that the Mandatory has entirely misunderstood the nature of the Mandatory

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<sup>81</sup> *Minutes of the Eighth Session*, 47.

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

principle, a charge which found some support in the French Chamber” the Commission decided that it would only be proper to begin the meeting by “eliciting from M. de Caix a statement of the general principles which had guided the Mandatory Power in the execution of its task.”<sup>83</sup>

To this, de Caix responded that the mandate was “a provisional system designed to enable populations which, politically speaking, are still minors to educate themselves so as to arrive one day at full self-government.”<sup>84</sup> While de Caix admitted to the general idea that the mandatory power should guide the populations with as little interference as possible in their internal affairs, he did specify a qualification, that the mandatory power “be in a position to not only give advice, but also to correct the working of the native government and even to make up for their deficiencies.” It wasn’t until the promulgation of the Organic Statute that the mandate was considered to be “following its proper working course.”<sup>85</sup> The fact that the Syrians were in a state of rebellion, the Commission could safely assume that they were clearly not ready for the mandate to go into full effect.

The mandate for Syria and Lebanon was understood to be divided into two phases: before and after the promulgation of the organic law in Syria and Lebanon. The mandate would only be in full effect after the promulgation of the organic law. According to Article 1 of the mandate, before such a time, the territory would be governed in accordance with the “spirit of this mandate.” The ambiguity of this stipulation allowed for broad interpretations of mandatory responsibilities. Article 2 stipulated that until the organic law was formulated, the mandatory had

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<sup>83</sup> LNA, Carton R 27 50356/4284, “Note submitted to the Sub-Committee of the Permanent Mandates Commission by Sir F. Lugard” (20 March 1926).

<sup>84</sup> *Minutes of the Eighth Session*, 45.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

the responsibility to secure public order—this included the power to maintain a military and raise local militia. Therefore, as far as complaints by Syrians were concerned regarding harsh military rule, French actions in Syria had remained within legal means. Though a military regime was regrettable, it could not be interpreted as illegitimate. Yet, not all members of the Commission felt satisfied with this *fait accompli*.

Of all the Commission members, M. Van Rees felt most frustrated with this state of affairs. Many of the petitions that had flooded the Commission took issue with the existence of the mandate altogether, and hence, were not up for discussion. In addition, the majority of the communications received by the Commission were telegrams, and not petitions, further discounting them from official discussion, and thus recognition, during the meetings. Still, other petitions could be read for information concerning the method in which French measure were undertaken.

...In his view, the evidence furnished was not sufficient to allow him to weigh the *pros* and *cons* of the various complaints. He regretted this fact profoundly. He considered that the mandatory Power, in accepting the mandate, had at the same time agreed to submit to supervision on the part of the League of Nations—a supervision which was exercised, so to speak, though the intermediary of the Permanent Mandates Commission. This obligation to submit to such supervision meant, in his opinion, that the mandatory Power assumed the obligation to facilitate as much as possible the exercise of that supervision. He wondered, however, whether it had done all it could to facilitate this task.<sup>86</sup>

Van Rees and other members of the commission expressed grave concern that the French had come to the eighth session with only a provisional report covering the year of 1925, had inadequately addressed the underlying causes of the revolt, nor responded to a number of petitions which the PMC had forwarded to them. The enquiry headed by the new high commissioner, Henry de Jouvenel was still underway, and moreover, months removed from the

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 48.



events that had transpired under the watch of General Sarrail. Why had they not followed the example of South Africa with Bondelzwarts rebellion, and conducted a “complete inquiry” on the spot? Why wasn’t the Commission given the report of the investigation concerning Captain Carbillet’s actions in the Jebel Druse? And where was Brunet’s report, who had been sent on an official investigative mission to Syria? Van Rees especially cared to know why the mandatory power had not furnished the PMC with a special report concerning the petitions. The effect of this unpreparedness, lamented Van Rees, was that it hadn’t provided the commission with enough information to judge whether the mandatory power had been operating along the “spirit and principles of the mandate.”<sup>87</sup> Van Rees continued:

The activity of the mandatory Power should be essentially a benevolent activity—an expression of friendly co-operation with the native authorities. It was in this way that the words of the Covenant “advice and assistance” might be interpreted. What he had learned from the documents which had reached him was that, instead of peaceful and benevolent relations, the system of guardianship had been transformed into a system based more on the principles of direct administration which were very imperfectly carried out the ideas of those who had drawn up the terms of the mandate.

The ensuing discussion, and the tension it raised, suggest that the members of the Commission had rather unclear, or rather discordant ideas about what the role of the Commission was. M. Freire d’Andrade took issue with Van Rees’ speech, and thought his assertion about the PMC’s role as supervisor of the mandatory power to be too exaggerated. Whereas Freire d’Andrade sought to describe the relationship of the Commission as that of a cooperative and yielding advisor, the Swiss representative, William Rappard was in full agreement with Van Rees’ sentiments. Keeping in mind that Commission members acted as individuals and not representatives of their countries, Rappard believed that, “If the members of the Commission were to any extent the mouthpieces of their respective governments, their duty of co-operation

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 48.

would limit their duty of supervision to such a degree as to make it quite illusory.”<sup>88</sup> Rappard particularly stressed the importance of petitions in allowing to League to fulfill its role of supervising the mandate, a relationship that he compared to a guardian seeing to the interests and concerns of its minor. Rappard remarked upon the “catch 22” which seemed to enshroud the procedures regarding petitions:

It would accordingly be regrettable if the representatives of the guardian authority saw in the importance attached by the Commission to the grievances of the minor anything except an evidence that the Commission desired to do its duty. The position of the Commission in the presence of petitions was extraordinarily delicate, as had already been noted on many occasions. Petitions came before the Commission. The Commission asked the mandatory Power against whose actions the petitions were directed what it thought of the petitions, and the commission could only accept the replies made by the mandatory Power. It was not astonishing, in these circumstances, that nations which, under the Covenant, were declared to be provisionally independent considered themselves abandoned by the League.

Petitions put the PMC in a compromising position, for the credibility of their claims drew from the League Covenant itself—the very same Covenant that brought the mandate into existence. Rappard and other “members of the Commission had been disturbed precisely because there were patriots who had been promised independence and who could quote in support of their claims definite texts, among others, those of Article 22 of the Covenant itself.”<sup>89</sup> The Swedish Mme. Bugge-Wicksell, the only woman on the Commission, also chided the mandatory power for not making any observations about the petitions. Moreover, it had been noted that petitions from within the mandated territories were conspicuously absent. “There is a singular absence of any petition from Syria itself, and M. de Caix said it might be admitted that

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 61.

the people were afraid to send any," bringing up the question of whether or not French censorship was somehow responsible for this.<sup>90</sup>

The recourse to procedures also meant that the PMC also denied the request of the Syro-Palestinian Congress to speak to the Commission as it convened its eighth meeting. A letter from Amir Shakib Arslan requested a meeting with the PMC in order "to facilitate the difficult task of the Commission and enable it to discern the truth among the conflicting statements and arguments before it."<sup>91</sup> Arslan believed that the PMC had a responsibility to hear the delegation if wanted to remain true to its role in overseeing the work of the mandate. Arslan appealed to the Commission's strict adherence to procedure as a reflection of their impartiality, but also reasoned that, "The Covenant does not forbid the granting of a hearing to the persons concerned, or their interrogation with a view to ascertaining the truth."<sup>92</sup> In light of the recent, dangerous turn of events in Syria, Arslan also suggested that either the Commission send an Commission of Enquiry "on the spot," or "grant an interview to the duly appointed delegates of the Syrian nation, who—failing such an enquiry—are alone able to explain, and rectify the statements made by the representative of the mandatory Power."<sup>93</sup> Arslan and the Syro-Palestinian Congress thus positioned themselves as official representatives of the Syrian people, mirroring as well as foiling the part played by Robert de Caix as the accredited representative of the French government, and thus challenging the inherent faithfulness of the mandates system and that of the League of Nations.

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<sup>90</sup> LNA, Carton R 27 50356/4284, "Note submitted to the Sub-Committee of the Permanent Mandates Commission by Sir F. Lugard" (20 March 1926).

<sup>91</sup> *Minutes of the Eighth Session*, 156.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

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

Again, the debate that followed this request reflected both the limitations of the League's bureaucracy, as well as its precarious and undecided nature. Whereas Freire d'Andrede was generally in favor of receiving "representatives of the natives," he believed that in light of the precedent set by the Commission with regards to the Bondelzwarts affair—in which they refused to receive the petitioners—it would be difficult to adopt a different policy.<sup>94</sup> Van Rees believed that the receiving the petitioners was clearly excluded by existing procedures, defective as they may be. The PMC was an advisory body whose function derived from Article 22 of the Covenant.<sup>95</sup> In so far as the PMC would receive and examine the annual reports of the mandatory powers, it was therefore only conferred an "executive function" when forming "an opinion upon written" petitions only. On the other hand, Rappard believed that the "principle of impartiality obviously favored the proposal that the native representatives should be heard." He interpreted the PMC's task to be "judiciary" in nature, and pointed out that, "A court, however, which neglected the principle *audiatur et altera pars*" i.e. which did not also hear the opposing party, had little real authority.<sup>96</sup> Nevertheless, he fell on the side of refusing the petitioners based upon precedent. Though receiving the delegation would doubtless "increase its importance in the eyes of public opinion generally, and especially in the eyes of Syrian public opinion," he feared the consequences of this would be creating "fresh difficulties for the mandatory Power." Still others

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 157-158.

<sup>95</sup> " A permanent Commission shall be constituted to receive and examine the annual reports of the Mandatories and to advise the Council on all matters relating to the observance of the mandates," See *Minutes of the Eighth Session*, 157.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 158.

thought that receiving the delegation would be confirming their position as “accredited representatives,” a “qualification to which they had no right.”<sup>97</sup>

In response to these concerns, the French representative replied that the report did not go into a greater discussion of “deeper causes” of unrest for the simple fact that “no unrest existed to which they could draw attention, nor was there anything to point to the existence of deeper causes which might have led up to and given warning of the events of 1925.”<sup>98</sup> As for the petitions, the accredited representative of France at the eighth session Robert de Caix felt that the commission should not take the general complaints too seriously. According to de Caix, “Most of these petitions came from a group which is systematically hostile to the mandates and states the position according to its own biased views.”<sup>99</sup> Despite these suspicions, the Commission often took France for its word, noting that though a large number of petitions came from “America and other places abroad” they should be largely discounted owing to the fact that these communities had “long been out of touch with their country.”<sup>100</sup> Having maintained relations with diaspora organizations in Egypt, France could better speak to concerns of émigré groups in Egypt. As for the lack of petitions from Syrians within the mandate, de Caix conjured an explanation that lay blame on the inherent fear of Syrian people, who for years suffered at the hands of harsh Turkish censorship.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>98</sup> League of Nations, Permanent Mandates Commission, “Permanent Mandates Commission: Eighth Session (extraordinary) Comments Submitted by the Accredited Representative of France on the Commission's Observations with Regard to the Report on the Situation in Syria and the Lebanon in 1924 and the Provisional Report on the Situation in Those Territories in 1925” (Geneva: League of Nations, 1926), 1.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

French unpreparedness at the eighth session might be interpreted as tacit refusal to comply with League procedures. It is possible that the French did not wish to provide the Commission with more information through which to yield power over the French mandate. This is reflected in internal French debates. As French authorities deliberated the findings of the eighth extraordinary session of the Permanent Mandates Commission, Captain Carbillet, along with General Sarrail, found themselves being scrutinized by their own government. In one telling incident, Carbillet sought to have his reports submitted to the Mandates Commission along with the investigations of Counsellor Daclin, who was appointed by the French to head an inquiry on the alleged abuses of the French in the Druze region of Syria.<sup>101</sup> Daclin's report painted a picture of serious maladministration on the part of Carbillet, found his policies in Jebel Druze tactless, and his behavior morally questionable.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, despite his harsh criticisms, he did not fully blame Carbillet for the revolt's outbreak. Rather, the Druze did not possess the sensibilities, which would allow them to appreciate the harsh reforms he was attempting to enforce. Needless to say, Paris found no reason to send Carbillet's comments to the Mandates Commission. There was no reason for the Mandates Commission to be turned into a "court for the agents of the mandate," and especially no reason "to begin to establish a procedure that would have the logical consequence of allowing the Commission to revise the terms of investigations of the Mandatory, and by consequence, to submit the acts of the Mandate agents to a jurisdiction other than to that of the national authority responsible for them."<sup>103</sup> These comments reveal the tensions between

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<sup>101</sup> Daniel Neep. *Occupying Syria Under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 63.

<sup>102</sup> Neep, 72.

<sup>103</sup> AN 313AP/248, MAE to Ministre de la Guerre (1926).

notions of national sovereignty and the internationalism brought to bear by the League of Nations.

At the conclusion of the eighth session, the Mandates Commission assigned much of the blame for the current state of affairs in Syria on unsuccessful attempts at repression by the mandatory government, as well as on “the intervention of unruly bands,” propaganda carried out by groups hostile to the mandate, and on widespread discontent leading up to 1925. The revolt was only further encouraged by too active a role played on the part of certain mandate authorities who often took the place of native authorities, the result of which appeared to Syrians to be a “system of direction administration,” contradictory to the terms of the mandate.<sup>104</sup> This tendency towards direct rule was exacerbated by a government staff that “did not constitute, owing to the diversity of its origin, a sufficiently coherent and experienced body of officials.” In other words, the Commission accused the French mandatory government of being unprofessional at times, and without proper knowledge of the country. The consequence of popular unrest thus led to the mandatory government’s reliance on a “military intelligence service whose officials, stationed all over the country, may in certain cases have been beyond the control of the local authority.”<sup>105</sup> Overall, it appeared that military apparatus of the mandatory government acted in discordance with its enfeebled civil administration.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the PMC came down on the side of the French. The PMC recommended that the “persistence in rebellion must be deprecated, not only by the mandatory Power and by the League of Nations, but by all those in Syria, in the Lebanon, our outside, who desire to see peace, prosperity and freedom prevailing in a country which is now divided by

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<sup>104</sup> *Minutes of the Eighth Session*, 207.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 207-208.

sterile bloodshed and strife.”<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, from the proceedings of the PMC, it becomes obvious that the Syrian petitioners had carved a space for themselves in the sphere of international society. With sufficient pressure on the members of the PMC, one could argue that they effectively manipulated the discussion enough to raise concern about public opinion, and thereby bringing about the eighth extraordinary session of the PMC. In such a way, the diasporic engagement of the revolt from abroad played an important role in the reinforcement of post-war normative understandings on international law, sovereignty, and human rights.

## **Conclusion**

After all that was said and done, the PMC did little beyond lightly scrutinize the actions of the mandatory power in Syria. Unsurprisingly, time and time again, the members of the commission consistently fell on the side of the French. After the eighth extraordinary session, the PMC would continue to take up the questions raised by the unrelenting petitions sent by the Syro-Palestinian Congress. In February 1927, the PMC took a final decision on whether or not to hear petitioners. According to the Netherlands representative charged with writing up the report:

In their replies to the Council, the mandatory Powers all oppose the hearing of petitioners. They point out that with such a procedure—which would involve the hearing, at the same time, of a representative of the mandatory Power—the parties would, in fact, be engaged in a controversy before the Commission; and they urge that any procedure which would seem to transform the Commission into a court of law would be inconsistent with the very nature of the mandatory system; that it would weaken the authority which the Mandatory should possess in order to carry out its duties successfully, and that it might lend itself to intrigues on the part of those who are more desirous of promoting disorder than remedying defects.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid. 208.

<sup>107</sup> LNA, R61, 57159/22099, “Question of the Hearing of Petitions by the Permanent Mandates Commission in Certain Cases: Report by the Netherlands Representative” (22 February 1927).



Based on these objections, the PMC found no reason to change the procedures with regards to petitioners. The PMC further limited petitions by saying that petitions sent to the chairman could be rejected on three grounds: “(a) If they contain complaint which are incompatible with the provisions of the Covenant or the Mandates; (b) If they emanate from an anonymous sources; (c) If they cover the same ground as was covered by a petition recently communicated to the Mandatory Power and do not contain any new information of importance.”<sup>108</sup> In its 11<sup>th</sup> session, the PMC went so far as to conclude that Syrian petitioners “must not ask concessions which would practically make the mandate nugatory.”<sup>109</sup> The Syro-Palestinian Congress adjusted to this cold reality by tempering its demands. While dismissing many of the petitions as either being repetitive or unrealistic, the PMC did tend to focus on one issue in particular: the promulgation of the Constitution in accordance with Article 1 of the Mandate. Noting in its 11<sup>th</sup> session that Syrian petitioners had moderated their requests by asking for a regime similar to that of Iraq, the PMC cautioned the Syro-Palestinian Congress “that it is in their interest to help the mandatory Power to bring about such a situation that it may be able to draw up and promulgate the organic statute provided for in Article 1 of the Mandate.”<sup>110</sup>

Meanwhile, in Syria, Jouvenel’s efforts to reach a bargain with nationalists in Damascus had failed in December in 1925, when the candidate for the presidency of a provisional national government, Shaykh Taj al-Din al-Hasani—under directives from the Syro-Palestinian Congress—submitted a list of demands that were not all too different from those asked for at the

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<sup>108</sup> LNA, R61, 56169/22099, “C.P.M. 558: Summary of the procedure to be followed in the matter of petitions concerning Mandated Territories” (8 May 1927).

<sup>109</sup> League of Nations, Permanent Mandates Commission, *Minutes of the Eleventh Session, Held at Geneva from June 20th to July 6th, 1927* (Geneva: League of Nations, 1927), 214.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

start of the rebellion.<sup>111</sup> “Unable to find either a pro-French notable willing to risk his reputation and possibly his life, or a moderate nationalist with acceptable conditions for cooperation” Jouvenel appointed special envoy Pierre Alype to administer the Syrian state.<sup>112</sup> With the support of the PMC secured in February 1926, the French mandatory government upped their military measures in Syria, with continued use of aerial bombardment of the countryside. In April 1926, Jouvenel attempted once again to form a provisional government with the pro-French Damad Ahmad Nami (the ex son-in-law of the Ottoman sultan).<sup>113</sup> In the meantime, however, the military launched strategic offensives that severely weakened the rebellion: they recaptured Suwayda, the capital of the Jabal Druze, and they bombarded the Damascene Maydan quarter in May 1926, another devastating blow leading to anywhere between 600-1,000 deaths.<sup>114</sup> In the wake of the Maydan bombardment, Nami submitted a new list of demands, which included the stipulation of Syrian unity. However, Jouvenel had already approved Greater Lebanon’s constitution, which reaffirmed the 1920 annexations. This dealt a blow to Syrian nationalists insisting on the unity of much the two territories. In the wake of these events, Nami was unable to gain the support of the nationalists in his cabinet, who were arrested on charges of connections to the Syro-Palestinian Congress.<sup>115</sup> With Paris pressuring Jouvenel to suppress the rebellion

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<sup>111</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 211, Carton 412, HC (Beirut) to MAE (Paris), “A.S. Agissements du Comité du Caire” (20 December 1926). The information was found in seized letters meant for Taj al-Din al-Hasani and others. The specific letter in question was from Riad al-Solh to al-Hasani dated 21 November 1926, which referred to previous directives and communications between the two.

<sup>112</sup> Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 189.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 197-199. With a well-balanced cabinet at his side, Nami submitted a list of demands that included a “30-year Franco-Syrian treaty and the right of Syrians to vote for their own constitution,” but which “conveniently avoided the thorny question of Syrian unity.”

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 200.

once and for all, a brutal offensive was launched in the Ghuta, just outside Damascus in July 1926, which resulted in 1,500 deaths, 400 of which were estimated to be rebel fighters.<sup>116</sup> This final offensive in the Ghuta broke the back of the rebellion, though skirmishes continued into the next year.

Jouvenel sought to take advantage of the relative calm to once and for all bring about a resolution to the conflict, and deliver the organic law that the League of Nations had been eagerly expecting. The mandatory government's numerous postponements of the constitution were proving to be embarrassing for France. Jouvenel traveled to Paris at the end of May 1926 to convince the government to strike a deal with the nationalists on the basis of a thirty-year treaty, the drafting of an organic law, and the promise of Syrian unity—a plan which had the backing of the PMC.<sup>117</sup> Yet, his liberal approach to the mandate was not welcomed by his military staff, nor by Paris' new conservative government under the premiership of Raymond Poincaré.<sup>118</sup> Despite his approval of a Lebanese constitution in May 1926, Jouvenel seemed to have a change of heart. He attempted to convince Paris that her favoritism towards Lebanon, as well as the minorities' policy in general, was dangerous and less than strategic. Only by appeasing the Syria's Muslim majority population could France avoid another rebellion. Accordingly, Jouvenel recommended reducing Lebanon's territory, and joining Tripoli and Ba'albak to Syria.<sup>119</sup> With the upper hand military, Poincaré, however, felt no need to appease the nationalists, and rejected Jouvenel's proposal, consequently leading to his resignation. In September 1926, Jouvenel was replaced

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 201.

<sup>117</sup> Meir Zamir, *Lebanon's Quest: The Road to Statehood, 1926-1939* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), 14.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 13-14.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 15.

with Henri Ponsot, a liberal diplomat who had served posts in Bangkok, Montreal, and Tunis.<sup>120</sup>

As this chapter has illustrated, despite their inability to bring about a change in the status of the mandate, Syrian-Lebanese petitioners did play a noteworthy role in the proliferation of the norms and rhetoric around which the post-war international order was *ideally* organized. While the origins of the League of Nations were intimately tied with efforts to sustain a European imperial order, it was subaltern voices such as those of the Syrian-Lebanese petitioners that gave life to an alternative, egalitarian understanding of the meaning and function of the international system. The discourse, interest and appeals of Syrian émigré intellectuals and writers reflected a global moment in which the League of Nations epitomized an internationalism that appeared to be the order of the day. Such a moment saw various intellectuals and nationalists making appeals to the Syrian diaspora, as well as the United States and the wider global community, on behalf of their various nationalist movements. Whereas many Syrian and Lebanese nationalists were critical of the League of Nations, seeing it as reinforcing a broader European imperialism, they nevertheless acknowledged that the times called for political organizing on an international scale. This chapter exposes the contested and variegated approaches activists and intellectuals took with respect to nationalism, and reveals just how ironic, ambiguous and yet essential the process of nationalist formation became. This ambiguity was ever more pronounced among Syrian-Lebanese émigré intellectuals, who were physically separated from the events of the revolt, but who were nevertheless called upon by various contingent factors to take a stance. All in all, the proliferation of transnational media and institutions by émigré intellectuals helped produce a civic order which reflected the emerging hegemony of the nation-state system.

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 16.

The following chapter will follow up on this question of the civic order, by considering the role of those who opposed to the Syrian revolt; more specifically, it looks at the effect that transnational efforts to help the victims of the fighting had on the crystallization of Lebanon's borders. The story hence shifts the lens from the heart of mainland Syria to the southern border region of Wadi al-Taym near Mount Hermon. As rebels crossed into south Lebanon, the persistent question of Syrian unity was once again tested.

## Chapter 3:

### The Local and Global in South Lebanon

#### Introduction

In late November 1925, one of the most fierce and decisive battles of the Syrian Revolt began in the village of Rashaya, located on Mount Hermon's western slopes in today's south Lebanon. Like many neighboring border villages, Rashaya's history is speckled with moments of rupture and violence, its strategic location and its religiously mixed demography acting as a fault-line for conflict.<sup>1</sup> A visit to Rashaya today reveals a quaint and sleepy village—roads cobbled in gray stone and distinctive red-tiled rooftops lead up to an impressive eighteenth-century Shihabi-era fortress, all set to the background of Mount Hermon's snow-capped summits. A number of Rashaya's buildings date back to the French mandate period, a testament to the reconstruction that took place after the French bombarded the town in November 1925. The restoration of Rashaya is also a testament to the evolving constructions of the colonial civic order that was, in part, shaped by Syrian and Lebanese migrants abroad.

Elizabeth Thompson defines the “colonial civic order” as the “broad arena in which states and citizens interact,” and wherein the “terms of citizenship and state power are both expressed and continually renegotiated among agents of the formal state apparatus, its unofficial agents, and the their clients.”<sup>2</sup> Building upon this concept of the colonial civic order, this chapter considers its place in a global and diasporic context. By exploring the relationship of Lebanese to

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<sup>1</sup> Rashaya in particular was primarily Greek Orthodox, followed by a substantial Druze population. Minorities also include Syriac Catholics and Maronite Catholics.

