AFTER 1860: DEBATING RELIGION, REFORM, AND NATIONALISM IN THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE

The events of 1860 constitute a turning point in the modern history of Lebanon. In the space of a few weeks between the end of May and the middle of June, Maronite and Druze communities clashed in Mount Lebanon in a struggle to see which community would control, and define, a stretch of mountainous territory at the center of complicated Eastern Question politics. The Druzes carried the day. Every major Maronite town within reach of the Druzes was pillaged, its population either massacred or forced to flee. In July, Damascene Muslims rioted to protest deteriorating economic conditions, targeting and massacring several hundred of the city's Christian population. Although the reasons for the fighting in Mount Lebanon and the riot in Damascus were quite different, the Ottoman, local, and European reactions inevitably conflated both events. Following the restoration of order, the conflict of 1860 was the subject, effectively, of an Ottoman government mandate of silence—a desire to forget the events and proceed with administering the newly constituted Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon. At the same time, however, the sectarian violence prompted an outpouring of local memories that the Ottoman government could neither control nor suppress.

Historians of 1860 have long been preoccupied with piecing together a basic narrative about the events of that year using a variety of Ottoman, European, and local sources. They have not, however, adequately analyzed these sources as narratives that used the war of 1860 to make competing yet highly problematic modern cultural and political claims. Ottomanists have written about the events of 1860 by adopting, more or less unchanged, a 19th-century imperial Ottoman perspective: that the sectarian unrest was a primordial outburst of long-standing indigenous hatreds; that the object of the Ottoman state was to try to contain these supposedly age-old hatreds within a modernizing project of the Tanzimat; that modernization itself was an essentially imperial project to be imposed on a backward periphery; that this periphery on its own had no contribution to make to debates about the meaning of Ottoman modernity except as a foil to modern Ottoman identity. Historians of Lebanon and Syria, by contrast, have largely interpreted the violence within Lebanese and Syrian nationalist paradigms; they have, with a few exceptions, described the Ottomans as brooding...
tyrants bent on stifling Arab, Lebanese, or Syrian (or any combination thereof) quests for modernity. Ottomanists, in other words, have scarcely bothered to investigate how local narratives of 1860 contributed to an empirewide debate about the place of religion in a modern nation as well as the relationship between an emergent concept of citizen within a post-Tanzimat state, and historians of Syria and Lebanon have failed to examine the extent to which local narratives reproduced many of the conceits about modernity inherent in the Ottoman imperial perspective at the same time that they challenged, simply by their existence, the authoritarian logic of the Tanzimat.

This article therefore focuses on a series of pamphlets about the war of 1860 written and anonymously circulated by the 19th-century Syrian intellectual and educator Bu-trus al-Bustani. It reads these pamphlets as a counterpart to an official Ottoman perspective about 1860 represented by Fuad Pasha, the Ottoman foreign minister who was sent to Syria to investigate the massacres. I suggest that while Bustani embraced Ottoman reform, he resisted the authoritarian implications of Ottoman modernization as it was being articulated by Tanzimat-era statesmen such as Fuad Pasha. Yet Bustani, like Fuad Pasha, participated in what James Gelvin has called the “modernist apotheosis” of nationalism. Both men accepted and, to a large degree, incorporated old-regime notions of the commoner as ignorant within an ideology of modernization. Despite the profusion of their writings and proclamations on the violence of 1860, neither actually comprehended the violence as anything other than an expression of ignorance and backwardness that interrupted the march of progress. Despite their advocacy of Syrian patriotism and Ottoman nationalism, respectively, both interpreted and judged within fundamentally 19th-century notions of progress. In other words, they both explicitly resisted European imperialism at the same time that they deployed a discourse of national and tribal time, which was itself based on European colonialist thinking that divided the world into advanced and backward nations, peoples, and tribes.

Bustani and Fuad Pasha, however, disagreed on the lessons to be drawn from the sectarian strife of 1860. For Fuad Pasha, the violence of 1860 reflected putatively local sectarian characteristics that Ottoman reform ultimately would discipline. His proclamations were an expression of modern Ottoman power and official nationalism that developed as a response to Western encroachment and imperialism; they exploited the opportunity created by sectarian violence to display a discourse of a self-avowedly “tolerant,” modern, reforming state uplifting and civilizing its putatively uncivilized frontier. Although this discourse was inclusive insofar as it preached an Ottoman identity unrelated to religion, Osmanlilik, it was also inherently imperial in nature. It insisted that only Ottoman reforms—imagined by the center, then unilaterally imposed on the periphery—could lead Mount Lebanon, and Syria more generally, toward an Ottoman modernity.

Bustani’s writings, however, were a local interpretation of the possibilities of modern Ottoman secularizing power. Bustani, like Fuad Pasha, insisted that 1860 represented the antithesis of a European-dominated modernity. He therefore anticipated a question central to non-Western historiography: is it possible to represent an indigenous national past using a decidedly Eurocentric notion of modernity? He did not, however, conceive of reform as an exclusively imperial project that had to be imposed on a recalcitrant periphery. He saw modernization as a process that recuperated puta-
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The unprecedented ferocity of the intercommunal violence in Mount Lebanon, compounded by the July riots in Damascus, forced local and foreign writers to ponder the meaning of coexistence and to ask how Mount Lebanon could be reorganized to prevent future outbreaks of sectarian unrest. In the aftermath of the devastation, Sultan Abdülmecid dispatched Foreign Minister Fuad Pasha to Syria with soldiers from the reformed Western-style army to investigate the events and restore order, whatever the cost. Napoleon III in turn sent a French army to Syria, ostensibly to help the Ottomans maintain tranquillity. An International Commission was also established—a war-crimes tribunal of sorts made up of representatives from Britain, France, Austria, Russia, and Prussia—to assist Fuad Pasha in his investigations. Many Maronites, emboldened by the arrival of the French and Fuad Pasha, sought vengeance against the Druzes. More to the point, Maronite refugees were afraid to return to what was left of their villages and towns as long as the Druzes were still there. The upshot was that Fuad Pasha imposed a reign of terror in Damascus, where he executed hundreds of alleged rioters, and then in Mount Lebanon, where he arrested Druze leaders, had them summarily tried in a military court, and, despite their protestations of innocence, promptly sentenced them to death for failing to protect the Christians.

