MOBILISATIONS SOCIALES ET POLITIQUES : LES SOCIÉTÉS EN MOUVEMENT
MOBILISATIONS COLLECTIVES À L’ÉPREUVE DES CHANGEMENTS AU MAROC
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Le changement lié au processus de modernité et aux réformes portées par la politique de libéralisation économique engagée par le Maroc, s’accompagne de l’émergence de nouveaux acteurs sociaux qui s’approprient Internet, Facebook, en tant qu’espace virtuel de liberté d’expression pour une nouvelle socialisation des mobilisations collectives. En investissant l’espace public par de nouvelles stratégies et un nouveau répertoire d’action, ils tentent de renverser les conventions, les coutumes et les croyances pour des droits plus subjectifs. La nouveauté de ces actions se situe dans leur extraversion. Ces mobilisations collectives seront pensées et analysées par la sociologie du sujet, une démarche traitant l’acteur à travers son rapport social à l’autre. Ce rapport reflète une tension dynamique qui semble génératrice de conflits permanents, voire de changement. L’article se base sur l’observation, des entretiens et une analyse documentaire.

Mots clés : Mobilisations collectives, Internet, Facebook, espace virtuel/public, activisme numérique, Maroc.

Dans un contexte mondialisé caractérisé par l’accélération, l’encouragement et l’intensification des flux d’investissement, d’échanges et d’informations provoqués par l’ouverture économique et culturelle que connaît le Maroc actuellement – notamment par le biais de traités de zones de libre-échange avec l’Union européenne, les États-Unis et des pays arabes, mais également par


** Article on line

WRITING HISTORY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

THE LIFE, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION OF THE HISTORY OF LEBANON, OR THE VICISSITUDES OF THE PHOENIX

Candice Raymond*

The aim of this article is to examine the conditions and the procedures followed in drawing up an official history of Lebanon, in the sense of a historiography produced and promoted by the state apparatus. It retraces the story of the “history of Lebanon,” a historical discourse integral to the formation of the state, when initially the very pertinence of whose object was called into question and whose main statements were disputed. The article then describes the processes by which this historiography was reconfigured in order to form the basis of a minimal and default national history after the civil war that nevertheless reflects an unprecedented narrowing of positions within Lebanese society, and a desire for consensus that is stronger than expected in view of the persisting divisions between the different communities.

Key words: Lebanon, historiography, official history, national history, Lebanonism.

From a Biblical toponym referring to the snow-capped mountain range that extends along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean, Lebanon has become an object of history. Furthermore, in the work of many contemporary Lebanese authors it has become a historical subject in itself, in the same way that Europe, according to Ferdinand Pessoa, “from being a simple geographical description [wanted] to become a civilized person” (Pessoa 1993, 37).

Kamal Salibi¹ points out that the term Jabal Lubnan (Mount Lebanon) mentioned by Arab geographers and Crusader historians, and a bastion of the

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1. Kamal Salibi (1929–2011), professor of history at the American University of Beirut, one of the best-known and most internationally recognized of contemporary Lebanese historians. Author of numerous publications on different periods of Lebanese history, Bilad al-Sham, and the Arabian peninsula, he also made his mark with one of the first historical works, now a classic, on the historiography of Lebanon and the related issues at stake (Salibi 1988).
Maronite Christian community, only referred to “the higher, northern ridges which overlook the stretch of coast between the towns of Tripoli and Jubayl” (Salibi 1988, 64). It was only at the end of the eighteenth century that the name came to refer to the whole mountain range, at a time when the northern part finally fell under the control of Emir Bashir II Shihab, whose lineage had converted to Maronitism and who already controlled the southern part of Mount Lebanon, known as the Mountain of the Druze, or Jabal al-Shuf. This political unification of the Mountain, following a south-north axis, had been facilitated by a migratory movement of the Maronites begun in the sixteenth century, in the opposite direction, from north to south. This coming together of a political power, the “Maronite nation,” and a territory formed the basis, after the fall of Emir Bashir in 1840, of the first calls to establish an autonomous or semi-independent political Maronite entity in Ottoman Mount Lebanon (Hakim 2013, 30). It is hardly surprising therefore that, for the intellectuals who witnessed this Maronite projection beyond their historical stronghold, the history of Lebanon became an intellectual specialty that is distinct from the religious history of the Maronite community, (Salibi 1959 and 1962). Then its consolidation as a historical discourse, and not merely a field of knowledge, subsequently accompanied the extension of Maronite power in the Greater Lebanon of 1920, with the Mountain no longer representing more than one half of this territory (Firro 2003).