<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 1.

their compatriots in the diaspora, and consequently the way Lebanese negotiated with the state and international society, one can begin to consider the global implications of the interwar, colonial Lebanese experience of the mandate. More specifically, this chapter looks at the spread of the revolt to Wadi al-Taym in south Lebanon as an occasion for the articulation of debates about the local civic order. Heretofore, the history of the revolt has been generally limited to the boundaries of modern-day Syria. The Anglo-American historiography of the revolt for its part makes slight mention of the spread of the revolt to Lebanon. This chapter takes the village of Rashaya, now part of Lebanon, to broaden the geography of the revolt. It further moves beyond the borders of the mandate to uncover the critical relationship of refugees from south Lebanon to their compatriots abroad. The flow of donations from the Americas prompted a dynamic debate over questions of homeland, nationalism, and sectarianism—and more particularly of the role of the mandatory government and international community in the compensation of Christian victims from south Lebanon. In situating the revolt globally, the chapter uncovers the critical role of propaganda and fundraising that took place across oceans and ultimately conditioned the outcome of debates and events surrounding the revolt. Moreover, a look at Rashaya reveals the contested nature of the revolt as it translated across the Syria-Lebanon border, and beyond.

Rashaya makes a telling case study in the development and crystallization of a separatist Lebanese nationalism in the post-World War I period. Prior to the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, a Lebanese separatist vision mainly reflected the political preferences of Mount Lebanon's Maronite community. The region of the Biqa' Valley to which Rashaya belonged, however, was a far more gray and ambiguous area. In the late Ottoman period, Rashaya and neighboring areas belonged to the *vilayet* of Syria, with the broader region of the Wadi al-Taym occupying a unique geographical space which had long-standing commercial connections not

only to Mount Lebanon, but also to Damascus and northern Palestine.<sup>3</sup> As the World War I came to a close, residents of the contested region of the Bīqā‘ Valley remained ambivalent about their place between the pro-independence Arab and Syrian nationalists supporting Amir Faysal in Damascus, and the Lebanese separatists calling for an independent Lebanon in its “natural and historical boundaries.”<sup>4</sup>

In the aftermath of World War I, both Lebanese nationalists and Faysal invoked the inability of the French to secure the region to push for a separate agreement between the Lebanese Administrative Council and Damascus.<sup>5</sup> The subsequent agreement between Damascus and certain members of the Lebanese Administrative Council to secure Lebanese independence while renouncing the French mandate threatened French designs for the region. In April 1920, the Conference at San Remo granted France a mandate over Syria and Lebanon, thereby abrogating Faysal’s rule in Syria. Rashaya, along with the rest of the Bīqā‘, were eventually annexed by the mandate’s first high commissioner, Henri Gouraud, in August 1920. The following month, Gouraud announced the establishment of a Greater Lebanon.<sup>6</sup>

Carol Hakim aptly makes the point that far from being set in stone, the idea of an independent Lebanese nation was—up until Greater Lebanon’s establishment—amenable to change. The establishment of Greater Lebanon, she argues, did not happen according to an organized Lebanese, nationalist scheme. Rather, nationalist schemes emanated from a diverse

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<sup>3</sup> See Fawaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (Pluto Press: London, 2007), 29.

<sup>4</sup> Amir Faysal occupied Damascus in 1918 to establish the “Arab kingdom” that had been promised to his father, the Sharif of Mecca, by the British in return for his rebellion against the Ottomans during World War I.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.



group of Lebanese activists—including many in the *mahjar*—with flexible and fluid political visions.<sup>7</sup> Nor was the future of an independent Lebanon secure with the establishment of the mandate in 1920. The Syrian Revolt of 1925 reopened a space wherein questions of Syria and Lebanon’s future political, social and economic makeup could once again be brought up. This space, I shall illustrate, extended beyond the borders of the Levant, to include the many spaces of the *mahjar*. The story of Rashaya’s transnational campaign for reparations starts with the battle at Rashaya’s citadel in late November 1925.

### **Rashaya Before 1925**

With its mixed Christian, Druze and Muslim residents, Rashaya and the surrounding villages of the Bīqā‘ had long been sites of communal compromise and conflict. This was especially true with the outbreak of Maronite-Druze violence in 1860. The Christians of Rashaya, Hasbaya, and neighboring villages paid a particularly high price. Estimates put the number of dead around 1,800, the majority of which were Christians.<sup>8</sup> One response to the rupture of 1860 was emigration from Lebanon for the shores of North America, although revisionist historians have established economic changes as the most compelling push factors. Rashayans clustered around Detroit and Montreal. Popular narratives of emigration as a dire response to communal violence proved resilient among émigré communities of south Lebanon. The tumultuous period after World War I subsequently invoked the painful events of 1860.

The debate over the Bīqā‘ played out in the maneuverings of the Mount Lebanon’s Administrative Council as early as December 1918, when it had decided to work towards an

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<sup>7</sup> Carol Hakim, *The Origins of a Lebanese National Idea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>8</sup> Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *An Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Lebanon and Damascus in 1860* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 64.

expansion of the *mutasariffiya*'s borders.<sup>9</sup> In February 1919, representatives of the Administrative Council led by Dawud 'Ammun presented its case at the Paris Peace Conference. The arguments of the Lebanese delegation, along with those of the Maronite Patriarch Elias Huwayik –who lead yet another delegation in Paris later that year—aimed to persuade the French to widen the limits of Lebanon's borders to include Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon and the Biqa'. The case for a Greater Lebanon was crucially tied to the question of Lebanese emigration. The current borders, it was argued, stifled the economic prosperity of the country, causing it to be drained of its most productive youth.

While the views of the delegations at the Paris Peace conference represented the aspirations of elite Syrian factions, independent petitions to the Allied Powers, as well as those gathered by the American King-Crane Commission permit greater insight into the opinions of various Syrian groups across the globe. The British noted receiving petitions from Arabs in the Biqa', protesting their inclusion in a "French Lebanon."<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, in late July 1919 the King-Crane Commission spent a day in Ba'albak, "where was first encountered the struggle for and against annexing 'Hollow Syria' (known as the Bekaa) to the Greater Lebanon."<sup>11</sup> The commission noted that the, "Valley of Bekaa is usually regarded as an integral part of Greater Lebanon," although only eleven petitions made "especial reference to its inclusion, while eight

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<sup>9</sup> Diane Moser, *Hometown and Family Ties: The Marriage Registers of the Lebanese-Syrian Orthodox Churches of Montreal 1905-1950* (M.A. Thesis: McGill University, 1990) 77-78.

<sup>10</sup> TNA, FO 608/96/60, "Future of Lebanon" (25 March 1919).

<sup>11</sup> "The American King-Crane Commission Report" in Ed. Akram Fouad Khater, *Sources in the History of the Modern Middle East* (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2010), 162.

ask that the Valley remain in the Damascus area.”<sup>12</sup> Yet, of all the petitions received by the Commission, only 16.9 percent asked for an independent Greater Lebanon.

The region of the Bīqā‘ and south Lebanon was in a particular state of administrative and military flux due to the fact that the French army did not assert control over the region for nearly two years after their occupation of the country (1918-1920), allowing Faysal control over the Bīqā‘ Valley, while maintaining control of the mountain and coast.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, British troops remained stationed in the region until late 1919. Prior agreements underlay Faysal’s assumption that the region would remain part of Syria. The question of the withdrawal of British troops from the region raised serious concerns for residents of the region. Rather than asserting immediate control, the French initially supported a policy of allowing Faysal to believe the withdrawal of British troops from the region would not bring about a change in the borders of the region.<sup>14</sup>

Between the years of 1918 and 1920, the French and Faysal vied for support in the Bīqā‘ and Ba‘albak. Amir Faysal made trips to the region, hoping to enlist support for his army.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, the French sent liaisons to the region, attempting to lay the groundwork for military occupation. In the meantime, they studied the inhabitants, identifying supporters and potential mediators. In the district (*qada’*) of Rashaya, this man was a local by the name of Faris Ghantus, whose pro-French sentiments put him at odds with members of his mixed Christian-Druze

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Hakim, 251.

<sup>14</sup> CADN, Syrie-Liban Carton 2375, Haut Commissariat de la République Française au Syrie et commandant au chef de l’armée du Levant, “Instruction personnelle et Secrète pour le Colonel Gizard,” (26 November 1919).

<sup>15</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 44, Carton 313, M. X. de Lafrocade (Beyrouth) to Stephen Pichon (Paris) “Visite de l’Emir Faysal à Baalbek et à Bekaa” (27 August 1919).

town.<sup>16</sup> In late July 1919, just after the King-Crane commission had visited the nearby region of Zahlé, Faris Ghantus and others belonging to the Democratic Club of (Mt.) Hermon—including ‘Isa Busamra in Montreal—addressed a letter to the French expressing their desire to be attached to Lebanon, and moreover seeking French assistance.<sup>17</sup> The members of the club situated their authenticity in the diverse social and class composition of its members, which included members of the important émigré community abroad. They wrote:

In our capacity as representatives of national public opinion; given that we are among the writer, the merchant, the farmer, the thinker, etc.; given that we have braches of our club in all areas of Wadi el-Time, and that all the associations formed in countries abroad, particularly in the Americas where our club is represented, approve and confirm our principles; whereas the majority of the public supports these principles, we have taken the following decision, the implantation of which is entrusted to Mr. Fares Ghantous, President of the Circle, so that he will pursue that matter well and speak on our behalf, with regards to this decision.<sup>18</sup>

Their demand to be annexed to Greater Lebanon rested upon their assertion that the western slopes of Mount Hermon, until the sectarian violence of 1860, had never been separate from Lebanon. The letter implied that Turkish interference in the international effort to pacify the region in 1860 brought about the reorganization of Mt. Lebanon district, which eventually separated Wadi al-Taym from the Mountain. “Geographical indications clearly show,” that the “natural frontier of Lebanon is to the southeast side of Mount Hermon.” Furthermore, the letter elaborated, geological evidence revealed that the region of Wadi al-Taym was of the same “layer

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<sup>16</sup> CADN, Syrie-Liban Carton 2375, Archimandrite of Rashaya, Michel Abi ‘Assaly to the HC (26 November 1919).

<sup>17</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 16, Carton 313, Telegram by Laforcade (11 August 1919). Also see MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 44, Carton 313, Petition by Comité Central Administratif du Club Démocratique de Mont Hermon (25 July 1919).

<sup>18</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Vol. 44, Carton 313, Petition from Comité central admisnistratif du cercle democratique du Mont Hermon (25 July 1919).

of land” and that the rocks are of a single species” as Lebanon. Social relationships also illustrated their Lebanese identity. Their customs and traditions resembled those of Lebanon, while trade and business networks linked them to (Mount) Lebanon and Beirut. Ghantus would soon be arrested by soldiers of the Sharifian government, and thereafter briefly detained in Damascus, making him into a national hero in the eyes of his peers.<sup>19</sup> With the spread of rebel activity to Rashaya in 1925, Ghantus returns as a key figure. As the following pages shall illustrate, however, by 1925 Ghantus’ demands and support of the French government had taken on a different meaning. His campaign to hold mandate authorities responsible for the restoration of Rashaya contributed to the region’s evolving civic order.

French reports in July and August of 1919 also contain numerous petitions from various villages throughout the district of Rashaya, expressing the same sentiments and arguments as the above-letter. Addressed to the French, these similarly worded petitions were mostly signed by Christian leaders of the region. And yet despite the fact that French reports asserted that all Christians of the region were in favor of the mandate, daily intelligence reports from Rashaya illustrate a far more complicated picture. According to the French liaison, Captain de la Bassetière, though pro-French sentiment did exist among the Christians of the district, this did not necessarily translate into a desire for French military presence. Rather, de la Bassetière’s presence in late 1919, alongside the Faysal’s forces, became the cause of serious unrest.

As negotiations unfolded, Rashaya and its neighboring villages came under assault by armed bands with the aim of preventing further French occupation of the region. Armed guerilla bands from Syria, which were formed as part of independent committees of national defense,

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

spread disorder throughout these contested territories, and were at times aided by local Shi'ite and Druze forces.<sup>20</sup> Though at times these bands were in open conflict with Faysal's government in Damascus, the French had reason to believe that the disorder worked in Faysal's favor, as it demonstrated French inability to secure and pacify the region as proceedings at the Paris Peace Conference unfolded. More accurately, however, the bands played into separatist arguments. The Christians of this religiously mixed region often bore the brunt of these assaults. Viewed as supporters of the French, they became easy targets for reprisal attacks and opportunistic looting. These border towns would remain in a state of tumultuous flux throughout the entire period following World War I until the outbreak of the revolt in 1925.

In response to this state of unrest, local Druze and Christian notables gathered together in Rashaya to discuss possible solutions. The meeting took place at Shaykh 'Ali al-'Aryan's house, a leading member of Rashaya's prominent Druze family. Together, they agreed to send a delegation of two Christians and two Druze to the *qa'imaqam*, or provincial governor.<sup>21</sup> Upon returning to the town, a Druze and Christian jointly drafted a message to send to the government of Damascus and to Amir Zayd. The original draft purportedly stated: "We are Arabs, a French officer just arrived to Rashaya, we absolutely refuse to allow him here, long live absolute independence." The strong language of the message apparently made many members of the assembly nervous, and so after a long discussion they agreed instead upon the following: "We are Arabs, we want absolute independence, and refuse any government of a foreign agent." Not all members of the assembly signed on to the message, however.

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<sup>20</sup> James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 20 and 122.

<sup>21</sup> CADN, Syrie-Liban Carton 2375, Captain de la Bassetière (Rashaya) to Cdt.. Arlabosse (Zahlé) (17 December 1919).

Regardless, this information raised serious doubts for the French officer, who wrote to his authorities convincing them that his presence only served to make matters worse. Blaming the weak local government, de la Bassitière stated that he did not have any authority in the town, and that his presence only caused more trouble. He believed that without proper military reinforcements, the local government and raiding forces would take advantage of the situation. He then warned that the arrival of “Bedouins” acted as a harbinger for the massacre of men, the raping of women, and the pillaging of goods, as the recent violence in the nearby village of Marj ‘Ayun indicated.

Contrary to their assumptions, the French agent found that support for the French mandate did not fall neatly along sectarian lines. Though the majority Druze of Rashaya did oppose the French, a Shaykh Sulayman Zaki proved to be an exception. Furthermore, even as Christians sought French protection in light of possible reprisal attacks, this was certainly not an indication of unchanging loyalties or sectarian divides. As one local Christian noted:

The Christians of Syrian and Lebanon in general, and the Catholics in particular, have long liked France. Despite this love, during the time of the Turks, they were in full agreement with the Muslims and the Turkish government. The Christians of the Bekaa especially, were the most influential, honored, valued, and their rights remained sacred. In that time, one could not distinguish between Christians or Muslims.<sup>22</sup>

Rather it was their support of France in the chaotic postwar arrangements that allowed them to be treated as enemies by the “Muslims and Arab government.” According to the author, ‘Abdallah Rizq, the unrest was purposefully provoked in order to demonstrate to the Peace Conference overall Syrian refusal of the French mandate, and to further illustrate that it would take a military occupation to pacify the region. Even though the French had replaced British troops in the region, the Christians were no safer than before. This left them with only two

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<sup>22</sup> CADN, Syrie-Liban Carton 2375, Letter from Abdullah Rizk (Zahlé) (3 January, 1920).

options, opined Rizk. Either they armed themselves in self-defense or they would have to emigrate. If the French “would not protect the Christians of the Bekaa,” then they would have to protect their own lives, honor and property.

The question of French responsibility towards the Christian minorities of the Biqa‘ would never be completely resolved. Until a Lebanese constitution was approved, the borders and nature of the Lebanese state would remain in flux. With the start of the revolt in 1925, these questions would once again come to the fore.

### **The battle at Rashaya’s citadel**

Under the leadership of Zayd al-Atrash (brother to Sultan Pasha), rebel forces from Syria crossed the southern Lebanese border into the town of Hasbaya in Wadi al-Taym in November 1925. While the Druze inhabitants of Mount Lebanon were cautious of provoking the French and the Maronites, the Druze in Wadi al-Taym mostly welcomed the rebels and their coreligionists. As in 1919, some armed gangs took advantage of the situation to loot, pillage and attack Christian homes. This became a point of contention around which the Christians of the region rallied, calling upon mandate authorities to put an end to their suffering. This demand, as will be illustrated, included an insistence by Christian communities that they were entitled to compensation. What became a rigorous local campaign to gain reparations for Rashaya, however, quickly extended beyond the borders of the mandate, taking on transnational dimensions.

Upon successfully occupying the village of Hasbaya, rebel forces debated crossing into the neighboring administrative district of Marj‘ayun. Rebel leaders at the Suwayda headquarters in Syria had only agreed to extend their uprising into Wadi al-Taym. Certain locals in south



Lebanon, however, encouraged and even invited the rebels to enter their towns and villages.<sup>23</sup> Yet, insurgent forces also grappled with the fear they seemed to cause in surrounding Christian communities. They were, moreover, well aware of a growing discourse among Christian communities to arm themselves. Witnessing the spread of the insurgent forces across the border, local Christians began to question the ability of the government to suppress the rebellion. An anonymous contributor to the Beirut-based Greek Orthodox journal *al-Hadiya* correlated the trade in arms among Christian civilians to the government's lack of soldiers; since the government was "unable to knock out the rebels at the current moment," then it should at least train civilians to defend themselves.<sup>24</sup> The author was thus essentially calling for the militarization of Lebanese state and society. Aware of such rhetoric, Zayd al-Atrash, in a statement entitled "Religion belongs to God and the nation to all,"<sup>25</sup> addressed the Christians of Hasbaya and Rashaya saying:

To our respected Christian brethren of the districts of Hasbaya and Rashaya: we've learned oh dear citizen, that the presence of the national campaign in your neighborhood has caused fear to enter among you, and that it has caused them harm. This news has pained us greatly. The first of our pains: because you are brothers of ours, there is no difference between you and any other belonging to a different sect. Secondly, your action hurts our sense of national pride due the lack of trust in what we've stated in the tracts wherein we brought to light the truth of this nationalist (patriotic) revolt.

As a result of your current stance, we have resorted to addressing you according to your sect.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hasan Amin al-Bi'ayni, *Sultan Basha al-Atrash wal Thawra al-Suriya al-Kubra* (London: Druze Heritage Foundation, 2008), 255.

<sup>24</sup> "Al-hukuma wal 'isabat; al-ahali wal silah," *al-Hadiya* (Beirut) (5-18 November 1925).

<sup>25</sup> The slogan began with the Egyptian revolt of 1919, then became popular among government circles and their supporters during the Faysali period.

<sup>26</sup> "Akhbar Lubnaniya: Manshur Zayd al-Atrash 'ala al-Masahiya" *al-Hadiya* (Beirut) (13 October-13 November 1925).

Despite this, in what was apparently a move agreed upon by only a minority of leaders, rebel Hamza Darwish and a few of his companions entered the small, Maronite village of Kawkaba on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1925.<sup>27</sup> In some accounts, Hamza Darwish is reported to have demanded money from the Christian residents.<sup>28</sup> As supporters of the mandate, the villagers refused to lay down their arms. Gunfire was exchanged. Hearing the gunshots, rebel reinforcements advanced onto the village, indiscriminately taking their revenge. Fighting ensued for several hours. Twenty-eight civilians had been killed in what stood out as the most sectarian moment of the anticolonial uprising that had erupted only a few months before.

Though rebel leaders regretted the turn of events at Kawkaba and took measures to curb wayward activities, it seemed that fear had been irrevocably instilled in nearby areas. By the time rebel forces entered the Rashaya al-Wadi on November 20<sup>th</sup>, many of its inhabitants had already taken temporary refuge in nearby towns with only the elderly remaining. Anticipating the spread of the uprising to Rashaya, Captain Granger mobilized his squadron of Foreign Legion soldiers, leaving the town for the citadel earlier that month. Joining them was a group of around 100 Lebanese soldiers, under the leadership of General Tiné. Before entering the town, rebel leaders reached out to Christian leaders asking them to remain neutral. Upon witnessing these preparations, Christian villagers from Rashaya prepared themselves for the worst. Many families, hoping to escape the fighting before it began, sought refuge in nearby villages. Druze residents also fled, fearing French reprisals.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Al-Bi‘ayni, *Sultan Basha al-Atrash*, 257.

<sup>28</sup> Anthony Shadid’s account of this incident indicates that rebels had asked a villager to forfeit his weapon, instigating a fight. Anthony Shadid, *House of Stone: A Memoir of Home, Family, and a Lost Middle East* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 189.

<sup>29</sup> Bi ‘ayni, *Sultan Basha al-Atrash*, 272.

On November 21<sup>st</sup>, a force of nearly 3,000 rebels attacked and besieged the citadel. All roads to the citadel had been cut off by rebel skirmishes in the surrounding areas. After three days of “hand to hand fighting and desperate bayonet charges,” it seemed the rebels were prepared to defeat the French garrison.<sup>30</sup> Carrying a desperate request for reinforcements, a carrier dove proved crucial in turning the tables. Maryam Nahhas, the wife of the priest Yusuf Ta‘meh, braved gunfire to deliver the French response, which had been dropped by airplane outside the citadel. This raised the spirits of the fighters stranded inside. Maryam’s actions were later honored by the French.<sup>31</sup>

Rebel advances were brought to a swift end, however, when French forces began bombarding the village. Aerial bombardment preceded the arrival of ground reinforcements. Surrounded, rebel fighters retreated into the mountains. The French had gained a strategic victory, but Rashaya lay in ruins—a number of homes were burned to the floor, the fortress greatly damaged. The spread of the revolt to Rashaya resulted in 14 deaths, including seven women, and seven men.<sup>32</sup> Four men were additionally killed in the fighting that took place near the citadel, while 29 French soldiers were killed. Rebel forces suffered heavier losses, with insurgent casualties totaling around 100.<sup>33</sup>

In the battle’s wake, the French surrounded the nearby village of ‘Aqaba, thought to have sheltered Druze fighters responsible for killing a French commander. There, French forces killed

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<sup>30</sup> Jean-Denis Lepage, *French Foreign Legion: An Illustrated History* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2008), 131.

<sup>31</sup> Bi‘ayni, *Sultan Basha al-Atrash*, 276.

<sup>32</sup> CADN, Santiago Ambassade 616po/1, Carton 51, MAE to French Consul (Santiago) “Affaire de Rachaya,” “A.S. supplique des habitants de Rachaya au Pape Pie XI” (28 May 1927).

<sup>33</sup> Al-Bi‘ayni, *Sultan Basha al-Atrash*, 276.

43 civilians, women included. French forces also turned their attention to the remaining residents seeking refuge at the home of the Druze religious leader Nu‘man Zaki and his family. Having purportedly warned the rebels against entering Rashaya, those seeking refuge with him assumed they would be safe. Everyone inside, a total of 24 people, was killed. Knowledge of these incidents spread throughout the Arab world, and beyond. As news of the events spread to the League of Nations, the French agreed to send an investigative commission to south Lebanon. Unsurprisingly, their inquiries revealed no evidence to support claims of French abuses.<sup>34</sup>

Controversy surrounds the question of who was responsible for the pillaging that took place after the battle. Sensationalistic accounts of Druze bandits murdering women and children while pillaging the town filled the pages of the Christian and French press. Yet American accounts of the violence allot a significant portion of the blame on French troops. Reports from “Christian refugees from Rashaya” to the American consul in Damascus, J.H. Keely Jr., indicated that “the French out-druzed the Druses in their barbaric treatment of inhabitants of Rashaya.” According to the report, which had not yet been verified, the Druze had “killed only a few (less than a dozen) persons who were known to be French agents,” but that “when the French came in the soldiers were given a free hand.” French soldiers allegedly raped women and children, burned a church where women were taking refuge, and committed acts far more barbarous than “what the Turks used to do to the Armenians.”<sup>35</sup> In affidavits itemizing losses incurred during their absence, Rashayan Christians claiming American citizenship appealed to the United States government for compensation. The local accounts that emerge through these legal documents also divide the blame between the rebels and the French soldiers for the

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<sup>34</sup> Bi‘ayni, *Sultan Basha al-Atrash*, 278. French findings are discussed in Colonel Raynal’s report.

<sup>35</sup> NARA, Box 4, RG 84, Volume 465, Damascus Consular Report No. 12 (4 December 1925).

plundering that occurred in their absence.<sup>36</sup> Importantly, local Rashayans who had previously supported the mandate would later use and confirm some of these accusations to pressure the mandate government in their campaign for compensation.