Fuad Pasha insisted that his restoration of order in Mount Lebanon was based not on the principle of maza ma maza (madâ mă madâ), or letting bygones be bygones (which is how previous Ottoman officials often had dealt with local violence) but on uprooting local society from its stagnant tribal past and forcibly, yet benevolently, pushing it into an age of modernity. For precisely this reason, he insisted on the punishment of Druze notables whom he considered culpable for the events in Mount Lebanon, for they had, as he put it, shocked the “public conscience of the civilized world.” Further, he issued printed proclamations to the people of Mount Lebanon and Syria informing them that the events of 1860 had deeply saddened, pained, and angered the sultan. He ordered all the inhabitants of Mount Lebanon immediately to return to their stations in society, to desist from politics, and to be obedient subjects, grateful for the bounties showered on them by the reforming and benevolent sultan. If they did not, Fuad Pasha warned, they would be crushed mercilessly by the army he had brought with him. Even before he had completed his investigations, Fuad Pasha was convinced that what had occurred in Mount Lebanon was merely a reenactment of an age-old tribal spectacle—most definitely not part of the Ottoman modernity that he embodied and represented. The events of 1860, in his words, were “pek eski bir şey,” or “a very old thing.”

This was the setting in which Butrus al-Bustani sat down to reflect on the war of
1860. A Maronite from the village of Dibiyya in the Shuf region, near Dayr al-Qamar, which itself had been the scene of a massacre of Christians during the war, Bustani had good reason to write about 1860. He was born in 1819, at a time that the social order of Mount Lebanon had been dominated by an oligarchy of Maronite and Druze notable families and social status, not religious affiliation, defined politics. Bustani was educated at the Maronite seminary of ‘Ayn Waraqa and witnessed the transformation of Mount Lebanon in the 19th century. In the century’s first half, the operative social and political distinction had been between knowledgeable elites and ignorant commoners. Belonging to a religious community had little direct influence on politics; in fact, religious authorities, both Christian and Druze, had legitimized a traditionally nonsectarian political and social order of Mount Lebanon. Bustani saw Mount Lebanon develop from a backwater into a base for American Protestant and Jesuit missionaries seeking to evangelize the Ottoman East, and he watched as Egyptian armies that occupied Syria in 1831 were evicted in 1840 by British-backed Ottoman forces.

Consequently, Bustani’s Mount Lebanon became a center of Eastern Question politics. The contest between Europeans, who insisted on saving the “subjugated” Christians of the Orient, and Ottomans, who were urgently reforming their empire, singled out religion in Mount Lebanon as the basis for, and as a sign of, modern reform. In 1839 and again in 1856, Tanzimat–era Ottoman authorities formally declared the equality of Muslims and non-Muslims and guaranteed the various Lebanese religious communities equal political representation and taxation. The problem that confronted Ottoman authorities, European officials, and local elites was how to transform religious communities into political communities while preserving social order. This problem became a crisis when, in 1859, Maronite villagers from Kisrawan, who had conflated religious equality across communal boundaries enshrined in various Tanzimat decrees with social equality within them, spread their “sedition” to the Druze-dominated districts of Mount Lebanon. Bustani, during this tumultuous period, associated himself with American Protestant missionaries, as their Arabic teacher and as a translator of the Bible. His interaction with the Americans led Bustani to develop a theory of secular, Arabic-based Syrian patriotism within an overarching Ottoman framework. Long before 1860, Bustani’s flirtation with Protestantism; his intimate knowledge of the case of the first Protestant “martyr” in the Ottoman Empire, As’ad Shidyaq (who died in a Maronite prison in the late 1820s); and his involvement with the Syrian Society for the Advancement of Sciences and Arts marked Bustani as an independent-minded individual willing and able to look critically at his own society. Yet his criticism was tempered by a recognition of the complexity of local society—in stark contrast to his missionary acquaintances, whose chauvinism he resented—and a belief in the redeemability of local society and traditions.

The bloodshed of 1860 galvanized Bustani to elaborate his patriotic vision and to speak out against the spirit of violence and vengeance that dominated post–1860 Mount Lebanon. Between 29 September 1860 and 22 April 1861, he anonymously wrote and distributed eleven one-page Arabic pamphlets in Beirut. They were entitled Nafir Suriyya (Clarion of Syria), indicating both an alarm at what Bustani perceived to be the pervasiveness of sectarian animosities and an urgent, if didactic, call to the Syrian “nation” to awaken from its backwardness. As Bustani asked his “compatriots” (abnā’ al-watan) in the sixth issue, dated 8 November 1860, “Awaken!
Awaken! Why are you still slumbering? Each pamphlet was signed simply by “a patriot” (muhibb li'l-watan). Bustani’s importance lies not only in that he was among the first to deal with the war of 1860 in a sustained manner, or that he was a pioneering literary and nationalist thinker; rather, what makes Bustani significant is that he explicitly recognized an urgent need to combat the sectarian legacy of the war of 1860. He advocated a secular liberal citizenship that was far more explicit than anything Ottoman statesmen had envisioned, a citizenship that was not simply decreed by imperial fiat but that was developed, taught, and embraced simultaneously at an imperial and local level. His perspective on how reform should function and his reading of 1860 as a national calamity challenged the imperial and authoritarian logic of the Tanzimat-era Ottoman state, yet it did so within a framework that willingly took up the cause of Ottoman reform.

