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'This age is the age of associations': committees, petitions, and the roots of interwar Middle Eastern internationalism*

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Abstract

This article examines three diasporic campaigns orchestrated by Middle Eastern political entrepreneurs in Paris, New York, and Cairo, in the years bookending the First World War. Mobilizing across borders, their organizers were exemplary denizens of the transnational public sphere created by Ottoman migrants from the 1880s onwards. Exponents of globalism, they regarded the body politic as a diasporic construct unconstrained by territory. Furthermore, they saw the associations that they founded both as instruments of civility capable of reforming society and as practical political vehicles, mouthpieces for the claims that they communicated to the 'community of nations' through petitions and telegrams. Such strategies of appeal suggest that many of the features of 'interwar' Middle Eastern internationalism emerged not in response to the post-war settlement but in the last decades of Ottoman rule. This article therefore contributes to our understanding of the histories of globalism, the practices and perceptions of public life, and the engagement of non-Western people with international society.

Keywords civil society, diaspora, globalization, international society, Middle East

Introduction

The political theorist John Keane has contended that 'the liveliest "local" civil societies are those enjoying the strongest worldwide links'.[1] This article turns this proposition on its head;

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1 John Keane, *Global civil society?*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 25.

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the liveliest 'global' 'civil societies', it suggests, are those that are essentially local in their intentions – a myriad of rays all focusing upon a single point. This was the case for the committees, associations, newspapers, and journals established by migrants from the Ottoman provinces of Mount Lebanon, Beirut, and Damascus as they fanned out through the globe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even as they sought their own livelihoods elsewhere, these figures remained intensely bent on securing administrative and economic reform for the places that they had left behind and, later (during and immediately after the First World War), on ensuring that the territorial confines and political configuration of the states that would emerge from the remains of the Ottoman polity were ones that suited their own aspirations and affiliations. Far from dissolving their ties to the homeland, their departure compounded their attachment, leading them to 'live their [political] lives across borders'.[2]

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, cities such as New York, São Paulo, Buenos Aires, and Paris became centres of intellectual exchange and political debate for the migrants from the Arabic-speaking Eastern Mediterranean who flowed into them in significant numbers from the 1880s onwards. The activities of publishers and journalists such as Na'um Mukarzil and Najib Diyab in New York, Wadi' Sham'un in Buenos Aires, or Na'um Labaki and Sa'id Abu Jamra in São Paulo, or propagandists and political entrepreneurs such as Shukri Ghanim and Georges Samna in Paris, made these cities key points of a transnational public sphere hitherto largely centred upon Beirut, Cairo, and Alexandria. Political and intellectual historians of the Arabic-speaking Eastern Mediterranean have long focused on these cities' hyperactive print cultures.[3] There is no doubt that their leading journals, such as Jurji Zaydan's *al-Hilal* or Faris Nimr and Ya'qub Sarruf's *al-Muqtataf*, were central nodes of the networks of print that began to wind their way through the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond in the last half-century of Ottoman rule, esteemed and widely read clearing-houses of knowledge. But, important as they were, they were but one strand in a far more expansive world of print and political activity, whose poles included Mukarzil's *al-Huda*, Labaki's *al-Munazir*, and Sham'un's *al-Salam*. Its participants chronicled, and eagerly discussed, developments in the Eastern Mediterranean in the periodicals they established; held gatherings such as the conference that brought together delegates from across the Americas in the Brazilian city of Petropolis in 1904;[4] and led concerted campaigns to secure their 'reforming' aims, by drafting petitions, pamphlets, and memoranda, and by meeting with diplomats, ministers, and functionaries, upon whom they insistently pressed their claims.

Only recently have scholars come to pay greater attention to this 'geographically fragmented' world of physical dispersion and intellectual exchange, prising it from the 'nationalist narrative' into which it has been 'forcibly incorporated'.[5] This article follows

2 Nina Gluck Schiller and Georges Eugene Fouron, *Georges woke up laughing: long-distance nationalism and the search for home*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001, p. 3.

3 The *locus classicus* of such an approach remains Albert Hourani, *Arabic thought in the liberal age, 1789–1939*, London: Oxford University Press, 1962.

4 'Abdallah al-Mallah, *al-Hijra min mutasarrifiyyat Jabal Lubnan*, Beirut: n.p., 2007, pp. 201–2.

5 Leyla Dakhli, *Une génération d'intellectuels arabes: Syrie et Liban (1908–1940)*, Paris: Karthala, 2009, p. 8. Ilham Khuri-Makdisi, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the making of global radicalism, 1860–1914*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010, p. 8. See also Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and white: race and ethnicity in the early Syrian American diaspora*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009, pp. 81–112.

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their lead, examining three such diasporic campaigns in the years bookending the First World War. The first of these, and perhaps the most circumscribed in its demands, was coordinated by three organizations: the Parisian Comité Libanais, set up by Ghanim and his acolyte, the journalist Khayrallah Khayrallah; the *Nahda al-Lubnaniyya* or Lebanon League of Progress, established by Mukarzil in New York in 1911; and the *Ittihad al-Lubnani* or Alliance Libanaise, created by the lawyers Iskandar 'Ammun and Yusuf al-Sawda in Cairo and Alexandria in 1909. Unfolding through 1912, this campaign sought the overhaul of the administrative status of the *mutasarrifiyya* (autonomous province) of Mount Lebanon, created in the wake of the sectarian strife of 1860.[6] The second, meanwhile, was the *mu'tamar al-'arabi al-awwal*, or 'first Arabic congress', held in Paris in April 1913, which brought together self-appointed reformers from across Syria and its diaspora to discuss the ills of Ottoman misrule. Organized in Paris by a group of Ottoman students spearheaded by the Beirut journalist 'Abd al-Ghani al-'Uraysi, and the *Hizb al-Lamarkaziyya al-Idariyya al-'Uthmani* (Ottoman Administrative Decentralization Party), established in Cairo by the editorialist and religious reformer Rashid Rida and the Damascene notable Rafiq al-'Azm in December 1912, it represented the culmination of a series of calls made through early 1913 for greater devolution of power to the Arab provinces.[7] The third campaign consisted of a symphony of petitions and pamphlets, orchestrated by the Comité Central Syrien, created in June 1917 by Ghanim and Samna to militate in favour of a 'federal' Greater Syria under French aegis, whose borders would stretch from 'the Taurus to the Sinai, and the Mediterranean to the Desert'.[8] Facing stiff competition both from the supporters of Amir Faysal, who demanded of the peace conference the establishment of an Arab kingdom in Syria centred upon Damascus, and from partisans of Greater Lebanon, Ghanim and Samna strove unsuccessfully to persuade their French patrons of the viability of their political vision.[9]

Historians have tended to regard these campaigns as separate movements, each the expression of a distinct nationalist or proto-nationalist current aiming for the eventual establishment of a 'Lebanese', 'Arab', or 'Syrian' polity.[10] There is no doubt that figures such as Mukarzil and 'Uraysi regarded themselves as *wataniyyin* (patriots), nor that they held rather varied conceptions of political community. Whereas the former portrayed himself as 'serving Lebanon', the 'preservation of its privileges', and the 'development of its prosperity and civilization', the latter spoke in lofty terms of *al-umma al-'arabiyya* (the 'Arab patria').[11]

6 John Spagnolo, *France and Ottoman Lebanon, 1861–1914*, London: Ithaca Press, 1977, pp. 271–93.

7 Rashid Khalidi, "Abd al-Ghani al-'Uraisi and *al-Mufid*: the press and Arab nationalism before 1914', in M. R. Buheiry, ed., *Intellectual life in the Arab East, 1890–1939*, Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1981, pp. 38–61; Thomas Philipp, *The Syrians in Egypt: 1725–1975*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1985, p. 116; Hasan Kayalı, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman empire, 1908–1918*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997, pp. 116–43.

8 Comité de l'Orient, *La question syrienne*, Paris: n.p., 1918, p. 6.

9 See Gérard Khoury, *La France et l'Orient arabe: naissance du Liban moderne, 1914–1920*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1993.

10 Eliezer Tauber, *The emergence of the Arab movements*, London: Frank Cass, 1993.

11 Al-Nahda al-Lubnaniyya, *al-Kitab al-lubnani li-tadhkar yubil al-nahda al-lubnaniyya al-fadi*, New York: Al-Hoda Press, 1936, pp. 31–2; Hizb al-Lamarkaziyya al-Idariyya al-'Uthmani, *al-Mu'tamar al-'arabi al-awwal*, Cairo: Matba'at al-Busfurus, 1913, p. 7.

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However, there is no need to treat such creeds as discrete entities. Rather, these men held 'several overlapping' allegiances.[12] Far from entertaining exclusive relations with a single conception of political community, they fitted together Lebanese, Syrian, Arab, and Ottoman identities in various overlapping permutations. Thus, Khayrallah allied his fierce Lebanese particularism to a sense of Syria's geographical and historical unity, and its place in a broader 'Arab' world. Furthermore, there was 'no need', at least before the First World War, 'for lines to be sharply drawn', as all shared a commitment to *islah* (reform) of government.[13] Indeed, these transnational campaigns drew their personnel from the same, small, cast of characters. Ghanim, for instance, figured prominently in all three, only discarding his allegiance to the Ottoman state during the war years, while Mukarzil participated without qualms in the 'first Arab congress'.