The fact remained, however, that Rashaya was nearly destroyed. Residents of the beleaguered town were now scattered throughout neighboring villages, some reaching as far as Beirut and Damascus, feeding into a Christian refugee population that reached nearly 10,000.<sup>37</sup> Those who returned to the town shortly after the battle found it uninhabitable, their homes looted and burned. French reports indicate that nearly 420 homes were destroyed in Rashaya, and a total of 1200 destroyed in southern Lebanon.<sup>38</sup> Many of the Christians of Rashaya took advantage of the sectarian discourse of the French, and refused to re-inhabit the village with their Druze neighbors, now fashioned as enemies of the state. Instead, they preferred to remain in their temporary residences. One report claimed that, “Refugees were pouring into Sidon and Beirut by the hundred with wildest stories of what was taking place.”<sup>39</sup> A number of naturalized Americans were among them. So emerged the beginnings of a notorious refugee problem, around which various articulations of a civic order were negotiated. In a testament to the events of 1925, many of the residents of Beirut’s neighborhood of Karm al-Zaytun originally settled as

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Meir Zamir, *The Formation of Modern Lebanon* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1985), 176.

<sup>38</sup> CADN, Santiago Ambassade 616po/1, Carton 51, MAE to French Consul (Santiago) “Règlement de l’affaire de Rachaya” (12 August 1927).

<sup>39</sup> NARA, Box 4, RG 84, Volume 465, “Notes on the situation in Syria covering the period from November 9<sup>th</sup> to December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1925”

refugees fleeing the fighting in Hawran and south Lebanon.<sup>40</sup> Though displacement affected other populations affected by the fighting, Rashaya appeared to receive the most attention. The heightened focus around Rashaya over other places was, in large part, made possible by the involvement of the *mahjar*.

### ***Rashaya's Campaign for Compensation***

A dialectical relationship between migrants and their compatriots back home manifested itself in the mobilization of transnational philanthropic organizing. Importantly, though, unlike the bombardment of Damascus, which solicited aid from Muslims and Christians alike, Rashaya's campaign for relief and compensation was largely aimed at a Christian audience. Though not always driven by sectarian discourse, the language of sectarianism was used with varying degrees in appeals for aid. Pointing to the assistance they received from their compatriots in the diaspora, Rashayans launched a campaign for government reparations that went to the heart debates over south Lebanon's place within the Lebanese nation.

Although petitions for war losses predated World War I, the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the absence of a formal state augmented the international dimensions of individual petitions for compensation in wartime. It was in this post-World War I context that many Christians of former Ottoman territories looked to the mandatory powers and the League of Nations to act as interlocutors in their attempts to be compensated for losses incurred during the war. After all, France played no insignificant role in insisting upon the payment of reparations by Germany, and certain Lebanese were keenly aware of this. The Christian victims of Rashaya

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<sup>40</sup> Thanks to Dr. Souad Slim for sharing this knowledge with me. Also see Rayan Majed, "Remnants of Old Beirut," *NOW*. (December 1, 2013), <<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reportsfeatures/523175-remnants-of-old-beirut-karm-al-zeitoun-and-rmeil>>

drew upon these traditions, while at the same time framing their grievances in new ways. This campaign, articulated as it was through Christian particularism, provided an opportunity for the entrenchment of a separatist, Lebanese nationalism.

With the spread of the uprising to south Lebanon, expatriates found themselves recalling the famine that struck the region during World War I, and were reminded of the anxiety they felt over their loved ones back home.<sup>41</sup> During the war, migrants closely followed the Arabic-language press, steadily writing to the American and French embassies hoping to gain news of their families. Communities throughout the *mahjar* sought to relieve the suffering of their communities back home through philanthropic endeavors. By 1925, a pattern of remittance sending had been set in place. Accordingly, Rashayans sought out the help of their relatives in the *mahjar* following the battle in Rashaya. In the immediate wake of the fighting, ‘Isa Busamra and Nicola Zuhair, representatives of Rashaya who were businessmen in Montreal, reached out to the New York-based journal *al-Huda*. Their ad read: “Rashaya’s people are homeless, and the situation is tragic. Many are in great need, and urge their relatives to send help as soon as possible.”<sup>42</sup> In a move to include the victims of Rashaya among the Lebanese community, the editors of *al-Huda*, namely the Maronite Na’um Mukarzil, responded: “They are not only in need of their relative’s sympathy, but are worthy of the sympathy of Lebanon in general.” It was decided that the victims of Rashaya would receive a significant portion the donations collected by the New York-based Lebanon Relief Society.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Letters from Syrian-Lebanese immigrants to US representative concerning their relatives in Mount Lebanon during World War I can be found in: NARA, General Records of the Department of State: Central Decimal File (1910-1929), Box 4521.

<sup>42</sup> “Barqiya Khususiya ila al-Huda,” *al-Huda* (New York) (28 November 1925).

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

Rashayan Faris Ghantus dominated local efforts to reach out to the diaspora for help.” Hoping to appeal to American public opinion, Ghantus addressed a public telegram to Mukarzil and *al-Huda*, inviting Mukarzil to spread the word among their “countrymen.” “In the name of the 20,000 victims of southern Lebanon who suffered at the hands of the Druze rebels,” Ghantus protested against circulating narratives in the global press depicting the revolt as a fight for independence. “We reach out to France, the League of Nations and the civilized world to punish the murderers and to compensate us for our losses,” proclaimed Ghantus.<sup>44</sup> He and others shared the common belief that by using their material and social capital, migrants abroad played a crucial role in shaping the political, economic and social affairs of their homeland. The Syrian-Lebanese diaspora thereby held the keys to shape public opinion on an international scale.

The mobilization of transnational philanthropic activity in the *mahjar* generated debates at home that played a role in the reshaping of the relationship of Rashayans to the mandate government. Rashayan’s were apparently touched by the generosity of their compatriots from “all corners of the globe”—in the Americas, Europe, Australia and the Arab world. More specifically, the catastrophes that befell Rashaya showcased the dutifulness of all Christian denominations in ameliorating the pain and suffering of the refugees.<sup>45</sup> Whether adopted or self-ascribed “*mankubi Rashaya*,” or “the victims of Rashaya,” became a universal reference that permeated public discourse. “The Association of Victims of Rashaya” consequently became the name of the organization of refugees from Rashaya who settled in the nearby town of Zahleh. Under the leadership of Bishop Theodosius Abu Rajbali of the Orthodox church, the group

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<sup>44</sup> “Al-Mudun wal qura al-mankuba tastafeeth barqiya min Bayrut ila jaridat al-Huda ‘ala al-harb,” *al-Huda*, (New York) (30 November 1925).

<sup>45</sup> “Sawt shukr wa kalimat raja’ ‘an mankubi Rashaya,” *Al-Hadiya*, (Beirut) (5-18 December 1925).



hoped to secure and ultimately oversee the mandate government's reconstruction of Rashaya. It also served the important function of collecting, and then distributing aid that it received from various sources. Nearly a month after the French victory at Rashaya, refugees were still stranded in nearby villages. Until the mandate government brought about a quicker solution, the Association of Victims of Rashaya would continue to place its faith in God, the good people, charitable committees and the donations of "generous citizens" near and far.<sup>46</sup>

Rashayan refugees were receiving a steady stream of donations collected from abroad, allowing them to subsist at a time when the government failed to address their concerns. Soon after the battle, a group of refugees addressed a number of demands in the form of a petition to the high commissioner. First and foremost, they claimed that Christian Rashayans no longer felt safe sharing the town with their former Druze neighbors. If the Druze stayed, they would be forced to settle elsewhere. In their opinion, justice would only be served if the Druze were fined and punished for the losses suffered by the Christian communities. Most importantly, they demanded reparations from the government. But until the government stepped up to their responsibilities, they asked their countrymen to send more donations.<sup>47</sup>

Eleven months after the fighting in Rashaya, the situation was apparently no better. The "Victims of Rashaya" in Zahleh and Beirut felt compelled to address an appeal in both French and Arabic to the mandatory government, the Lebanese government, the Lebanese parliament, and the general public. The tract began by acknowledging the circulating discourse, especially among the French, that the 1925 revolt was, essentially, a religious conflict. They posed two

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> "Wafd Rashaya al-Wadi yurid al-mathul fi 7adrat al-mafuwad al-sami." *Al-Hadiya* (Beirut) (17 December 1925).

general questions to their audience: 1) “Is our destroyed region a victim of a religious war?” and 2) “Is compensation a right? Or an act of a charity?”<sup>48</sup> Despite the overtly sectarian rhetoric of such appeals as the one mentioned above, the “victims of Rashaya” in this particular instance concluded that the conflict was not primarily of a religious nature. In their point of view, what started out as an administrative dispute in the Hawran of Syria, soon grew into a region-wide rebellion that had two general aims: to suppress the mandate, and to bring about the unification of Syria and Lebanon. The Christians of south Lebanon were affected by the fighting to varying degrees. In villages where they were surrounded by a majority supporting the Druze, they lived peacefully, only obliged every now and then to provide the rebels with hospitality. On the other hand, in villages where support for the mandate was strong, and where the Christians refused to remain neutral, they were subjected to violence and “barbarism.” The disasters that had befallen “the Christians of the frontiers” were not primarily due to religious conflict, but largely because of their support for the mandatory power.

As a result, the victims of Rashaya felt entitled to compensation. If the government was not going to impose this payment on the rebels, then it or the Lebanese government should provide the necessary supplies to reconstruct Rashaya’s homes. After all, the mandatory government often “made the argument that she had fought for the integrity of Lebanon.”<sup>49</sup> As for the petitioners, they were firmly determined to demand their rights to “full and effective compensation by their government.” The government was responsible for the security of its subjects in times of war, rebellion and other disasters by virtue of the principle of governmental

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<sup>48</sup> Archives of the Maronite Patriarchate (Henceforth Bkirké), Huwayik, 20/22, “Mashru’ al-ta’wid ‘ala al-bilad al-lubnaniya al-mankuba” (1 October 1926).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

responsibility for “social risk” and by the principle of the “collective solidarity of a nation.” The petitioners came to this conclusion based upon laws promulgated in France in 1919 after the First World War, which established the principle of full reparations based upon the idea “equality and solidarity of all citizens.” It was no stretch, then, that these same principles of “governmental responsibility and social solidarity” (principles recognized by “the entire world”) should be applied to the current rebellion.<sup>50</sup>

The above-mentioned Faris Ghantus was the ringleader responsible for the spread of this agitation across the *mahjar*. His father, Michel Ghantus, who according to the French was singled out by the Druze for his reputation as a “usurer”—was killed along with his wife during the fighting that took place in Rashaya. Faris Ghantus, a man who the French painted as having a history of “recidivism” dating back to 1920, had apparently fled during the fighting. Upon his return to the town, he and his supporters drew up a request for reimbursement for losses suffered by the Christians of the town. Their “extravagant demands” amounted to nearly 6.5 million francs.<sup>51</sup> In October 1926—months after the battle had taken place—Ghantus had apparently distributed a brochure against both the Lebanese and mandatory government. Not only did he lead the campaign to pressure the mandate for compensation, he was also believed to be behind the refusal of Rashayan refugees to return to their hometown. Instead, the French believed he was encouraging the Christian refugees to head for the shores of the United States and Canada. Ghantus reached out to the Rashayan associations of Montreal, recommending to one man in

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 409, Carton 443, High Commissioner (Beyrouth) to French Consul (Rome) “A.S. Article du journal “al-Huda” (27 April 1927).

particular, to renew their slander against France. This was considered the only viable way to pressure the government to achieve their demands.<sup>52</sup>

According to the journal *al-Hadiya*, as their catastrophe worsened, Christians wrote to their relatives about their suffering, and expressed their real desire to also leave the land of the forefathers for the *mahjar*.<sup>53</sup> They further pleaded their relatives in the Americas to intercede with their governments to secure a place for them to live with their families so they could escape the injustices that had befallen them. *Al-Hadiya* claimed that around 300 of the best youth of Rashaya left for Canada with the intention of permanently residing abroad. While Canada stood to benefit from the skills of these newcomers, Rashaya and the mandate more broadly would eventually come to feel the harmful effects of a sustained emigration movement. The mandate government still had a chance to transform this catastrophe if it would only heed the needs of the “victims,” and take steps to punish the rebels.

The politically influential Maronite Patriarch Elias Huwayik, in a letter to the French Prime Minister Briand in July 1926, also expressed concern over the emigration of Christians from south Lebanon:

It is with bitter regret that we see the Christians of the South-East region, Hasbaya-Rachaya-Mardjayoun, emigrate to America, while their murderers, the Druze, return alone, in all tranquility, to settle back in this area.<sup>54</sup>

Continued emigration would possibly tilt the demographic balance in south Lebanon in favor of the Druze, thereby weakening the power of the Christians in Lebanon. It was, most likely, with

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<sup>52</sup> CADN, Santiago Ambassade 616po/1, Carton 51, Consul General of Montreal to MAE, “Situation à Rachaya” (8 June 1927).

<sup>53</sup> “Sawt shukr wa kalimat raja’ ‘an mankubi fi Rashaya,” *al-Hadiya* (5-18 December 1918).

<sup>54</sup> Translated in Meir Zamir, *The Formation of Modern Lebanon* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 295.

this logic that the Patriarch therefore suggested a population exchange, whereby the Christians of the Hawran in Syria would take the place of the Lebanese Druze who would be moved to Syria.

Rashayan attempts to pressure the mandate government did not stop at the doors of Lebanese migrants. In a long letter dated January 1927, Ghantus and others from Rashaya took their case to Pope Pius XI. Despite the fact that the majority of Rashaya's Christians were Greek Orthodox, surely the Pope—who for centuries defended the oppressed—would hear them out. Strategically playing on sectarian discourse, the Christian petitioners proclaimed that unlike the “wild” and “bloodthirsty” Druze, they were a “calm” and “civilized” people. The Druze of their town took advantage of the revolt to join the rebels of the Hawran, unleashing horrendous atrocities on Christian men, women and children of Rashaya, killing several old men and women. Meanwhile, they pillaged and burned the city. The refugees also alleged that when the French soldiers came to defend the village, they too burned and looted what the Druze hadn't. Nearly two years after the events at Rashaya, the French who they had championed, had done little to aid them. Instead, they assigned a Druze to oversee the reconstruction of the city, and were moreover forcing the Christians to return to living with Druze. Refusing to return, the mandatory government thus forced the Rashayan victims to live in misery as refugees. It seemed to them that the French showed no inclination of paying them the indemnities they rightfully requested.<sup>55</sup>

According to the letter, the Pope would have good reason to assist the Christians of Rashaya. The presence of Christian souls in Rashaya, they argued, was a “guarantee for

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<sup>55</sup> MAE-La Courneuve Syrie-Liban Vol. 409, Carton 443, Directions du Services des Renseignements du Levant, High Commissioner to French Consul (Rome) “A.S. Article du journal “al-Hoda” (27 April 1927).

Christianity in [all of] Lebanon.”<sup>56</sup> The district of Rashaya acted as a gate to Lebanon, bordering Syria and the Hawran, with those who desired to be their “enemies” and whose interest it was to defeat Christianity in the region. If the Christians were forced to inhabit Rashaya without any guarantee of their rights or punishment of their aggressors, then one should “say goodbye to the independence of Lebanon, of Christianity, and of the prestige of Christian power in the Orient.” Consequently, the future of Christianity in the East—of “justice and civilization” more broadly—depended on the Pope helping the Christians of Rashaya. With his moral prestige, the Pope was in a position to pressure the mandatory power to fulfill their demands. These demands included: 1) Indemnifying victims for their losses, only after canceling the estimations calculated by the “Druze” in charge, to be replaced by a Christian civil servant or religious authority; 2) Applying the law of population transfer by ordering the removal of all of the Druze from the region of Rashaya and replacing them instead with the Syrian Christians of the regions of Hawran and Wadi al-‘Ajam across the border; 3) If the mandatory power could not execute their second demand, then they asked that it purchase land removed from the Druze so they could reconstruct a new town; 4) In case the mandatory power could also not satisfy their third demand, then they demanded that their compensation not hinge upon their return to Rashaya, instead leaving each the free choice to live as they pleased; 5) Finally, it asked that the government not decide upon the civil liability of the Druze if it went ahead with the decision to pardon them of their criminal liability.

The donations from the “charitable emigrants” that they depended on were decreasing. They called upon the Pope’s altruism and asked for his help through the intercession of his representative in Syria, the Apostolic Delegate Mgr. Berdiano Gianini, and by the intermediation

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

of the patriarchs and bishops under the leadership of the Maronite Patriarch Elias Howayek. The letter was signed by the heads of Christian families in Rashaya, and authenticated by the support of the Bishop of Ba‘albak, Malatios Abu ‘Asali.

The French largely denied the allegations put up against them in the petition to the pope. In a report to the French ambassador in Rome concerning the petition, the office of the high commissioner expressed concern that the complaints of Ghantus and his several friends were “filling the pages of journals across the two hemispheres,” causing considerable commotion abroad.<sup>57</sup> These fears, as the follow section shall illustrate, grew out of the “long-distance” bonds that Rashayan and Lebanese migrants maintained with their homeland.

### **Helping “Mankubi Rashaya,” Creating Lebanese**

A substantial contingent of Syrian-Lebanese migrants to North America, particularly in Montreal, originally came from Rashaya and surrounding villages. While the earliest wave of Lebanese emigration from Mount Lebanon was primarily a result of changes in the wider political economy affecting the region, emigration from Christian and mixed villages in the south of Lebanon—where the silk industry was less significant—is more strongly associated with the legacy and fear sectarian fighting of the 1860’s.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, chain migration from Rashaya to places like Montreal in particular during the first wave (1880s-1930s) was mostly perpetuated by sustained kinship networks and village ties.<sup>1</sup> Starting with in the 1920’s and 1930’s, set amidst the general background of a receding world economy, emigration was also encouraged by a staged and professional scheme to get refugees from Rashaya to abandon their village for North

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

America. This scheme, it will be shown later in this chapter, was directly linked to the spread of the revolt into southern Lebanon.

Like other Syrian-Lebanese migrants, Rashayans abroad maintained their particularistic ties to their hometown, creating enclave communities in the *mahjar*.<sup>58</sup> The reproduction of particularist identities, however, was not mutually exclusive with parallel, broader forms of identity. The events in Wadi al-Taym in the south of Lebanon, like the bombardment of Damascus only a month before, thus came to conspicuously occupy the pages of the global Syrian press. The conflict conjured a heated debate over the meaning, place and significance of religion, citizenship and the mandate government in Syria and Lebanon. The press and literary organs of the *mahjar* hence became a discursive battleground where the events in Kawkaba, Hasbaya and Rashaya came to be narrativized, remembered and used to advance a rival nationalist vision among Lebanese émigrés. While the majority of Christians from Rashaya were Greek-Orthodox, Syro-Lebanese Christian communities abroad rallied together, drawing upon a universalist Christian discourse during moments of critical juncture such as the revolt of 1925. This position was arguably reinforced by their situation as Christian migrant communities in North America—a role they used to their advantage to also make political gains in their new environments.<sup>59</sup> Thus, while histories of the Syrian revolt have persuasively framed the uprising within a wider history of an evolving Syrian nationalist struggle, the uprising can also be read as formative in the parallel evolution of Lebanese nationalist identity.

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<sup>58</sup> Norman Marino, *The Antiochian Orthodox Syrians of Montreal, 1905-1980: an Historical Study of Cultural and Social Change Over Three Generations* (PhD dissertation: Concordia University, 1994).

<sup>59</sup> Sarah Gualtieri sheds light on the Syro-Lebanese move for naturalization in the United States. Christian immigrants drew upon their Christian backgrounds to advance their position as “white.” Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).



Ambiguity still shrouded the question of identity in Rashaya in the moments leading up to the revolt in 1925. This ambiguity can be detected on two broad levels. Up until that point, the majority of Syro-Lebanese abroad had left before the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Upon arriving to the shores of the Americas, they were often registered as Turks, and only came to be later identified as Syrians. Thus, while identifying mostly with their hometown and religious community Syro-Lebanese migrants accepted the label “Syrian” to varying degrees as a means of collectively representing themselves to their surrounding communities. Moreover, although Rashaya was almost always identified as being part of “south Lebanon,” attributing a specific national identity to its inhabitants was less clear. French mandate and diplomatic officials oscillated between calling them Syrians or Lebanese. The spread of fighting to these areas thus conveniently played into the hands of a few politically and nationally motivated diaspora activists, such as Na’um Mukarzil.

The evolving association of Christian particularism with a broader Lebanese nationalism in the south of Lebanon occurred both at home and abroad. This relationship was not simply a dialogue between local Rashayans and their émigré countrymen, however. The nationalizing process actively involved the French mandatory government in Syria. This too had a long-distance component, as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs frequently kept in touch with its consulates abroad in order to gain intelligence on Syrian-Lebanese migrant communities.

Lebanese émigrés were quick to respond to the cries of their compatriots. Only a week after the fighting at Rashaya had ended, Dr. Solomon D. David, a Lebanese orthopedic surgeon from Houston, Texas wrote the French Ambassador in Washington D.C. on December 3, 1925:

The ruins of both life and property in the region of Hasbaya, Mardj-ayoun [sic], and Rashaya bespeak a very sad story. Christians mandated by France were mercilessly

slaughtered by the fanatic Aldruses [sic] rebels. Apparently, France is not able to protect her own friends in Syria. But for how long should we allow this [to] keep going on. This writer has a mother, sister and brother marooned in Rashaya and their fate is unknown to me. Consequently I feel distressed and ask that your Excellency transmit my message to Paris.

We the Christians who loved France so dearly request that France protect us to the nth power. Rashaya is the last to suffer a crushing injury. Thousands are left homeless and without subsistence. Many refugees are in Beyrouth [sic] and other cities of Liban [sic]. The rebels are not through with the tragical dramatization. Therefore I appeal to the Central Government, Paris. Thru you for immediate reinforcement [sic], for immediate establishment of (Kitchen-Soup) [sic], bread lines and Red Cross expeditions to save the refugees stranded everywhere. The situation is tense and urgent.<sup>60</sup>

Dr. Solomon David (Sulayman Dawud) belonged to the Syriac Catholic Dawud family based in Rashaya. At an early age, he decided to join his maternal uncles in the United States where he completed his studies, got married and settled down.<sup>61</sup> Having cultivated a rich interest in Arabic poetry and literature, Dr. David most likely learned of the events unfolding in his hometown through one of the many Arabic-language journals published and distributed in the United States. His letter conveniently summarizes the various dynamics at play in the “Rashaya affair,” as the French called it. At the heart of David’s demands for soup-kitchen, bread lines and Red Cross relief was the implicit understanding that a pact existed between the French mandatory government and the Christians of the region; in return for their support, the Christians expected a degree of security and welfare benefits.

Cynics of the uprising from Lebanon to Mexico seized upon the spreading disorder in south Lebanon to resurrect questions of national identity and belonging. The Maronite editor of the well-established New York newspaper *al-Huda*, Na‘um Mukarzil missed no opportunity to use the fighting in south Lebanon to paint the revolt as a religiously motivated and fanatic

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<sup>60</sup> CADN, Washington Ambassade, 737PO/1, Carton 745, Letter by Solomon David to French Ambassador of the United States (3 December 1925).

<sup>61</sup> Alfred N. Daoud, *The History of the Daoud (David) Family: a Branch of the Anahilat Clan* (1982), 27.

endeavor. Shortly after the fighting at Rashaya, Mukarzil addressed a letter to the French ambassador hoping to combat what he felt was misdirected sentiment in the American press. “The Syrian problem is primarily and chiefly a religious one,” Mukarzil asserted. Collapsing the categories of Druze and Muslim, Mukarzil arguably fed “into Orientalist notions current in America,” when depicting the current uprising as a Crusade-era legacy of conflict between Christians and Muslims.<sup>62</sup> Unabashedly francophile, Mukarzil argued that anti-French propaganda in America and beyond only served to “expose Christians to the ruthless fanaticism of the Mohammedan element” (thereby also inflating Druze with Muslims). Consequently, a number of Christian villages had been tragically attacked, pillaged, “women and children murdered in the most cold-blooded manner.” So while the revolt was being represented as anti-colonial one, it was rather—in his opinion—a war against the Christian populations of the region. Finally, Mukarzil articulated a separatist Christian nationalist stance that separated Mt. Lebanon from the rest of Syria by virtue of its majority Christian population.<sup>63</sup>

Mukarzil regularly used his journal *al-Huda* to advance his opposition to the Druze-led rebellion in the south of Lebanon. Catering to a broader Syrian-Lebanese community, the language in *al-Huda* is markedly less vociferous and opinionated when compared to Mukarzil’s above-mentioned letter to the French ambassador. Nevertheless, with its years of experience and renown, *al-Huda* led the way when it came to its pro-French and pro-Lebanese position. Article upon article, *al-Huda* advanced and articulated a Lebanese nationalist position in the face of the

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<sup>62</sup> To distance themselves from the label “Turk,” usually associated with Muslims, migrant peasants from Mount Lebanon adopted Orientalist tropes that depicted Islam as “nefarious, violent and repressive.” See Akram Khater, “Becoming” Syrian” in America: A Global Geography of Ethnicity and Nation,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 14, no. 2 (2005), 303.