AUTHORITARIAN OTTOMANISM

Nafir Suriyya contradicted Ottoman authority on several levels. On the face of it, the goals of Fuad Pasha as an official Ottoman representative intent on restoring “order” in provincial Syria, and Bustani, the independent intellectual trying to make sense of the catastrophe that had befallen his own land, were clearly different. Therefore, their views of 1860 were to a large extent incommensurate. Yet both Fuad Pasha and Bustani realized that the end of the 1860 war created an opportunity to refashion local society dramatically. Both anticipated the dawn of a new nationalist age, and both used the print media to elaborate their respective understandings of this nationalist age, vindicating Benedict Anderson’s observation of the crucial importance of print media to the imagination of nationalism. For Fuad Pasha, his arrival in Syria in the aftermath of 1860 marked the beginning of a supposedly rational modern Ottoman rule on a supposedly tribal and uncivilized periphery. For Fuad Pasha, and just about every Ottoman official who followed him to the provinces, the war of 1860—which was cast as the inevitable eruption of tribal savagery, or “an age-old feud,” as Fuad Pasha put it—proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that reform had to be, could only be, an imperial and authoritarian concern, something that was closed to local interpretation. The failure of the local Ottoman authorities was limited, in Fuad Pasha’s eyes, to their inability to foresee, and therefore prevent, the natural tendency of the local population toward irrational violence. The task of Ottoman officials henceforth was to show to the people of Syria (and Mount Lebanon) that the reforming sultan treated all subjects equally, without any regard for their religious affiliation, and to punish without mercy any who transgressed against the sultan’s reforms. In printed circulars, for example, Fuad Pasha announced to the people of Syria his return to Istanbul in late 1861 in the following terms:

People of Syria:
I will soon be leaving you [in accordance with the directives issued by the sultan]. . . . Because the vile traces of the painful events that broke out last year in this region, and which aroused the disgust of people of honor, have disappeared in the shadow of the Sultan’s good will and accommodation, and because the tranquility and security of the country have stabilized, and because initiatives have been taken to promote the well-being of the victims [of the events], you watch me now returning to the Abode of Felicity [Istanbul] taking with me the single
consolation that I will soon see you, with Allah’s blessing, in a [more] prosperous condition, having [put behind you] your formerly wretched state. Because of my hard work fulfilling the mission with which I was entrusted—to labor unceasingly and without exception in this region to achieve the Sultan’s will of compassion and solicitude towards all imperial subjects—I now consider myself to be a Syrian at heart. . . . Without doubt, all should set their minds at ease in the shadow of Sultan’s might, as there will not occur the slightest diminishment in the invocation of imperial mercy that has thus far been extended towards the victims [of the events]. In return, all people should act in accordance with the Sultan’s benevolent wishes, and each class of the imperial subjects should embrace tightly the principles of unity, patriotism (hubb al-watan), and service to the nation by obeying imperial orders and by zealously fulfilling humanitarian obligations. [The Ottoman authorities are] authorized to carry out swift and strict punishment of any individual or group who dares oppose the imperial will.22

The style and tone of Fuad Pasha’s proclamation reflected an official Ottoman nationalism, or what came to be known as Osmanlılık, that could not be disassociated from its imperial underpinnings. His call for patriotism was one that strengthened rather than diminished the hierarchical relationship between rulers and ruled. He could claim to be a “Syrian at heart” because, in Fuad Pasha’s view, all Ottoman subjects were bound by a common nationalism. Yet this nationalism was one in which all subject-citizens had to obey uncritically a father figure, the distant sultan, who oversaw a strict social order (as in the past) but who also treated each “class” with equal compassion and solicitude, a hallmark of Tanzimat discourse that stressed the equality of all subjects before the law irrespective of religious affiliation. In his proclamations to his Ottoman soldiers, Fuad Pasha clarified his understanding of Ottoman nationalism. He informed them that “a soldier is the hand of the Padişah. The Padişah’s hand is justice. He strikes at the oppressor. He cares for the oppressed. Let us show everybody what the worth and value of a soldier is and let all our compatriots know our Padişah’s justice.”23 Fuad Pasha also stressed that “without exception all of the imperial subjects are your compatriots. . . . You must treat each one as a fellow citizen. . . . In any case, being soldiers of the Padişah who loves all his subjects as if they were his children and desires only their happiness, and being sons of a nation of justice and mercy, it is desired that you exhibit zeal [in fulfilling your duties and obligations towards these compatriots].”24 This association of patriotism with paternalism and obedience—and the conflation of the figure of the sultan and the metaphor of the nation—defined official Tanzimat–era Ottoman nationalism.25 Taken together, and read alongside Fuad Pasha’s numerous confidential dispatches to Istanbul during his tenure in Syria in which he inveighed against the supposedly savage manners and customs of local peoples,26 these proclamations advocated religious but not social or political equality. Fuad Pasha’s confidential dispatches further hinted at an Ottoman anxiety about the ultimate place of the Druze and Maronites in a still tentative Ottoman nationalism. In Fuad Pasha’s view, the Druze and Maronites were compatriots—in Ottoman, vatandaşlar—not because they were equal to him but because they were equal in the eyes of the sultan and, more important, because they were equal in their submission to him. Citizenship, insofar as it was acknowledged by Fuad Pasha’s use of the term hemşirilik, was conceived as an empty vessel to be filled by the center, to be disciplined and then reformed by the authoritarian but supposedly benevolent and modernizing power of the imperial state.27
CONTESTING AUTHORITARIANISM

For Bustani, the war of 1860 reflected both a local and an imperial failing. It was a failure on the part of Syrians to realize that they were compatriots, and so Bustani concluded his first pamphlet by reminding his readers: “O compatriots (yā abnā’ al-watān), you drink one water, you breathe one air, and the language you speak, the ground upon which you tread, your welfare, your customs—they are all one.”²⁸ He declared that the war of 1860 held important lessons for any who dared contemplate them. “Among them,” he wrote on 14 January 1860, was:

[t]he recognition among compatriots that their general, and therefore private, welfare requires the manifestation of the ties of unity and harmony between [them]. No intelligent person can deny that the people of Syria are endowed with the highest level of refined intellect and natural nobility and the greatest desire to progress in arts and industries and to advance to the highest levels of civilization. Let those who hate and who are prejudiced against them say what they will. [Syria] is among the wealthiest of nations in terms of her natural resources and her trade location. Syria and her people did not reach the degree of decline, backwardness, and humiliation in which they now find themselves save through their lack of unity and love for one another, their lack of concern for the welfare of their country and compatriots, and their stupid and ignorant self-deliverance to the power and thrall of sectarian, communal, and familial interests. . . . So long as our people do not distinguish between religions which must be left to the believer and his Creator, and the civil affairs which must regulate [a person’s conduct] with his compatriots, or with his government, and upon must be built the institutions of human society and political relations, so long as they do not erect a dividing line between these two principles . . . , they cannot hope to succeed in either one, or in both, as is evident [by the recent events].²⁹

Bustani’s call for an explicit removal of religion from civil affairs was genuinely revolutionary and more than anything else illustrated the interpretative gulf that separated him from his Ottoman rulers. In Bustani’s view, 1860 was also a failure on the part of the Ottoman government because its officials were corrupt and unqualified and because the government was not truly secular. Bustani preferred not to scapegoat a few local Ottoman officials. Instead, he suggested that the roots of failure lay in the overall structure of a government that was unable to separate the secular public sphere from the private sphere. He advocated a secular meritocracy and asserted that only through unity across religious lines could Syrians diminish foreign encroachment.³⁰ In the tenth Nafir Suriyya, written on 22 February 1861, Bustani pleaded with the Ottoman government to select officials on the basis of their achievements and not on the basis of their lineage or wealth, and to make certain that these officials were aware of, and responsive to, local and not just imperial interests and conditions. Finally, Bustani demanded that a firm “barrier” be placed between “religious authority” and “civil authority.”³¹ It was not, in other words, a matter of arguing against a vigorous role for religion in society. Bustani (like many in the United States today) believed quite firmly that “genuine” religion, conceived of didactically as a guarantor of a mythologized tradition of coexistence, provided a moral but not a political basis for secular citizenship. “Hubb al-watān min al-imān,” he wrote in the fourth Nafir Suriyya, exhorting his readers to a civic-minded compatriotship.³² He called for a secular public sphere because he believed it was the only way that members of different religious communities could transcend, without abandoning, a narrow religious
identity and embrace a larger national entity that could safeguard their common welfare. Presciently, Bustani asserted that the mixture of religion and politics would lead to an inflexible political system that could not adapt to new realities, anticipating almost word for word modern-day criticisms of the sectarian political system that dominates Lebanon.

Implicit in Bustani’s *Nafir Suriyya* was a belief that reform itself provided a two-way exchange between center and periphery and between government and citizens. He was convinced that this interaction between center and periphery could lay the foundations for a modern state. Citizenship, for Bustani, was an active process that required and demanded the participation and knowledge of all citizens—they had to be informed and educated, they had to sacrifice for the nation just as the nation had to protect the rights of its citizens. Bustani hoped that the 1860 war constituted a point of departure for rational, modern, and secular rule that would enlighten both rulers and ruled. For Fuad Pasha, subjects would be transformed by the state into citizens; for Bustani, by contrast, subjects would have to transform themselves into citizens. It follows from this that the nation, according to Bustani, was not tied to the person of the sultan but resembled, as he put it, “a string of connected episodes, bounded at one end by our home or place of birth and those it encloses, and on the other by our country and all those in it.” More to the point, the anonymity of the *active* “patriot” who wrote each pamphlet stood in stark contrast to the repeated Ottoman invocation of the figure of the sultan as the embodiment of the nation. Bustani’s anonymity, and his appeal to equally anonymous citizens, imagined a community of equal citizens.

In contrast to Fuad Pasha’s official imperial and authoritarian Ottoman nationalism, Bustani’s concept of the nation was explicitly local—that is, Syrian. It centered on the Arabic language at the same time that it was ambivalently located within an overarching Ottoman imperial framework. Bustani, in other words, was not an Arab nationalist in the manner of post-World War I nationalists in Syria, a Lebanese nationalist, or simply an a-political and quiescent Ottoman compatriot as defined by Fuad Pasha. He did not advocate separation from the Ottoman Empire. He was, rather, a Protestant-inclined, reformed Maronite Syrian Ottoman subject who aspired to become a modern citizen. Modernity for him was embodied in the virtues of tolerance and equality; citizenship was defined by brotherhood, compatriotship, and rights, such as the right to “life, honor, and property,” as well as the right to freedom of expression and conscience. Although he knew that the only way to advance patriotism was to ensure that people felt that “the country is their country,” he avoided mentioning any formal right to self-representation. Bustani was not a democrat, for he took for granted that “enlightenment” and “knowledge” were prerequisites for government. According to Bustani, these attributes were missing from the vast majority of his compatriots—hence, 1860. He was an intellectual whose multiple subject positions defined the possibilities opened by Ottoman modernization but were not limited by any of the doctrinal positions later enjoined by formal Ottoman, Syrian, Arab, or Lebanese nationalisms.