Moreover, all these figures operated within the bounds of a single political culture. The 'discourses and symbolic practices' that 'sustain[ed] and [gave] meaning' to their 'political activity' were drawn from the same repertory of claims and tactics.[14] It is to this common ground that I draw attention here. Working systematically across borders, the organizers of these campaigns were exemplary denizens of the transnational public sphere I examine. Indeed, they relied on the regular deployment of globalist language, and strove to present their own endeavours as truly worldwide in scope. And, as I argue in the second part of this article, they did not just found committees and associations to pursue their aims, but also voiced normative assumptions about the beneficent effects of these instruments of public life. These were often not *ex post facto* justifications for political deeds, but the declared motivation for their actions. These figures' engagement in a diasporic public space of discussion, debate, and representation was at once 'discursive and performative'.[15] Their political lives rested on the constant conflation of rhetoric and practice. There is little point, then, in trying to sift words from actions, or social reality from its representation, as historians of associational life have been wont to do, for 'praxis and theory flow into each other', entangled and mutually constitutive.[16]

Furthermore, as I argue in the third part of this article, these campaigns were but three examples of a politics of pressure designed to wrest concessions from both the Ottoman state and the European governments that increasingly encroached on its sovereignty in the last decades of its existence. Mobilizing and presenting the desires of the Eastern Mediterranean diaspora through petitions and pamphlets, the committees leading them sought to impress on the community of nations not just the eminent good sense of their reformist demands but also the representativeness and good standing of those making them. Situated on either side

12 Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian identity: the construction of modern national consciousness*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, p. 19.

13 Hourani, *Arabic thought*, p. 287.

14 Keith Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: essays on French political culture in the eighteenth century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 4.

15 Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson, 'Redefining Muslim publics', in Dale Eickelman and Jon Anderson, eds., *New media in the Muslim world: the emerging public sphere*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998, p. 2.

16 John Hall and Frank Trentmann, 'Contests over civil society: introductory perspectives', in John Hall and Frank Trentmann, eds., *Civil society: a reader in history, theory and global politics*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005, p. 18.

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of the First World War, they suggest that intense engagement with the international community through petitions, delegations, and committees was first essayed in the last decades of Ottoman rule, rather than emerging, as historians have suggested, in the interwar years in response to the creation of the League of Nations and the Mandate system. By pointing to the pre-1914 origins of such strategies of appeal, I seek to question narratives of the interwar years as a discrete period, defined by the emergence and decline of novel mechanisms of international interaction. In so doing, I echo historians of the Arabic-speaking Eastern Mediterranean who have pointed to the considerable continuities between late Ottoman and post-Ottoman political culture and practice.[17]

In making these claims, this article contributes to three distinct fields of scholarship. First, these campaigns can provide us with rich material for the intellectual history of the 'idea[s] of globalisation' and migration.[18] The political entrepreneurs who participated in them did not simply live 'globalization' as an objective social reality, forging connections between the various points of the Eastern Mediterranean diaspora and laying down networks for the circulation of print and the mobilization of persons. They also reflected on these linkages. Insistently stressing their worldwide reach, they came to conceive of the globe as a single entity, bound together on one level by the proliferating movement of people, goods, and ideas, and on another by the 'international' relations of the world's empire-states. Thus, it is not quite true that the 'spatial imagination' of these 'political activists' was 'neither global nor local'. Their political lives undoubtedly remained reliant on 'specific lines of connection'.[19] But they were also explicitly global in their aspirations and claims. Self-conscious exponents of globalism, who conceived of the world as a single sphere of civil interaction, they looked on those who lived in the *mahjar* (the lands of migration) as integral members of a diasporic body politic. Striving to capture them in the net of their political activities, they hoped to draw strength from dispersal.

Secondly, such moments of mobilization provide valuable insight into the history of the 'ways we think about and perceive' the practices of public life.[20] Many would now regard the petitions, committees, and associations used so liberally by late Ottoman public men as central instruments of 'civil society' – that putative domain of associational life, free of ties to the state, in which private individuals come together to discuss public matters and to make, in print and in person, public demands.[21] That is not to say that 'civil society' is a term that

17 See, in particular, James Gelvin, *Divided loyalties: nationalism and mass politics in Syria at the close of empire*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998; Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: the politics of Arab nationalism, 1920–1945*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987; Keith Watenpaugh, *Being modern in the Middle East: revolution, nationalism, colonialism, and the Arab middle class*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

18 Emma Rothschild, 'Arcs of ideas: international history and intellectual history', in Gunilla-Friederike Budde, Oliver Janz, and Sebastian Conrad, eds., *Transnationale Geschichte: Themen, Tendenzen, Theorien*, Göttingen: Vandenhoek and Ruprecht, 2006, p. 218.

19 Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in question: theory, knowledge, history*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005, p. 109.

20 Michael Warner, *The letters of the republic: publication and the public sphere in eighteenth-century America*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990, p. xii.

21 Hall and Trentmann, 'Contests'; Sudipta Kaviraj and Sunil Khilnani, eds., *Civil society: history and possibilities*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001; Adam Seligman, *The idea of civil society*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992.

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can be used unreflectively. It is an essentially normative category, a prescriptive vision of the social order, rather than a description of any 'determinate social reality "out there"'.[22] What is more, it is not an emic category of late Ottoman political culture, but a new entrant into Middle Eastern political discourse, whose Arabic renditions have only acquired resonance in the last generation.[23] This has not prevented scholars from tracing the origins of contemporary civil society to the intellectual effervescence of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, effectively reducing this concept to an 'unbound signifier' designating any avenue of 'collective exchange … of opinion', regardless of time and space.[24]

We must remain wary of such attempts to fit the ways of the past to the preoccupations of present-day political thought. As Frederick Cooper has cautioned, in confusing the 'analytical categories' of current scholarship for the 'categories of practice' 'indigenous' to the past, we risk drowning out the voices of bygone actors, translating their words in a way that does scant justice to their own arguments.[25] Nevertheless, the notion of 'civil society' remains good to think with, a heuristic lens that can reveal both the importance of past practices of association and the ethical notions of civility and public engagement that underwrote them. Reform-minded late-Ottoman literati in Paris, New York, and Cairo regarded the committees they founded as incarnations of certain ethical norms of social exchange, beneficent instruments of progress in their own right, which could serve to reform the body politic, creating a community governed by the same moral practices and bound together by shared interests and practices of civil engagement.

Finally, this article contributes to the growing body of scholarship on the ways in which people in the non-Western world perceived, and interacted with, the institutions of international society, suggesting that many of the features of this engagement in the interwar years were already well established by the outbreak of the First World War. The last two decades or so have been marked by a revival of interest in both the Mandatory states of the interwar Middle East and the League of Nations itself, along with the popular internationalism that it initially benefited from and attempted to encourage.[26]

On the one hand, historians have increasingly jettisoned notions of the British and French mandates as just another form of imperialism, for which the notions of 'trusteeship' and 'tutelage' first bandied about in the 'Wilsonian moment' served as only the most perfunctory of fig-leaves.[27] Despite the constant prevarication, arbitrary about-turns, and outbursts of

22 John Keane, *Civil society: old images, new visions*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998, p. 52.

23 Sami Zubaida, 'Civil society, community and democracy in the Middle East', in Kaviraj and Khilnani, *Civil society*, pp. 232–49; Augustus Norton, ed., *Civil society in the Middle East*, Leiden: Brill, 1995.

24 Alaa Saber, 'Civil society and social capital in the Middle East', in Hans Anheier and Stefan Toepler, eds., *International encyclopaedia of civil society*, New York: Springer, 2010, p. 308. The quotations are from Cengiz Kırlı, 'Surveillance and constituting the public in the Ottoman empire', in Seteney Shami, ed., *Publics, politics and participation: locating the public sphere in the Middle East and North Africa*, New York: SSRC, 2009, p. 179; and Geoff Eley, 'Politics, culture, and the public sphere', *positions: east asia cultures critique*, 10, 1, 2002, p. 224.

25 Cooper, *Colonialism*, pp. 62–4, 133.

26 Nadine Méouchy and Peter Sluglett, eds., *The British and French Mandates in comparative perspective*, Leiden: Brill, 2004; Susan Pedersen, 'Back to the League of Nations', *American Historical Review*, 112, 2007, pp. 1091–1117.