<sup>63</sup> CADN, Washington Ambassade, 737PO/1, Carton 745, Letter by Na’um Mukarzil to French Ambassador (27 November 1925).

revolt's spread to the mandate borders of Lebanon. Responding to circulating criticism against French attempts to negotiate with the Druze, *al-Huda* asserted its support for the "free and just France," while separating itself from the "hard-liners seeking revenge."<sup>64</sup> Along these lines, it was therefore important not to corroborate the accusations against the "Druze of Lebanon," whose despair most likely drove them to support the opportunists and fanatics among them. Notwithstanding the malice of the ignorant of their Christian, Muslim and Druze Lebanese, *al-Huda* announced its intention to help the "*mankubin*" not out of spite, but with the aim to "discipline."<sup>65</sup> What these conflicting attitudes demonstrate is a struggle by Lebanese inside and outside of Lebanon to envision a secular, Greater Lebanon that include more than its significant Christian population.

The largely Rashayan expatriate community of Montreal, now naturalized Canadians were "haunted by the memory of [their] small country," followed the events back home "with passion," and were "also able to influence the attitude of their compatriots in Syria."<sup>66</sup> The Rashaya United Benevolent Society in Montreal was unsurprisingly at the forefront of attempts to raise money for Rashaya and pressure the French government from abroad. In a telegram to French Prime Minister Raymond Poincaré, the Montreal-based society repeatedly called upon the principles of "justice" and "civilization" while demanding compensation for victims of Rashaya. They also entreated the government to not oblige the Christian refugees to return to living with

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<sup>64</sup> "Al-Mudun wal qura al-mankuba tastefteth barqiya min Beyrut ila jaridat al-Huda 'ala al-harb," *al-Huda* (New York), (30 November 1925), 4.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 409, Carton 443, Consul General (Montreal) to MAE "A.S. colonie syrienne de Montréal" (3 March 1927).

their enemies in a village that was now destroyed.<sup>67</sup> The petitioners simultaneously spoke as, and spoke for, the Christians of Rashaya, bridging the distance that separated them. According to the French the letter was considered to not have much “import in Canada,” but nevertheless had the potential to influence people back home, who believed that their compatriots abroad stood to “benefit from American liberties.”<sup>68</sup> The Rashaya Relief Society of Grand Rapids, Michigan also addressed a similar telegram to Poincaré. The secretary Alexandre Mallick called upon the “big heart of France” to provide “immediate financial assistance for the faithful Christian survivors of Racheye, Grand Liban, Syria who are penniless and suffering.”<sup>69</sup> The ironic contrast of the telegram’s singling out of Christian victims in southern Lebanon while adhering to the administrative realities which still bound the state of Greater Lebanon to Syria highlights the tensions surrounding the revolt’s larger significance not only as an anti-colonial struggle but a struggle to further define the natural history of the region. Articulations of a Lebanese, Christian nationalism were not new. The 1925 revolt played a crucial role, however, in the popularization of these nationalist understandings, particularly in south Lebanon.

### *The mandatory power responds*

The “Rashaya affair” gathered unprecedented momentum abroad, sustaining the attention of the French mandate authorities well into the end of 1927 when the revolt had all but ended. By April 1927, French intelligence estimated that than nearly four million francs in donations to

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<sup>67</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 409, Carton 443, Telegram “A.S. Situation à Rachaya,” (24 January 1927).

<sup>68</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 409, Carton 443, Consul General (Montreal) to MAE, “A.S. colonie syrienne de Montréal” (3 March 1927).

<sup>69</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 409, Carton 443, Telegram “A.S. Situation à Rachaya” (24 January 1927).

south Lebanon had flowed from America, allowing some to live “handsomely at the expense of relief committees.”<sup>70</sup> The concerted efforts of the Rashayan Christian community to gain the emotional and material support of their compatriots in the Americas threatened France's legitimacy as a mandatory power, and its role as guardians of the Christianity in Lebanon more specifically. Two years had passed since the events in Rashaya, yet the campaign for compensation only seemed to be gaining more momentum. The French had good reason to believe that diaspora support was a threat to colonial stability. It not only emboldened the refugee campaign, sustaining them materially as they opposed the mandatory government, but it also hurt France's global image. The French consequently responded to this transnational activism in two ways: 1) They reached out to their consuls with specific instructions to counteract the negative propaganda, and 2) They took a number of steps to ensure the successful reconstruction of south Lebanon, thereby entrenching the welfarism that came to define the colonial civic order in the following decade.

Concerned with their global image, the French closely followed the activities of Syrian-Lebanese émigré communities. It seemed to the French that the refugee campaign had gone too far. The office of the high commissioner was primarily concerned with the fact that “opponents of the mandatory power” in Lebanon (Ghantus frequently came to mind) were exploiting the difficulties encountered by mandatory government with respect to the reconstruction to influence the opinion of the “principle Syro-Lebanese colonies abroad.”<sup>71</sup> Accusations of gross negligence and the renegeing of French promises to the Christians of the region threatened France's

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<sup>70</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 409, Carton 443, High Commissioner to French Ambassador (Rome) “A.S. Article du journal le ‘Hoda’” (27 April 1927).

<sup>71</sup> CADN, Santiago Ambassade 616po/1, Carton 51, MAE to French Consul (Santiago), “Situation à Rachaya” (4 July 1927).

international image. It was becoming necessary to devise a counter campaign to downplay the events that had transpired in Rashaya. The global Syrian community would have to be convinced that the mandatory government was making progress towards Rashaya's rehabilitation. Like the Rashayan activists, France too considered the role of Syrian-Lebanese emigrants crucial to any effort to win over the hearts and minds of their colonial citizens. In a report to the French foreign minister Aristide Briand, the French consul in Montreal noted that the Syrian community was often influenced by news of a more seditious nature. The French consul believed that "if the Syrians in Canada would no longer portray the French action in Syria in a biased and erroneous light, they would cease to encourage the opposition of their countrymen," and more importantly would "stop playing the role of lawyer in the world for their complaints and recriminations." "Americanized" Syrians, having benefited from "modern civilization" stood to act as educators and moderators between Syrians and the mandate government.<sup>72</sup>

In order for Syrian-Lebanese communities in the *mahjar* to shape public opinion in favor of France, they would have to come to believe French accounts of the events in Rashaya. Accordingly, mandate authorities in Beirut frequently distributed reports to their French consuls in the Americas updating them on the situation in Rashaya, meanwhile familiarizing them with activities of Ghantus and his supporters in the *mahjar*. Consequently, Montreal updated the high commissioner who then updated the French Consul of Santiago, Chile. One such incident that traversed these diplomatic telegrams was a letter to *al-Huda* by a certain Emile Dawud, a recent Rashayan immigrant to the United States, and brother to Dr. Sulayman Dawud. The general consul in Montreal warned against the spread of this letter among the Syrian colony, which

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<sup>72</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 9, Carton 443, General Consul (Montreal) to MAE, "A.S. colonie syrienne de Montreal" (3 March 1927).

accused France of deceiving its agents abroad—who in turn deceived the Syrian migrants—into believing that the mandatory government had already compensated the Christian residents of Rashaya.<sup>73</sup> In fact, alleged Dawud, the victims received nothing from France. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs then appended this reported incident in a dispatch to the French consul in Santiago, Chile, warning him against “solicitations of Faris Ghantus and his cronies.”<sup>74</sup> Consuls were instructed to do their best to muffle the exaggerations of the certain Rashayans by reminding the protestors that other villages had fared much worse both in number of deaths and destruction. Of the 110 Christians killed in Lebanon during the course of the “Druze revolt,” only 18 were from Rashaya. Moreover, these figures didn’t include the sacrifices endured by the French. The office of the high commissioner further instructed the consul to ensure that Syrians abroad knew that a total of 1.5 million francs of the sum seized from the Ottoman Public Debt had been set aside solely for the reconstruction of Rashaya.

In response to the biased information emanating from certain “Lebanese centers in America,” the high commissioner sent out a general dispatch to French consuls informing them that efforts towards the reconstruction of Rashaya were underway. The exaggerative campaign by certain local agitators, mainly Ghantus, to obstruct the return of Christians under the pretext that they were not receiving compensation was made possible by the “indiscriminate support by insufficiently informed American groups.”<sup>75</sup> Money flowing from the America proved that “the zeal of Lebanese for their compatriots” was strong. With agreement from the Lebanese

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<sup>73</sup> CADN, Santiago Ambassade 616po/1 Carton 51, Consul General (Montreal) to MAE, “Copie: Situation a Rachaya” (8 June 1927).

<sup>74</sup> CADN, Santiago Ambassade 616po/1 Carton 51, MAE to French Consul (Santiago), “Situation a Rachaya” (4 July 1927).

<sup>75</sup> CADN, Santiago Ambassade 616po/1 Carton 51, MAE to French Consul (Santiago), “A.S. Situation à Rachaya” (9 April 1927).



government, the high commissioner would initiate a campaign to combat the efforts of Ghantus by winning over moderate-minded refugees who had been more or less grateful to efforts made by the mandatory power, the Lebanese government, religious leaders, the Red Cross, and various private charitable societies. Syrian colonies in America should be warned against the exaggerations of Ghantus, and in response be made “aware by their countrymen, and if possible by our consuls, of efforts to revive their little city.”<sup>76</sup>

Rashaya’s campaign may not have achieved immediate results, but French documents do reveal a steady increase in spending for refugees between the years 1925 and 1927. At first, the state allotted an initial 1,500 Syrian pounds to Zahleh, where most of the refugees from Rashaya were residing. Early efforts also included attempts to find work for refugees, but this did not meet with much success because they were “unfortunately quite stubborn.” Similarly, the state also organized the distribution of food and supplies to refugees in Saida and Beirut. In Saida, a total of 320,000 francs was dispensed. In Beirut, the government further took charge of maintaining 110 refugees by covering the cost of food, clothing and lodging. Another 445 refugees were partially assisted. By September 1927, the total of those costs was around 150,000 francs in Beirut.<sup>77</sup> Similar efforts were undertaken in Zahleh as well, where the Department of Reparations oversaw the distribution of 330,000 francs worth of wheat and flour (as of 1927). Altogether, the Lebanese government had spent over one million francs in relief supplies. These services were clearly not enough, and the French indirectly admitted this. The “private relief” of “generous American donors” admittedly “largely supported the efforts of the state, especially in

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<sup>76</sup> CADN, Santiago Ambassade 616po/1 Carton 51, MAE to French Consul (Santiago), “A.S. Situation des populations Chrétiens de Rachaya” (30 March 1927).

<sup>77</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 409, Carton 443, Service des Reparations, “Note sur les reparations au Liban” (26 September 1927).

Zahleh and Beirut." The French accused the most "disreputable and loud" of the Rashaya refugees, however, of "largely absorbing under various pretexts" the nearly 4 million francs of foreign donations, a number that nearly matched what the French had set aside for all of southern Lebanon. It was yet unclear to the government how this money was being distributed.<sup>78</sup>

As for reconstruction efforts, the government allocated an original sum of five million francs for Christian homes in south Lebanon that were either destroyed or damaged (In comparison, Damascus was allotted only two million francs). Around 1,200 homes needed repair, 400 of them in the village of Rashaya alone. The "most urgent works" were undertaken first, and reconstruction efforts were admittedly not meant to restore homes to their original state. While the government had successfully restored a majority of the homes in south Lebanon, Rashaya stubbornly resisted. Mandate officials complained of Ghantus and his friends, accusing them of leading the "the poor and ignorant heard of sheep" against the government. Their demands were "wildly spilling over into extravagance." "Benefiting from American aid," they took advantage of the ruins as a form of leverage against the mandatory power and Lebanese government in order to obtain greater compensation.<sup>79</sup>

Meanwhile, the Lebanese government refused to give into "this blackmail." The head of the Department of Reparations denied accusations that they withheld living allowances from Rashayans who refused to return to their village. Drawing upon the testimonies of religious leaders from Zahleh and Rashaya, they further refuted claims of refugee deaths by starvation. While the French claimed that many dissenting Rashayan Christians actually hoped to return to

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

their homes, they was still the problematic fact that by September 1927, 400 homes in Rashaya (i.e. all the homes damaged or destroyed) had yet to be rebuilt.

Out of the 5 million francs set aside for the reconstruction of Lebanon, Rashaya was allocated 1.5 million. It was estimated that nearly 420 homes in Rashaya were destroyed in the fighting, and for that reason “it was understood that Rashaya should receive the biggest portion, at least to build its roofs, because to rebuild the entire city would cost tens of millions.”<sup>80</sup> This reconstruction was being overseen by the French Inspector of Administrative Services, who had successfully attended to the reconstruction of Christian homes in the surrounding Christian villages of Marj‘ayun and Kawkaba. The mandatory government, in cooperation with the Lebanese government, also sought to convince Christian families to return to their homes. Additionally, while the Lebanese government bore the responsibility for the indemnification of Christian refugees, Druze refugees would have to spend out of their own pockets to reconstruct their homes. The fear of returning to live with the Druze was, in their opinion, unfounded. The French believed that the Lebanese government and the majority of the Orthodox clergy were “successfully” combating the campaign for compensation. Such efforts were not only directed at the pacification of Christian refugees but also of the diaspora. In the final analysis, the refugees and their transnational liaisons “must understand that it is thanks to the benevolence of the M.P. (mandatory power) and their government that refugees have so far received effective relief” and that it would be thanks to this “benevolence that they can count on the restoration of Rashaya and a return to their homes.”<sup>81</sup>

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

With negotiations between the French and the various Syrian and Lebanese nationalists residing within and outside the mandate borders, tensions were running high over the future of Lebanon's borders. The controversy caused by the rebellion intensified the urgency for the ratification of a Lebanese constitution in accordance with the terms of the mandate. The French had a difficult equation to balance. Any reassurances they offered the Lebanese would surely threaten the pro-unity factions in Damascus. In February of 1926, the press went in arms against a statement by Jouvenel at a speech in Damascus, where he made reference to the "United States of Syria and Lebanon," intimating his willingness to support Syrian nationalist demands.<sup>82</sup> Internal debates among French mandate officials reveal disagreement over the course of action, as occurred when Monsieur Solomiac, the delegate of the high commissioner, gave a speech in front of the Lebanese parliament suggesting the proclamation of the constitution would be a French guarantee of Greater Lebanon's borders.<sup>83</sup> Torn over the question of Greater Lebanon, certain French officials feared that a premature pronouncement of the constitution would act a symbolic guarantee of Lebanese borders, one that they were yet unprepared to give.

The Cairo-based *Alliance Libanaise* (introduced in the first chapter) had more or less dropped out of view with the declaration of Greater Lebanon in 1920. Yet, with the spread of the rebellion to south Lebanon, its members were pushed once again to defend its borders. Writing the high commissioner in November 1925, they urged the French government to end—once and for all—the ambiguity shrouding Lebanon's frontiers.<sup>84</sup> In their opinion, the "enemies of Lebanon, who are also the enemies of France" would have people believe that Lebanon's borders

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<sup>82</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 263, Carton 413, Clip from *L'Orient* (20 February 1926).

<sup>83</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 263, Carton 413, Berthelot (Paris) to M. de Reffye (Beirut) (26 June 1926).

<sup>84</sup> Bkirké, Huwayik, 76/6, Alliance Libanaise (Cairo) to HC (Beirut) (30 November 1925).

were the principle reason for “Syrian agitation.” They believed this was a ploy, however. They continued:

The truth is that Syria, like Lebanon, is exacerbated by the humiliation she suffered under the policy established by M. Robert de Caix, and which considered the country under mandate as a simple domain of exploitation for the benefit of some business tycoons. Everything in the law and the administrative organization converges towards this goal....<sup>85</sup>

Robert de Caix, who was at the time acting as France’s representative at the League of Nations, was instrumental in setting the French policy in Syria. As the secretary of the first high commissioner in Syria, he brought with him his experience from Morocco, as well as his divide-and-rule tactics.<sup>86</sup> The *Alliance Libanaise* blamed de Caix for alienating the “secular sympathies of Syria and Lebanon.” The heart of their plea rested on the mandatory government’s responsibility to collaborate with the population towards the creation of a constitution and national assembly. Instead, Lebanon suffered under the tyranny of its French governors, as well as the creation of mixed tribunals, its “onerous” contract with the Bank of Syria, the monopolization of the tobacco and agricultural industries, as well as high taxes. It was the opinion of the *Alliance Libanaise* that it was these diverse grievances—inspired by the mandate regime—which gave cause to the rebellion. As “faithful interpreters of the vast majority of Lebanese emigrants in Egypt and America, as well as our brothers in Lebanon who did not always have freedom of expression,” the *Alliance Libanaise* hoped that the mandatory government would hear their desire for the final recognition of Lebanon’s borders. To do so, the mandate government would have to live up to its duties, and facilitate the drafting of constitution and the election of a representative national assembly.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Kaufman, 27.

In March 1926, the high-profiled Lebanese émigré, ‘Abdallah Sfeir Pasha wrote to the Maronite Patriarch from his home and headquarters in Cairo, Egypt.<sup>87</sup> In his letter, Sfeir Pasha interceded with the Patriarch Huwayik to reassure him that Lebanon’s sovereignty and independence would be preserved and upheld by the French. Yet, Sfeir Pasha also hoped to persuade the Patriarch that in the context of the revolt, the best course of action would be to make concessions to the Muslim population of Greater Lebanon, which had been greatly increased by the annexation of the coast, the Bīqā‘, and parts of the Anti-Lebanon.<sup>88</sup> He also pointed out that many maintained commercial and cultural links to their coreligionists in Damascus and elsewhere. Yet without these regions, Lebanon would also be economically unviable. Consequently, according to Sfeir Pasha, Lebanon’s Christians would have come to terms with the fact that their enlarged state would also bear them the cost of losing certain privileges, as well as the “the hostility of fellow countrymen who before the war dominated the country,” and who “today are dominated on one side by foreigners, and the other side by a national element which represents (appears) their inferior,” causing much of the coastal residents to side with “aristocratic Damascus.”<sup>89</sup>

Bearing all of this mind, Sfeir suggested an “economic alliance” between Lebanon and Syria that would cover issues of common interest such as: customs, the post, the telegraph and other means of communication, currency, and all matters necessary for the “ease of trade, and in general, the relationships of various kinds of people together.” This alliance would be set up with a special agreement to be renewable at certain intervals, and which a Joint Economic

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<sup>87</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 263, Carton 413, Sfeir (Heliopolis) to Huwayik (Bkirké), (2 March 1926).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

Commission under the control of the High Commissariat would oversee. Sfeir took special care to assure the Patriarch that such an arrangement would not affect the independence of Lebanon, and would in the long-term only enhance the development and prosperity of Lebanon while mitigating the resentment of the Muslim populations towards the idea of Lebanese independence.

Yet Lebanese Christian leaders appeared to be little appeased. Leading members of the Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, and Melkite churches met to discuss Lebanon's future. This was looked upon with suspicion and alarm by French authorities. Writing to the high commissioner, they clarified their intentions:

Following the events that disrupt Syria, the spread of alarming rumors on the subject of the independence and integrity of Greater Lebanon have produced in our population a real depression which could not but have us concerned. We believed that we should meet to demonstrate that the situation did not leave us indifferent, and to appease them [the population].

The letter continued to clarify that the meeting had not intended "to provoke a new explanation of the intentions of France, who has never been in doubt for anyone."<sup>90</sup> In response to the meeting, Jouvenel had assured them of inviolability of Greater Lebanon's territory.

As the above examples illustrate, the defense of Lebanon's borders employed different appraisals of the revolt. While the *Alliance Libanaise* favored a secular reading of the rebellion, the Maronite Church in particular pushed a sectarian interpretation of the events that recalled France's duty to protect minorities. What both these views had in common, however, was a qualified support for the French mandatory regime. Though at odds with one another, they were similar to the Syrian petitioners of the previous chapter in that they also employed their diasporic networks to encourage their defense of Lebanon. Similarly working within the framework of the

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<sup>90</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 263, Carton 413, Letter from various Christian patriarchs to HC (Beirut) (15 March 1926).

postwar treaties that defined the mandate borders, they nevertheless questioned the validity of the mandate by either denying or reaffirming an ethno-confessional sectarian reading of the rebellion.

By tapping into Christian charitable networks in the mandate and abroad, Rashayans were able to subsist at a time when the government had failed them. Dissenting Rashayan refugees used the material and emotional support of their compatriots in the *mahjar* to carry out a sustained campaign for government reparations that lasted nearly two years. In the meantime, as they reiterated and articulated their demands, they actively debated their place in the Lebanese nation. What was an ambiguous border region in 1919, before its annexation by the French in 1920, became with the revolt in 1925 a crucial site for the making of the Lebanese nation. Inclusion in the Lebanese nation was notably articulated through the particularist associations of town and sect (Rashaya and Christianity). In response, the mandatory power and the Lebanese government took several steps towards the reconstruction of the south Lebanon. At the heart of these reconstruction efforts, were attempts to bring southern border towns under the fold of the state. Ultimately, this was also a question of participation and inclusion into Lebanese nationhood. Between 1925 and 1927, the revolt provided Lebanese separatists and nationalists with a decisive opportunity to assert their pressure upon France. It was in this context that the first Lebanese Constitution was adopted in May 1926. The constitution reaffirmed Lebanon's desire to be independent from Syria, and more importantly, the distribution of offices in the Lebanese government on the basis of a system of confessionalism.

As debates over the rebellion played out across the Atlantic, the boundaries between Syria and Lebanon solidified. The promulgation of Lebanon's constitution certainly did not end the debate over Syrian unity. Years after, Syrians and Lebanese would continue to debate the



mandate's borders as an essential requirement to achieving a deal with the mandate government. Despite approving the constitution, Jouvenel himself returned to Paris at the end of May 1926 with a belief that Greater Lebanon was unviable due to its Muslim majority population. Yet, despite impending revisions to the 1926 constitution, Lebanon's borders would remain unchanged, and its political system would continue to attempt cautiously balancing secular and confessional currents.

The previous chapters have thus far focused on the mobilization of Syrian and Lebanese diaspora networks, and their expressions of "long-distance nationalism." Yet, the Syrian revolt played out in ways that surpassed the nation-state as well. The following chapter will consider the ways in which Syrian nationalists utilized different layers of anti-imperialist networks to champion their anti-imperialist cause. When recourse to the mandatory power or the League of Nations proved lacking, Syrians émigrés simultaneously coordinated with Pan-Islamist as well as Communist circles in their struggle against imperialism.

## Chapter 4:

### Transnational Rebellion: Wilsonian, Pan-Islamist and Communist Anti-Imperialism

Dr. Woodrow Wilson conveyed to us his famous Fourteen Points, starting first with the right of weak and subjugated peoples to self-determination. Receiving these beautiful words, we believed in them and lent them faith, we, the Arabs. The whole world can therefore say that the Arab enthusiastically believes in the words of others, which means that he is innocent and simple, and that he believes lies. But I prefer a thousand times to be candid and simple than be cunning, deceitful and treacherous.<sup>1</sup>

#### Introduction

Dr. ‘Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar pronounced the above words to a lively and applauding audience in Baghdad in December 1926. Shahbandar had spent over a year among the ranks of the Syrian rebels before escaping to neighboring Iraq when it was becoming clear that the insurrection had been all but subdued. Only a few months later, Shahbandar and other rebel leaders would call off the revolt. Shahbandar’s speech to the Baghdadi audience that winter evening was an expression of the great disenchantment many felt with the broken promises of the Allied powers. Identifying this disillusion, Erez Manela argues that the collapse of the “Wilsonian moment” in 1919 gave way to the increasing popularity of Leninist internationalism across the colonial world.<sup>2</sup> Yet, Shahbandar’s words, while expressing a sense of treachery, also alluded to a continued hope in the principles that came to be associated with the American president. Wilson’s rhetoric left a lasting imprint on the political imaginations of Syrians and Lebanese seeking sovereignty and independence. Two years after the insurrection had ended,

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1 MAE-La Courneuve Syrie-Liban Vol. 212, Carton 412, HC (Beirut) to MAE (Paris) “A.S. Sujet du Chahbandar” (19 Janvier 1927). Translated excerpt from “*Istiqlal*” (16 December 1926) follows.

<sup>2</sup> Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7.