Bustani was most dissident, however, in his understanding of sectarianism itself. Bustani analyzed the events of 1860 as an aberration from the norm of coexistence and as a shocking but temporary (he hoped) madness. He constructed a past (that is,
before 1860) that allowed the possibility of coexistence, a vision that emphasized the contingency of human difference rather than its absoluteness. By advancing such a proposition, Bustani placed himself at odds with his Ottoman rulers. Since the end of the 1860 violence, Ottoman officials had constructed a narrative about the 1860 war that conveniently located the origins of sectarianism in the endemic and tribal nature of local society. The Ottoman version of 1860 originated in Fuad Pasha’s reports from Syria but was later invoked throughout the late Ottoman Empire to counter a widespread European belief in the pervasiveness of Ottoman Islamic fanaticism. The history of 1860, moreover, was incorporated into a larger narrative of an Ottoman civilizing mission in the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire. For example, the son and biographer of the famous Ottoman reformer Midhat Pasha noted that, when his father was sent to govern Syria, he had to contend with the fact that “the population of Syria, composed as it is of people of diverse races and religions, who are always at enmity with each other, had preserved their ancient manners and customs.” This situation presented any Ottoman reformer with the “overwhelmingly difficult task of creating a complete union between all these jarring elements, and of strengthening the Ottoman Supremacy in the country—where the minds of the population were excited by foreign influences.” For his part, another famous Ottoman reformer, Osman Hamdi Bey, who oversaw the creation of a distinctly Ottoman archaeological and cultural heritage, described the Maronites as a remarkably proud and intelligent people, but like their Druze neighbors, with whom they have never been able to live in harmony, the Maronites have proved difficult to bring to heel. Only a few years ago has the joint efforts of the imperial Ottoman government, together with its faithful allies, succeeded in pacifying [Mount Lebanon]; today the age-old hatreds of the Druzes and Maronites seem to have been finally quelled; obedient subjects, they now live as brothers under the legitimate authority of a Christian Pasha sent by Istanbul to govern Mount Lebanon.

Underlying these descriptions, and Fuad Pasha’s own reports from Syria, was an Ottoman understanding of modernity as a struggle with Europe in which natives were merely pawns and victims of European incitement. Just as European authors consistently discerned a sinister (yet baseless) Ottoman anti-Christian and anti-Western plot that instigated the Druze attacks on the Maronites, Ottoman authorities could not comprehend that the local communities were active agents in their own right. In Ottoman eyes, the Druzes and Maronites were locked in an eternal cycle of sectarian violence that Europeans exploited to obstruct Ottoman modernization. Because the Ottomans firmly believed that the local inhabitants were entirely consumed by sectarian passions, any solution—in their eyes—had to take into account, and at the same time neutralize, these passions if it were to succeed locally. To prevent a relapse into tribalism and anarchy in Mount Lebanon, and to modernize the region under Ottoman tutelage, the Ottomans (and European powers that claimed to protect and represent the interests of various local communities) created a sectarian administration in the newly reorganized Mutasarrifiyya of Mount Lebanon.

The Mutasarrifiyya was governed by an Ottoman Christian of non-Lebanese origin who was aided by an administrative council in which the Maronites, Druzes, and other sects of Mount Lebanon were to be equitably represented. This system laid the basis for what has been retrospectively labeled a “balance of communities”—that is, a care-
ful and supposedly proportional apportionment of administrative posts based on one’s religious affiliation. Ironically, Fuad Pasha’s sincere desire to eradicate what he considered to be a destructive innate and tribal will to sectarianism led him to enshrine a sectarian principle of government. The maintenance of an alleged balance of (religious) communities—communities that hitherto did not exist as coherent political units—became the ultimate end of political life. The implicit assumption of all politics henceforth was that, without the equitable treatment of religious communities and their local involvement in politics, the war of 1860 would erupt once more. Therefore, the abiding dictum of all politics was that nothing must be done that might disturb this so-called balance of communities. Everything for which Bustani had urgently pleaded, including a manifestly secular politics that could “accommodate change and reform,” as well as a frank discussion of the meaning and implications of the 1860 events, was ignored. Having created what they hoped would be a lasting peace based on a sectarian “balance of communities,” the Ottoman authorities announced that Fuad Pasha had succeeded in “obliterating all traces of the painful events” of 1860. He returned to Istanbul. The memory of 1860 was officially abolished.

MEMORY AND PUNISHMENT

By not dwelling on an obviously divisive history, the Ottomans adopted a strategy of peace-making that foreshadowed later Lebanese government attempts to deal with the legacy of the 1975 Civil War. However, the Ottoman presumption of having uprooted all traces of the events of 1860 by virtue of having decreed it succeeded only in covering up a furious war of narration that was being waged on the margins of Ottoman order. From oral histories to printed anonymous reflections (including Bustani’s), from petitions addressed to various governments to the publication of books in British-occupied Egypt after 1882, this war of narration belied any official pretense of collective amnesia. In a sense, the contradiction between Ottoman decree and local memory underscored the limits of Ottoman hegemony in the post–1860 age. The very “enmity” that Ottoman nationalism was supposed to overcome flourished in post–1860 Mount Lebanon and Syria, not so much because of ancient “tribal” animosities, but because of conflicting memories of a very recent conflict. Rumors abounded about an Ottoman conspiracy aimed at eradicating the Christians of the Orient, particularly among local Christian writers. A Christian chronicler from Kisrawan, Mansur al-Hattuni, insisted that the Ottomans had fomented divisions within the Maronite community, leaving them defenseless before a premeditated Druze onslaught. Even Mihayil Mishaqa, who was far less anti-Ottoman than most of his contemporary Christian chroniclers, insisted that what had occurred in 1860 was a deliberate attempt by the Ottoman rulers to “weaken” their disobedient Christian subjects. Muslim notables in Damascus, for their part, left behind manuscripts in which they exonerated themselves by blaming the Kurds and the Druzes for the Damascus riots. In a sense, these narratives of blame functioned to preserve a sense of communal and social coherence: by attributing the violence of 1860 to the non-Damascene Druzes or to the “ignorant” rabble, notables such as Muhammad Abu al-Sa’ud ibn Ahmad al-Hasibi sought to restore the tarnished reputation of the city’s traditional Sunni Muslim elite, and by invoking an
Ottoman conspiracy aimed at wiping out the Christians, Maronite authors sought to cover up the contradictions in their own elite communal self-representation that had emerged during the 1860 conflict. In the case of Mount Lebanon specifically, the war of narration ran throughout the last decades of Ottoman rule and into the post-Ottoman age. It involved, at first, a zero-sum game in which both Druze and Maronites battled to vindicate their exclusive claim to Mount Lebanon. For example, Druze leaders, while not nearly as prolific as their Christian counterparts, petitioned the British government in the immediate aftermath of the fighting in 1860, claiming that, “[a]s it appeared and is known thro’ out all the land and filled all ears . . . the Maronite nation have premeditated since 1840 (Hegira 1257) about 20 years ago the total extirpation of the Druses from their Mountains.”