27 Toby Dodge, *Inventing Iraq: the failure of nation building and a history denied*, London: Hurst, 2003.

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recriminatory violence that characterized French rule, the interwar years witnessed constant negotiation between Mandatory administrators and their Lebanese and Syrian charges.[28] These exchanges, as Elizabeth Thompson has argued, gave rise to a 'colonial civic order' whose workings 'shaped the powers and responsibilities of the state and the rights and obligations of colonial citizens'.[29]

On the other hand, scholars such as Susan Pedersen and Simon Jackson have shown the ways in which the insistence of officials in Geneva on providing Mandatory populations with a tribune for their concerns, and the alacrity with which the latter took up this offer, made the League a 'permanent … node of … political activity in the Mandate'. Jackson has argued that, far from being an 'irrelevance', the League became a 'practical element' of Mandatory administration, playing a part in the particular orientation of French developmental efforts in Lebanon and Syria.[30] Pedersen, meanwhile, has examined the concatenation of concerns that led League officials to devise a mechanism for the hearing of petitions presented by nationals of the Mandatory states, suggesting that 'colonial subjects and imperial powers alike adjusted their strategies to amplify, exploit, or seek to avoid, the "noise" coming from Geneva'.[31]

There is no doubt that the citizens of French-administered Lebanon and Syria enthusiastically seized upon the opportunities that these mechanisms offered for voicing their concerns before the League's Permanent Mandates Commission. No fewer than 1,322 of the 3,044 petitions that the Commission received were the work of Lebanese or Syrian nationals. By contrast, only 69 such documents made it to Geneva from Iraq, and a mere 66 from Tanganyika.[32] We cannot discount the heavy constraints upon the dispatch of petitions in the 'B' Mandates of Africa – constraints that also existed, to a significant degree, in the Middle East, where administrators obstructed the activities of some groups while encouraging others to plead their case before the League.[33] Nor, indeed, can we forget the fact that many of these petitions were sent by Lebanese and Syrian migrants, who enjoyed greater freedom of expression in their positions in the diaspora, much to the displeasure of frustrated French consular officials.[34] Nevertheless, this level of engagement remains noteworthy.

This article argues that the origins of such enthusiasm are not to be found in the evanescent sense of hope created by the 'Wilsonian moment', or the new international institutions erected in the wake of World War One, but in the last decades of Ottoman rule. The post-war peace conference may well have 'appeared to present unprecedented

28 Jean-David Mizrahi, *Genèse de l'état mandataire: Service des Renseignements et bandes armées au Liban et en Syrie dans les années 1920*, Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2003; Michael Provence, *The great Syrian revolt and the rise of Arab nationalism*, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005.

29 Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial citizens: republican rights, paternal privilege, and gender in French Syria and Lebanon*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 1.

30 Simon Jackson, 'Mandatory development: the political economy of the French mandate in Syria and Lebanon', PhD thesis, New York University, 2009, p. 454.

31 Susan Pedersen, 'A whole world talking: petitions and peoples before the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations'. I thank Professor Pedersen for kindly allowing me to cite this unpublished paper.

32 Anique van Ginneken, *Volkenbondsvoogdij: het toezicht van de Volkebond op het bestuur in mandaatgebieden 1919–1940*, PhD thesis, Rijksuniversiteit te Utrecht, 1992, pp. 211–18.

33 Benjamin White, *The emergence of minorities in the Middle East: the politics of community in French Mandate Syria*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011.

34 Jackson, 'Mandatory development', pp. 392–457.

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opportunities' for 'self-determination', as Erez Manela has noted. Rather less novel, however, were the tactics used by claimants who 'formed delegations, selected representatives, … launched campaigns and … composed and circulated a flood of declarations, petitions, and memoranda directed at … world leaders'.[35] Ottoman Arab notables had long been aware of the 'need to lobby fiercely'; as adept players of the games of 'imperial politics' they would later use these skills to pressure representatives of the international community at Versailles and Geneva.[36]

A longstanding feature of Ottoman political life, which played a 'pivotal' role in the 'relationship between' imperial capital and provinces, petitioning was given a new lease of life by the *tanzimat*, the sweeping reforms on which the Sublime Porte embarked in the mid nineteenth century.[37] These reforms, while traditionally regarded as a confrontation between the bold centralizing vision of modernizing statesmen and the atavism of local notables intent on preserving their power, have latterly been recast as a protracted 'bargaining process'.[38] Far from merely receiving, or resisting, directives from the centre, the empire's inhabitants used refurbished institutions such as provincial and municipal councils, and novel technologies like the telegraph, to voice their desires and communicate them to Istanbul. Moreover, their claims and grievances were increasingly 'couched in terms of rights and constitutional responsibility', showing a 'political voice that seems more in keeping with citizenship than subject status'.[39] By the early twentieth century, then, the petition had been transformed from a means of appeal to an instrument of representation.

However, by this stage the Ottoman state was not the only recipient of these petitions. The growing encroachment of European powers upon Ottoman sovereignty in the late nineteenth century encouraged inhabitants of the empire's Arab provinces to seek the former's intercession in their dealings with the Porte. This was, perhaps, particularly so for the *mutasarrifiyya* of Mount Lebanon, created in the wake of the civil strife that tore through the Mountain in 1860. The *règlement organique* of 1864, which served as a framework for its administration, was guaranteed by the European powers, who took it upon themselves to ensure that its stipulations were upheld. As a matter of course, any request for its revision was dispatched not just to the *mutasarrif* (the district governor) and his superiors in Istanbul but also to the European consuls of Beirut, and to the foreign ministries of Paris and London. As the Lebanese understood only too well, sovereignty over their province was effectively parcelled out between the Porte and the European powers.

35 Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian moment: self-determination and the international origins of anticolonial nationalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 4.

36 Jackson, 'Mandatory development', p. 402.

37 Nora Lafi, 'Petitions and accommodating urban change in the Ottoman empire', in Elizabeth Özdalga, M. Sait Özervarli, and Feryal Tansug, eds., *Istanbul as seen from a distance: centre and provinces in the Ottoman empire*, Istanbul: Swedish Research Institute, 2011, p. 73.

38 Elizabeth Thompson, 'Ottoman political reform in the provinces: the Damascus advisory council in 1844–45', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 25, 1993, p. 458. See also Jens Hanssen, *Fin-de-siècle Beirut: the making of an Ottoman provincial capital*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. For Egypt, see John Chalcraft, *The striking cabbies of Cairo and other stories: crafts and guilds in Egypt, 1863–1914*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2004, especially pp. 67–103.

39 Eugene Rogan, 'Instant communication: the impact of the telegraph in Ottoman Syria', in Thomas Philipp and Birgit Schäbler, eds., *The Syrian land: processes of integration and fragmentation. Bilad al-Shām from the eighteenth to the twentieth century*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1998, pp. 123–4.

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Petitioning was internationalized because rule over Mount Lebanon was itself understood by contemporaries to be 'international' in nature.

It also became international in another, more literal, sense, because migrants leaving the 'well-protected domains' continued to use these documents in their interactions with the bureaucracies of their countries of election, and made frequent appeals to the Porte and the Quai d'Orsay for intercession, when confronted with migration controls and commercial prohibitions.[40] Significantly, they also petitioned to intervene from afar in the affairs of their home provinces. This was entirely in keeping with their sense of the Eastern Mediterranean diaspora as a single social body spread out across the *mahjar*. It is to the history of these displacements, and the political claims that came to be associated to them, that I now turn.

Diasporic linkages, global visions

'Emigration', wrote a Presbyterian missionary posted to Mount Lebanon in 1892, 'like a mighty lever is stirring every village and hamlet in our field. The people are all in motion, and no one seems willing to remain who can by hook or by crook get money enough to carry him over the seas'.[41] By 1903, the French consul, the Comte de Sercey, claimed that 80,000 had migrated from Mount Lebanon since the early 1880s – around a fifth, he thought, of the province's population.[42] This wave of movement continued to grow in amplitude, broken only by the outbreak of the First World War. In 1914, an Ottoman official estimated that a quarter of the Mountain's inhabitants now resided in the *mahjar*.[43] Modern scholars largely concur with such estimates; Akram Khater has estimated that more than a third of the Mountain's population lived beyond the empire's confines in 1913.[44]

It must be said that migration from Mount Lebanon was particularly intense – a consequence of the waxing and waning of its silk economy, which gave the district's inhabitants a brief, tantalizing taste of prosperity before its slow, steady decline pushed them to look elsewhere to maintain their livelihoods. However, we would be wrong to gloss Ottoman migration as an exclusively Lebanese phenomenon.[45] One observer noted in 1903 that while 23% of the Eastern Mediterranean migrants of New York originated in Mount Lebanon proper, another 21% hailed from 'Beirut and its environs', 14% from 'North Syria', and more than 25% – the largest proportion – from 'Coelo-Syria'.[46] Though much of this last area fell within the boundaries of Mount Lebanon, the point remains that a significant

40 Andrew Arsan, 'Failing to stem the tide: Lebanese migration to French West Africa and the competing prerogatives of the imperial state', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 52, 2011, pp. 450–78.

41 *Fifty-sixth annual report of the board of foreign missions of the Presbyterian Church of the United States of America*, New York: Mission House, 1893, p. 250.

42 Ministère des Affaires Etrangères, Paris, Turquie/Syrie-Liban/Nouvelle Série (henceforth MAE, T/SL/NS) 107, De Sercey to Delcassé, Beirut, 26 February 1903.