Throughout the twentieth century, this play between the name, the territory, the people, and the power would fuel a so-called “Lebanonist” historiography that from a nationalist position sought desperately to become fully national. The problematic nature of this historiography, like those that opposed it in the name of concurrent national principles (Arab, Pan-Syrian), hinges on the fact that the nationalisms instilled in the intellectual output in twentieth-century Lebanon were largely affiliated with the political strategies of rival Lebanese religious communities. In Salibi’s view, the dispute between the nationalisms was merely a “great confidence game,” “a succession of devious transactions between players who invariably pretended to stand for nationalist ideals and principles aimed at the common good.” (Salibi 1988, 55) In fact, it was mainly the strictly sectarian interests that were at stake, whether for some it was a matter of preserving a dominant position within the state, or for others of renegotiating the Lebanese political formula to their advantage. Thus the definition

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2. In accordance with Lebanese usage, the Mountain (capital letter) refers to Mount Lebanon, while the mountain (no capital) refers to the general geographic area.

3. The expression is understood here in the sense that Western travelers to the East in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries gave to mean the confessional minorities within the Ottoman Empire.

4. Ahmad Beydoun defends a similar position, maintaining: “Hegemony, whether Maronite or any other, is clearly at the heart of the Lebanese problem. It is in order to hide it that the Maronites themselves invoke the idea of coexistence or Lebanese nationalism. And it is to break it” that the Shiites, Sunnis, and other religious communities each put forward their own ideologies backed up by the appropriate interpretation of history (Beydoun 1984, 580).
of national history has been at the center of the sectarian conflict in Lebanon, then of the civil war (1975–1990), and redefining the notion of a unified history has been one of the major issues at stake in the postwar reconstruction.

The aim of this article is not to retrace the history of this Lebanonist historiography and its many rivals, since this has already become well documented in the pioneering work carried out by Ahmad Beydoun (1984) and Kamal Salibi (1988). The article is more concerned with the specific question of developing an “official history,” in the sense of a historiography that is produced and promoted by the state apparatus. More precisely, the aim of the article is to examine how the history of Lebanon, a historical discourse integral to the formation of the state, the very pertinence of whose object is in question, has been reconfigured, “de-Maronitized” in order to form the basis of a minimal and default official historiography, which at the same time reflects an unprecedented narrowing of positions within Lebanese society, and a desire for consensus that is stronger than expected in view of the persisting divisions between the different communities.

FROM A NAME TO A STATE: THE BIRTH OF THE “HISTORY OF LEBANON”

The name Lebanon has been associated with the Maronite community since the Maronite clergy began to record the community’s history. From Ibn al-Qilai at the beginning of the sixteenth century up until Bishop Yusuf Daryan in the twentieth century, and including the key historic contribution of Patriarch Istifan al-Duwaihi (1629–1704), the traditional Maronite historiography has been devoted chiefly to the history of the Church and of the community located in the north of the Lebanese mountain range. It is only from the nineteenth century onwards, when Lebanon becomes a political project, that, in some Maronite historical texts, it also becomes an object of history in itself, and not just a simple framework in which the history of the community evolves (Salibi 1959, 161; Kaufman 2004, 39).

The directions taken by this historiography of Lebanon, which recycles certain aspects of the Maronite historiographic tradition by rearranging them into new narratives, have been heavily determined by the variations in the macropolitical context; first under the Ottoman rule, then after the realization of the Lebanonist ambition and the creation of the state of Greater Lebanon in 1920 under the French mandate, and then with independence in 1943. The main target of the nationalist histories written before the breakup of the empire, such as that published under a pseudonym by Bulus Nujaym in 1908, was the Ottoman leadership itself, which they accused of hampering the Maronites’ progressive democratic dynamic (Buheiry 1981). At that time, the question of
frontiers was not yet a determining issue, which enabled a certain vagueness to prevail as to the definition of the territory as claimed by those authors committed to the Lebanese nationalist cause. The variations, ambivalences, and frequent changes of opinion in the intellectual output of this period indicate that there was a high degree of sensitivity to the fluctuations in the general situation within the empire (Hakim 2013, 8).

After the First World War, when the question of territory arose, those in favor of creating a Lebanese state developed an economic and historic rationale for the addition of various peripheral lands to Mount Lebanon, which since 1861 had benefited from a status of autonomous administrative district; these were Tripoli and Akkar to the north, the Beqaa plains to the east, Saida and Jabal Amil to the south, and most importantly Beirut, which was intended as the capital of the new state. So the rhetoric of perpetual struggle against oppression was replaced by a teleology of state power that distinguished Maronite Lebanonist historiography from Maronite communal historiography. The former reversed the links that tied the Maronite community to the Lebanese territory. It was no longer the community that, in fighting for its freedom, bestows its particular identity on the territory it occupies, but the territory that, because of its specific geographical and morphological features, imposes an identity and a purpose on its inhabitants. The geographic parallelism of the Mediterranean coast and the Lebanese mountains is mirrored by the double functionality of the territory: Lebanon the broker, between the sea and the continent, between East and West, and Lebanon the refuge, the sanctuary of freedom and independence. Henceforth, the state would root its history in the political experiences that have fulfilled these two functions, while the nation would take them as the basis for its specific identity.