The Maronite church, in turn, initially opposed power-sharing in the Mutasar-rifiyya because it felt that too much power had been conceded to non-Maronites. Mount Lebanon, in its eyes, historically constituted a Maronite principality in which the Druze had taken refuge. But at another level, as the possibility of exclusive communal control over Mount Lebanon faded in the decades after 1860 because of what Engin Akarlı has called an Ottoman “long peace,” this zero-sum game was overshadowed (but not totally eclipsed) by what Ahmed Beydoun has called the “historiographical duel over Lebanon” (and what Kamal Salibi called a “confidence game”) in which Maronite and Druze historians both fabricated a history of a multi-communal Lebanon.

As it became clear that neither the Maronites nor the Druzes could triumph absolutely over the other and, in fact, needed each other to justify an incipient idea of an independent Lebanon, the events of 1860 were reinterpreted. This was especially the case during moments of anti-Ottoman sentiment. The massacres of 1860 became one of many historical episodes that had contradictory communal interpretations but also the implicit understanding that the rival community must be incorporated in a meaningful, if subordinate, position within the imagined “balance of communities.” The Maronite notable Yusuf Bek Karam, who posthumously would be mythologized as a national hero in Lebanon because of his (failed) “rebellion” against the Ottomans in 1866, wrote in his memoirs that Ottoman troops actually dressed in Druze costume during the war of 1860, insinuating that the entire episode was nothing more than an Ottoman conspiracy aimed at discrediting the long-standing coexistence of Druze and Maronite notables. The Maronite author Bulus Nujaym published La Question du Liban in Paris in 1908 under the pseudonym M. Jouplain—possibly to avoid undue attention from Ottoman censors. As Ahmad Beydoun has pointed out, although the book depicted the Maronites as a community representing modern values of liberty, freedom, and social equality, and the Druzes as a “feudal” community, Nujaym nevertheless insisted that the civil war of 1860 was ultimately an Ottoman conspiracy to destroy Lebanese “independence.” Perhaps the ultimate irony of the Ottoman denial of the persistence of the traces of 1860 was that the only acceptable narrative that both Maronites and Druzes would ultimately take partial comfort in was that of Ottoman duplicity and treachery and of a putative Ottoman strategy of “divide and rule” in Lebanon that afflicted both Maronites and Druzes. Either way—as a zero-sum game that scripted rival communities as outside the pale or as a confidence game that...
incorporated rival communities in a subordinate position within an emerging Lebanese polity—these narratives tended to reinforce rather than question in any substantial fashion the logic of communal politics.\textsuperscript{59}

Bustani immersed himself in this war of narration by urging his fellow compatriots not to forget, but to reflect on, the events of 1860 and to understand what he saw as their “national” implications. “It is for me to write and remember,” he told his compatriots, “and it is for you to read and reflect.”\textsuperscript{60} Because Bustani resisted the logic of communal thinking held by the majority of Ottomans, Europeans, and Lebanese who insisted that after 1860 the only way to rebuild local society was along communal lines, he became a secular dissident within an increasingly hegemonic culture of sectarianism. This is not to deny Bustani’s evident biases: his recourse to a discourse of ignorance to explain the reasons for confrontation in 1860 reproduced traditional chroniclers’ antipathy toward popular mobilizations; his invocation of “true” religion as peaceful and tolerant glossed over the degree to which religious quiescence had buttressed social violence in the old regime in Mount Lebanon and the extent to which violent religious mobilizations in 1860 enabled bold social and political claims of liberation; and his repeated descriptions of sectarian violence as nothing more than a series of “reprehensible actions” or a volcanic eruption that “darkened the pages of history”—although understandable and, perhaps, even essential for Bustani’s exhortation for tolerance—nevertheless rendered him unable to acknowledge any complexity inherent in sectarian movements.\textsuperscript{61} Bustani, however, manipulated conventional wisdom neither to restore a paradise lost nor to reassert a diminished political, social, or communal authority, as almost every other narrative sought to do. Rather, he encouraged debate about the proper relationship between citizen and ruler in a modern nation and, hence, in the modern world.

In this context, Bustani broached the extremely sensitive question of memory, punishment, and nationalism. While Bustani circulated Nafir Suriyya, Fuad Pasha, of course, was already in Syria discussing with the European representatives on the International Commission the most appropriate form of punishment for the culprits of 1860. Fuad Pasha, as mentioned earlier, sought to punish Syrians both to assert a break with the Ottoman past and to illustrate to his European counterparts on the International Commission that the modern Ottoman state could act in strict accordance with the letter of modern law—in this case, the Tanzimat-era Ottoman penal code, which was itself based on French law. Above all, however, Fuad Pasha’s punishment was meant to reassert imperial authority over recalcitrant subjects—to terrorize and therefore discipline Ottoman subjects in Syria by setting what he called a “salutary example.”\textsuperscript{62} Fuad Pasha reasoned that, if the Druzes were savage because of their actions during the war of 1860, then the Maronites were equally savage because they clamored for the extermination of the Druzes in its aftermath. Punishment, he asserted, was not vengeance; it was deterrence designed to promote the “well-being” of what was regarded as a backward society.\textsuperscript{63} Punishment, in other words, was inextricably linked to—and, indeed, it constituted the physical manifestation of—an Ottoman attempt to rationalize their hegemony in the Arab provinces. It served to draw a very clear line between the rational and modern Ottoman center personified by Fuad Pasha and the not yet Ottoman, ignorant, vengeful, and therefore dangerous inhabitants of a distant periphery. Although it may have been aimed at helping to erase the painful
memories of 1860, it was explicitly designed to leave supposedly pre-modern Syrians with a vivid memory of the power of the modern state whose subjects were commanded to be obedient, passive, and utterly submissive to imperial authority.