43 Charles Issawi, ed., *The economic history of the Middle East 1800–1914: a book of readings*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966, pp. 270–1.

44 Akram Khater, *Inventing home: emigration, gender, and the middle class in Lebanon, 1870–1920*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001, p. 59.

45 Kemal Karpat, 'The Ottoman emigration to America, 1860–1914', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 17, 1985, p. 182.

46 Lucius Miller Hopkins, *Our Syrian population*, New York: n.p., 1903, p. 19.

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proportion came from the neighbouring provinces of Beirut, Damascus, and Aleppo. Ten years later, a Beirut man of religion, Shaykh Ahmad Tabbarah, put the number of 'Syrian' migrants in the world at 550,000. These men and women had scattered far and wide. The largest number, some 250,000, dwelt in the United States, but another 100,000 lived in Brazil, 75,000 in Argentina, 14,000 in Mexico, 8,000 in Australia, 2,500 in the Philippines, 20,000 in Europe, 49,000 in Egypt, and 31,500 in the 'remainder of lands'.[47]

By the early 1900s, these migrants formed an eager diasporic reading public, assiduously keeping up with Eastern Mediterranean publications such as *al-Hilal* or *al-Muqtataf*. In 1913, the former had subscription agents not just in Beirut, Damascus, Jerusalem, Tripoli, and Hums, and smaller localities such as Nazareth or the Mount Lebanon town of Amyun, but also in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Manaus, the United States, 'Mexico and its environs', Uruguay, and French Guinea. Further confirmation of *al-Hilal*'s reach is provided by its monthly *al-su'al wa al-iqtirah* (question and answer) column. In October 1913 letters came from Basra and Kuwait, but also from Khattar Yusif, in Flagstaff, Arizona, who asked of the origins of the 'petrified forests' of his new abode.[48] In April 1920, a reader in Ottawa inquired after the 'origin of the word "bazaar"', while another in Kingston, Jamaica, asked for 'insight' on the 'origins and beliefs' of the Bolsheviks.[49]

Moreover, migrants not only sought to remain plugged into the debates unfolding in the periodicals of Egypt, Beirut, and Damascus, but also busily went about establishing their own publications, printing presses, and political and charitable associations. In his index of the Arabic press to the year 1929, Philippe de Tarrazi listed thirty-three newspapers published in Paris, thirty-six in New York, thirty in Rio de Janeiro, and thirty-nine in São Paulo.[50] Najib 'Abduh, meanwhile, enumerated no fewer than ninety-one young men's organizations, ladies' societies, religious associations, hometown clubs, and civic committees in the American *mahjar* in his 'useful travels in the New World', a vast directory of the Eastern Mediterranean diaspora published in 1907. These included organizations as varied as the New York branch of the clandestine Committee of Union and Progress (CUP); the Reform Society of DuBois, Pennsylvania; the Syrian Ladies' Association in America, in Brooklyn; the Cedar of Mount Lebanon Society, in San Francisco; the Maronite Benevolent Society, in Rio de Janeiro; the Paraiso de los Pobres, in Buenos Aires – as its Arabic name suggested, a *malja'* (refuge) for those who had fallen on hard times; the Humsian Patriotic Society, in São Paulo; the Sociedad Jovenes Syrios, in the Yucatan town of Mérida; and the Sociedad de la Nueva Epoca, in Santo Domingo.[51]

These gatherings and periodicals did not, however, appear everywhere that migrants from the Ottoman lands could be found. It is clear that an appetite for association was not

47 Hizb al-Lamarkaziyya, *al-Mu'tamar*, p. 88.

48 *Al-Hilal*, October 1913.

49 *Ibid*., April 1920.

50 Philippe de Tarrazi, *Tarikh al-sahafa al-'arabiyya*, vol. 4, Beirut: Matba'a al-Amirkaniyya, 1933, pp. 372–7, 406–13, 438–49.

51 Najib 'Abduh, *al-Safar al-mufid fi al- 'alam al-jadid*, New York: Matba'at Jaridat Mir'at al-Gharb, 1907, pp. 332–4. On the diasporic activities of the CUP, see Şükrü Hanioğlu, *The Young Turks in opposition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995; and Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a revolution: the Young Turks, 1902–1908*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

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restricted to teeming centres of Eastern Mediterranean diasporic life such as New York, São Paulo, and Buenos Aires. Newspapers and associations could pop up, too, in seemingly peripheral locations such as the Amazon rubber town of Manaus, or Lawrence, Massachusetts, whose commercial opportunities attracted sizeable numbers of migrants.[52] But other places, including West Africa, the Philippines, and Australia, though not insignificant in trading terms, were largely absent from this map of associational and print life. Meanwhile, the Ottoman community of Paris produced far more than its fair share of periodicals, petitions, and committees. Hardly noted for its size, it was made up in the early twentieth century of wealthy rentiers such as Nadra Mutran; respectable lawyers like Charles Dibbas; students such as Fakhri al-Barudi, the scion of a notable Damascene family; and commercial and political entrepreneurs like 'Abbas Bijjani or Shukri Ghanim.[53]

However, it was precisely its members' status and location at the heart of the French empire – not to speak of its role as a central node of diasporic trade, whose merchants supplied kin and colleagues in West Africa and Latin America – which made the Parisian Ottoman community a hub of political activity. For its constituents had the social capital and material wherewithal to intercede with the Quai d'Orsay on behalf of their scattered compatriots, urging France to increase its commitments to the inhabitants of Ottoman Syria. Though demographically a mere drop in the ocean of Eastern Mediterranean migration, men such as Ghanim and Bijjani were central in other ways. They were brokers in goods and ideas, who made it their life's work to accumulate connections and contacts and to coordinate efforts, in trade as in politics.

It would be difficult, therefore, to speak of either the Eastern Mediterranean diaspora or its public activities as truly global – a blanket of dispersion covering the entire world. The history of its members' commercial and political undertakings is, of course, one of contacts sustained across vast distances. Yet it is also one of missed linkages and of lumpiness – of accretions of people, or material and social capital, at particular spots.[54]

For all that, early twentieth-century Eastern Mediterranean public men such as 'Abduh or Tarrazi themselves regarded the world as a single spatial unit, given coherence by the movements, commercial linkages, and intellectual pursuits of their compatriots. The ambitions of both Tarrazi and 'Abduh were encyclopaedic, in the original sense of the word – they sought to encircle and cover every part of the world's knowledge. The directories that they compiled are not just useful guides for contemporary scholars keen to retrace early twentieth-century networks of commerce and intellectual exchange, and, perhaps, to impose their own visions of global processes on the past. They are also relics of their authors' own globalism, a feature evident in the very titles that they chose for their works. While 'Abduh described his undertaking as a 'commercial guide to the sons of the Arabic language in the whole world', Tarrazi stated that his 'history of the Arabic press' included 'information on every Arabic newspaper and magazine published in the world, east and west'.[55]

52 Tarrazi, *Tarikh*, pp. 448, 414.

53 'Abduh, *al-Safar*, p. 428; Hizb al-Lamarkaziyya, *al-Mu'tamar*, pp. 15–16;

54 Cooper, *Colonialism*, pp. 91–2.

55 'Abduh, *al-Safar*, p. 5; Philippe de Tarrazi, *Tarikh al-sahafa al-'arabiyya*, vol. 1, Beirut: Matba'a al-Adabiyya, 1913.

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This globalism also pervaded the outlook of the organizers of both the 1912 campaign for reform of the Lebanese statute and the 1913 Arab congress. The *Nahda al-Lubnaniyya*, for instance, 'aim[ed] to establish branches in all the lands of migration and Mount Lebanon', thus creating a veritable worldwide network. A political entrepreneur of unbridled ambition, its founder, Na'um Mukarzil, sought to capitalize on dispersion. Seemingly convinced that a single community acting in isolation could achieve little, Mukarzil strove to gather migrants from far afield into a single cohesive organization, overseeing the establishment of branches in Paris, Marseille, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, and the Mexican city of Teziutlán. In practice, however, the *Nahda*'s activities largely remained confined to North America, where twenty-six of its thirty-one branches could be found.[56]

Such an awareness of the need to band together across borders, to appeal to others elsewhere, was also apparent in the language of early Arabists such as 'Abd al-Ghani al-'Uraysi. In his 'appeal to the sons of the Arab nation', disseminated on the eve of the Paris conference, he explicitly cast this political community in diasporic terms. Far from remaining hemmed in the 'Arab lands', it was a social body 'dispersed through the continents of the earth'. That is not to say that he and his fellow travellers reneged entirely upon territorial ties. On the contrary, the underlying rationale for the conference was 'the need for decentralizing reforms in the Arab lands' – that is to say, the Arabic-speaking provinces of the Ottoman empire, and principally 'Syria'. The object of the affections and political intentions of Syria's 'sons', wherever they might be, should remain their native land, that 'flower' of the Arab 'patria'. Nevertheless, it is clear that the organizers sought a way of casting the net of political participation as widely as possible, drawing in those who moved through the *mahjar* as much as those who remained rooted to the spot in the country of their birth.