Sultan Pasha al-Atrash stood before a congress of former rebel leaders and Syrian nationalists in the valley of Wadi al-Sirhan, a desert straddling what is now the Jordanian-Saudi border, and spoke the following words:

Guided by the immortal principles of Human Rights proclaimed by the French Revolution, as well as the principles of freedom of the weak peoples called by President Wilson and the official representatives of the Allies, we meet—leaning on divine help—and proclaim to the entire universe that Syria will never give up its legitimate rights...<sup>3</sup>

Taken together, the discourse of the two rebel leaders reflected the continued belief in the liberal international order imagined by Wilson and others. It was in the vein of this liberal internationalist vision that Syrians and Lebanese addressed the Paris Peace Conference, and then mobilized around the League of Nations. Despite their failure to achieve sovereign statehood, they persisted in their recourse to a state-centered discourse. The previous chapters have illustrated the ways in which Syrians and Lebanese abroad mobilized around the mandate system put in place by the League of Nations. Both supporters and detractors of the rebellion skillfully utilized the logic of postwar system to ask for their collective rights, and thereby attempted to shape the civic order that defined the future Syrian and Lebanese states, even if they did not always succeed in achieving their intended aims.

Yet, as suggested by Shahbandar's speech, this was not a blind adoption of post-war liberal internationalism. The continued reliance on "Wilsonianism" was but a means to achieve their desired ends, but it was certainly not the only conduit for their political aspirations. Syrians pulled from both the sacred and secular to legitimate their nationalist struggle. French High Commissioner Henry de Jouvenel sought to convince the British liaison officer in Beirut of the

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<sup>3</sup> CADN, Syrie-Liban, Carton 409, Service de Renseignements "Traduction de l'Arabe: Congrès du desert tenu le 25 Octobre 1929 à Hodeissa, dans le Wadi Serhan sous la Présidence du Commandant Supérieure de la révolte syrienne" (14 November 1928).

need for British mandatory authorities to clamp down on Syrian activities in neighboring Transjordan and Palestine. He stressed the Syrian rebellion as a transnational one, painting a rather dark and ominous picture. According to the report of the liaison officer:

He foresaw such dangerous combinations as a Russo-Turco-Indian alliance, as a reply to Locarno.

The Russo-Turkish part of the alliance was already a 'fait accompli.' He pointed to the fact that both Ibn Saud and the Syro-Palestinian Committee were in close touch with the Indian Moslems. He also bore out his theory by adding that Chekib Arslan, the Druze who is at Geneva, is now pretending to represent the Druzes, the Indian Moslems, and the Syro-Palestinian Committee. He said that he considered that there was far less liaison between Syria and Morocco than between Syria and India.<sup>4</sup>

The rather prescient paranoia of the French mandatory government reflected a messy postwar reality. Groups operated across borders in defiance of the Locarno treaties, the mandates system, and new border arrangements.

This chapter seeks to shed light on the myriad transnational and supranational connections that groups like the Syro-Palestinian Congress and others utilized to support the Syrian cause of independence. In their advocacy, Syrian activists were not confined by physical boundaries. They tapped into various activist networks, simultaneously drawing resources and support from Leninist, Muslim, and liberal internationalist circles, thereby exemplifying the porosity of such ideological and strategic networks.<sup>5</sup> Hence, while the focus of this dissertation has situated the activities of Syrian migrants in the context of an emerging nation-state system, this chapter takes a step back to acknowledge the volatility of the interwar period, as well as the contingency of the nation-state.

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<sup>4</sup> TNA, FO 141/552, Report by A.G. Salisbury-Jones (Beirut) to General Staff Headquarters, Palestine Command (Bir-Salem, Palestine) (31 January 1926).

<sup>5</sup> One need only look at the career of Amir Shakib Arslan. Exiled in Europe, Arslan spent several years lobbying the League of Nations as a member of the Syro-Palestinian Congress. Yet, he was also found rallying different circles in Moscow, New York, and Mecca in support of the Syrian cause.

By shedding light on these diverse actors, we can see the Syrian Revolt was a multivalent one, holding meaning for divergent but overlapping “internationalist” struggles, not all of which considered the nation-state framework as their dominant paradigm. Referring to the origins of Third Worldist activity in Europe, Robert Malley notes that, “Third World solidarity can be viewed as the diaspora’s offspring.”<sup>6</sup> Immigrants to the metropole he argues, were confronted with “disparity and injustice, often more acutely than the in the colony itself.” Such feelings of alienation incentivized them to organize, but more importantly, the fact of “migration to the metropolis resulted in contact with other Third World exiles.”<sup>7</sup> Syrian migrants thus played a crucial role in problematizing the Eurocentric internationalism embodied in the League of Nations. Physically removed from the center of the nation, they were especially suited to conceptually and physically subvert the postwar setup, as much as they were also better suited to access the League (see Chapter 2). In such a way, their activities can be interpreted as a prelude to Third Worldist activism, as well as foreshadowed a tendency towards non-alignment.

The outreach of the Syrian émigrés to various transnational networks was not without its tensions. Ultimately, the Syrian nationalist cause trumped the ideals of pan-Islamism or Leninism, and the persistent claims to Wilson’s ideals were deemed a lost cause. Nevertheless, the simultaneous appeals of Syrian nationalists to Wilsonian, Pan-Islamist and Leninist networks challenges the idea that a singular “Wilsonian moment” gave way to the popularity of Leninism in the colonized world. While such divergent networks used each other for their own ends, they also shared a common goal of dispelling imperialism, and of challenging Eurocentric

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Malley, *The Call from Algeria: Third Worldism, Revolution and the Turn to Islam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 21.

<sup>7</sup> Malley, 21.

internationalism. With this knowledge in mind, it is possible to see the interwar period as offering alternative visions for the international order, though the nation-state system ultimately prevailed.

### **Enduring Wilsonianism? Problematizing the League of Nations**

On June 21, 1926, the *New York Times* ran an article conveying a “personal message” from Sultan Pasha al-Atrash to the “American people.”<sup>8</sup> The statement had apparently been delivered to the Associated Press after passing through dangerous enemy fire. Hoping to dispel rumors that the rebels had attacked their Christian neighbors, Sultan Atrash asserted that their rebellion was a nationalist one, claiming: “We make no distinction in religions or sects, as our only aim is to obtain our legal rights, which belong equally to the Sons of Syria, whatsoever they may be.” In bestowing these words upon the “good men of America,” Sultan Atrash requested their “honorable impartiality,” sympathy, and assistance. The article ended with the words of Amir Amin Arslan, “the third leading personality among the Druse people,” who allegedly asserted that there would be no peace “until the French offer the revolutionists as a whole very liberal terms in writing, guaranteed by a third power, preferably by the United States, or as a last resort, the League of Nations.”<sup>9</sup>

Of course, no such terms were offered to the rebels, nor did the United States serve any role in mediating peace. In appealing to the American people, the rebels were also calling upon their compatriots who were naturalized in large numbers in the United States. Nowhere were the cross-border appeals of the Syrians nationalists more readily answered (and contested) than in the United States. The question of monetary support for the rebels had long perplexed the

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<sup>8</sup> “Druse Leader Begs for Our Sympathy,” *New York Times* (21 June 1926), 4.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

French. In 1927, it became clear that Syrian-Lebanese residing in the United States had contributed the most financially to the cause of their homeland through donations to rebels and civilians alike.<sup>10</sup> Syrian-Lebanese migrant communities further engaged the rebellion through debates in the press, and organized parties and conferences to strategize plans to support the nationalist cause. French mandate authorities were well aware of this, noting that propaganda hostile to the mandatory power also operated beyond the mandated territories, and its neighboring states. Anti-French propaganda extended “to the main centers of immigration” where Syrian and Lebanese colonies maintained strong ties to homeland.<sup>11</sup> These centers had “their own journals, circles and sources of political information,” which were utilized to spread “distorted, tendentious and often imaginary” news against the mandate.<sup>12</sup> Consequently, the French responded to subversive diasporic activity by instructing their ambassadors and consuls to strengthen their ties to Syrian and Lebanese colonies abroad.

Syrian-American support for the rebellion—though never unilateral—was accompanied by its own conceptual challenge to the postwar international order. The United States—having refused to join the League of Nations despite its origins in Wilson’s initiative—played a unique role in debates over the usefulness and role of the mandates system and the League of Nations in furthering European imperialism. Despite an apparent tendency towards isolationism, academic and policy circles in the United States preserved an internationalist current. Groups like the Foreign Policy Association sustained public interest in international affairs, including the place

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<sup>10</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 213, Carton 412, Consul General of France (Jerusalem) to HC (Beirut), “A.S. des fonds destinés aux victims des événements de Syrie” (16 August 1927).

<sup>11</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 210, Carton 412, HC (Beirut) to MAE (Paris), “Objet: Presse et propagande” (8 April 1926).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

of the Syrian rebellion in wider debates over European imperialism. Following the bombardment of Damascus, the association desired to see reforms in the structure of the League in order to allow it to send a commission of inquiry to Syria. It was hoped that such reform would improve the reputation of the League, and prove that the “mandate system is not a sham or veiled form of annexation, but a genuine attempt to replace arbitrary imperialism by an elastic but effective form of international control.”<sup>13</sup>

Even as the disheartening reality of the League of Nations' mandate system came into full view, the “Wilsonian moment” cast a long shadow onto the subsequent period. The King-Crane Commission in particular held symbolic significance for anti-French and pro-independence Syrians. For them, the Commission marked a hopeful moment: a possibility that the Syrian people would have a say in the mandatory placed upon them. With it came a steady call for an American mandate that lasted well into the years of the Syrian Revolt of 1925. This call was strengthened by public tensions between the United States and France over its debt, as well as France’s overt military tactics in Syria and Morocco during the 1920s. In a memorandum written in November 1925, Crane himself suggested that:

If America did not want to take a mandate it was necessary to say so, but if the American Commission had been sent to get an expression of the peoples at Palestine and Syria it had obtained that expression and it was the duty of the government to see that the expression was given full force and carrying power. That duty was evaded. Now we have still further responsibility because in the last analysis the billions of francs being used by the French to carry on this unwise and wasteful process are American money.<sup>14</sup>

In calling for U.S. intervention and support, Syrians hoped to engage the international sphere in a

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<sup>13</sup> “Policy of France in Syria Assailed,” *New York Times* (20 December 1925), 22.

<sup>14</sup> King-Crane Commission Digital Collection, “Memorandum by Charles R. Crane about the Syrian mandate” (24 November 1925). <http://dcollections.oberlin.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/kingcrane/id/1764/rec/3>



debate over the legality and viability of the postwar international system. The simultaneous appeals of Syrians to both the League of Nations as well as the United States thus reflected their ambiguous yet pragmatic relationship to the postwar international order.

The New York-based *Mir'at al-Gharb* (Mirror of the West), a Syrian Greek-Orthodox periodical, stood out as one of the few Christian journals in the United States to espouse support for the Syrian rebellion. The pages of the periodical reveal the Syrian community's ambiguous expectations of the League of Nations, as they approached European internationalism with a grain of salt. One such example can be seen in *Mir'at's* dim forecast for the Locarno Treaties taking place in 1925. Previous European attempts to bring about international peace met with little success, and the League of Nations—only a few years into existence—proved this. With the creation of the League, it was said that Europe had “safeguarded against the danger of war forever.”<sup>15</sup> In reality, explained the article, peace treaties were no more eternal than those who created them. Wars, like earthquakes, were unpreventable, and hence considered to be inherent to the nation-state.

On the occasion of the United States' debate over membership in the World Court, the New York-based *al-Bayan* similarly expressed deep skepticism over the mission of the League of Nations. *Al-Bayan*, under the supervision of its Druze editor, Sulayman Baddur, was often regarded as the organ of the Syro-Palestinian Congress in the United States. It is thus ironic, given the Congress' frequent mobilizations around the League of Nations, that the journal described the League as “nothing but a trap that Europeans set up to entangle the weak.”<sup>16</sup> The

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<sup>15</sup> “Al-salam al-wahmi,” *Mir'at al-Gharb* (27 October 1925).

<sup>16</sup> “al-mahkama al-dawliya wa majlis al-shuyukh,” *al-Bayan* (23 January 1926).

editorial went on to claim that the United States, mindful of European imperialistic schemes, therefore refused by majority vote to be a part of the World Court.

Yet, such journalistic debates over the current setup of the international system nevertheless suggested divergent expectations.<sup>17</sup> Various other editorials acknowledged that the League ushered in a new form of international politics, even if they often took this at face value. Najib Diab, a member of the Syrian League of Flint, Michigan described the French bombardment of Damascus as “one of the most egregious military attacks” in history, serving as an example of France’s maladministration of Syria. The secretary of the organization, Raghib Mutraj asked Diab to publish copies of his group’s petitions to the United States and League of Nations. In doing so, the organization did not naively expect to “fight the guilty and arrogant nations with telegrams.” Rather, it sought to express to the world its displeasure with France’s barbarous actions, while also acting as “Syrians defending the homeland” against “colonization.”<sup>18</sup> In petitioning the League of Nations to cancel the French mandate over Syria, the Syrian League endowed the international organization with certain standards: “Your esteemed authorities cannot be uncaring over the French atrocities in Syria,” as “it would also not suit you to overlook its duties towards the Syrian people who are being sacrificed.”<sup>19</sup> In addressing the United States, they further located their protests in what they considered to be two core American principles: “freedom and humanitarianism.” The group went on:

We American Patriots, Syrians by birth—on behalf of the stricken city [Damascus] and the Syrian people—who have no means to voice their complaints to the world—seek to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> “Surat al-Ihtijaj al-marfu‘ ila ra’is al-wilayat al-mutahida,” *Mir’at al-Gharb* (20 November, 1925).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

turn your attention to the mission carried out about by President Wilson to Syria to assess the wishes of its people during the Peace Conference.

The authors reminded the readers of the United States' relationship to the Syrian struggle dating back to the American-led King-Crane Commission in 1919. The Syrian League wished for the American people to learn of their hope in the great political "influence" of the United States in alleviating the catastrophe that befell the Syrian people, and in putting an end to French actions.

At the start of 1926, Syrian appeals to the United States made their way into the U.S. Senate, where the Senator of Wisconsin, Robert La Follette Jr.—son of the famous Progressive Robert "Fighting Bob" La Follette—brought up the Syrian question. An isolationist and labor advocate like his father, La Follette Jr. brought the Senate's attention to a report drafted by members of the Syrian-American Society, detailing the disastrous situation in Syria.<sup>20</sup> Syrians in the United States attempting to call attention to French rule in Syria went so far as to suggest that they would prefer a U.S. mandate over a French one. Seeing the United States as an independent party, supporters of the revolt called upon the U.S. government to intervene in Syria. The New York-based Syrian American Society also addressed this memorandum to the President, the Secretary of State Frank Kellog, and members of Congress.

More specifically, the memorandum touched upon the role played by President Wilson and the United States, focusing on the King-Crane Commission as a pivotal moment whereby Syrians mobilized to express their desire for self-determination—a desire they were sure to point out was upheld by Article 22 of the League of Nations covenant. Petitions to the King-Crane Commission had revealed an overwhelming desire for self-rule, but secondly a strong preference for an American mandate, if not simply American "assistance." Why did Syrians prefer the

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<sup>20</sup> The speech was split into 3 installments. "Al-qadiya al-suriya fi majlis alshuyukh al-amriki" *Al-Bayan* (28 January 1926). "Al-qadiya al-suriya fi majlis al-shuyukh al-amriki 2" *Al-Bayan* (29 January 1926). "Al-qadiya al-suriya fi majlis al-shuyukh al-amriki 3" *Al-Bayan* (30 January, 1926).

United States? The Syrian-American Society pointed to the conclusions of the Commission.<sup>21</sup> According to the findings, Syrians had been confident in President Wilson, and were moreover thankful for “American relief of the starving and naked” during World War I. Adding to that, Syrians had expressed a general feeling that “America came into the war for no selfish reason,” had no colonial ambitions in Syria, and was therefore better suited to assist the Syrian people. The memorandum continued to extol the financial power, as well as educational and humanitarian work of the United States.<sup>22</sup> Whether truly reflecting the opinions of the Syrian people, or simply those of the Commission, the Syrian American Society and many others like them came to believe that the United States offered a more benevolent and just alternative for Syria and the world.

Given that the U.S. was not a member to the League of Nations, the Syrian American Society posed the question of whether American intervention was still possible. The memorandum argued:

But America’s moral responsibility toward Syria remains. The United States engaged in the World War for the purpose of ushering in a better era. It was on this basis that President Wilson was given authority to pursue the war with all the resources of the nation. That President Wilson understood the purpose of his own mandate is equally clear. That finally he permitted the men who sat with him at Paris to get the better of his judgment is much to be regretted. The fact remains, however, that he not only initialed the Covenant of the League of Nations, but was largely responsible for its character.<sup>23</sup>

Syrian-Americans were “under no misapprehension at all in what concerns international relations and affair,” and therefore called upon the precedent cases of Cuba and the Philippines. For a

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<sup>21</sup> LNA, C.P.M 373, “Memorandum on the Application of the Mandatory System of the League of Nations by France in Syria” (February 1926).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 26.

brief time before the mandate, Syrians envisioned a democratic government with the encouragement of the King-Crane commission. It was therefore now America's moral duty to follow up on the "benevolent" mission that President Wilson had started.

In January 1927, even as it was becoming clear that the Syrian rebellion was witnessing its final moments, the Michigan-based New Syria Party held a general conference in Detroit in support of the Syrian cause for independence. The special guests of the conference were Amir Shakib Arslan hailing from Geneva, and Nasim Sayb'a, who was associated with the Syro-Palestinian Congress in Egypt. While Arslan's mission was more oriented towards gaining publicity, Nasim Sayb'a hoped to set up a network of donors for Syrian victims. The meeting provided the conference-goers with an opportunity to make the Syrian cause known to their non-Syrian neighbors. Local government officials were invited to the conference, their motorcades were adorned in American flags, and they strategized over plans to cooperate with local charities to send aid to Syria's victims. The conference also prompted surveillance by American and French officials. The French were especially keen to learn how Syrians in the United States were collecting and then channeling aid to Syria. Believing that these funds were too large to emanate from Syria émigrés alone, the French suspected "purely" American figures, such as Charles Crane, of helping out.<sup>24</sup>

Both at the Detroit conference, as well as the follow-up meeting in Flint, Arslan catered to his audience by drawing parallels between the American Revolution, and the Syrian cause for independence. He was confident that Americans would be able to empathize with the Syrian population in their opposition to French rule, saying: "I take it that the American people see in

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<sup>24</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban, Vol.409. Carton 443, Consul of France, de Fontnouvel (Chicago) to French Ambassador, Berenger (Washington) (23 April 1926).

the Syrian Nationalist movement a reflection of their own ideals. For my countrymen are fighting for the very same ideals for which the American people rose in arms in 1776.”<sup>25</sup> Sayb‘a also frequently referred to his credential as a graduate of the American University of Beirut, which he considered to be a key educational institution in which Syrians were imparted the legacy of U.S. ideals and democracy. Sayb‘a suggested that, “it was this American school that has been the most potent factor in Syria’s war for independence.”<sup>26</sup> For Arslan, Syrians in the United States who lived and benefitted from its democratic political system would be acting as traitors to their adopted home by supporting French colonialism.

At the time, the United States had not yet formulated a clear policy towards the region. Knowledge of the “Near East” had been generally the realm of American missionaries. Yet, World War I heralded the United States as a global economic power. Coupled with the Red Scare, the interwar period witnessed an increase in U.S. diplomatic missions abroad, as well as an expanded interest in security. The 1920s United States exhibited the dual tendencies of isolationism on the one hand, and sustained interest in internationalism on the other. Thus, even as “national introversion” seemed to mark the interwar United States, Syrian-Americans gazed outwards.<sup>27</sup> Read in this light, calls by Syrian-Americans for U.S. intervention in some ways foreshadowed the expansion of American empire. More importantly, however, the efforts of the Syrian diaspora highlighted the contingency of the nation-state system in the interwar period.

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<sup>25</sup> “Syrian Prince Gets Welcome,” *The Detroit News* (19 January 1927).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Benjamin D. Rhodes, *United States Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period, 1918-1941: The Golden Age of American and Diplomatic and Military Complacency* (Westport: Praeger, 2001), 1. Of course, it has to be noted that the interwar period witnessed the rise of U.S. Empire in Latin America.

Even as Syrians petitioned the League of Nations, and negotiated with the French mandate, they recognized the potentially strategic role that the U.S. could come to play in the Middle East.

### **The Ottoman Legacy and Pan-Islamism**

In November 1925, a French intelligence report from Annemasse—based on information gathered from the “Eastern” groups in Geneva—opined that the French could have easily suppressed the Syrian rebellion had it not been for the steady flow of “encouragement, assistance, financial support, and volunteers” from Egypt, Turkey, Transjordan, Palestine and Germany, excluding the large amount of subsidies coming from India and Brazil. The report noted with concern that the “All India Muslim League,” as well as the “The Muslim Community of Rio de Janeiro” had sent both the Syro-Palestinian Committee in Cairo, as well as the “Pan-Arab Committee of Adana” large sums of money.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the note warned of a possible cooperation between the Syrian People’s Party and the “Intermuslim Committee of Berlin,” under the leadership of a Turk by the name of Dr. Nami Sadr al-Din. To make matters worse, the Berlin committee was apparently “in full agreement with some representatives of the Comintern in Germany,” and had even held meetings with Chicherin, the People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs.<sup>29</sup>

No doubt the above-mentioned account was inflected with exaggeration and paranoia. Yet, the reports of the French security apparatus in Annemasse were ample and repetitive enough to lend some credibility to their findings. Based in Cairo and Geneva, with a committee in Jerusalem, the Syro-Palestinian Congress was no stranger to French paranoia and suspicion.

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<sup>28</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 210, Carton 412, Service des Renseignements, Genève, “Renseignement de bonne source: a/s des événements en Syrie” (27 November 1925).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Though the intended purpose of the organization was to bring together the diverse Syrian, Lebanese and Palestinian actors, members of the organization did not shy away from seeking the support of Arab, Muslim, and European figures alike. From the moment of its inception in 1921, the Geneva delegation traveled across Europe networking with various groups who could be interested in the Syrian cause. Moreover, as Malley suggests, the Syrian delegation in Europe was most suited to such transnational mobilizing, for it was in exile that Syrian nationalists came across a diverse array of other exiled colonial subjects. After World War I, exiled nationalists of Arab background gathered in and around Geneva, forming pan-Arab and pan-Islamic societies. During the 1925 revolt, these groups cooperated over their shared concern for the situation in Syria, as well as a simultaneous rebellion in the Rif mountainous region of Morocco.<sup>30</sup> Amir Shakib Arslan frequented these various clubs as a special guest.

Writing about Arslan, historian Martin Thomas notes that, “French security services were less engaged by the singularity of Shakib Arslan’s views than by his unrivaled network of international clients. His contacts stretched from the North African immigrant community in the tenements of northern Paris to the royal palaces of Baghdad.”<sup>31</sup> With his exile to Berlin in the aftermath of the First World War, Arslan joined his friend, the Ottoman politician Enver Pacha, upon an invitation to join an “Islamic International” (more commonly named the Union of Islamic Revolutionary Societies).<sup>32</sup> The organization was an extension of the Committee of

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<sup>30</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 210, Carton 412, M. Poriquet (French Consul in Lausanne) to MAE (Paris) (2 December 1926).

<sup>31</sup> Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 205.

<sup>32</sup> See Raja Adal, "Constructing Transnational Islam: The East-West Network of Shakib Arslan" in *Intellectuals in the Modern Islamic World: Transmission, Transformation, Communication*, Eds. Stéphane A. Dudoignon, Hisao Komatsu and Yasushi Kosugi (London: Routledge, 2006).



Union and Progress (CUP) that had been exiled in Europe.<sup>33</sup> Enver Pasha apparently “envisioned a decentralized organization consisting of regional cells spanning the entire Islamic world, each with its own strategy but operating within a general framework and with an overarching goal: the freedom and self-government of Islamic lands.”<sup>34</sup> It was in his capacity as a member of the Islamic International that Shakib Arslan met Trotsky at the third general conference of the Comintern.<sup>35</sup> As a leading figure of the Geneva delegation of the Syro-Palestinian Congress, Arslan further branched out beyond the Syrian cause to liaise with the League of Oppressed Nations in Genoa, and with 'Abd al-Hamid Sa'id, an Egyptian activist in Rome who helped organize a general "Eastern Conference" in 1922.<sup>36</sup>

Consequently, by the summer of 1925, when the Syrian rebellion first ignited, a network of ready enthusiasts among Muslims, Arabs, and Communist circles had already been in the works. As evidenced by the goals of the “Islamic International,” what brought this complicated web of actors together was a shared interest in defeating imperialism, and the final realization of self-determination. This section will consider French suspicions of pan-Islamism on the part of the Syrian rebels, focusing on different networks: one linking Syrian rebels to figures in Turkey, the cooperation of the Syro-Palestinian Congress with the Khilafat (Caliphate) movement in India, and finally the courting of ibn Sa‘ud in the final stages of the rebellion.