For Bustani, the question of punishment and memory was far more complicated, in part because he conceived of Syria as a nation and its conflict as a “civil war” (harb ahlīyya) rather than as a war between perpetually feuding tribes, and in part because he realized that it would be difficult, if not impossible, to bring to a close (khātima) the events of 1860 if the perpetrators of the violence were not brought to justice. For Bustani was clearly in a quandary. As an advocate of Syrian patriotism, he had to believe in some essential ties of brotherhood that could be salvaged despite the massacres, but he also could not countenance turning a blind eye to all those whom he depicted as plunging the nation into mortal danger. In this dilemma, Bustani anticipated once more a central problem that all nations emerging from civil war must confront: where and how to define accountability in the aftermath of civil conflict. On the one hand, he pleaded with Fuad Pasha not to let bygones be bygones. “[O]ur hope,” he wrote, “is that things will not revert to the principle of maḍa ma maḍa as has happened in the past.” On the other hand, he called for Syrians to “look to the future” rather than “[dwell] on the past.” Accountability, for Bustani, had to go hand in hand with an effort to revive a spirit of coexistence that he firmly believed already existed in Syria. For Fuad Pasha, the task at hand was to rein in age-old enmities and introduce a notion of coexistence under the auspices of an authoritarian state that, although not overtly secular, held all communities at an equal distance. Although both men desired to promote a tolerant society, they sought to achieve it within very different cultural and national frameworks. For Bustani, tolerance could be the product only of simultaneous revolutions in state and society. The inculcation of an active discerning citizenship that was cognizant of the lessons of its own history was just as important for him as the establishment of a secular state that enforced justice equally on all citizens, regardless of their religious background. For this reason, Bustani would go on to establish the National School (al-madrasa al-wataniyya) in Beirut in 1864 to promote a secular education that, he hoped, would supplant the sectarian consciousness that had manifested itself in 1860.

CONCLUSION: THE LIMITS OF SECULARISM

Bustani’s plea for secular Syrian nationalism, located within an Ottoman framework, resisted the authoritarian logic of imperial Ottoman reform generally and the emerging culture of sectarianism that came to dominate post-1860 Mount Lebanon. It also resisted the majority of writers who sought to vilify or vindicate one community or another in Mount Lebanon. It did not, however, resist a colonial logic of modernization. Rather, it was shaped—and, hence, intrinsically limited—by it. Bustani ardently believed in what the anthropologist Johannes Fabian has described as an evolutionary “stream of Time”—a 19th-century discourse of progress that justified and supposedly mediated “advanced” European colonialism in the allegedly “stagnant” and “backward” non-Western world. Bustani certainly viewed the pre-1860 past more ambiguously than did the Ottomans. He declared that it contained the basis for modern Syrian nationalism—namely, religious toleration, coexistence, and fraternity—but he also
considered it to be an inferior stage of a universal civilization. In his last \textit{Nafir Suriyya}, Bustani elaborated on civilization, or what he called "tamaddun."\footnote{68} He defined \textit{tamaddun} as a state of moral, social, and political cultivation, as opposed to a state of natural barbarism. True civilization, Bustani continued, could be based only on the uplift of each individual, men and women, and on the total equality of all. He acknowledged that the Europeans (\textit{al-ifranj}) possessed a great deal of civilization, which placed them "higher than the people of this country [Syria], which in past ages had been a seat of civilization in its own right." But he insisted that civilization was an acquired state that involved "borrowing [but not superficial imitation], diligence, and individual judgment" if one were to "reach its highest stages." Civilization could not be imposed; nor could it be blindly imitated. The relationship between the civilized and the barbarian, he wrote, was exactly the same as that between "light and darkness" or "between the cannibals of remotest Africa who eat each other and the nobles and notables of Paris and England."\footnote{69} Bustani asserted that Syria had just "placed its left foot on the first step of the ladder of civilization" when it was devastated by the war of 1860.\footnote{70} By their savage actions, he lamented, the Syrians had alienated what he called the "civilized world," and, following his own model of development, had lowered themselves to the level of cannibals in Africa.

Bustani's self-implication in the "stream of Time" set the stage for a nationalist discourse of progress in which the West alone occupied the space of modernity, a space of convergence that oriented all non-Western nationalisms. Hence, for Bustani, the events of 1860 represented a regression away from modernity and a decline toward Africa.\footnote{71} By setting up Europe as the apex of civilization, Africa as its antithesis, and Syria as an intermediary between the two, Bustani also unhesitatingly replicated the very language of 19th-century European colonialism, even as he warned his readers about uncritically adopting Western ways. Moreover, by explaining 1860 in terms of an irrational and uncivilized explosion, Bustani echoed the sentiments expressed by Fuad Pasha and the European representatives on the International Commission. The Austrian envoy, for instance, had emphatically denied that the Druze even had the right to "carry the title of 'nation.'"\footnote{72} If for the Ottomans and the Europeans there was nothing worth saving from antebellum Mount Lebanon, for Bustani there had to be or else there could be no moral or political or cultural claim to nationalism. The past as a liability, as an inferior civilization (which resulted in 1860), had to be reconciled with the past as a source of identity and tradition—that is, as coexistence and toleration.

It is in this dilemma of recuperating an autonomous national history through a teleological discourse of progress that Bustani foreshadowed the great problem confronted by all advocates of a secular Lebanese and Arab nationalism—indeed, probably of all secular non-Western nationalisms. By this I mean their simultaneous demand to become part of history—that is, to locate themselves as active agents of a narrative of progress, modernization, and development—on independent terms from the West while also exhibiting a profound inability to come to terms with the dynamism and specificities of their own history. In other words, Bustani, for reasons that are perhaps understandable, did not actually dwell on the war of 1860 except to condemn it using the language of progress that, by definition, reinforced rather than supplanted European colonialist discourse. More to the point, Bustani fired the first shot of a secularist
academic historiography that has been unable or unwilling to come to terms with the significance and implications of sectarianism for and in modernity. Since then, in fact, there has been a basic disassociation between modernity, which is invariably defined as the secular West, and religiously troubled tribal Lebanon, as if they occupy two separate and irreconcilable spheres.