Consequently, the Lebanonist historical discourse under the French mandate was characterized by two major orientations. Firstly, like many national historiographies that developed at the same period in the former provinces of the empire, this discourse advanced an antiquity-based tropism, and which, in the case of Lebanon, followed two different courses. The first is neo-Phoenicianism, which flourished in certain French-speaking literary milieus close to the political power, and subsequently at the Musée National, which was set up around this time. It is worth pointing out that, on this matter, the Lebanonist historiography distances itself once more from the traditional communal historiography, since the elders in the Maronite Church refused to hold up the pagan Phoenicians as pious ancestors of the Lebanese nation (Beydoun 1984; Kaufman 2004). This antiquity-inspired tropism was also based on a revived interest in the Roman and Hellenistic periods, particularly amongst Jesuit specialists in archaeology and epigraphy working at the Saint Joseph University (SJU) set up in Beirut in 1875. The law school there, founded in 1913 in association with the University of Lyon, was held up as the reincarnation of the
illustrious Berytus law school. So to some extent, France and its mandatory authority was assimilated to ancient Rome, thus legitimizing in historical terms its “civilizing mission.” Furthermore, the Lebanonist historical discourse also presents another tropism, which might be termed Mount Lebanonist. It is based on the mythology of the secular autonomy of Mount Lebanon and works on the model of the noyau, the nucleus, as analyzed by Ahmad Beydoun. The Mount Lebanon nucleus “had the function of preserving by itself the longevity of the ‘name’ Lebanon, while other parts [of the territory] would detach from it with more or less equanimity, returning to it when circumstances permit them to do so” (Beydoun 1984, 37).

These major historiographical orientations were guided by two pragmatic but vital necessities for the new state; on the one hand, it had to its existence independently of Syria had to be justified on historical grounds, and on the other hand those who criticized the “Lebanon idea” had to be convinced that it was a legitimate cause, and not an artificial creation by the French in the service of Maronite interests. The principles of centuries-old cultural diversity and sectarian coexistence were put forward, while drawing a veil over the contentious sectarian issues that were a hangover from the bloody conflict in Mount Lebanon in the nineteenth century. However, the contradiction between these two objectives soon proved intractable: the first led the historical discourse in the direction of an implicit expression of non-Arab identity, represented in particular by the Phoenicianist elements. This met with strong resistance from the annexés, crystallizing the sectarian antagonisms that the second objective had specifically intended to resolve.

Alongside those partisans of the Lebanonist project who were participating in the intellectual debate of the time, the Saint Joseph University was playing a key role in the creation and the dissemination of the national historical discourse. The Jesuit university had become the chosen place for training and recruiting the country’s political and administrative elite. Moreover, the university was at the head of a veritable educational empire, and enjoyed a significant influence over the entire school system in its supervision of Ministry of Education regulations or the development of teaching curricula. Having already established an active printing press in Beirut during the second half of the nineteenth century, the Jesuits also played an important role in writing and publishing history textbooks for schools. They produced textbooks for their own network of schools, and their teaching staff was asked to produce a series of textbooks for the state schools (Gilbert-Sleiman 2010). The Saint Joseph University could rely on its long tradition of erudition and scientific production in the Orientalist field. As a matter of fact, the historical precis written after the First World War by one of their most eminent scholars, the Belgian Jesuit Henri Lammens, would eventually become a central reference in Lebanonist historiography (Lammens 1921).
AN OFFICIAL HISTORY UNDER PRESSURE

From its creation in 1920 until the 1975–1990 war, the Lebanese state intervened very little in the historiographical domain, maintaining a laissez-faire policy that reflected the way it managed the economy. Unlike most of the other states in the region, Lebanon did not mobilize its political, institutional, and financial means in order to supervise the production of a national history that would stand as historiographical doxa. Its liberalism in this domain stems to a large extent from a constitutionally recognized freedom of education, in the name of which the private educational institutions had long held sway within both school and university systems, and had even defied any attempt, however diffident, at state regulation. However, this does not mean that there was not an “official history” in Lebanon. Initially, this was conveyed by a public institution instigated by the mandatory authorities, the Service des Antiquités, which included the Musée National. It was also expressed in the curricula implemented in the state schools, which the private schools also used in preparing their pupils for the official examinations such as the baccalauréat and the secondary-school brevet.