By the same token, this vision of a scattered body politic allowed 'Uraysi and his peers to enhance their claims to representativeness. They were able to claim, with some truth, that the 'waves of the reformist movement did not swell only under Arabic skies', rising above 'the Arabian peninsula … Iraq and the land between the rivers, the Jordan valley, and Syria, her plains and mountains, shores and highlands'. Rather, they had spread as far as Constantinople and Egypt, Europe, and 'North and South America', whose 'Arabic colonies' sent delegates to the Paris conference.[57] Appeals to the global forces of diaspora therefore formed an important part of the repertoire of claims that Eastern Mediterranean political campaigners drew upon in the years before 1914. Alongside them could be found evocations of the moral potency of the associations that so often served as the vehicles for their political aspirations – and their personal ambitions.

Association and its meanings

'First schools, then the printing press, periodicals, and finally associations': these were the 'factors' Khayrallah argued in his 'open letter to the League of Nations' of 1919, which had sown the seeds of the 'Arabic literary renaissance, which began in Lebanon, before spreading to Syria, Egypt, Mesopotamia, the Hijaz and elsewhere'. In fact, Khayrallah corrected himself, none of this could have been possible without print, the fundamental vehicle of progress.

56 Al-Nahda, *al-Kitab*, pp. 36, 44–5.

57 Hizb al-Lamarkaziyya, *al-Mu'tamar*, pp. 7, 9, 3–4.

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The '*superior* and *complex* … Arab soul, which had suffered a centuries-long eclipse', was reborn 'the day the genius of Gutenberg was joined to that of al-Idrisi and Avicenna, when a Lebanese withdrew from the press the first page of printed Arabic'. It was this soul, given a physical casing in the sundry outpourings of the printing press, that had 'once again filled Lebanon and Syria with schools', and that 'blew' through the pages of patriotic periodicals such as Butrus al-Bustani's *Syrian Clarion*.[58]

If print was the very foundation of this newly civilized society, then associations were the surest signs of a revived 'political life'. It was no coincidence that the months after the Young Turk revolution of July 1908, which had restored the imperial constitution suspended in 1878, should have witnessed an 'extraordinary flowering of committees'. The blooms of this political spring, they were the concrete manifestations of the 'immense hope' and 'enthusiasm' that had galvanized 'all the nationalities' of the Ottoman empire. These 'associations', Khayrallah insisted, were the natural pendant of the debates that now filled the long-vacant chamber of deputies. Indeed, it was fitting that the 'Arab brotherhood' should have 'met … first at a house in Prinkipio, then at the Théatre des Variétés', for its members were not only private men working for public ends but also played out a mirror image of parliamentary proceedings. However, this efflorescence of gatherings was curtailed by the curbing of political rights in the wake of the counter-revolution of March 1909. Physical embodiments of the revolutionary values of 'fraternity and liberty', these 'organs' could survive only so long as the latter thrived.[59]

One might contend that Khayrallah made such arguments only to meet the particular exigencies of the post-war moment, claiming a part for the 'liberated Arab regions' in a world of free-standing nation-states by stressing their participation in the wider currents of progress. Certainly, he argued that the Arabs' latter-day intellectual and political revival was proof that they met all the criteria of nationality, as Renan had defined it – 'a common spirit and will and clearly-defined aspirations'. More than this, they were 'united racially, linguistically, strategically and economically, historically, and legislatively', and 'therefore had the sacred right to organize themselves in *one* State or *several*, *independent* of one another or *confederate*, according to the national will'. All this, he insisted, was in perfect agreement with the 'principle' of 'self-determination' enunciated by Wilson and which, as European statesmen such as Pichon, Balfour, and Lloyd George agreed, applied 'beyond Europe' to 'Arabia … Armenia, Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine'. Just as importantly, these regions had shown in their periodicals and public life all the signs of an 'evolution' that warranted not only the 'attention' of 'public opinion' but also their inclusion by the 'governments of the civilized world' in the community of states. The latter, then, could not but allow the 'liberated Arab regions' to 'dispose of their own fate'.[60]

In his missive, Khayrallah drew on the powerful new language of self-determination. However, he also reprised arguments that Eastern Mediterranean litterateurs had already rehearsed in the years before 1914 on the beneficence of public association and discourse. In *The muleteer and the priest*, his anti-clerical *conte philosophique* of 1904, the Lebanese essayist and public speaker Amin al-Rihani had sung the praises of such interchange, which

58 K.T. Khairallah, *Le problème du Levant*, Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1919, pp. 19, 194.

59 *Ibid*., pp. 29, 31, 34.

60 *Ibid*., pp. 194–5, 185–7, 189, 10.

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had transformed his protagonist, Abu Tannus, into a purposeful member of the community, concerned with something 'wider, greater, [and] more just' than his own petty personal preoccupations: the 'common welfare'. His 'friendship' with the young man he took on as his 'bookkeeper' while a trader in New York, who 'acquainted his master with Voltaire', his 'struggle … in the path of freedom and justice', and the 'inspiration and direction' that he received from 'admixture with foreigners' and the 'political meetings he attend[ed]' – all of these 'polished his natural intelligence', making him a 'reformer in spite of himself'. Public gathering and untrammelled intellectual exchange, Rihani suggested, were essential preconditions for the construction of a new political subject, free and yet aware of his duties to the 'public good'.[61]

In a speech given in 1908 to a gathering held in 'celebration' of the restoration of the Ottoman constitution, Rihani expanded further upon his vision of freedom. He insisted that the 'political liberty' that Ottomans hoped they had achieved in those halcyon days was no end in itself but only part of a broader sense of emancipated selfhood; a 'branch of a more fundamental spiritual liberty', it was 'merely one of its results'. This, in turn, consisted of the ability of each 'individual to dispose of himself, free from shackles pressing upon the soul and mind'. But it was not entirely without constraints: 'liberty is ordered, on the one hand, by the law, and, on the other, by civility, for without the one the ruler becomes a despot, and the government is tarnished with oppression, and without the other the people throw themselves into rebellion, and the body politic slips into chaos'.[62] Just as important as checks on the power of the ruler, then, were restraints on the behaviour of the ruled. Rihani lay the stress here on *tahdhib* – *politesse*, refinement, and correctness in comportment towards others – just as he did, in his account of Abu Tannus' political education, on selflessness and public engagement. This ethical dimension was central to Rihani's conception of social and political community.

It also lay at the heart of the effusive picture that Khayrallah himself had painted, in an essay published in 1912 in the Orientalist *Revue du monde musulman*, of the recent transformations in Syria's 'social, intellectual, economic, and political conditions of life'. In this ancient land, the very notion of society as anything more than 'an agglomeration of disparate elements brought together by conquest and kept by tyranny and terror under the same authority' was no more than half a century old. Before 1860, 'Syrian society did not exist', only a congeries of 'distinct groups', each 'ignorant' of the other and fuelled only by 'hate' and 'fanaticism'. This was a population, Khayrallah maintained, devoid of any 'moral' sense. However, the impulse of 'daily needs … [and] the advantages of peace and concord' had slowly but surely worn away at old prejudices.

Crucial to this overhaul of social 'relations' was the 'ferment of ideas and sentiments' in Beirut, the 'intellectual capital of Syria', whose 'literary youth' played a signal role in the 'disinfection of souls', 'cleansed' of 'prejudice, corruption, … vengeance, selfishness, and laziness' and 'brought back to life' by the balm of a common 'culture'. Khayrallah insisted that their energy was a 'powerful current pushing forwards' that 'old Oriental society'. Working to bring uplift 'through speech and the pen, at the lectern' and the writing-desk, they founded charitable 'societies', took to the 'tribune' in 'public place[s]' to 'stigmatis[e] … tyranny', and

61 Amin al-Rihani, *al-Mukari wa al-kahin*, Beirut: Dar al-Rihani, 1969 (first published 1904), pp. 25–9, 14.

62 Amin al-Rihani, 'al-Hurriya wa al-tahdhib', *al-Qawmiyyat*, Beirut: Dar al-Rihani, 1956, pp. 26–7.

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held demonstrations such as the 'socialist celebration' that Khayrallah himself had helped to organize before fleeing to France. Khayrallah wrote, of course, for a French audience, painting a picture of progress that would convince the *Revue*'s learned readers of the importance of the changes surging through Syria. But his was also a fundamentally ethical vision of a newly civil social order, whose members' more sympathetic, moral comportment had been formed by public interchange, by the commerce and 'community of interests' that it created, and by the 'unity of views' born of conversation and committee-making.[63]

This was a sentiment that Rashid Rida would have concurred with. Rida viewed public bodies as possessed of a clear moral end, and used such arguments to justify his own political undertakings – not least among them the 'first Arab congress', to which he lent his imprimatur as one of the founding members of the Ottoman Administrative Decentralization Party. 'This age', he declared grandiloquently in his preface to its proceedings, 'is the age of associations':