NOTES

1There were many reasons for the war of 1860. I argued in The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Ottoman Lebanon (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000) that amid sustained European interference and Ottoman reform, contradictory local interpretations—at both elite and subaltern levels—of the meaning and implications of European intervention and Ottoman reform led to the rise of what we today call sectarianism.


7For the most comprehensive account of the international tribunal, see Antar Daw, ed., Hawadith 1860 ft Lübnan wa Dimashq: Iajmat Bayrut al-dawaliyya, al-mahadir al-kamila, 2 vols. (Beirut: Mukhtarat, 1996).

8Punishment of the Druze were commuted for various political and diplomatic considerations: see Fawaz, Occasion for War, 185–86.

9Başbakanlık Archives (hereafter, BBA), İrade Meclis-i Mahsus 935/1, Leff. 3, 24 January 1861. Translations mine, unless noted otherwise.


11BBA, İrade Meclis-i Mahsus 851/4, Leff. 2, 24 July 1860.

12I argue this point at great length in Makdisi, Culture of Sectarianism, 28–51.


15For more on Bustani, see Hourani, Arabic Thought, 99–102. See also Yusuf Khuri, Raja‘ sabiq li-‘asrihi: al-mu’allim Butrus al-Bustani (Beirut: Bisan, 1995).

16The society was called Al-jam‘iyya al-sariyya li-ikitisab al-‘ulam wa al-funan, which translates literally as the Syrian Society for the Acquisition of Sciences and Arts.


18Eleven original pamphlets are preserved in the manuscript collection of the Jafet library of the American University of Beirut. They were collated, edited, and printed by Yusuf Khuri as Nafir Suriyya (Beirut: Dar Fikr li-l-abbath wa al-nashr, 1990). All references are to the printed versions of 1990.
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16Bustani, Nafir Suriyya, no. 7, 19 November 1860.
18BBA, Irade Meclis-i Mahsus 851/4, Leff. 2, 24 July 1860.
19Bustani, Nafir Suriyya, no. 7, 19 November 1860. Italics added for emphasis.
20BBA, Irade Meclis-i Mahsus 851/3, Leff. 4, n.d.
21BBA, Irade Meclis-i Mahsus 851/3, Leff. 4, 29 May 1861. Italics added for emphasis.
22Anderson refers to this processes as “official” nationalism, which concealed a discrepancy between nation and dynastic realm: Anderson, Imagined Communities, 110.
23See Makdisi, Culture of Sectarianism, 148–49.
24This process became far more pronounced in the decades after 1860, particularly during the reign of Sultan Abdülhamid II: see, for example, Eugene L. Rogan, “Aşiret Meketbi: Abdülhamid II’i’s School For Tribes (1892–1907), International Journal of Middle East Studies 28 (1996): 83–107, and his more recent study of the Ottomanization of Jordan in Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850–1921 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
26Among the most famous of these works is Charles Henry Churchill, The Druzes and Maronites under the Turkish Rule from 1840 to 1860 (London: Garnett, 1994 [1862]).
27Makdisi, Culture of Sectarianism, 169.
28See Akarli, The Long Peace, 82–84. See also Fawaz, Occasion for War, 216–17.
29Makdisi, Culture of Sectarianism, 161–65. The actual idea of a sectarian administration dates back to the early 1840s, when the British agent who oversaw the Ottoman restoration in Syria, Richard Wood, suggested the creation of a sectarian council in Mount Lebanon: see ibid., 61.
30See Fawaz, Occasion for War, 220–21.
31Bustani, Nafir Suriyya, no. 4, 25 October 1860.
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Not least of which was the rise of the Maronite muleteer Tanyus Shahin, who presented a subaltern understanding of Maronite communalism and the Tanzimat that conflated social and religious equality: see Makdisi, “Corrupting the Sublime Sultanate,” 190–208.


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54The best-known Maronite treatise on Maronite Lebanon actually appeared in the 1840s when the Maronite Bishop Nicolas Murad toured Europe to promote a Maronite principality led by the Shihabs. See Nicolas Murad, Notice historique sur l’origine de la nation Maronite et sur ses rapports avec la France, sur la nation Druze et sur les diverses populations du Mont Liban (Paris: Librarie d’Adrien Le Cler, 1844). For more information, see Makdisi, Culture of Sectarianism, 81–84.

55Beydoun, Al-sira’ ‘ala tarikh Lubnan, 154; Salibi, House of Many Mansions, 55.


57Beydoun, Al-sira’ ‘ala tarikh Lubnan, 281–85, presents an excellent reading of Nujyam’s work.

58This narrative would become official only after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of an independent Lebanese nation-state. The Lebanese government promoted in its history textbooks a narrative of the infamous “marble game,” which located the roots of sectarianism in a children’s quarrel between a Maronite and a Druze boy that escalated because of alleged Ottoman Turkish malevolence against the Lebanese “nation.”

59Beydoun puts it best when he asserts that, beginning in the 20th century, Christian historians began to transform the discourse of Lebanon from being a Maronite refuge to being a series of refuges for a number of different communities: see Beydoun, Al-sira’ ‘ala tarikh Lubnan, 154.

60Bustani, Nafir Suriyya, no. 5, 1 November 1860.

61Ibid., no. 1, 29 September 1860, and ibid., no. 4, 25 October 1860.

62BBA, Irade Meclis-i Mahsus 935/1, Leff. 3, 24 January 1861.

63Ibid.

64Bustani, Nafir Suriyya, no. 7, 19 November 1860.

65Ibid.

66Ibid., no. 3, 15 October 1860.


68Bustani, Nafir Suriyya, no. 11, 22 April 1861.

69Ibid.

70Ibid., no. 1, 29 September 1860.

71Ibid., no. 11, 22 April 1861. This is also implied in Butrus al-Bustani, “Hubb al-watan min al-iman” Al-Jinan, 1870.

72Daw, Hawadith 1860, 1, 84.