Some former pupils and teachers from the SJU played a key role in helping to integrate the Lebanonist Maronite historiography into this official historiography, and also in ensuring a sort of continuity between the periods of the French mandate and that of postindependence. For example, Emir Maurice Chehab (1904–1994), the irremovable director of antiquities for more than half a century, was trained by the Jesuits. Alongside his work at the Musée National and as director of antiquities, he taught at the SJU, at the École Normale Supérieure, and then at the Lebanese University, the national public university founded in 1953. Apart from his contribution to highlighting Phoenician archaeological heritage, he initiated a public collection of historical archives, which represents the documentary manifestation of the state’s Lebanonist discourse, and he also promoted a policy of publishing historical sources following the same pattern (Raymond 2013). Another major personality involved was Fouad E. Boustany (1906–1994), a specialist in Arab literature and civilization, who had also been trained at SJU, and was teaching at the university when the French mandatory authorities asked him to produce a series of textbooks for the state schools and commissioned him with the scientific edition of several Lebanese chronicles. He went on to teach at the École Normale, then the École Normale Supérieure, and became the first rector of the Lebanese University, a post that he occupied.

5. In the case of Egypt, Anthony Gorman identifies several methods by which the state intervened in the production of a national historiography: by commissioning individual historians during the reign of King Fuad; the creation of para-academic institutes and think tanks under Nasser; the creation of government committees under Nasser and Sadat, and so forth (Gorman 2003). See also Freitag (1994) for an analysis of government projects for rewriting history in six Arab countries from the 1960s onwards. The author points out that this type of initiatives was not excluding other ways of controlling historiography, notably through censorship, or the sponsorship of historians or works on specific historical subjects (Freitag 1994, 20).
The Life, Death, and Resurrection of the History of Lebanon from 1953 to 1970. At the LU he set in motion a program of historical publications following on from the program led by the director of antiquities, and to which he had also made a major contribution.

What these two players had in common was the same academic background and the fact that they belonged both to the Maronite community and to the body of high-ranking civil servants. One was from the Bustani family from Deir el Qamar (in the Shuf district), from which some of the great lay scholars of the Nahda had emerged. The other belonged to the venerable Shihab family, whose emirs had ruled Mount Lebanon from 1697 to 1841. These were contributing factors to a system of social values that predisposed them not only to favor the integration of the Maronite discourse with that of the state, but also to tilt the historiographical balance in the direction of the latter to the detriment of strictly sectarian concerns. The state-sponsored program of publication, through the Ministry of Public Education during the mandate or, after independence, the Directorate of Antiquities, dealt mainly with chronicles relating to Mount Lebanon at the time of the emirs Fakhr al Din II Ma`n and Bashir II Shihab, who were held up as founding fathers of the state and as heroes in its quest for independence. As for Beirut, which was less easily assimilated into the historical dynamic of the Mountain, these publications continued to praise its ancient heritage. Meanwhile, the two education reforms of 1946 and 1968 perpetuated the discourse linking Phoenicianism with the centrality of modern Mount Lebanon. On the eve of the civil war, school textbooks were for the first time produced by a public institution, the Center for Educational Research and Development (CRDP), and continued to demonstrate an alignment with the fundamental directions of the Maronite Lebanonist narrative, although the editorial board was made up according to a principle of sectarian balance (Gilbert-Sleiman 2010).

Paradoxically, on the other hand, the Chehabist period6 was one of historiographical silence on the part of the state. The paradox lay in the Chehabist experience being based on the dynamic of state proactiveness (regaining control of its core functions, planning efforts, reinforcement of public bodies, new impetus for state schools, and so forth). However, perhaps this silence should be seen as the effect of a state that wished to restore a sense of balance in its position on the sectarian front and to placate the partisans of Arabism in the context of ardent Nasserism. During the whole of this period, the Directorate of Antiquities, which in 1966 was attached to the tourism ministry and was no longer part of the education ministry, stopped all its historical publications. The national public university, meanwhile, which had blossomed under the Chehab mandate, was not used as a platform for Lebanonist historiography.

6. The period that began with the short civil war in the summer of 1958 and the accession of General Fouad Chehab as president of the republic, and which continued until 1970 during the mandate of his successor Charles Hérou.
which did have a voice there, but remained on a par with other ideological
trends. A concession was even made to the Nasserites with the very political
nomination of Zahya Qaddura, a Sunni historian who received her doctorate
from Cairo University, as head of the history department and later the human-
ities faculty at the Lebanese University. Finally, one of the rare breaches of
this historiographical silence occurred when the Lebanese state commissioned
a Sunni historian turned diplomat,7 Adel Ismail, to write a popularizing book
is misleading because it is really a history of the territory and the powers that
governed it, part of the state’s continuing Lebanonist discourse, but carefully
retuned to avoid any potentially polemic issues and to seek compromise on all
subjects involving the conflicting sensibilities related to identity.