> All civilization, and all progress in the sciences and crafts, and in administration and government, is the product of such gatherings, and the dialogue and deliberations of their members upon their affairs and interests. And the progress of nations itself is dependent on their capacity for the development of associations and of common social works. Those who do not have the good fortune to create such gatherings – be they called societies, or parties, or conferences, or companies, or guilds – will not benefit from the culture of the age, and will not count among its nations and peoples, no matter their number and the profusion of the social ties making them speak with a common voice, but will remain hirelings and slaves of the social nations.[64]

This was potent stuff. Events such as the Paris congress did not just serve a practical purpose in the eyes of their organizers. They did indeed give the 'reformers' of Syria and its diaspora the opportunity to discuss in person the crucial matters of government and, potentially, to achieve concrete political ends. More than this, however, they served to enact, through three days of speeches and questions from the floor and enthusiastic applause, the vision of a body politic united in its civility and espousal of decentralization. In doing so, they stood as an incontrovertible sign that Syria – and, by extension, the Ottoman empire as a whole – belonged to the civilized world. This, in turn, provided further support to the conference's central contentions: on the one hand, the Arab provinces of the empire deserved a measure of control over their own affairs commensurate with their level of development, and the assistance of Europe in achieving this aim; on the other, Syria should be free from the 'danger of occupation and disappearance' apparent from 'international communications'. Its people, as the conference's organizers reminded 'those who play with the fates of peoples', 'will not acquiesce to submission' – whether 'the wrongs of central rule' or the parcelling out of the Syrian provinces by the great powers that would be its ultimate 'result'.[65]

Powerful normative assumptions therefore informed committees and conferences such as the 'Arab congress'. Association, more than just convenient political practice, constituted for

63 K.T. Khairallah, *La Syrie*, Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1912, pp. 105–6, 111–12, 116, 122.

64 Hizb al-Lamarkaziyya, *al-Mu'tamar*, p. i.

65 *Ibid.*, pp. iv–viii, 9.

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figures such as Rida the very highest mark of civilization. A powerful tie binding the social body together, it also served as a reminder to European observers that the Ottoman lands were by no means refractory to the forces of change. However, Rida's contemporaries were not content simply to put progress on display. Rather, they sought to engage directly with the community of nations. Broadcasting their opinions through congresses, delegations, and petitions, they also increasingly relied on the last of these to buttress their claims to represent the body politic, treating them as endorsements that granted them the authority to act on behalf of their compatriots.

Petitions and their uses

This use of telegrams and petitions as instruments of appeal and measures of public opinion was evident in the 1912 campaign for reform of the statute of Mount Lebanon. The *règlement organique* of 1864 had granted this province a significant measure of autonomy, with its own budget, fiscal regime, gendarmerie, and administrative council, presided over by the *mutasarrif*, himself an Ottoman Christian. This, however, was not enough for Lebanese public men such as Shukri Ghanim, Na'um Mukarzil, and Iskandar al-'Ammun. Mount Lebanon had seen its 'prerogatives … withdrawn one by one, [and] its autonomy dismantled' by the administrative fiat of its governors in the dark days of 'Hamidian oppression'.[66] Now, they claimed, it faced the CUP's 'attempts' to 'strip it of its privileges'.[67] Deprived of its own port, customs, commercial tribunal, and the 'agricultural outlets' of the Biqa' plain, it was effectively a 'rocky prison', which could provide no adequate means of subsistence for its inhabitants, who were pushed into exile in droves.[68] Nothing less would do than a complete overhaul of its statute, through the 'establishment of a constitutional, effectively autonomous, government', and the 'reintegration' of the territories that its inhabitants argued had been lost with the post-1860 delimitation of its boundaries.[69] It was for this that the Comité Libanais, the *Nahda al-Lubnaniyya*, and the *Ittihad al-Lubnani* campaigned.

In their quest for reform, these associations also relied on the particular form that the *règlement* had given to Ottoman sovereignty over Mount Lebanon. Though an imperial decree, it was an act guaranteed by the European powers. As the Lebanese lawyer and administrator Bulus Nujaym noted in 1908, the consequences of this were far-reaching. 'The Sultan is not', he argued, 'the only veritable sovereign of the governor, as the latter also depends in practice on the Powers.' No longer 'free to give' the *mutasarrif* 'any order he pleases', he found 'his powers upon Lebanon … limited by international acts'. More than this, 'no modification [could] be made to the *règlement* … without the consent of the Powers'. Lebanon, therefore, was 'withdrawn from the direct domination' of the Ottoman state, and 'governed under the collective control of Europe and the Porte'.[70] Lebanese petition-makers and public men were quick to seize on the possibilities of shared sovereignty and of a

66 Comité Libanais de Paris, *Mémoire sur la question du Liban*, Paris: n.p., 1912.

67 Al-Nahda, *al-Kitab*, p. 31.

68 Comité Libanais, *Mémoire*.

69 MAE T/SL/NS 117, 'Dépêche adressée par l'Alliance Libanaise aux six grandes puissances d'Europe à la date du 20 novembre 1912'.

70 M. Jouplain, *La question du Liban*, Paris: Arthur Rousseau, 1908, pp. 513, 510.

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governing arrangement that meant, in practice, that all claims relating to the administration of the Mountain had to be referred to the diplomats of Beirut, Istanbul, and the European capitals. This allowed those who sought reform or redress, if not to bypass the Ottoman administration entirely, then at least to seek convenient support from one or other of the European powers.

It thus became a frequent occurrence for the European consuls at Beirut to handle missives such as those that Sir Robert Drummond-Hay, the British envoy, received in July 1902, requesting 'the support of His Majesty's Embassy in obtaining the establishment of Commercial Courts in the Mountain'. A French version of the petition, evidently prepared for the benefit of Beirut's diplomats, was accompanied by six copies in Arabic, to each of which had been appended by hand the formula 'this petition is presented by the generality of the people of the villages' of the districts of the Kisrawan, Matn, and Batrun.[71] Below this phrase were the seals of the signatories, who were often, it would seem from their titles, the headmen and clerics of the concerned localities. This was a sign of the ways in which the new order instituted in the Mountain in the wake of the events of 1860 both introduced a novel language of popular representation and kept in place some of the hierarchical assumptions that had underwritten the old regime.[72] These lay notables and ecclesiastics were still those who addressed power. However, they now spoke on behalf of the common people, *al-ahali*. The latter, meanwhile, were nominally represented, if only indirectly.

This use of petitions only became more frequent and better coordinated in the years after the 1908 revolution, as the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon resorted to the mechanisms of shared sovereignty to protect their much-cherished prerogatives. In November 1909, René Ristelhueber reported the arrival at the French consulate of 'ninety-five petitions from the different districts of the Mountain' protesting the introduction of identification cards into the *mutasarrifiyya*. Many Lebanese regarded this measure, proposed by the CUP as a means of standardizing administrative procedure across the empire, not just as a surreptitious head-tax but, worse still, as an attack on their privileges. However, this was to Ristelhueber no spontaneous upsurge but a coordinated campaign, instigated by 'a committee known as the "Union Libanaise"', a 'particularly tenacious defender of the privileges of Lebanon', which regarded the apposition of the Ministry of Interior's seal to these cards as a dangerous precedent, suggesting that Mount Lebanon was subject to the Ministry's jurisdiction. This view was contrary to the Union's own interpretation, in which an otherwise autonomous *mutasarrifiyya* answered only to the Grand Vizierate. The Union circulated a 'collective protest', which argued that the introduction of identity cards constituted a breach of the Lebanese statute and was therefore an offence towards both 'the Ottoman government and the powers signatory to the convention'. Significantly, it succeeded in gathering 11,000 signatures, a measure both of the strength of opposition to this proposal and of the Union's organizational nous.[73]

Such political petitioning was not, it is clear, the exclusive prerogative of Lebanese campaigners. On the contrary, notables elsewhere in the empire increasingly resorted to

71 The National Archives, Kew, Foreign Office (henceforth TNA, FO) 195/2117, Drummond-Hay, 18 July 1902.

72 See Ussama Makdisi, *The culture of sectarianism: community, history, and violence in nineteenth-century Ottoman Lebanon*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000.