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<sup>33</sup> For more on the Union see Martin Kramer, *Islam Assembled: The Advent of the Muslim Congresses* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

<sup>34</sup> Adal, 181.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. Enver Pasha would later break with the Soviets in 1921.

<sup>36</sup> *A'mal al-Wafd al-Suri al-Filastini*, 12. For more on the Eastern Conference see Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski. *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Though the Syrian rebellion never gained much ground in the northern city of Aleppo, the reports of the French *sûreté générale* repeatedly highlighted plans by Turkish and Syrian activists in eastern Anatolia to aid the rebels across the Syrian-Turkish border. French intelligence surmised that “frequent shipments of Turkish guns and cartridges” were secured in Istanbul and transported to Adana, where Syrians there ensured their passage into Syria.<sup>37</sup> Though bearing minimal impact on the outcome of the uprising, such transnational mobilization deserves mention for its implications towards understanding the interwar period as a messy and unsettling era of adjustment to the new postwar international order. Such subversive activity along the border importantly took place in the context of negotiations surrounding the Ankara Accord (Franco-Turkish Treaty), and its registration at the League of Nations in 1926. In exchange for Turkish recognition of French sovereignty over Syria, the French ceded areas along the border, formerly belonging to the *vilayets* of Adana and Aleppo. The timing suggests that such cross-border activities, in some form or another, were a reaction to this changing political geography.

In December 1925, French reports indicated a possible “terrorist plot in Syria,” implicating the Damascene notable Shukri al-Quwatli (also a member of the Syro-Palestinian Congress), who at the time was exiled in Berlin.<sup>38</sup> Quwatli, along with the Egyptian activist and scholar ‘Abd al-Aziz Shawish, had apparently traveled from Istanbul to Moscow to plot with various heads of the “Inter-Islamic movement” in Turkey and Berlin to send men from Turkey

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<sup>37</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 210, Carton 412, Commissaire Spéciale d’Annemasse, “A/S des événements en Syrie, Renseignement de source généralement bonne” (27 November 1925).

<sup>38</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 210, Carton 412, Commissaire Spéciale d’Annemasse, “Complot Terroriste en Syrie” (10 December 1925).

into Syria to carry out targeted attacks against members of the government.<sup>39</sup> The “Syrian Committee of Constantinople” apparently included High Commissioner Henry de Jouvenel on the list of those condemned to death.<sup>40</sup> A man by the name of ‘Iz al-Din, a Syrian national who had spent two years in Moscow, and was apparently invited to work for the Eastern section of the Comintern in Turkestan and Afghanistan, was charged with executing the mission. He would travel to Syria to organize with the Revolutionary Committees of different cities there.

In addition to the above actors, French reports drew attention to the cooperation between the *Comité de l’avenir de l’Islam in Konya*, Turkey and the “Syrian Committee” of Dörtyol near the province of Hatay, an area that would be later ceded to Turkey with the Franco-Turkish agreements.<sup>41</sup> The French described the Konya group as “the most powerful and rich inter-Islamic organization” of the time.<sup>42</sup> The two committees agreed to designate Hassan Zako, a Syrian residing in Istanbul, as their representative in Beirut. Zako had apparently served as the commander of the Arabs in the Turkish army under Cemal Pasha, and was also importantly a friend of the rebel leader Hasan al-Kharrat.<sup>43</sup> The Syrian committee in Dörtyol conspired with the above mentioned ‘Iz al-Din and other members of the Konya organization to carry out his plot in Syria. ‘Iz al-Din entered Syria between Aintab and Aleppo at the end of December, and had gotten in touch with a former Turkish colonel, Edhem Bey, who “led all relations between

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. For more on the activities of ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Shawish, see Kramer, 50-54. According to Kramer, Shawish was a strong supporter of “Muslim solidarity and Ottoman primacy,” and was a friend and colleague to Shakib Arslan leading up the World War I. After the war, Shawish spent time in Berlin, then in Turkey, before returning to Egypt.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 210, Carton 412, “Note confidentielle” (Paris) (21 December 1925). Also MAE to Beirut (23 December 1925).

<sup>42</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 210, Carton 412, “Note confidentielle” (Paris) (6 January 1926).

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

the different Syrian organizations of Turkey, and the Syrian committees of Syria.”<sup>44</sup> Edhem Bey, who during the Allied occupation of Istanbul during World War I was apparently charged with coordinating with Mustafa Kemal, had recently entered Syria and was hiding in Aleppo and its surrounding environments.<sup>45</sup> In addition to aiding ‘Iz al-Din, the Konya committee also sent “12 people to join Sultan el-Attrache, and to give him the instructions of the inter-Islamic circles,” upon which the rebel leader would resume his military operations.<sup>46</sup> The special envoy was also apparently charged with giving Sultan Pasha al-Atrash a large sum of money, and would convene a meeting with him to determine the future action of the rebels.<sup>47</sup>

Final news of the mission came from their passing through Aleppo, and it is unclear whether they were apprehended before reaching Sultan Pasha al-Atrash. Moreover, Turkish support for the rebellion across the northern frontier was limited by the success of the Franco-Turkish Agreement in 1926, and in turn, the Turkish nationalist movement. The French noted that heads of the Turkish nationalists in Ankara let it be known that “inter-Islamic” movement would no longer be tolerated within the “territory of the Republic.”<sup>48</sup> To this end, the Aintab Committee received a visit from “one of the closest collaborators of Mustafa Kemal Pasha who, in very friendly terms,” described Turkey’s agreement with the French ambassador and the high

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<sup>44</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 210, Carton 412, MAE to High Commissioner (Beirut), “A/S Complot contre M. de Jouvenel” (29 December 1925). Also, “Note confidentielle” from Paris (29 December 1925).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 210, Carton 412, “Note confidentielle” (Paris) (6 January 1926). Also contained in a note from MAE to High Commissioner (Beirut), “A/S Mission envoyée à Soltan Attrache” (9 January 1929).

<sup>47</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 210, Carton 412, “Note Confidentielle” (Paris) (11 January 1926).

<sup>48</sup> MAE La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 211, Carton 412, Commissaire Spéciale d’Annemasse, “A/S de la situation nouvelle du monde islamique” (10 June 1926).

commissioner in Syria. The committee was instructed to “cease all activity, and provide no more assistance in the future to Syrian insurgents.”<sup>49</sup> With the future of an independent Turkish state secured, the needs of the Turkish republic consequently trumped the need to foster transnational anti-imperialist networks. Despite its limitations, collaboration across the Anatolian-Syrian frontier reveals the significance of the Ottoman legacy in shaping transnational mobilizations during the interwar period.

In addition to a network linking Anatolia and northern Syria, the Syro-Palestinian Congress, as well as the Syrian rebels, benefitted from a broader Muslim network that mobilized around the question of the caliphate after the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire. Shakib Arslan, the Muslim scholar Rashid Rida, and the head of the Jerusalem committee, the *mufti* Haj Amin al-Husayni, in addition to being Arab nationalists were Islamic nationalists as well. Utilizing their layered identities, Arslan, Rida and Husayni rallied the support of the Indian Khilafat Committee.<sup>50</sup> The Khilafat movement of India, led by brothers Muhammad ‘Ali and Shawkat ‘Ali (and which briefly had the support of Gandhi), aimed for the restoration of the caliphate as a joint Hindu and Muslim cause against British imperialism. The multi-ethnic loyalties associated with the caliphate would provide them with a potent and symbolic anti-colonial but also nationalist platform.<sup>51</sup> As the Syrian rebellion was underway, a number of congresses were convened throughout the Muslim world to confer over the question of the caliphate. While abstaining from participation in Egypt’s General Islamic Congress (1926), members of the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Rida, who had traveled to India in 1912, had already established personal connections to Muslim scholars there.

<sup>51</sup> For more on the Khilafat movement see: M. Naeem Quresh, *Pan-Islam in British Indian Politics: a Study of the Khilafat Movement, 1918-1924*, (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

Indian committee did attend Mecca's Congress of the Islamic World (1926), then under the leadership of ibn Sa'ud. The Khilafat committee further participated in the General Islamic Congress of Jerusalem, under the leadership of Amin al-Husayni, in 1931.<sup>52</sup>

The global protest against France's assault on the ancient city of Damascus perhaps best illustrates the different ways "transnationalism" can be used to describe the development of cross-border solidarities of the period. In the protests against French actions one encounters both cross-border solidarities within "nations," whereby Syrian-Lebanese across the world called for justice and Syrian independence, but also across "nations." The anti-imperial outcry against the bombardment of Damascus was also a supranational affair, organized along networks of anti-colonial activists. The Jerusalem Committee reached out to leaders of "Islamic and Oriental countries," asking for support and relief aid for the victims of the bombardment.<sup>53</sup> Such figures notably included Haj Ajmal Khan, president of the Khilafat Committee, and former president of the Indian Nation congress. Jamal al-Husayni instructed Khan to "direct protests to top places" in India.<sup>54</sup> Messages from Shawkat 'Ali asked the president of the League of Nations to "kindly cancel [the] Syrian Mandate," in order to put an end to the "inhuman carnage" on the unarmed civilian population.<sup>55</sup> 'Ali's telegram was followed by another telegram from Ajmal Khan, who demanded that the League put an end to the violence in Syria.<sup>56</sup> In Khan's opinion the "entire system of mandates" threatened to cause only more bloodshed, "sowing the seeds of permanent warfare in Asia." Together these two telegrams reveal the significance of the Syrian Revolt as a

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<sup>52</sup> For more on the congresses, see Kramer, Chapters 9, 10 and 11.

<sup>53</sup> CADN, Syrie-Liban, Carton 1704, Section Politique, "Bulletin des Renseignements," (3 November 1925).

<sup>54</sup> LNA, Carton R 23, 47458/4284, Telegram from Shaukat Ali (30 October 1925).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> LNA, Carton R 23, 47458/4284, Telegram from Ajmal Khan (30 October 1925).

global anti-imperial symbol. Drawing from both their identities as Muslims and Indians under British colonial rule, the thoughts and activities of the Khilafat movement leaders provided a common ground for anti-colonial activism that transcended national borders. To give an idea of the extent of these transnational efforts, funds collected in India by the Indian Muslim Committee totaled around 18,000 pounds, exceeding the 5,000 pounds raised in Egypt.<sup>57</sup> With this in mind, the French minister in Egypt warned the Minister of Foreign Affairs that the propaganda movement against France went far beyond the Syro-Palestinian Congress.

As the Syrian insurrection waned, Indian Muslims continued to send their financial support. In late August 1926, members of the Syro-Palestinian Congress in Egypt studied a project to send a delegation to India and the Arab countries to raise aid for the victims.<sup>58</sup> The delegation would begin its journey in Aden, and then go to Bombay.<sup>59</sup> This coincided with an emerging controversy about the mishandling of aid sent to committees in Jerusalem and Egypt, and as a result, dwindling financial support from abroad. Rebel leaders in Haifa, “very unhappy” with the use of funds, acknowledged the need to send delegations to India and America to raise aid.<sup>60</sup> By 1927, the rift in the Syro-Palestinian Congress in Egypt was out in the open, with a faction surrounding the figure of Michel Lutfallah, and another around Rashid Rida. While the Lutfallah faction received little support from abroad, Rida’s group—due to his scholarly network that extended to personalities in India—continued to receive large sums of money from “groups

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> TNA, FO 141/810/6, High Commissioner Egypt, Note from El-Kaisy to Sirri Siasi (28 August 1926).

<sup>59</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 211, Carton 412, Extract from “Al-Muqattam” (Cairo) (15 September 1926).

<sup>60</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 211, Carton 412, Confiscated letter from Salah Beyhum to Hajj (‘Akka) (30 November 1926).

established in America, and from Muslims in India.”<sup>61</sup>

As alluded to earlier, the connection between Shaykh Rashid Rida and the Khilafat Committee was enhanced by their shared interest in seeing the revival of the caliphate in the Muslim world. Here, the rise of ibn Sa‘ud in Arabia, and his competition with the Hashemites—the former rulers of the Hijaz—bled into the dynamics of the Syrian rebellion. An intelligence report from Annemasse, reflecting the attitude of Muslim circles in Geneva pronounced that the “future of the pan-Islamic movement” would be concentrated in the hands of King ibn Sa‘ud, “whose influence grows daily in the Muslim world.”<sup>62</sup> While the Lutfallah faction had been longtime patrons of the Hashemite family, Rashid Rida and Shakib Arslan tended to side with ibn Sa‘ud, who they believed was less likely to collaborate with the British as the Hashemites. As the Lutfallah’s were managing to secure donations for the Syrian cause from the Hashemites, Rashid Rida and his allies consequently sought to rally ibn Sa‘ud to the cause of the Syrians as well. Shukri al-Quwatli was especially instrumental in this regard, being the main person in charge of convincing ibn Sa‘ud to donate to the Jerusalem committee of the Syro-Palestinian Congress.<sup>63</sup>

This was not a simple question of financial support, however. Rida and eventually Arslan, perceived Mecca as a more suitable seat for reviving the question of the caliphate. More than that, however, they believed ibn Sa‘ud’s control of the Arabian Peninsula would pose a

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<sup>61</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 214, Carton 412, Service des Renseignements Central, “Situation du Comité Syro-Palestinien” (15 March 1928).

<sup>62</sup> MAE-LA Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 211, Carton 412, Commissaire Spéciale (Annemasse) “A/S de la situation nouvelle du monde islamique” (10 June 1926).

<sup>63</sup> This division also manifested itself between Shahbandar’s People’s Party, which sided with Lutfallah and the Hashemites, and the Independence Party, which rallied to the side of Rashid Rida and the Sa‘udis.



greater challenge to imperialist ambitions in the region. By 1925, the Saudis had conquered the holy cities, wresting them from the leadership of the long-standing Hashemite family. Yet, the Muslim world was slow to give its support to ibn Sa‘ud, who was deemed by many to be “an intolerant sectarian.”<sup>64</sup> Hoping to win the favor of the Muslim world, ibn Sa‘ud issued several invitations to hold a congress in Mecca to determine “the future form of government for the Hijaz, and in this manner ibn Sa‘ud aspired to case himself as trustee rather than conqueror.”<sup>65</sup> Muslim figures like Rashid Rida and Hasan Ajmal Khan of the Indian Khilafat movement therefore saw in ibn Sa‘ud an opportunity to make Mecca the center of a league of Muslim states, with a democratically elected leader.<sup>66</sup> In January 1926, however, the notables of the Hijaz conferred the tile of king upon ibn Sa‘ud, thereby leaving “little to be determined in the matter of government.”<sup>67</sup> When the Mecca congress did take place in June 1926, the Sa‘udis attempted to avoid any political discussions from taking place, focusing rather on matters related to the *hajj*.

Political discussions were unavoidable, however, and to the dismay of the Saudis, many expressed displeasure with their monarchical rule of the Hijaz. Foremost in these criticisms was the Indian Khilafat delegation, which believed a republic was the best form of government in Mecca. Others hoped that ibn Sa‘ud would call upon the Muslim world to assist ‘Abd al-Karim’s anti-colonial rebellion in the Rif region of Morocco. As far as the Syrian and Palestinian representatives went, “All that interested them was, first, to appear on the stage in any possible

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<sup>64</sup> Kramer, 106.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Shakib Arslan, *al-Sayyid Rashid Rida, aw ikha’ arba’in sanah* (Cairo: Dar al-Fadilah, 2006), 323. Letter from Rashid Rida to Shakib Arslan (9 October 1926).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

manner, and second, to protest what was happening in their own country and ask for aid.”<sup>68</sup> Though Rida was able to secure 4,000 pounds from ibn Sa‘ud for the Syrians, little effort was made to organize a concerted effort to unify Muslim response in the way of supporting the two anti-colonial rebellions.<sup>69</sup> Finally, it seemed, the failure of Muslim leaders to agree at the Mecca congress only seemed to affirm the new postwar reality: the concerns of the nation-state undermined the broader concerns of the global Muslim community.

As Noor-Aiman Khan has demonstrated in her study on Egyptian-Indian nationalist collaboration, Muslim nationalists in India rallied alongside secular Egyptian nationalists.<sup>70</sup> Khan does not describe this type of collaboration as a manifestation of transnational Islam. Rather, the two camps collaborated in their shared desire to see an end to imperialism. In a similar vein, the leaders of the Syrian rebellion, who couched their struggle in secular, nationalist discourse, nevertheless used their multiple professional and social identities to strategize with various Islamic and anti-imperialist networks. Writing in 1932, Arslan problematized European notions of “pan-Islamism,” contending that the affinity of Muslims to one another was no different than that of European Christians throughout certain moments in history. This affinity, in his opinion, did not measure up to an “absolute and general” pan-Islamist movement as conceived by Europe.<sup>71</sup> A history of divergent alliances among Muslim powers proved otherwise. Moreover, Arslan believed that the notion of pan-Islamism propagated by European powers was used to

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<sup>68</sup> As quoted in Kramer, 110. Original quote from the Zawahiri report on the Congress.

<sup>69</sup> Shakib Arslan, *al-Sayyid Rashid Rida, aw ikha' arba'in sanah* (Cairo: Dar al-Fadilah, 2006), 351. Letter from Rashid Rida to Shakib Arslan (8 June 1926).

<sup>70</sup> Noor-Aiman Khan, *Egyptian-Indian Nationalist Collaboration and the British Empire* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>71</sup> “Solidarité musulmane et non panislamisme,” *La Nation Arabe* n. 3 (May 1930). “Solidarité musulmane et non panislamisme,” *La Nation Arabe* n. 4 (June 1930).

justify a policy of divide-and-rule. Despite Arslan's personal and political interest in Muslim affairs, his argument ultimately reflected his overarching commitment to a secular, nationalist project.

Though the Ottoman Empire had ceased to exist, its networks of activists continued to collaborate. In the midst of the consolidation of a secular Turkish republic, former Ottoman generals collaborated with Syrian rebels against the French mandate. Similarly, Syrian and Indian Muslims and nationalists also sought to support one another in their shared struggles against British and French colonialism. Critical in linking these networks were the mobile and exiled Syrians residing in Egypt, Europe and beyond.

### **The Threat of Communism? The Syrian Revolt and the Third International**

Overlapping at times with pan-Islamist mobilizations around the rebellion was the question of Bolshevik intrigue in Syria. Like the various Islamic nationalist circles, Communists and socialists shared an interest in eliminating imperialism, though the nationalist cause of the Syrian revolt was not their primary concern. French paranoia over Communists infiltrating the Syrian rebels was exaggerated; yet, the French association between the two had significant implications. The fear of Communism in general “was integral to the huge expansion in colonial intelligence reportage in the interwar years,” producing the knowledge upon which colonial policy was built.<sup>72</sup> More specifically, suspicions of Syrian-Communist collaboration during the mandate period increased the monitoring of Communist groups infiltrating Syrian borders. More generally, “By the mid-1920s the plethora of analysts’ appreciations of pan-Islamism and oppositional Muslim groups was matched by a constant stream of surveillance reports and

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<sup>72</sup> Thomas, 90.

predictive threat assessments about the dangers of Communist subversion in the Arab world.”<sup>73</sup> In 1926, Henry de Jouvenel wrote to Paris suggesting that a network be set up to facilitate the exchange of information on Communist activity in French colonies. In light of alarming reports that the “Bolsheviks of the Far-East” were closely following Syrian affairs, the French government found this to be a legitimate proposition, and instructed its Ministry of Foreign Affairs that the high commissioner should “establish a link between his administration and that of various French colonies to facilitate a joint fight against Communist propaganda. M. de Jouvenel to this effect would be able to communicate directly with the governors of our possessions to exchange information regarding the activity of the suspect groups.”<sup>74</sup> Though the activity of neighboring Communist parties within the borders of Syria were nascent at this time, French suspicions were not totally unfounded. Syrian rebels did indeed communicate with the Soviet figures, as well as various personalities associated with the Comintern, often times to attain munitions from eastern Europe.

At the time of the revolt, two separate local Communist parties were active in Syria—one Lebanese, the other Armenian. With the encouragement of Joseph Berger, a representative of the Communist Party of Palestine, Yusuf Yazbak and a Lebanese émigré to Egypt, Fu’ad Shimali, founded the Lebanese People’s Party in 1924.<sup>75</sup> Also operating in Syria was the Armenian Spartacus League, or “Spartak,” founded by émigrés from Turkey, Artin Madoyan and

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

<sup>74</sup> MAE-LA Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 211, Carton 412, Minister of Colonies to MAE, “Propagande communiste en Syrie et aux colonies” (25 May 1926).

<sup>75</sup> Tareq Ismael and Jacqueline Ismael, *The Communist Movement in Syria and Lebanon* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 7-8.

Haykazun Boyadjian.<sup>76</sup> In 1925, Syria was faced with increased taxes and inflation. Combined with the start of the Syrian Revolt, the two organizations rallied their efforts, and merged in December 1925 to form the Communist Party of Syria and Lebanon. While the agenda of the Lebanese People's Party had mostly focused on the plight of workers, with the start of the uprising, the new party veered towards the struggle against imperialism. It announced its support for the "Syrian revolution" at its first conference held in December 1925. Soon, Shimali collaborated members of the Palestine party, who were also representatives of the Comintern, and "they agreed to supply the Syrian revolution with material and more and political support, and to seek the cooperation of all branches of the International Comintern in this endeavor."<sup>77</sup> Shimali was instructed to coordinate with the insurgents through the intermediary of the Druze rebel, 'Ali Nasr al-Din.<sup>78</sup> The party was responsible for distributing anti-military tracts around Lebanon and Syria, calling Arab soldiers in the French army to abandon their posts, and fight for the revolutionary cause.<sup>79</sup> However, the French mandatory authorities were quick to clamp down on the leaders of the party, forcing them underground until their reemergence in the 1930s.

Even with the few leaders among the Armenian and Lebanese communists, the rebels utilized other avenues of collaboration to advance their cause towards independence and national sovereignty. Even as the French were extinguishing the spark of rebellion, communist activity flared once again in late 1926, and 1927. Evidence shows that Elie Teper, a representative of the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>78</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 212, Carton 412, Direction de la sureté générale (Beirut), "Renseignements sur le situation communiste" (14 March 1927).

<sup>79</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 213, Carton 412, Directeur de la sureté générale à ministre plénipotentiaire du HC (Beirut) (17 June 1927).

Comintern and member of the Palestine Communist Party, had been directly in touch with rebel leader Nasib al-Bakri to discuss ways to support the insurgents, and to procure support from Moscow.<sup>80</sup> With the help of exiled rebel leaders ‘Adil Arslan, Rashid Tali‘ and Nassib al-Bakri. the Central Committee of the Palestine party had managed to smuggle relief supplies to the insurgents in Jabal Druze, though to a limited extent.<sup>81</sup> In his memoir, ‘Ajaj Nuwayhid, a Druze residing in Palestine, confirmed that meetings took place between Rashid Tali‘ and Communists in Jerusalem for the purpose of acquiring munitions for the rebels through the “ports of the Hijaz.”<sup>82</sup> However, since the Comintern representative from Rome insisted that the rebels propagate communist principles, the negotiations fell through.<sup>83</sup>

In a similar vein, French intelligence had learned that the Syrians were directly negotiating with the Soviets for the obtaining of support and supplies. According to reports, Habib Lutfallah, a brother to Michel Lutfallah, had met with the Mr. Hakimov, the Soviet consul in Jeddah.<sup>84</sup> Upon hearing this news, the French ambassador to Moscow got in touch with Chicherin to warn him that such “relations with the Druze” jeopardized the Soviet Consul in Jeddah. Chicherin denied these allegations, but confirmed that the “Druze are apparently dealing

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Ajaj Nuwayhid, *Sittun ‘aman Ma‘a Al-Qafilah Al-‘arabiyah: Mudhakkirat ‘ajaj Nuwayhid* (Beirut: Dar al-Istiqlal, 1993), 66-67. According to Nuwayhid, Tali‘ also tried to attain cartridges from Shakib Arslan in Germany.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 212, Carton 412, Interior minister of the sureté générale to MAE (Paris), “A/S activité communiste en Syrie” (18 May 1927). The French reports spell his name, “Kakimoff.” Another rendition of his name has been “Khakifmov.”

with ibn Sa‘ud.”<sup>85</sup> The French ambassador retorted that the Soviet government would do best to “disavow any interest in them without delay.”<sup>86</sup> Despite Chicherin’s denial, mandate police would later confiscate a letter providing them with the proof they desperately sought after to confirm their haunting suspicions.