In this book, as well as previous historiographical publications sponsored
by the state, the official historical discourse borrows several central narrative
structures from the Maronite Lebanonist historiography: the permanence of
the name (Lebanon), which enables the institution of a historical continuity
spanning millennia, even when this name is “hiding” behind that of Phoenicia
(Beydoun 1984, 50); the centrality of the Mountain and the myth of refuge
for minority communities; the key role of certain founding heroes of the state
and the nation (Fakhr al Din II, Bashir II); and the rhetoric of freedom, open-
ness, and independence. However, in spite of this overall alignment, amongst
different variants of the Lebanonist discourse, the official discourse is always
on the side of the version that is more acceptable to the (non-Maronite) other:
the Mediterranean Phoenicianism of Michel Chiha, for example, prevails over
the anti-Arab Phoenicianism of Youssef al Sawda.8 Furthermore, the narra-
tive testifies to a constant attempt at euphemization or neutralization of the
more contentious issues. The official historiography distances itself above all
from any aspect that might fuel an antagonistic reading of Muslim-Christian
relations, such as the question of the Mardaites9 or the Crusades, where each
official stance taken resembles a preventive mine clearance exercise. The same
applies also to the sectarian conflicts in Mount Lebanon, seen through the
prism of a conspiracy and an external enemy—in this case the Ottomans
(Raymond 2010).

The explanation for these variances can be found in the very position of
the state and its specific aims to maintain peaceful cohabitation on which its

7. As Ahmad Beydoun points out, Adel Ismail comes from Iqlim al-Kharrub, an area on the southern foothills of Mount Lebanon,
and therefore he “shares a feeling of Mount Lebanon minority identity (without any real obligation to do so), and not the majority
identity of the Arab East” (Beydoun 1984, 413).
8. For variations of the Phoenicianist discourse of these two writers, one of whom (Michel Chiha) was one of the main authors of
the Constitution of Lebanon of 1926, see Kaufman (2004).
9. Contemporary Lebanese historians concerned with the origins of the Maronites dispute the precise identity of the Mardaites, a
group of Christian soldiers who settled in Mount Lebanon in the seventh century. What is more, they are in opposition with regard to
the identity of their allies and their adversaries, alternatively Byzantines or Arab Muslims (Beydoun 1984, 161 and following pages).
own survival as a theoretically universal political authority depended. Ahmad Beydoun developed the concept of “the decency of the communities” to illustrate the practices that became indispensable for “transforming the point of intersection where communities meet into the domain of the state. It is as if a part of each identity had to be erased in order to guard against the shock of coming up against the others, and it is the state that occupies—or is—this erased area” (Beydoun 1984, 333–334). The imperatives for containing the historical discourse became increasingly important and gave rise to some instances of self-censorship and “exorcism” (Beydoun 1984, 392), which were particularly prevalent in the state-sponsored publications. So, for example, when in 1955 the historian Asad Rustum, who was chiefly responsible for introducing modern norms in the critical or scientific editing of historical sources in Lebanon, published Mikhail Mishqaa’s manuscript on the dramatic events of 1860 in Mount Lebanon and Damascus for the Directorate of Antiquities, he only published extracts from which all elements likely to revive the Maronite-Druze conflict had been carefully removed (Thackston 1988, xviii). Indeed the state often “delegated” services to a private player, as for example in the case of the Documents diplomatiques et consulaires français relatifs à l’histoire du Liban (published from 1975 onwards): the Directorate of Antiquities and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs entrusted the task to Adel Ismail and his private publishing house so that they would not have to deal with the fallout from the publication of sensitive material, even if this had been carried out within the tacit rules of censorship relating to the subject. This policy of cleaning up texts was ultimately at the heart of the fierce polemic that broke out during the civil war about this series of archive collections: against the unreported cuts, which had been made for reasons of state but were interpreted as signs of editorial partiality, critics of the series advocated a rigorous scientific ethic that entailed the exposure of the “historical truth” in its raw state, even if this truth was the alleged historical oppression of the Christian populations of the Mountain.10

THE ARAB PHOENICIANS AND THE INFILTRATED NUCLEUS

These preventative measures were by no means enough to calm a highly polemic historiographical debate. They were even less successful in generating support for an official historical discourse that remained largely based on the Maronite interpretation of Lebanese history. From the very beginning, the Lebanonist historiography was opposed by the supporters of union with Syria, and more generally Arabism, and the resulting division has shaped the debate about historiography throughout the whole of the twentieth century. Like the

10. For a detailed analysis of this dispute, which began in 1980 with the publication of a “critical study” by the historian Antoine Hokayem (1980), and was taken up again by Adel Ismail in 1998, see Raymond (2012).
initial boycott of Lebanese institutions by the opposing elite, the historians among them began with a process of concealment. As they did not consider Lebanon as the subject, their work did not really confront the Lebanonist narrative (Beydoun 1984, 220). As the unionist plan weakened and independent Lebanon grew stronger, they began a new strategy of Arabizing the history of Lebanon, not only by annexing it to Arab history in general, but also by reappropriating some of its topoi. The strategy resulted in a fixation on the Semite or even Arab identity of the Phoenicians, who were said to have originated on the Arab peninsula (Kaufman 2004; Gilbert-Sleiman 2010). Subsequently, this gave rise to an assault on the Lebanonist citadel of Mount Lebanon by proposing alternative emirate experiences, such as that of the Druze dynasty of the Buhtur in the Gharb, as well as by the “re-Islamization” of Emir Fakhr al Din II and the Shihab line of emirs.