73 MAE, T/SL/NS 112, Ristelhueber to Bompard, 8 November 1909.

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longstanding procedures of appeal to voice their claims and concerns, as they became more obdurate in their pursuit of the devolution of administrative powers, and resigned to the realities of European encroachments on Ottoman sovereignty. The movement for local autonomy spearheaded by Sayyid Talib al-Naqib in Basra in 1913, for instance, took care to draft a *mazbata* (petition), calling on the Sublime Porte to convene 'without delay' an 'extraordinary session' of the provincial 'General Council' to 'arrest once and for all the ruin [and] misfortunes' of the province. This was 'circulated for signature among the [provincial] notables', garnering the support of some 300 individuals, before being passed on to the local governor, the Ministry of Interior, and the Grand Vizierate.[74] In similar fashion, a delegation of six 'Arab notables' of Aleppo, alarmed by the news that 'some amongst the Great Powers' – a thinly veiled allusion to France – 'wish to take hold of Syria', visited the British consul, Ralph Fontana, in March 1913 to present him with a petition, sealed by fifty-six of their peers, to 'let you know from the bottom of our hearts that we wish for the English eagle to fly above our provinces'.[75]

Two features, however, distinguished campaigns focused on Mount Lebanon. The first was their explicit reliance on the mechanisms of shared sovereignty. Lebanese campaigners turned in the first instance to the European powers, understanding this to be the most expedient, if not the only, way to extract concessions from the Sublime Porte. By contrast, others either appealed directly and exclusively to the Porte for redress or, as in the case of the notables who petitioned Fontana, already looked to a time beyond Ottoman sovereignty. While the denizens of Mount Lebanon and its diaspora had become accustomed by the 1910s to viewing sovereignty as a property that might be parcelled out between different parties, their peers continued to regard it as effectively indivisible, forcing them to make a choice between Ottoman rule, however much tempered by decentralization, and the complete dominance of one or other of the European powers.

The second feature was the increasingly transnational character of such mobilizations. Migrants, for instance, played a prominent role in the opposition to the mooted application to Mount Lebanon of the press law introduced by the Ottoman Chamber of Deputies in late 1909. This rapidly raised the hackles of several of the Mountain's most prominent newspapermen, who communicated to the French consulate their displeasure at this move.[76] They asserted that it was a measure objectionable on several counts. It contravened Lebanon's 'privileged organization', by imposing upon it a measure intended for ordinary provinces, and drafted by the Ottoman parliament, to which the Mountain sent no representatives. Moreover, it threatened to 'introduce' the 'censorship' from which Lebanese 'printing-houses had always been free'. Finally, it had not received the assent of the European powers, in direct breach of their 'right to legislate in common', recognized by the Porte. It was precisely to France's authority as a 'guardian power' to approve, or in this instance to refuse, laws applying to Mount Lebanon that these men appealed.[77]

These figures' colleagues in the *mahjar* soon amplified their protests. In April 1910, the São Paulo newspaper *al-Munazir* reported that a number of Lebanese journalists had met to

74 TNA, FO 424/237, Lowther to Grey, Constantinople, 24 March 1913.

75 TNA FO 424/238, Fontana to Lowther, Aleppo, 25 March 1913, and enclosure.

76 Tarrazi, *Tarikh*, pp. 410–11.

77 MAE T/SL/NS 112, Jounié, 10 December 1909.

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state their opposition to a measure that threatened to bring about the closure of Mount Lebanon's 'newspapers and printing-houses'. However, they took a far more radical stance than the editorialists of the Mountain. Perhaps emboldened by distance, they called not just for the intervention of the Powers but also for 'demonstrations … and the establishment of a just popular government' in place of the *mutasarrif*.[78]

It is therefore no surprise that the Lebanese associations of Paris, New York, and Egypt should have taken the lead in agitating for reform of the Mountain's statute in 1912, later claiming the support of the 'delegates of the different Lebanese committees of America and Africa', nor that they should have pressed their claims first and foremost on the European powers watching over the *mutasarrifiyya*'s affairs.[79] The Alliance Libanaise, for instance, sent its desiderata 'to the governments concerned, the ambassadors in Constantinople, the consuls in Beirut, and the foreign representatives in Egypt'.[80] The Comité Libanais, meanwhile, addressed its demands to the 'powers protecting Lebanon and liberal constitutional Turkey'. Indeed, the proximity – both literal and metaphorical – of the Comité Libanais to the heart of the French empire proved positively useful. After all, Ghanim had, in 1908, established the Amis de l'Orient, an association whose members included such prominent diplomatic players as the Quai d'Orsay functionary and colonial lobbyist Robert de Caix and the sometime Foreign Minister Stephen Pichon, to whom he therefore enjoyed relatively privileged access.[81]

Nevertheless, there were signs that by 1913 others were beginning to follow such precedents. The organizers of the 'first Arab congress' – themselves based in Paris and Cairo – both stressed the diasporic character of their gathering and hoped that European statesmen might serve as useful intercessors, persuading the Sublime Porte of the need to devolve an array of administrative powers to the provinces. The conference did not just include 'migration to and from Syria' on its agenda; it also brought together delegates from Alexandria, Cairo, Paris, Mexico City, and New York, as well as Beirut, Damascus, and Basra. 'Uraysi, 'Azm, and their acolytes hoped that such inclusiveness would increase their credibility in the eyes of the 'foreigners, before whom the conference' would be held. For they did not just expect 'representatives of the European press' to attend proceedings; they also intended to put together a delegation that would present their request for 'recognition of the national life of the Arabs … and the need for decentralizing reforms' to the European ambassadors assembled at the London Peace Conference of 1912–13, held to decide the fate of Albania.[82] These plenipotentiaries, they hoped, would both persuade their own governments to hold back from invading Syria – a move many feared in the wake of the painful loss of Tripolitania to the Italians – and prevail on the Porte to accede to their reformist desiderata.

Moreover, many of those who demanded reform of the Ottoman state in the years before 1914 strove to buttress their position by making claims to broader representativeness. However, in doing so, they oscillated between two quite different registers of representation.

78 Mallah, *al-Hijra*, pp. 198–9.

79 MAE T/SL/NS 121, Comité Libanais de Paris to Pichon, 27 June 1913.

80 MAE, T/SL/NS 116, Bompard to Poincaré, 1 June 1912.

81 Christopher Andrew and Sydney Kanya-Forstner, 'The French "colonial party": its composition, aims, and influence, 1885–1914', *Historical Journal*, 14, 1971, pp. 99–128.

82 Hizb al-Lamarkaziyya, *al-Mu'tamar*, pp. 7, 14–15, 66–74, 107–10.

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One was founded on the self-evident right of some to speak on behalf of the community by dint of their social distinction, whereas the other was based on a contractual understanding between the body politic and those who presumed to act in its interest. It is clear that the former was dominant in the minds of the six Aleppo notables who earnestly 'told' Fontana that 'the entire Moslem population of [the city], high and low, feel that the state of things is to admit of no hope of improvement', and 'that with one common accord they were praying for a British government of the country'. Speaking without qualms in the name of the community, they assured the British consul, in telling terms, that 'further petitions sealed by the notables representing public opinion in other towns of this vilayet' would be forthcoming.[83]

This logic of unquestioned assumption of responsibility was also that followed, despite its name, by the Beirut *jam'iyyat al-islah al-'umumiyya* (General Reform Society) in the early months of 1913. On 12 January, the administrative councils of the city's religious communities – bodies made up of religious and lay dignitaries, the well-to-do, the pious, and the reputable – gathered in the municipality to elect first a committee of eighty-six members, then a special 'commission' of twenty-five men charged with 'elaborat[ing] a precise project, to present it to the government, and to do its utmost to bring about its realization'.[84] It was this latter body that would prepare the 'reform programme', adopted at the committee's third meeting in late January, and duly dispatched to Istanbul.[85] Though this text was publicized in the city's reformist newspapers, it was not so much subjected to the scrutiny of public opinion as foisted upon it, a *fait accompli* for the body politic to accept as the wise work of its superiors.[86]

For their part, the organizers of the 1912 campaign for reform of the Lebanese statute awkwardly conflated such patrician practice with attempts to secure – or, at the very least, to suggest – representation. Shukri Ghanim, always a cautious political mover, was careful to secure the 'mandate' of the 'Lebanese residents of Paris', obtaining a letter signed by several of them entitling the Comité to 'represent us before whom they see fit, to act on behalf of us, and to undertake all the measures they consider useful'.[87] Iskandar 'Ammun, however, proved rather less circumspect. In a telegram sent in late November 1912, he stated that the 'Alliance Libanaise, for Lebanese people, reiterates its request for reform'.[88] This claim to embody the wishes of an entire people was reiterated in early 1913, when he and Khayrallah petitioned Joseph-Fernand Couget, the French consul at Beirut, for further concessions on Lebanese autonomy. Calling for the appointment of a governor drawn from the Mountain, and the 'restitution … of Lebanon's natural and historical borders', they were 'sure', in doing so, 'of interpreting the sentiments of all the Lebanese'.[89] Na'um Mukarzil, meanwhile, insisted that the '*Nahda* is not just for its elected administrators in New York, or those … who

83 TNA FO 424/238, Fontana to Lowther, Aleppo, 25 March 1913.

84 *Le Réveil*, 13 January 1913.

85 MAE T/SL/NS 119, Couget to Jonnart, Beirut, 28 January 1913; TNA FO 424/237, Cumberbatch to Lowther, Beirut, 12 March 1913.

86 *Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, 30 January 1913.

87 MAE, T/SL/NS 116, 'Texte de la procuration donnée à MM. Chékri Ghanem et K.A. Khairallah', 6 July 1912.

88 'Dépêche adressée par l'Alliance Libanaise'.