In December 1925, Muhammad Jamil Shakir wrote to the rebel leader Amir ‘Adil Arslan, informing him of his recent trip to Jeddah, where he met with consul of the Soviets, “Sir Hakim” to discuss the current situation in Syria.<sup>87</sup> According to Shakir, the consul had expressed “his desire, or rather the desire of his government, to give aid to the Syrian nationalists” by sending them material and monetary support.<sup>88</sup> The consul further requested more information about the Syrian rebellion, asking whether it was a local or general uprising, was concerned with the ability of the rebels to withstand months of French retaliation, and whether the uprising had the support of other outside powers, such as the British. Lastly, they discussed the best means of transporting the equipment to the rebels. There were two options: shipping them by way of the “White Sea” to the Turks, or by way of the port city of ‘Akaba, along the Red Sea. The French consul preferred the first method, but this would require the Syrians to come to an agreement with the Turks over passage into Syria. The second route would be too dangerous since the ships passing through the Red Sea or the Suez Canal were routinely being searched.<sup>89</sup> Shakir thought

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<sup>85</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 211, Carton 412, French Ambassador (Moscow) to MAE (Paris), “Relations entre Druzes et communistes” (19 May 1926). The confiscated letter is dated December 3, 1925 and was sent from ‘Amman.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 211, Carton 412, High Commissioner (Beirut) to MAE (Paris), “A/S relations des Soviets avec les révolutionnaires syriens” (August 1926).

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

that negotiations with the Turks might be difficult, and enquired with ‘Adil Arslan whether he could ensure their transport through the White Sea. What became of this transaction is uncertain, but by 1927, support for the Syrian rebellion seemed to be losing favor with the Comintern.

On March 8, 1927 the Communist Party of Palestine held a secret meeting to celebrate the third anniversary of its recognition by the Soviet Union. At the assembly, Haim Auerbach, who went by the alias Abu Siam, gave a speech on the attitude of Moscow concerning the affairs of the Levant. Abu Siam had apparently been charged by the central committee to take part in the Executive Committee of the International in December 1926, and was tasked with relaying the Executive Committee’s opinions on the Arab nationalist movement, the movement in Syria, as well as to ensure the line of communication between the Palestine party and Moscow.<sup>90</sup> According to Abu Siam, at the meeting in Moscow, the conversation concerning the Levant centered mostly on the Arab nationalist movement, and the Syrian insurrection. On the subject of the revolt, differing opinions were expressed. Some believed the Syrian revolt was but an extended local movement with little chance of success. Others thought they should take the opportunity to convert the rebellion into a general revolution, but if this were impossible, they believed that the current uprising should be terminated. Staunch anti-imperialists noted that the Syrian revolution was at the center of an Arab nationalist movement that had spilled into neighboring Arab countries. While it had been difficult “to interest the Bedouins and peasants in abstract and general questions,” the Syrian revolt had “produced a greater effect on the people than all the years of peace that preceded it.” In sum, they believed they should do what they

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<sup>90</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 212, Carton 412, “Traduction de discours de Abu Siam (qui s’est présenté comme Pinhas) sur l’attitude prise par Moscou devant l’Assemblée tenue à Tel Aviv le 8 Mars pour célébrer le troisième anniversaire de la reconnaissance de Parti de Palestine par la Russie Soviétique.”



could to help the Syrian revolt succeed.<sup>91</sup> According to Abu Siam, after a long debate, the Secretariat of the Eastern Affairs arrived at the following conclusions:

The Syrian Revolt is not local, and its effect (or consequences) cannot be denied. Though we hope for its success, we are of the opinion that it is not progressive, but rather that it declines (December 1926). It is not possible for us to help the Syrian Revolution by a few actions that we can accomplish here. Whereas the Chinese movement demands the greatest attention (help) given to it by the Working Class in Europe, we cannot help the two (Syria and China) at the same time.<sup>92</sup>

That said, the secretariat declared that it should be the duty of the French and Syrian communist parties “to help the Syrian revolution with all their might.” The conclusions drawn by the Third International was that the communist parties in the Levant should attempt to work more closely with the nationalist movement, that the local parties should provide their support to the Syrian rebellion, but that they should continue their work on the question of labor. Aside from that, the Palestine party in particular would have to seek a broader, Arab constituent, and Syria’s party would have to be renewed and reinforced.

Following the Moscow meeting, Abu Siam lamented the weak relationship of the Comintern to the Syrian and Palestinian parties; they seldom returned their letters, or communicated decisions regarding them. The sentiments expressed by Abu Siam reflected conflicting trends within the Communist movement. On the one hand, the voices of colonial territories within the Third International sought to shine a light on anti-imperialist struggles. This was most evident in the meeting of the League Against Imperialism in 1927. On the other hand, starting in 1927, the Comintern changed its attitude towards national liberation movements, and

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. As recalled by Abu Siam.

saw them as a potential harmful distraction from the issues concerning the working class.<sup>93</sup>

In late 1926, the League Against Imperialism invited the Damascene notable, Shaykh Taj al-Din al-Husseini to participate in their upcoming congress. The Congress of Oppressed Peoples, as it was called, sought to “organize the assistance and collaboration of progressive organizations and workers of imperialist countries, in an effort to protect and liberate the oppressed races in the colonies and semi-colonies.”<sup>94</sup> As Vijay Prashad has noted, the League Against Imperialism was named so as a foil and “a direct attack on the League of Nations’ preservation of imperialism in its mandate system.”<sup>95</sup> Its establishment was inspired by discussions that took place at the Second Congress of the Comintern, though it would have only the partial support of the Comintern.<sup>96</sup> The organization’s interest in Syria grew out of an initiative by German communist, Willi Münzenberg, who organized the committee “Against the Cruelties in Syria” in December 1925. The committee manifested its support for the Syrian independence movement by signing petitions, organizing public demonstrations, and aimed to send material relief to Syria (though it was never successful in doing so). Beyond this, the committee aimed to expand the anti-colonial work of the Germany-based Workers’ International Relief (IAH), and to gain the support of Arab anti-imperialists in Germany. The committee was transformed into the “Action Committee against the Colonial Politics of the Imperialists” in

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<sup>93</sup> Prashad, 22.

<sup>94</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 212, Carton 412, Invitation from League Against Imperialist to Syrian Taj al-Din al-Husseini (10 December 1926).

<sup>95</sup> Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People’s History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 21.

<sup>96</sup> Prashad, 20.

1926, and eventually fed into the initiative that gave way to League Against Imperialism.<sup>97</sup>

In coordination with the Syro-Palestinian Congress, Nasib al-Bakri's brother, Mazhar, was sent as a delegate to the first congress of the League Against Imperialism in Brussels in 1927.<sup>98</sup> Also affiliated with the Jerusalem committee of Syro-Palestinian Congress was Jamal al-Husayni, who attended the conference as one of the representatives of Palestine.<sup>99</sup> There they networked with Comintern members from the Soviet Union, and mingled with the likes of Nehru, and other subaltern leaders. The 1927 congress thus served as a platform for the formation of cross-solidarities of various anti-imperialist nationalist movements, and as such "provided the bedrock for the Third World."<sup>100</sup> Of Syria's participation in the congress, the French minister of Egypt, Gaillard, posited: "Extremist groups have only to replace their pan-Islamic doctrines with the new doctrine of the unity of the East against the West, endorsed today by Moscow."<sup>101</sup>

In the minds of the intelligence agents and police, the threat of Communism and pan-Islamism were linked. Yet, the French fear of communism in Syria was largely exaggerated. The French themselves had to admit that there was little indication of the effective participation

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<sup>97</sup> For more on the "Against the Cruelties in Syria" committee and the League Against Imperialism, see Fredrik Petersson, *Willi Münzenberg, the League against Imperialism, and the Comintern, 1925-1933* (Lewiston: Queenston Press, 2013).

<sup>98</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 212, Carton 412, Bulletin des Renseignements de Syrie, "A.S/ dans le comité syro-palestinien" (15 May 1927).

<sup>99</sup> Prashad, 25.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>101</sup> Mae-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 212, Carton 412, Bulletin de renseignements de Syrie (Beirut) "Dans le comité syro-palestinien" (15 May 1927).

between “militants of the Third International in France and those in the Levant.”<sup>102</sup> Indeed, anti-imperialist agitators within the French Communist party tended to be isolated, and its “membership displayed a distinct absence of fellow feeling with colonial comrades.”<sup>103</sup> As Martin Thomas has observed: “The supreme irony for security services obsessed by the possibility of Communist sedition was that in the three North African territories and the Levant mandates nationalist groups were instrumental in limiting the mass appeal of Communism.”<sup>104</sup> Yet, as Thomas also points out: “To the colonial intelligence state, Communist numbers mattered less than Communist tactics of propaganda, manipulation, and control.”<sup>105</sup>

The limited scope of the Communist party in Syria, however, did not prevent those sympathetic with the Syrian nationalist cause to seek Communist avenues in support of their rebellion. Nor did their differing ideological persuasions dissuade them from rallying towards independence together. At a session of the General Council to the League Against Imperialism, Shakib Arslan is quoted as having said:

I am not a Communist and haven't read Marx, but I know that Lenin was the first man to inspire the proletariat with a feeling of fraternal friendship for the colonial peoples, and that the Communists have been the first to spread this idea and translate it into reality.<sup>106</sup>

Despite Arslan's dabbling in Communist circles in Europe, “he was no more attracted to a

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<sup>102</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 212, Carton 412, MAE (Paris) to HC (Beirut), “A.S. Activité du parti communiste en Syrie” (30 May 1927).

<sup>103</sup> Thomas, 97.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Quoted in BG Gafurov, ed. *Lenin and National Liberation in the East* (Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1978), 143-144. Originally quoted in the Russian publication, G.Z.Sorkin, *The Anti-Imperialist League* (Moscow, 1965), 39.

Communist revolution than he was to capitalist America.”<sup>107</sup> Following up on this, historian William Cleveland notes that Arslan’s “presence mattered as much as his views.”<sup>108</sup>

By the 1930s, Arslan and Rida made their stance towards Communism, and Bolshevism in particular, very clear. From one perspective, they found the ideal admirable, and found no reason not to support the anti-imperialist initiatives and conferences of the Berlin-based Comintern. Yet, from another point of view they thought Bolshevism to be impractical and problematic. One main reason for this was their belief that Bolshevism made no room for religion. More importantly, however, they feared Russian expansionism. They considered Bolshevism to be more than just an ideological persuasion, but a Russian nationalist agenda that prompted caution.<sup>109</sup> According to Arslan, the Arabs—after having been subject to French and British colonialism in the form of mandates—would not be reduced to converting to Bolshevism. In the words of Arslan, the Arabs hoped “to recover their full independence while keeping their traditions and social system.”<sup>110</sup> This should not prevent a tactical alliance, however. In the context of Zionist expansion in Palestine, Bolshevik support for Palestinians was understandable. Additionally, if the Allied coalition contemplated a policy of renewing diplomatic and economic relations with the Soviets, “Why should not the Arabs, a great population of 70 million people, also maintain economic relations with Russia?”<sup>111</sup> Arslan’s words thus presciently hinted at the

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<sup>107</sup> Cleveland, 76.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> “Sur le bolchévisme: l’éternelle légende de l’influence bolcheviste sur le réveil national du monde musulman,” *La Nation Arabe* n. 10 (October 1932).

<sup>110</sup> Shakib Arslan, “Arabes et Bolchévistes: faux bruits,” *La Nation Arabe* n. 3 (May 1930).

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

development the non-alliance movement of the post-World War II period.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has attempted to illustrate how Syrian rebels and nationalists countered a Eurocentric international order by appealing to Wilsonian, pan-Islamist and Leninist anti-imperialism. Further, the prevailing historiography has described these movements as mutually exclusive; as this chapter has demonstrated, they emphatically were not. The interweaving networks of Communists, Islamists and nationalists made the categorization of the Syrian rebel motivations a slippery affair. The blurring of activist lines—if not ideologically—stoked the fears of the French mandatory government. The simultaneous but limited reliance of the Syrian independence movement on these alternative approaches to internationalism illustrates the overlapping tendencies of these movements. Syrian rebels received monetary and moral support from networks beyond their borders, allowing them to carry on a popularly supported uprising that endured for nearly two years, despite their limited manpower in the face of France's costly colonial military regime. Yet transnational support for the rebellion had its limits. As Cemil Aydin has demonstrated, pan-Islamism provided an intelligible critique of Western imperialism, but by the 1920s could not evade the state-centered focus of popular nationalist movements. Nor could they provide a concrete agenda in the face of statist models. Likewise, Communist support for the rebellion could only go so far. Popular Syrian nationalism identified with the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist critique of the Comintern, but their collusion with Communists was a largely strategic choice. Indeed, popular nationalism impeded the success of the Communist Party in Syria and Lebanon. The transnational mobilizations of the rebellion were not insignificant, however. Syrians participated in the Second International Congress against Imperialism and Colonialism 1929, and Shakib Arslan would go on to collaborate with activists

in North Africa during the 1930s.<sup>112</sup> The various anti-imperialist networks in which Syrians partook during the 1920s set the stage for the Third Worldist movement of the post-World War II period.

The autumn of 1926 brought with it a new high commissioner to the mandate of Syria and Lebanon—the leftist diplomat, Henri Ponsot. It would take nearly a year before Ponsot would address an official statement to the public elucidating France’s policy for the mandate now that the rebellion had been nearly pacified. Ponsot finally “broke his long silence” in July 1927.<sup>113</sup> The first of his statement’s principal points firmly declared that, “France will not renounce its mandate.”<sup>114</sup> The rest of the declaration remained general in nature, affirming France’s intention to progressively reduce its military and administrative presence in Syria, while working towards the drafting of an organic law. After ten months of anticipation, Ponsot’s statement left much to be desired, and was “received very unfavorably by practically all classes and faction of Syrians and Lebanese.”<sup>115</sup> Not only did it lack a specific program, but also remained largely silent on all the questions that had hitherto preoccupied Syrian nationalists. Little mention was made with regards to the topics of Syrian unity, the formation of a national government, or the granting of general amnesty to rebels and nationalists. By remaining ambiguous, Ponsot hoped to control his political maneuverings vis-à-vis Syrian and Lebanese politicians.

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<sup>112</sup> See Umar Ryad, "New episodes in Moroccan nationalism under colonial role: reconsideration of Shakib Arslan's centrality in light of unpublished materials," *The Journal of North African Studies* 16.1 (2011).

<sup>113</sup> Walter Browne, ed. *The Political History of Lebanon, 1920-1950: Volume I. Documents on Politics and Political Parties Under French Mandate, 1920-1926* (Salisbury, N.C: Documentary Publications, 1976), 64.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 60. Also see Provence, 144.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

The Syro-Palestinian Congress fractured under the burden of its mission to represent the aspirations of the Syrian people. In response to Ponsot's declaration, Ihsan al-Jabri wrote to Philippe Berthelot, secretary to the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressing his dismay:

For my part, I did everything with my colleagues in Geneva and elsewhere to maintain the belief among my countrymen that liberal France would uphold their legitimate claims. I also, along with my colleagues, avoided any gesture that could complicate the task of Mr. Ponsot. Not only have we not been heard by the latter, but all our approaches with him, as with the Secretariat of Government, remained unanswered and without result.<sup>116</sup>

After their failure to secure a deal with the Jouvenel in late 1925, the Syro-Palestinian Congress was forced to temper their demands, attempting their best to illustrate to Paris and the League of Nations that they were not the extremists that the French press and intelligence service depicted them to be. Thus, despite attempts to keep the flame of rebellion alive by securing support beyond the borders of the mandate, the organization was powerless against the unyielding reality of the mandate system authorized by the League of Nations. By 1926, the Congress had relinquished its demands for absolute independence, hoping instead to secure a deal with France that resembled the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty signed in 1924.<sup>117</sup> While Jouvenel was willing to secure peace with the Syro-Palestinian Congress on these terms, the new high commissioner was not convinced of the organization's importance or impact within Syria. Unlike Jouvenel, he remained aloof of the Syrian circles in Cairo and Paris. With the help of Syrian protégé Gabriel Enkiri, Ponsot willfully allowed the Lutfallah family to furnish false hopes for Georges

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<sup>116</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 213, Carton 412, Jabri (Geneva) to Berthelot (Paris) (3 August 1927).

<sup>117</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 213, Carton 412, Minister of France in Egypt to MAE (Paris), "A/S. des frères Loutfallah" (5 August 1927). Adjoined is a report issued by the Syro-Palestinian Congress: "Attitude du Comité Executif du Congrès Syro-Palestinian à l'égard de la Question Syrienne dans ses diverse phrases."



Lutfallah's presidency in Lebanon in exchange for their cooperation.<sup>118</sup> In such a way, he successfully took advantage of the fissures in the Syro-Palestinian Congress, further sowing the seeds of discord.

If the Congress sought to demonstrate a moderate outlook, it was because the organization had always been divided between a radical camp, and a more moderate one. It was the radical camp that was suspected of gaining the broadest support outside the borders of Syria and Lebanon, and of colluding with Muslim and Bolshevik circles. This camp was dominated by the *Istiqlal* party, which had been founded during Faysal's short-lived time in Syria, and had espoused a staunchly anti-imperialist and pan-Arabist stance.<sup>119</sup> Their broad reaching networks facilitated material support from sympathizers in Palestine, Transjordan, Iraq, and most importantly from the Syrian diaspora in the Americas. Shakib Arslan, Rashid Rida, Shukri al-Quwatli, and the Jerusalem mufti, Amin Haj al-Husayni gravitated towards the ranks of the *Istiqlalists*. The personal connections of the three also won the support of the Khilafat committee in India. Meanwhile, their commitment to anti-imperialism also facilitated their collusion with the League Against Imperialism. This group also courted the support of ibn Sa'ud, and welcomed his expansion in the Arabian Peninsula. They differed with the moderate camp over their support of the Hashemites, who they came to increasingly view with suspicion due to their connections to the British.

On the other hand, Lutfallah represented the moderate camp, and eventually had the support of 'Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar. This group was accused of being susceptible to foreign

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<sup>118</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 213, Carton 412 Enkiri (Paris) to Colonel Catroux (Director of S.R., Beirut) (27 June 1927).

<sup>119</sup> Tauber, 49. Following the French occupation of Syria, party members continued to operate in exile—in Transjordan and Cairo.

influence. In October 1927, Rashid Rida, the vice president of the Executive Committee of the Syro-Palestinian Congress in Cairo, invited members of the Congress to discuss its future, and the circulating rumors of the Lutfallah family's collaboration with the French over the fate of Lebanon's leadership.<sup>120</sup> Lutfallah declined to attend the meeting. Later that month, the Syro-Palestinian Congress released a statement declaring their separation from Lutfallah, and essentially rescinding his presidency. They cited Lutfallah's changing attitude as the main reason, and accused him of abandoning "the sacred cause of independence."<sup>121</sup> They were especially perturbed by his willingness to forgo the question of Syrian unity, and to accept the post-1920 border dividing Syria and Lebanon. Lutfallah refused to acknowledge their decision, and this led to the existence of two competing executive committees in Cairo. The adherents of the Syro-Palestinian Congress both within and beyond the *mahjar* were forced to choose sides. In such a way, the division of the Syro-Palestinian Congress also manifested itself across borders.

This open state of disagreement undermined the credibility of the Syro-Palestinian Congress, effectively putting an end to their ability to act in the name of the Syrian nationalists. While the Geneva delegation would continue its petitions to the League of Nations well into the 1930s, the Cairo committee lost much of its authority and cohesion. The press of the Arab world took to reassessing the Congress in light of its internal feuds, as well as its failures to achieve Syrian demands. In the process, ugly accusations from each side played out before the public eye. Lutfallah's group accused the Jerusalem committee of pocketing money intended for the

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<sup>120</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 213, Carton 412, Charge d'affaires de France au Caire à MAE (Paris), "A/S. Scission dans le comité syro-palestinien" (29 October 1927).

<sup>121</sup> MAE-La Courneuve, Syrie-Liban Vol. 214, Carton 412, "Note au sujet de la scission dans le comité syro-palestinien" (27 October 1927).

rebels in order to support the political ambitions of the exiled leaders of the *Istiqlal* Party. On the other hand, the Jerusalem committee accused Lutfallah's Cairo committee of withholding aide for the rebels, as well as prematurely calling off the revolt. Amid this controversy, the rebels also began to openly question the dwindling support promised to them. In an interview with the pro-French *l'Orient* of Beirut, former rebel leader Mut'ib al-Atrash described the desperate situation of the exiled rebels in Transjordan.<sup>122</sup> Mut'ib al-Atrash, who had submitted to the French in order to return to the Jabal Druze, claimed that a year after the rebellion the rebels had been reduced to hunger, and were selling their weapons to buy bread. When they received news that committees in Cairo and Palestine were raising money to relieve them, they were overjoyed. Yet, he claimed that they received but a small fraction of this relief (8,000 Egyptian pounds out of tens of thousands collected). Mut'ib accused the committees of enriching themselves at the expense of the rebels, who were only used to encourage the pity of potential benefactors.

The New Syria Party's Detroit Congress exemplified lingering moral support for the rebellion in the United States in January 1927. But even it could not escape the controversy that the Congress had generated, and the Detroit gathering accomplished little beyond pledging their renewed support for the cause of Syrian independence. The New York-based *Syrian World* noted that, "The lines of division among Syrian immigrants are being drawn sharper as actual hostilities in their mother-land show signs of abatement."<sup>123</sup> Syrian-Lebanese migrants engaged the Syrian rebellion by mobilizing at the League of Nations, as well as negotiating with French diplomats. They also used alternative channels beyond the reach of the French and League of

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<sup>122</sup>CADN-Santiago Ambassade 616PO/1, Carton 51, MAE (Paris) to Plenipotentiary Minister (Santiago), "A/S. Déclarations du chef druze Motheb Bey el Attrache" (29 August 1927). Extract from the journal is attached (*l'Orient*, 22 July 1927).

<sup>123</sup> Echoes of the Syrian Revolution in America," *The Syrian World* (February 1927).

Nations—they partook in vigorous propaganda campaigns in the global press, colluded with pan-Islamists in Anatolia and Asia, attempted to acquire weapons from the Comintern, and most importantly acquired the financial support of Syrian-Lebanese migrants across the world. Through such mobilizations, Syrian-Lebanese migrants thus conditioned the rebellion for better or worse, and were themselves affected by the politics of the Syrian Revolt.

## Epilogue:

### The Children of the Desert

Oh my homeland, do no blame us,  
Your blame lies with those who have betrayed you...

....

These ominous nights are sure to pass,  
Then the youth and their Sultan will be praised.  
Until your rights have been restored...  
Oh my homeland, we cannot be your people. <sup>1</sup>

According to Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, the above lines of poetry were orated by members of the Atrash clan as they left the caves of the Jabal Druze for the town of al-Azraq in Transjordan in the spring of 1927.<sup>2</sup> Several years after, the Druze composer and musician Farid al-Atrash transformed the lines into a *mawwal*, a non-metric vocal improvisation.<sup>3</sup> Farid's sister, the famously mesmerizing Asmahan, performed the *mawwal* in the 1944 film, *Gharam wa Intiqam* (Love and Revenge), just before her untimely death in a car crash. The footage accompanying the song opens with women doing a traditional *dabkeh* dance, followed by Asmahan's somber singing. Surrounding her are men, women and children in a traditional Bedouin tent. Today, the song acts as a cultural artifact memorializing the exiled rebels and their families. In the deserts of Transjordan and Arabia, steadfast rebels were forced to confront their newfound status as refugees. Isolated from the Syrian political scene, they faced the harsh reality of marginalization, as well as immeasurable hardships. Despite this, by virtue of their status as a new migrant

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<sup>1</sup> Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, *al-mudhakkirat al-kamilah lil-za'im sultan basha al-atrash: al-qa'id al-'am lil-thawra al-suriyah al-kubra, 1925-1927* (1998), 358.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. These leaders were Zayd al-Atrash, Sayah al-Atrash, and Fadl'allah al-Atrash.

<sup>3</sup> Farid and Asma' al-Atrash belonged to the Atrash clan, but her mother emigrated to Egypt in 1923 following the brief Druze revolt in 1922. Farid and Asma' became renowned musicians and singers.

population, exiled rebels continued to pose a challenge to the states (and borders) of the postwar period.

The failure of the revolt signaled the end of radical, oppositional politics in Syria, and ushered the formation and ascendancy of a new nationalist organization, the National Bloc in 1928. Urban landowning elite, who played little role in the 1925 revolt, dominated its ranks.<sup>4</sup> The conciliatory class-based politics of the National Bloc stood in sharp contrast to the popular rank and support of the rebel leaders.<sup>5</sup> Despite this change in political tactic, negotiations between nationalist leaders and the mandatory government failed numerous times, mainly over the question of Syrian unity. It was not until 1930—years behind the original deadline agreed upon at the League of Nations—that the French High Commissioner signed onto draft organic laws for the territories of the Jabal Druze, Latakia, Alexandretta, as well the constitutions of Syria and Lebanon.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, it would take another six years before the French finally acquiesced to nationalist demands to unite the autonomous Druze and ‘Alawite regions to the Syrian state with the signing of the 1936 Franco-Syrian Treaty of Independence.