The Lebanonist historiography was also fundamentally called into question during a “Marxist moment” in the 1960s and 1970s. The Marxist historiography put forward an interpretation of the bloody conflicts that had blighted Mount Lebanon between 1840 and 1860 in terms of class struggle. In doing so, it seriously dented the myths of secular coexistence and of an external conspiracy by reintroducing discord and contention into the very heart of the Lebanese social fabric. At the same time however, the Marxist historiography contributed to the crystallization of the centrality of Mount Lebanon, to the detriment, for example, of the history of the cities. The “nucleus,” although it had been infiltrated, had been returned to its role as the source of Lebanese modernity, as it was here that the first popular revolts had arisen, revolts that were of such great interest to the Marxist historiography.

On the eve of the war, therefore, the Maronite Lebanonist historiography and its various opponents were converging on a common object that they were continuously fighting over (Beydoun 1984, 12). The confrontation even ended up by confirming certain sites in their historiographic centrality, etching an image of a “history of Lebanon in counter-relief” where every pattern is differentiated not by its shape but by the color that has been applied to it.

THE HISTORY OF LEBANON IS DEAD; LONG LIVE THE HISTORY OF LEBANON!

It goes without saying that the fifteen years of war that devastated Lebanon between 1975 and 1990 had their effect on the conditions under which the historical discourse was produced. On the one hand, the unleashing of violence between different confessional groups re-activated rival collective memories (de Clerck 2010), thus breaking the “pact of silence,”\(^\text{11}\) which had previously

\(^{11}\) The expression used by historian Paul Preston in reference to the Spanish reconciliation, and taken up by Lavabre (2007, 140).
The Life, Death, and Resurrection of the History of Lebanon
cast shame over any mention of historical sectarian disputes. The removal of this duty to coexist prompted an inherent withdrawal in Maronite Lebanonism, turning it into what some already were denouncing as “political Maronitism,” as well as the unprecedented emergence of a Druze historiography, based on a discourse of the dispossession of their historical rights (Raymond 2010). The founding couple of the Mount Lebanon nucleus went through a bitter divorce, while their offspring set about killing each other in the “Mountain War” that ravaged the south of Mount Lebanon between 1982 and 1984.

Moreover, the conflict led to the disintegration of the central state and the fragmentation of both the urban and national territory; public institutions were either suspended or brought under local control. For example, the Musée National was closed and the Lebanese University split into regional branches that were more or less under the control of local warlords. The collapse of the Lebanonist ideal that had been promoted by the state happened at the same time that it was being overtaken both on the infranational and supranational levels: the rise in power of local entities on one hand and, on the other, reenrollment into a more extensive political or cultural unit—such as the Arab nation, the Islamic umma, or Christian civilization—appear to be the two perspective lines for sociopolitical dynamics that also found their expression in historiography (Traboulsi 1993, 37). Both a renewed interest in general Islamic history and a new growth of interest in local history can be noted, the latter being related to Mount Lebanon, or to areas that had been hitherto neglected (Akkar, Beqaa, and so forth), or to coastal cities, an area in which Greek-Orthodox and Sunni historians were particularly involved.12

The protean suppression of the official history of Lebanon was governed by conditions that would determine the very course of its renaissance. This was because, firstly, “by the very fact of being disputed, the object that had been reduced to shreds was paradoxically confirmed in its unity” (Beydoun 2009, 62). Secondly, the widespread use of historiography by the opposing parties in the conflict meant that it could also play a role in the exit strategy from the war. The Taif peace agreement (1989) was made possible by the exhaustion of local players and conditions that were favorable to a “Syrian solution” (Picard 2012). The accords were based on an internalist interpretation of the conflict, thus marginalizing the view that the war in Lebanon was a “war for the others” (Tuéni 1985). Taking into account the new balance of power between Lebanon and Syria, the agreement decisively settled the contentious matter of Lebanon’s identity, declaring Lebanon as “Arab in belonging and identity” (Art. I, para. B). Furthermore, the agreement charged the state with producing

12. Most of these numerous studies in local history, whether rural or urban history, deal with the Ottoman period, in which there was a huge renewal of interest in the 1980s. For a general overview of this historical output and an analysis of the more outstanding works, see Raymond (2013).
a historical narrative that would “[strengthen] national belonging, fusion, spiritual and cultural openness” (Art. III, para. F, v) through curriculum reform and unified textbooks on the subjects of history and national education.

LEBANONISM FOR ALL?