89 MAE T/SL/NS 119, 'Ammun and Khayrallah to Couget, n.d.

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sacrificed themselves for its cause … but for every Lebanese who considers himself as such', and shares its values of 'patriotism, association, and salvation'. In a sense, he was true to his word, for the statutes of the organization required little more for the 'establishment of a branch' than the 'signature of ten Lebanese'. However, in his vision these would remain dependent on the mother association 'administratively, politically, and financially', mere satellites hovering around the central orb of the *Nahda*.[90]

This ambivalence was only more apparent in the pronouncements of the organizers of the 'first Arab congress'. On the one hand, they claimed that they and their associates needed no other justification for their assumption of a leading role in the 'modern Arab renaissance' than their inherent 'self-restraint and ethical sense'; being *'uqala'* (men of reason), they were entitled to speak on behalf of the political community as members of the *tabaqat al-mutanawwirin* (enlightened class). On the other hand, they sought to strengthen their claims of diasporic representativeness in the lengthy appendix to the conference's proceedings, which reproduced the fifty-seven 'letters and telegrams' of support that they had received from, among other places, Beirut, Tripoli, Janin, Oregon, Massachusetts, and Germany.[91]

The tactics of the Comité Central Syrien in 1918 and 1919 seem, in the light of such pre-war precedents, not so much a radical innovation as an expansion upon an existing blueprint. Profiting from their experience of mobilization, and from the upsurge in interest in the political shape of things to come prompted by the First World War and the seemingly ineluctable collapse of the Ottoman state, Ghanim and Samna were able to gather telegrams of support for their vision of an 'integral, federal, independent Syria' under French protection from São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Pernambuco, and Belo Horizonte; from La Paz, Rivera, Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, and 'Mexico and Central America'; from New York and Los Angeles; from Manchester; from Sydney; from Paris; from Cairo and Alexandria; from Dakar, Thiès, and Conakry; and from 'Syria itself'. Ghanim insisted that these various 'committees and national groupings', spread throughout the *mahjar*, had 'mandated the Committee over which I have the honour of presiding' to work for the realization of the political vision they espoused, providing him with 'considerations, documents, protestations … and opinions' that he sought to gather and present to the 'Peace Conference'.[92]

For 'Syrian public opinion' did exist, 'despite centuries of the most barbaric oppression'. And, although it had 'no official organ to manifest' its desires – a lacuna, Ghanim suggested, that he himself could fill – its 'wishes' were 'beyond doubt'. Syria 'unanimously calls for the strict application of the principles of the independence of nationalities and the freedom of peoples for which the Allies have been fighting since 1914'. Hoping to become 'a free nation', it 'demand[ed] that this liberty extend to the entirety of the country' and called for 'unity within its natural borders'. It would not, he stressed, 'countenance a dismemberment through which the Allies would place themselves in flagrant contradiction with the driving principles of their [own] policy', and that would 'infringe upon [Syria's] natural rights, and violate all the lessons of history, geography, [and] ethnography'.[93]

90 Al-Nahda, *al-Kitab*, pp. 36, 40.

91 Hizb al-Lamarkaziyya, *al-Mu'tamar*, pp. 3, 7, 150–207.

92 Comité Central Syrien, *La question syrienne exposée par les Syriens*, Paris: n.p., 1919, pp. 5, 42–5.

93 Comité de l'Orient, *La question syrienne*, p. 6.

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With these words, Ghanim fought a rhetorical battle on several fronts. He invoked the liberty for which the Allies had gone to war, and the conventional markers of a nationality defined by natural contours and the human contingencies of history. But he also called upon a vision of a Syrian body politic unbound by territory and united in its hopes for the future. This image of a unanimity spreading, in Samna's striking turn of phrase, 'from one end of the universe to the other' was perhaps the most important part of Ghanim's arsenal. Samna, meanwhile, laid equal stress upon the 'exactions' that wartime Syria had endured at Ottoman hands. Such suffering, and the response that it prompted in 'Syrian colonies dispersed across the world', deserved international recognition for a 'people that wishes to live and to take its place' in the community of nations. Those in the *mahjar* had responded 'with a unanimous cry of vengeance' to news of the 'systematic campaign of destruction' that the Young Turks had waged on the 'Syrian people' – an assault 'no less cruel or shameful' than the 'horrid exercise in extermination' undertaken against the 'unfortunate Armenians'. Driven by a 'patriotic explosion of anger', 'Syrian' migrants had rushed to create 'committees', 'groups and sub-groups', all striving for the 'rebirth of … Syria'. Samna therefore resorted not just to a hyperbolic vision of global diasporic unity but also to appeals to Allied beneficence, and to the thoroughly conventional trope of enemy 'savagery', bolstered by an Orientalist stress on 'Turkish' 'barbarism' and 'ferociousness'.[94]

For Ghanim and Samna, such rhetoric was necessary to confront the fragmented political culture of these years. For they now faced not just opposing political visions but also competing claims to representativeness. On the one hand, they confronted the schemes of erstwhile fellow travellers, some of whom, such as Iskandar 'Ammun, favoured the creation of an Arab kingdom under Hashemite rule, while others, including his brother Dawud and Na'um Mukarzil, sought the establishment of an independent Lebanon. On the other, they had to contend with the claims of men such as the Arab nationalist Tawfiq al-Natur. A member of the Faysalite 'Party of Arab Independence', Natur insisted that it 'speaks in the name' of the 'hundreds of thousands of members all belonging to the enlightened class', and 'represents the desiderata of the Syrian people', whose demands for an 'integral Syria' under a 'civil democratic independent government' were 'unanimously formulated'. By contrast, Natur claimed, the Maronite Patriarch, who sought to impress upon the peace conference his own vision of an independent Lebanon, held the 'mandate' of only a 'small minority without any importance'. Meanwhile, the first Lebanese delegation to Versailles, in February 1919, claimed to hold 'its mandate from the great administrative Council of Mount-Lebanon, our national Parliament, elected on a democratic basis by the votes of the entire Lebanese nation'. Moreover, the 'great majority of the populations that inhabit [the] territories' that the delegation wished to append to Lebanon 'also requests this attachment'; its 'wishes', the memorandum noted, 'had been recorded in petitions addressed to the French government'. Similarly, the Maronite Patriarch claimed to act 'in the name of the government and administrative council of Lebanon, whose mandate he holds, as well as in that of the populations' of Lebanon and the regions 'requesting their attachment to it … populations by

94 Georges Samné, *La Syrie*, Paris: Brossard, 1920, pp. 486–92. See also Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, 'The famine of 1915–1918 in Greater Syria', in John Spagnolo, ed., *Problems of the modern Middle East*, London: Ithaca Press, 1992, pp. 229–58; and Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful shores: violence, ethnicity, and the end of the Ottoman empire, 1912–1923*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

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which he is duly mandated'.[95] In presenting their claims before the international community, all sought to use the language of representation. They claimed that they had secured the acquiescence – through the ballot box, petitions, or telegrams – of a majority of the people of the Eastern Mediterranean. In this rhetorical contest, in which all counted on the staggering arithmetic of large numbers, Ghanim and Samna turned, as they had done before, to the diaspora and its 'million … Syrians'.[96]

Conclusion

It is one thing to adopt particular definitions of globalization and civil society and to project them onto bygone practices, holding up the past for comparison against a reified present. It is quite another to look for the particular ways in which historical actors thought about, and used, notions of the globe and the institutions and instruments that they regarded as defining public life and imbuing it with a particular ethical force. As advocates of globalism, the late Ottoman public men who orchestrated diasporic political campaigns such as those for reform of the Lebanese statute or the establishment of a federal Syria under French rule regarded such waves of mobilization as displays of the worldwide dispersion of Eastern Mediterranean migrants and representations of a body politic unconstrained by physical confines. However, these campaigns did not signal a complete abnegation of such territorial markers. On the contrary, they were founded on the notion that the land of these migrants' birth should remain central to their political lives, wherever they were in the world. Political energies were to be galvanized across borders for the sake of the homeland.

Moreover, these campaigns rested on an understanding of associations as central components of public life, bodies that simultaneously stood as evidence of the Middle East's progress and helped to cleanse society of discord and ill-sentiment. But these arenas also served a practical purpose. Useful forums for claim-making and debate, they functioned as mouthpieces for the public men of Paris, New York, and Cairo to present their political demands to the 'community of nations'. In turn, the petitions on which they relied could be held up as evidence of the representative 'mandate' that they held, buttressing their claims to speak on behalf of a broader constituency. These practices are evidence that many of the features of Middle Eastern engagement with the international community in the interwar years, trumpeted as products of the new institutions born of the post-war settlement, were already in place before 1914. Instruments of civility that also served as vehicles for political claims, these associations are an indication of the ambiguities of public life. But they are also a pointed reminder of the vagaries of peremptory periodization.

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95 Antoine Hokayem and Marie Claude Bittar, eds., *L'empire ottoman et les grandes puissances 1914–1920*, Beirut: Editions Universitaires du Liban, 1981, pp. 208–9, 106–7, 197.

96 Samné, *La Syrie*, p. 487.

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