As for the rebels, they had been geographically and politically relegated to the margins. During the revolt, Druze refugees who had temporarily settled at Mafraq along the Transjordanian border were ordered to leave upon the request of the French. These refugees proceeded to al-Azraq, an oasis over 100 kilometers south of the Jabal Druze, and which fell under a British protectorate. By 1926, rebel fighters began to relocate their families there,

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<sup>4</sup> Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*, 141-142.

<sup>5</sup> Provence astutely points to the different Ottoman-era educational background of the two groups. Whereas the leading members of the National Bloc were brought up with an Ottoman civil education at the elite Maktab ‘Anbar in Damascus, many of the insurgent leaders were enrolled in the Ottoman military school. Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*, 142.

<sup>6</sup> Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 348.

swelling the number of refugees to nearly 3,000.<sup>7</sup> From al-Azraq, rebels were able to plan and execute attacks along the border, as well as smuggle weapons and supplies.<sup>8</sup> Yet, by the summer of 1927 the French had suppressed the remaining rebel strongholds in the Hawran and Damascus outskirts. In exchange for amnesty, numerous rebels were enticed to surrender, making the continuation of the revolt unsustainable. The above-lines lamented this defeat. Rebels who had refused to submit eventually joined their families in al-Azraq. Their refuge in Transjordan began to take “an air of permanence;” Druze leaders subsisted off the salt-mining trade, a flourmill had been constructed, and a school was established for the children.<sup>9</sup>

The French considered the long-term settlement of Druze near al-Azraq to be problematic. In the context of the revolt, the border between the Jabal Druze and Transjordan had become a contentious one. The issue was complicated by the fact that only a *de facto* border arrangement, based off the Sykes Picot agreement, had been in place since 1920.<sup>10</sup> The French had for a while harbored suspicions against the British for indirectly supporting the revolt, least of all because a stream of anti-French propaganda emanated from the Syrians in Egypt. Rebel operations across the Transjordanian border added to this feeling of animosity.<sup>11</sup> In response to French criticism, the British stepped up efforts to police al-Azraq and the border by sending reinforcements, declaring martial law, prohibiting the carrying of arms, and employing

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<sup>7</sup> TNA, CO 733/132/1, Memorandum by Chief British Representative (Amman) to the Chief Secretary, Government Offices (Jerusalem), “Supervision of the Frontier between Syria and Trans-Jordan” (5 August 1927).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Khoury, *Syria and the French mandate*, 204.

<sup>10</sup> Yoav Alon, *The Making of Jordan: Tribes, Colonialism and the Modern State* (New York: IB Tauris, 2007), 81.

<sup>11</sup> TNA, CO 733/132/1, H.E. Satow, Consulate General (Beirut) to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, (15 February 1927).

sophisticated air and land reconnaissance missions.<sup>12</sup> In the interest of controlling mobile populations (the refugees, but also bedouin more broadly), the British High Commissioner created the Transjordan Frontier Force, recruited mostly from Palestinians in 1926.<sup>13</sup> British efforts to control the border did not appease the French, however. The issue came to a head at the 10<sup>th</sup> session of the Permanent Mandates Commission, when the French representative Robert de Caix stated that, “The frontiers, which could be crossed by bands but not by the punitive columns, had afforded the rebels an impenetrable refuge where the bands could rest, reconstitution and re-arm themselves with a view to re-entering Syrian territory.”<sup>14</sup> The French had already attempted extending their administrative and military control into towns technically in Transjordan. Yet, de Caix’s remarks hinted at the underlying wish of the French to also annex territories south of the border in order to better control the movement of Druze refugees.<sup>15</sup> The Franco-British Protocol of 1931 officially extended French control and territory slightly south, separating Druze populations and placing new restrictions on “long-established patterns of land use that sustained the region’s villagers and Bedouin tribes.”<sup>16</sup>

By the spring of 1927, the French had convinced the British—and consequently Transjordan’s monarch, the Hashemite Amir ‘Abdallah—that Sultan Pasha al-Atrash and his closest allies could no longer remain in al-Azraq. The British attempted to encourage refugees to

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<sup>12</sup> TNA, CO 733/132/1, Note 52, (6 May 1927).

<sup>13</sup> Whereas the Arab Legion fell under the authority of Amir ‘Abdallah, the Frontier Force was responsible to the British High Commissioner in Jerusalem.

<sup>14</sup> League of Nations, Permanent Mandates Commission, *Minutes of the Tenth Session, Held at Geneva from November 4<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>, 1926* (Geneva: Publications of the League of Nations, 1926), 127.

<sup>15</sup> Robin M. Brown, “The Druze Experience at Umm al-Jimal: Remarks on the History and Archaeology of the Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Settlement,” *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan X* (Amman 2009), 385.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.



accept amnesty and return to their homes across the border, or else face forced evictions.<sup>17</sup> Many refused, however. Moreover, the French had sentenced Sultan al-Atrash and leading rebel commanders in absentia. Finally, the British forces raided al-Azraq in April 1927, ejecting any remaining refugees.<sup>18</sup> Led by Sultan al-Atrash, a group of nearly 1,300 moved 15 miles south of al-Azraq, and outside of the territory under martial law. Due to his apparent “intention to remain in the field against the French,” the British decided to eject him completely from the territory of Transjordan.<sup>19</sup> Though he was offered a home in Palestine, Sultan al-Atrash refused; he did not like the idea of living under another foreign power, and feared that a move too far from the Jabal Druze would make it difficult for him to carry on his cause. Shukri al-Quwatli, at the head of the exiled Independence Party and also affiliated with the Rashid Rida’s faction of the Syro-Palestinian Congress, negotiated with ibn Sa‘ud to allow Sultan al-Atrash and his allies to settle in the Wadi al-Sirhan, a valley straddling the borders of modern-day Jordan and Saudi Arabia.<sup>20</sup> Refugee families were allowed to return to Transjordan in 1932.<sup>21</sup> Yet their movements and activities would always be the subject of close surveillance by both the British and the French. Sultan Pasha al-Atrash would remain in exile for 10 years, returning to Syria in 1937 where a cheering crowd of 500,000 awaited him in Damascus.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Whether return refugees were given full amnesty was less certain. The question of return refugees thus forced the French and British governments to negotiate a new extradition law. TNA, CO 733/132/1, Note from Symes (Jerusalem) to Amery, (10 June 1927).

<sup>18</sup> TNA, CO 733/132/1, L. Rees, Group Captain-Air and Military Forces (Azraq) to Symes, Chief Secretary (Jerusalem), “Report on Occupation of Azrak,” (14 May 1927).

<sup>19</sup> TNA, CO 733/132/1, Note from Symes (Jerusalem) to Amery, (8 July 1927).

<sup>20</sup> Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*, 144. Hasan Amin al-Bi‘ayni, *Sultan Pasha al-Atrash wal thawra al-suriyah al-kubra* (London: Druze Heritage Foundation, 2008), 379.

<sup>21</sup> al-Bi‘ayni, *Sultan Pasha al-Atrash*, 501.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 522.

The Syro-Palestinian Congress, for its part, suffered from the dissension among its ranks, and insurgent leaders were pressured to take sides.<sup>23</sup> Amir ‘Adil Arslan, a close friend of Sultan al-Atrash, stood by Haj Amin al-Husayni’s Jerusalem Committee, despite overwhelming criticism that the committee had been responsible for the mismanagement of donations intended for the rebels in al-Azraq.<sup>24</sup> Mut‘ib al-Atrash, Sultan’s cousin, was one such voice of criticism. Sultan al-Atrash himself preferred to stay neutral, refusing to come out against Haj Amin al-Husayni or ‘Adil Arslan. Mut‘ib eventually surrendered, and returned to the Jabal Druze rather than accept the move to Wadi al-Sirhan.<sup>25</sup> In light of this controversy, the rebels in Wadi Sirhan decided to form their own committee for the distribution of aid to refugees in September 1927. The new “higher committee” asked Haj Amin al-Husayni, and indeed all donors, to redirect any donations to them. It also denied committee members from taking any salary from the donations.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The main source of this division was the personal feuds between those who belong to the exiled Independence Party (who became associated with the Jerusalem committee) and those who were loyal to the People’s Party (and who became associated with the Lutfallah faction of the Syro-Palestinian Congress in Egypt).

<sup>24</sup> Hasan al-Bi‘ayni, *Sultan Basha Al-Atrash: Masirat Qa’id Fi Tarikh Ummah* (Syria: Lajnat al-I‘lam, al-Idarah al-Madaniyah fi al-Jabal, 1985), 233.

<sup>25</sup> After this incident, Sultan was torn between his friendship towards ‘Adil Arslan, who aligned with the Independence Party, and his comrade ‘Abd al-Rahman Shahbandar who belonged to the opposing People’s Party. Reluctant to disavow the Shahbandar faction of the Syro-Palestinian Congress, the disagreement between the two was exaggerated in the press. Shakib Arslan summoned his brother to leave the Nabak, so as to avoid further dissension. Al-Bi ‘ayni, *Masirat Qa’id*, 233-236.

<sup>26</sup> The reproduction of the committee announcement can be found in Bi‘ayni, *Masirat Qa’id*, 359-360. This group had to contend with a rival refugee group. The Druze commanders that joined Sultan Pasha al-Atrash in his move to Wadi al-Sirhan came to be known as the group of “fighters steadfast in the desert,” or “the Druze leaders.” Their claim to authority over the distribution of aid, however, evoked opposition from a rival refugee group. This second group represented the rebels who fought in al-Ghuta outside of Damascus, and came to be called the “leaders of Damascus.” These rebels were mostly scattered throughout Transjordan, Palestine and Egypt. See Hasan Amin al-Bi‘ayni, *Sultan Pasha al-Atrash*, 472.

Despite such debilitating setbacks, Sultan al-Atrash reconfirmed his faith in the diaspora at an ensuing conference in al-Nabak along the current Jordanian-Saudi border. In 1928, he called a meeting of exiled rebel leaders who affirmed their devotion to the cause of Syrian geographical unity.<sup>27</sup> The third article of the conference summary placed faith in the “Syrian delegation” in Europe to resume the cause abroad. The fourth honored “Syrian emigrants” who continued to send aid to the victims of the revolt, and thanked the New Syria Party of Detroit in particular for organizing the donations, and for rallying the “wealthy Syrians overseas.” Yet, rumors against the former committee had already traveled too far. As people lost faith in both camps of the Syro-Palestinian Congress, aid continued to diminish.<sup>28</sup> The onset of the Great Depression further contributed to the dwindling of donations by donors living abroad, and in the United States especially.

The harsh reality of exile did not prevent Sultan Pasha al-Atrash from hoping to continue his struggle for the interconnected causes of Syrian unity and independence. The former rebel commander invited Syrian nationalist leaders to join the rebels in a conference near Wadi al-Sirhan in 1929 to study and strategize a new political scheme for the country.<sup>29</sup> As Provence points out, the desert conference received little attention in Damascus, and representatives of the National Bloc failed to attend.<sup>30</sup> Khalid al-Khatib and ‘Adil al-‘Azma representing opposing

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<sup>27</sup> Report of the conference is reprinted in al Bi‘ayni, *Masirat Qa'id*, 361.

<sup>28</sup> Aid continued to be collected by the Independence Party based in Palestine well into the 1930s, however. See CADN, Syrie-Liban Carton 924, “Note de renseignements: A/S. secours en faveur des rebelles syriens” (Jerusalem, 22 April 1933).

<sup>29</sup> Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*, 145. For a record of the congress conclusions, see CADN, Syrie-Liban Carton 409, Service des Renseignements du Levant, “Traduction (de l’Arabe): Congrès du desert tenu le 25 Octobre 1929 à Hodeissa, dans le Wadi Serhan sous la Présidence du Commandant Supérieure de la révolte syrienne,” (14 November 1929).

<sup>30</sup> Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt*, 146.

sides of the Syro-Palestinian Congress in Egypt attended, with Khalid al-Khatib acting as the secretary. Despite dismal attendance, the conference came to a number of telling conclusions. The first of these renewed the commitment of the attendants to the Syrian cause. The conference also denounced the “imperialist mentality” of the new French High Commissioner, as well as British support for Zionist expansion in Palestine. The meeting called for the renewed efforts in Arab countries and abroad for the collection of funds for the establishment of “national propaganda centers for the liberation of Syria,” and which would also collect aid for the refugee rebels. Lastly, the conference declared its “deep appreciation to all patriots in the country and abroad” for their support, material or otherwise, for the “sacred national cause.”<sup>31</sup> Conference members also came to a number of other resolutions, namely: they considered the territorial divisions created by the French mandate to be null and void; they expressed their support for the National Bloc, but also called for the unity of the Arab parties; they reprimanded the High Commissioner for the postponement of the Syrian Constituent Assembly; they also thanked donors for sending relief, and called for the creation of a single fund for donations.<sup>32</sup> Despite the conference’s poor attendance, such resolutions nevertheless broadly reflected the Syrian nationalist agenda. From his exile, Sultan al-Atrash corresponded with Syrian nationalists as well his compatriots in the Jabal Druze, hoping to convince them to resist French attempts to keep the Druze region separate from the rest of Syria.

Life in Wadi al-Sirhan was complicated by the ibn Sa‘ud’s ultimatums. A number of attempts were made to coerce the rebels to give up their arms. On each occasion, Sultan al-

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<sup>31</sup> CADN, Syrie-Liban Carton 409, Service des Renseignements du Levant, “Traduction (de l’Arabe): Congrès du desert tenu le 25 Octobre 1929 à Hodeissa, dans le Wadi Serhan sous la Présidence du Commandant Supérieure de la révolte syrienne,” (14 November 1929).

<sup>32</sup> CADN, Syrie-Liban Carton 409, Service des Renseignements du Levant, “Note: Congrès Arabe de Jerusalem du 27 Octobre 1929 et Réunion de Hadithe (frontier Transjordano-Nedjienne) du 25 Octobre 1929.”

Atrash refused. With the mediation of numerous Syrian personalities, such as Shukri Quwwatli, Kamil al-Qassab, and Khalid al-Hakim, the rebels were permitted to keep their weapons, but had to agree not to begin any new operations from Saudi territory.<sup>33</sup> The new monarch had apparently been concerned with “the presence of a big group of steadfast” rebels in his territory lest they incur foreign intervention, or incite an alliance with warring, local tribes.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, constant rumors that certain rebel factions were on good terms with the Hashemites, whom ibn Sa‘ud had only recently conquered in the Hijaz, further complicated matters. Drawn into the feud between the Saudis and the Hashemites, Sultan’s neutrality became problematic. Hoping to bring the rebels under his full control, ibn Sa‘ud requested that the rebels move further inland to an area called al-Jawf, or else leave the territory. Again, Sultan al-Atrash refused these requests on the grounds that a move further inland would transform the rebels into civilians by putting a greater distance between them and their homeland, as well as drawing them further away from the networks of aid and communication reaching them from Transjordan. Sultan al-Atrash did not want to risk bringing an “end to anything called a ‘revolution.’”<sup>35</sup> Again, Shukri al-Quwwatli interceded on behalf of the rebels, and was aided by telegrams and requests from numerous Arab leaders demanding their fair treatment. In 1932, Sultan al-Atrash chose to accept an invitation by Amir ‘Abdallah to return to Transjordan. Only a few rebel leaders stubbornly chose to remain in Wadi al-Sirhan.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Bi‘ayni, *Sultan Pasha al-Atrash*, 481.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 482.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 486.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 488

The insurgents and their families were eventually christened the “Children of the Desert.” Stripped of their livelihoods, they were deprived of decent water, food and educational facilities. Diseases were rampant, and medical care was scarce. Perhaps in response to the failures of the Syro-Palestinian Congress, individuals in Greater Syria and Iraq founded a campaign called “Relief for the Children of the Desert” in 1928.<sup>37</sup> The central committee of the campaign was located in Beirut, and fell under the leadership of a certain Sami Salim.<sup>38</sup> Like the rebellion itself, the “Children of Desert” campaign was transnational in scope. A report from 1935 recorded important donations from groups across the Arab world and diaspora. Among the founders in Iraq were military men such as Mawlud Mukhlis and Captain Subhi al-‘Umari, who served Sharif Husayn’s army during World War I. Other founding members included politicians and professionals from Beirut, al-Kura in north Lebanon, Tripoli, and Hama. Partisans spanned the geography of the mandate, and included the support of major journals such as *al-Nahar* in Beirut, and *al-Qabbas* in Damascus. Support also came from men and women in Aleppo, Damascus, Latakia, and the Hawran in Syria, as well as ‘Alay, the Shuf, Dayr al-Qamar, and the Matn in Lebanon. Nearly half the donations collected in 1935 came from the *mahjar* (60,830 out of a 123,310 Syrian pounds).<sup>39</sup> Important donors resided in the United States, Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chili, and Venezuela. In Africa, benevolent societies sent aid from the Ivory Coast, Nigeria, and Gambia. Other donors included individuals in Australia, the United Kingdom, and

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<sup>37</sup> It’s unclear whether the campaign was affiliated with the previous committee in Jerusalem. The campaign organizers were certainly not the same men. CADN, Carton 924,

<sup>38</sup> CADN, Syrie-Liban Carton 924, “Extrait de la revue de la presse arabe de Damas de 22-12-32, Les enfants du desert.”

<sup>39</sup> The funds for the campaign were deposited in Arab Bank in ‘Amman under the name of a leading businessman by the name of Hamdi Manko. CADN, Syrie-Liban Carton 409, Colonel Tarrit (Suwayda) to HC (Beirut) “Renseignements donnés par un dissident druze Nacer Hamcho du village de Lahte, reentrant du camp du Nebeck (Nejd)” (20 April 1935).

the West Indies. For the most part, these donors did not represent the urban, landowning elite of Syria and Lebanon, but originally hailed from villages in the countryside—Druze, Christian and Muslim.

The Children of the Desert campaign considered the “organization of National Assistance” to be “a sacred duty of all nations hoping to become equal to other peoples.”<sup>40</sup> More than a charitable campaign, the organizers hoped their work would set the foundations for future institution building: “Just as convents, mosques and churches have endowments, similarly, we hope the [project of] National Assistance will have an endowment.” The organizers envisioned the establishment of committees of “National Assistance” across the Arab world, which would contribute to the realization of self-reliance, and bring the region a “measure of freedom.” Donations and food supplies were distributed to families in need, but assistance was also given to support the education of students in places like the American University of Beirut. The Children of the Desert campaign was not alone in its assistance to the rebel refugees. Groups such as the Druze Progress Society in Mexico and the New Syria Party in Detroit also came to the relief of the former rebels and their families.<sup>41</sup>

Even though the rebels resided outside the territory of the French mandate, French intelligence nevertheless kept detailed reports on the activities and movements of former rebels in Wadi al-Sirhan and Transjordan. The Minister of Colonies, for example, kept the mandatory government, as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs abreast of any donations emanating from

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<sup>40</sup> Some urban notables did support the campaign, such as the Jabiri family in Aleppo.

<sup>41</sup> Bi‘ayni, *Sultan Pasha al-Atrash*, 475.

French colonies in Africa.<sup>42</sup> The French feared that continued subsidies to the rebels would prevent their return to mandated territories, having been informed that “notable dissidents prefer to live off the subsidies given to them by some naïve pro-Arab groups abroad than attempt a return to the Jabal...”<sup>43</sup> The defiant will of the exiled rebels thus stood in the face of French attempts to neutralize radical opposition, as well as convince the Druze to accept the mandate’s territorial division. To counter the influence of donations from abroad, French consuls were instructed to initiate counter-propaganda campaigns among Syrian colonies abroad to dissuade émigrés from sending further donations.<sup>44</sup> By blocking the flow of diasporic aid, the French hoped to make rebel intransigence unsustainable.

During the revolt, rebel leaders depended on the mobilization of the *mahjar* to make the cause of the Syrian Revolt known to the world. They employed the financial aid, political maneuvering, and networks of Syrian migrants whose transnational efforts challenged the authority of the mandatory power. With the end of the rebellion, the tables had turned. The rebels became migrants, torn from their homelands. Stripped of the power to physically oppose the mandate, their status as migrants—though incredibly debilitating—can also be regarded as a force in itself. The mobility and transnational appeals of the rebel refugees became a threat to surrounding powers, such that numerous attempts were made to settle them, and turn them into a civilian population. The “Children of the Desert” demonstrated that despite their physical and political marginalization, they were not totally without their influence. Former rebels challenged

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<sup>42</sup> CADN, Syrie-Liban Carton 924, MAE (Paris) to M. Lagarde (Beirut), “A.S. Collectes effectuées en Afrique pour les druzes du désert” (9 August 1935).

<sup>43</sup> This was based off correspondence with Dr. Tawfiq al-Halabi, son of rebel leader Muhammad ‘Iz al-Din al-Halabi. CADN, Carton 924, Colonel Tarrit (Suwada) to HC (Beirut), (7 January 1933).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.



the physical boundaries of the British and French mandatory powers. In response to the threat they posed, official border patrols were fashioned, and the lines of the future Syrian and Jordanian states demarcated. Moreover, the mere presence of formal rebel forces in Transjordan and the newly established Saudi Sultanate provoked the sovereignty of King ‘Abdallah and King ‘Abd al-‘Aziz respectively. Exiled rebels thus tested the limitations of nation-states in formation, exposing their weaknesses and causing them to reevaluate the need to enhance their infrastructures of control.

Syrian and Lebanese hopefuls abroad transformed their diasporic condition into a force for the mobilization of long-distance nationalism. Their physical distance provided them with both advantages and disadvantages. This study has also illustrated the ways in which the mobility and distance of émigrés allowed them to effectively bypass the censorship of the late Ottoman state and French mandatory government. Migrants debated homeland politics, called for change, and more importantly moved about and organized the flow of material and political support for divergent ends. Diaspora figures utilized Syrian and non-Syrian networks to advance but also challenge the cause of Syrian independence. So important was the transnational dynamic of the revolt that key groups collected donations, organized conventions, and traveled on foreign tours to rally support among various Syrian migrant and international communities. Though at far lengths from their homeland, migrants staunchly asserted their place within the nation.

Yet, bids by émigré groups to represent as well as act on behalf of their compatriots were burdened with complications. Groups like the Syro-Palestinian Congress had to contend with those who believed that their distance and time apart from homeland put them out of touch with the realities on the ground. When negotiations with exiled leaders failed, the French representative at the Permanent Mandates Commission took advantage of this dynamic to

discredit the efforts of the Syro-Palestinian Congress to lobby the League of Nations. Moreover, schisms dividing émigré groups left their mark on the rebel factions within Syria, hampering their resistance against the mandate. Émigré leaders enjoyed a fleeting period of influence as the revolt transpired, but ultimately had to struggle with the looming question of whether they had any right at all to represent the will of the Syrian people.

This dissertation has brought to light the transnational dimensions of the Syrian Revolt of 1925-1927, and has argued that the *mahjar* played a critical role in conditioning the goals and outcome of the rebellion. By including the activities of the *mahjar* as integral to the developments of Syria and Lebanon, this study has addressed a gap in the field that has neglected the critical role of diasporas in expanding our spatial and geographic understandings of the “Middle East.” Building upon more recent debates on transnationalism, this dissertation contributes to a better understanding of the ways in which nationalism and anti-colonialism were negotiated through a dialectical relationship between the homeland and the diaspora. Set in the context of a postwar international system defined by the creation of the League of Nations, this study moreover highlights the fraught and ambiguous place Syrians occupied in the new international order set up by the League of Nations. Syrians everywhere turned to the League, asserting their right to sovereignty and self-rule. Though their pleas would go unanswered, they persisted in their calls for justice, making themselves heard loudly and clearly on an international stage. Two years after the revolt had ended, Shakib Arslan, still residing in Lausanne, penned a letter to journalist Habib Katibah in New York, stating: “There is no denying that the national community in the diaspora has a great influence in its support of the Syrian national cause, and there is no refuting that the revolt, though it came to an end, was a lesson to the French. There is also no debating that the perseverance of those who struggled in Europe for Syrian independence

for the past ten years until today has finally begun to produce results...So we must remain steadfast, for now is the time to hustle and fight.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Faris and Yamna Naff Arab American Collection, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian, Box 12, Letter from Amir Shakib Arslan (Lausanne) to Habib Katib (New York), (6 January 1929).

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