Although, at the end of the war, most of the players were in favor of a plan for rebuilding the state and reforming the official historiography, there was still many a slip twixt the cup and the lip. However, several initiatives were set in motion, representing a real effort to achieve this goal. The prime minister Rafic Hariri (1992–1998 and 2000–2004), a businessman and politician who sought to impose himself as a central figure in the postwar years, was one of the sponsors of this attempt to reformulate the national history, which he pragmatically saw as a factor that might consolidate his image as the man who rebuilt Lebanon. Indeed, during his first mandate, he too called upon the indispensible figure of Adel Ismail, to compile a collective work in two volumes published by the Hariri Cultural Center in 1993. The first part of the work offered a “general history of Lebanon from the 3000 BC until 1975.” Twenty or so historians from every community were charged with writing a chapter each on a given historical period (Ismail 1993).

In 1996 Hariri then initiated a process for the reform of the school curricula and the publication of unified textbooks; a first attempt had been made in 1991 under Omar Karamé, but had crumbled under the weight of ideological and political pressures in the immediate postwar period. Of course, the new reform process gave rise to persistent and recurring displays of strength between the supporters of an Arab Lebanon and the partisans of Lebanese specificity, each seeking to retranslate the concept of national identity imposed by the Taif agreement in a way that corresponded best to its own sensibilities. When the reform was finally suspended with the withdrawal of the first unified textbooks in 2001, it was seen by public opinion as proof that it was impossible to resolve this ideological conflict. However, this was only half a failure, and indeed also half a success, since in spite of the textbooks being withdrawn, new school curricula were adopted in 2000 and unified textbooks compiled. The historians and educators who were involved in the reform had been chosen on

13. The decision to withdraw these first textbooks was taken at the end of 2001 by Abd al-Rahim Mrad, the minister of education in the new government of Rafic Hariri. The official justification was the controversy surrounding the treatment in the texts of the Arab conquest, which was put together in the context of various “foreign occupations” in a timeline entitled “They Have All Gone Away . . . Lebanon Remains: National Independence” (Gilbert-Sleiman 2010). In addition to this was a conflict of competence between the president of the CRDP and the minister, the latter having decided in 2002 to recommission a board of historians under his direct authority. But the decisive factor in the suspension of the reform was the balance of political power at that moment, and probably a political attempt to block the reform of the curricula and the textbooks, which were based largely on a patriotic rhetoric at a time when the country was experiencing a renewed anti–Syrian unrest.
a sectarian basis but they were able to work together and outline a consensual narrative. However, they did fail to defend the result of their work once it had entered the political field, which at the time was beset by serious contention (Gilbert-Sleiman, 2010).

Closer examination of the narratives put forward by the Hariri Cultural Center, and by the aborted reform of 1996–2001, reveals that, undeniably, efforts were made to reconcile the varying contradictory ideologies within a conservative national historical discourse. The aims of national integration that defined the narratives were set within a discursive strategy based on a form of exacerbated patriotism engendering a sort of “Lebanonism for all.” The continuity of the Lebanese experience over the millennia was restored and the Phoenicians, definitely considered as Semites, recognized as putative ancestors. The attempt to integrate the areas annexed to Mount Lebanon in 1920 resulted, paradoxically, in reestablishing the centrality of Mount Lebanon. Henceforth, their history is no longer concealed, but is only approached from the perspective of their precursory relationship with Mount Lebanon, or in a separate chapter unconnected to the main narrative. Finally, the myth of communal coexistence becomes the alpha and omega of the new national discourse, and it is in accordance with this that a new classification for Lebanese heroes is established: Fakhr al Din II is reinstated in his role as father of the nation and hero of the quest for independence (on the condition that the issue of his confessional identity is put on hold), and the Christian and Muslim nationalists known as the “1916 martyrs” are promoted, while the overly controversial Bashir II Shihab is noticeably sidelined in this new Lebanese pantheon. As for the dual function of the territory, it is partially reinterpreted: Lebanon the broker remains, while Lebanon the refuge is replaced by Lebanon the message, and the territory becomes the cradle of an experience of religious diversity which is assigned a universal value.

To date, this new history of Lebanon is not something that is promoted or widely disseminated in Lebanese society. The volumes produced by the Hariri Cultural Center have been distributed in intellectual and political circles and the school textbooks that were withdrawn have sometimes found a new lease of life as photocopies in few private schools, but obviously this does not mean that the new historical discourse is being widely popularized.

14. Beyond this particular book and the reformed curricula, this phenomenon is taken up further by Kaufman (2004, 249–250).
15. Reference to the nationalist militants who were publicly hanged on the orders of the Ottoman military authorities, on discovery of their secret correspondence with the French consul. Up until today the “fête des martyrs” commemorates the execution of some of these militants in Beirut’s main square, which was baptized “Place des Martyrs” by the French mandate’s authorities.
16. This expression used by John-Paul II in his “Apostolic Letter to All Bishops in the Catholic Church on the Situation in Lebanon” (1989) and was popularized during the papal visit to Lebanon in 1997.
17. As observed by Catherine Le Thomas in some Mabarrat schools founded by the Shiite ulama Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah (Le Thomas 2012, 234).
However, there are indications of converging opinions around its main statements in various sectors of the academic, intellectual, or pedagogic world, and even beyond. At the same time as the collective, politically driven initiatives to rewrite the national history, there are several works on similar lines published by individual historians who wanted to contribute by producing a general, updated history of Lebanon or by pinpointing certain episodes or key historical figures. Some school textbooks published by private publishing houses concerned with expanding their commercial opportunities are also keen to adopt this new discourse and therefore “smooth out the historical bumps in the name of national harmony and present a consensual or even sanitized view of Lebanese history” (Le Thomas 2012, 226). Finally, from regular socializing in intellectual circles in Lebanon, including book fairs and other various cultural events, it is clear that being “historiographically correct”, which implies being patriotic and consensual, is becoming the new norm when taking a public stance.

It might be concluded that this is simply a return to the coexistence imperative, which already before the war had imposed certain taboos and taken the rough edges off the historical publications that were sponsored by the state. However, other more or less situational factors went towards consolidating this discourse. Among these factors, there was a noticeable strengthening of a “distinct sense of territorial identity” (Salibi 1988, 222), henceforth shared by a vast majority of the country’s population.19 Added to that was the decoupling of the state and the Maronite community, which until 2005 had gone through a period of deep depression and had found itself on the sidelines of political power. The end of Maronite domination within the Lebanese state probably enabled certain elements of its historiographical tradition to be reappropriated. Emptied of their sectarian implications, these elements provided a line of national history that was acceptable to community players who were now enjoying an improved position within the state.20 Elements that were less likely to be reappropriated, or that compromised the ideal of coexistence, fell under the veil of “the decency of the communities,” whose capacity to circumscribe the historical discourse has remained in full force and effect in the postwar period.

18. See for example, the extensive Histoire du Liban by Boutros Dib (2006), the former ambassador and rector of the Lebanese University, or the less widely distributed, but typical work on Emir Fakh al Din II Ma’n by a professor of the Lebanese University (Raad 2005).
19. This consolidation of the sense of a proper Lebanese identity was sourced by Theodor Hanf in various opinion polls carried out during the 1980s, then again in 2002 (Hanf 2003). Besides, the results are also evidence that it is perfectly compatible with the concomitant strengthening amongst the participants of a feeling of solidarity with their own religious community.
20. In the 1980s, Ahmad Beydoun explained the “irredentism” that, for a long time, had characterized the Sunni ideological (and historiographic) output by the fact that the Sunni intelligentsia recruited “most of its elements in milieus that were put at a distance from the powerbase,” rather than those who were integrated within the circles of state (Beydoun 1984, 577). Conversely, it can be noted that the Sunni historians who are nowadays the most likely to subscribe to neo-Lebanonism are the ones in close connection with the core political establishment.
CONCLUSION

Confronted with the shortcomings of state that were merely renewed by the post-war political configuration, this new “history of Lebanon” has still not succeeded in achieving full official recognition, as evidenced by the final collapse of the process to reform the school textbooks. However, it certainly gained some ground with regard to collective representations. On the other hand, it is far from being widely accepted by academics, for whom it merely constitutes one discourse among many others, and for that matter, the one least in tune with recent developments in historical research. Nevertheless, the academic specialists’ disaffection for the literary genre of the general history has left the way clear for this historiography of the lowest common denominator, since there was no alternative to match against it.

At a time when in many Arab states there are increasingly urgent calls for the deconstruction of official histories and the pluralization of historical narratives, it seems paradoxical that in Lebanon the search for a unified and unifying national history should be one of the objectives of the postwar period, and that the achievement of this goal should be one of the criteria by which the reconstruction of the state will be judged. This greatly desired new history of Lebanon will only represent a new fiction, but as Kamal Salibi points out, it will be a “fiction which is equally complimentary to all the parties concerned [and which might therefore] stand a chance of gaining common acceptance.” However, he goes on to say, “historical self-deception is a luxury which only societies confident of their unity and solidarity can afford” (Salibi 1988, 216–217). Henceforth, probably the greatest service Lebanese historians can render to their society is not to redefine the official historical discourse, but to undertake a history and memory work that serves as a foundation for a process of reconciliation.

21. Evidenced by the popularization of Phoenicianist iconography in certain Lebanese communities, which, before the war, they would have been unlikely to appreciate.

22. The only recent exception to this statement dates from 2007 when Fawwaz Traboulsi’s work A History of Modern Lebanon (Traboulsi 2007) was published. It is too early to judge however whether this book will become a work of reference beyond the intellectual and academic circles familiar to the author. It does represent the first serious attempt at amalgamating the results of nearly three decades of academic research into Lebanese history on both a national and international scale.
REFERENCES


The Life, Death, and Resurrection of the History of Lebanon


