# Written Resistance: How the Middle Class in French Syria and Lebanon Utilized Petitions to Fight for Better Conditions Inside the Mandate-Era Classroom

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Chapter 1: League of Nations Petitions, Petitioners, and their Place within the Mandate-Era Story

The children stood outside and demanded entry to one of three Tripoli public schools yearning for the lessons that awaited them inside. The only lesson received that day, however, was via the authorities who taught them a difficult lesson in French colonial policy. Tripoli's two boys' and one girls' school were at capacity when the students demanded entry into the building leaving the police with no choice but to block their way. Students were forced to return to their homes and their parents, but this did not mark the end of their efforts. Parents and guardians were furious that fifteen years after the ratification of the Treaty of Sevrès, which granted France with mandatory power over modern-day Syria and Lebanon, the French did not fulfil the requirements laid out in article eight of the mandate charter which read, "the mandatory shall encourage public instruction, which shall be given through the medium of native languages in use in the territory of Syria and Lebanon."[1] Parents complained that, because they could not afford to send their children to private schools, public school was their children's sole educational option. Tripoline parents' anger was made known through a petition written to the French authorities and the Permanent Mandate Commission's council, which was

[1] "French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon," *The American Journal of International Law* 17 (1923): 177-182.

charged with hearing such petitions, and signed by two hundred and fifteen Tripoline fathers, guardians, and educators.[2]

Bolstering the claims of fuming parents was a petition filed to the committee by M. R. Chambour, who also wrote about the poor state of Tripoline education. In addition to arguing that "the budget is large enough to allow for a higher expenditure on education,"[3] Chambour also takes issue with Tripoli's administrators who refused to legalize the signatures of the two hundred and fifteen who signed the first petition. Chambour concludes his petition by exclaiming that by refusing to support and enforce compulsory education, the mandatory power is "unwilling to lead the population towards the promised independence."[4]

The delegates at the League of Nations Permanent Mandate Commission responded to this petition with contempt arguing that "the petition does not call for any special for any special recommendations to the Council." The delegates dismissed the petition on multiple fronts. First, they pointed to the language of the mandate charter arguing that it did not explicitly call for the mandatory to enforce a policy of compulsory education. They also referenced reports conducted by the mandatory's Department of Education submitted to the League of Nations annually which they argued demonstrate that France was providing for educational needs adequately. Finally, they argued that

[2]Permanent Mandates Commission Minutes of the Thirteenth Session October 2-November 11, 1936, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications 1919-1946 on Microfilm*, held in the Library of Congress's microfilm room, C.500.M.313.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

Lebanon boasts a better educated populous than neighboring Syria thanks to the influence of private missionary schools.[5]

The PMC partially defended France's educational failures by arguing that private institutions had shouldered much of the mandatory power's obligation to provide primary education to every child within the mandate territories. The role of private institutions, highlighted by the PMC in their justification of France's inaction, speaks to the role Elizabeth Thompson has assigned to entities like private schools within her "Colonial Civic Order." Thompson utilizes a "Colonial Civic Order" framework, defined by "constant negotiation of power relationships and identities," to analyze the interactions between the citizens of Mandate Syria and Lebanon and the French colonial apparatus.[6] Within this Civic order, which Thompson argues was first constructed under France's Ottoman predecessors, existed a citizenship hierarchy in which social capital was distributed. At the top of this hierarchy were Christians, Lebanese, elites, and men who received the greatest amounts of social capital. At the bottom of the hierarchy were Muslims, Syrians, peasants, and women who received the least amount of social capital. Schools, like those private institutions alluded to by the PMC commissioners, play a crucial role in Thompson's construct. Missionaries and other foreign actors, who were often at the helm of these private educational institutions, distributed social capital along the colonial confessional hierarchy.[7]

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[5]Ibid.

[6] Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 1.

[7]Ibid.,77.

The pair of petitions submitted to the PMC by the Tripoline also speaks to the high regard that middle class citizens of mandate Syria held for education, and the middle class's role in the negotiation of the "Colonial Civic Order." Middle class participation in the petition process demonstrates that they were especially equipped to utilize the language of the League of Nations and European notions of modernity to communicate the lack of educational resources available to them. The middle class wished to expose their children to a modern education which was viewed as one of the ingredients needed to achieve independence from their French hegemons. Petitions are one of the few sources which tell another story than that of the notables, providing insight to a portion of mandate history not yet explored in depth by historians.

An analysis of petitions submitted to the League of Nations Permanent Mandate Commission related to the shortcomings of the education system under the French occupation, reveals the role education played in the lives the middle class. These petitions are evidence of a broad-based resistance effort spear-headed by the Sunni Middle Class fought on a national and international front and provide the Sunni middle class with a voice within Levantine mandate history.

In conjunction with sources with like annual Department of Education reports sent to the League of Nations, the petitions reveal that the quality and quantity of education, like other social services, was distributed according to your position on the hierarchy of citizens within Elizabeth Thompson's "Colonial Civic Order. A close reading of these sources also reveals that parents had a conviction that education provided their children with the tools needed to survive in a post-Ottoman world, and that the action of petition writing, itself, was a form of resistance.

Keith Watenpaugh, in *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class,* argues that the middle class best embodies the modernity which emerged in the Levant and that they were well-versed in the language utilized by the French and League if Nations. It is through petitions which the voices of the middle-class shine. Voices which are uniquely served in answering the questions which rise from an exploration of the educational experience in interwar-era Lebanon and Syria. These voices fill the educational void in mandate historiography and demonstrate that education was at the heart of mandate-era politics. The middle class navigated a petition process which was convoluted, difficult to traverse, and flowed through French and other officials who acted against the middle-class's interests.[8]

Petitions, and their Role Within the League of Nations System

Petitions were a mechanism inscribed in the League of Nations which allowed individuals and groups who believed that the French administration failed to live up to promises made in the mandate charter, including to furnish the educational needs of Syrian and Lebanese children and protect minority rights, to air their grievances to an international commission.[9] When filing a petition, petitioners were required to submit their petitions to French officials, who would then forward the petitions to the Permanent

[8] Keith Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East; Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 236.

[9] Susan Pendersen, "Samoa on the World Stage: Petitions and Peoples Before the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40 (2012): 231-261, 232-233.

Mandate Council.[10] Susan Pendersen defines the mandates system as "a shaky compromise between Wilson's promise of an anti-annexationist peace and the Allied powers' determination to hang on to their conquest." Article twenty-two of the League's Covenant, which created the mandates system, was premised on "civilizational difference and tutelage," both central tenants of the civilizing mission driving European colonization in the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.[11]

Eric Weitz focuses on the civilizing mission in a discussion on the transition from the Vienna global political system, which he defines as a political order which defined states by their fixed landed territories, to the Paris System, which was embodied in the League of Nations and envisioned nationalism as an ethno-religious concept. Weitz argues that the emergence of this new global order hinged on the idea of the Civilizing Mission. The Civilizing Mission, whose origins appear in the language of the General Act of 1885, was a vehicle utilized by imperial actors to further their colonial ambitions with the promise of eventual liberation for the people they colonized. The General Act of 1885 required that the signatories occupy the territory to "disseminate Christianity and civilization for the improvement and well-being of native populations."[12] This logic was embodied in Article twenty-two of the League of Nations covenant which created the PMC and endowed mandatory powers with a responsibility to bring people of the mandated territories to an "appropriate level of civilization," before granting those

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[10] Susan Pendersen, "Settler Colonialism at the Bar of the League of Nations," in *Projects, Practices, Legacies,* ed. Caroline Elkins and Susan Pendersen (Philadelphia: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 115.

[11]Pendersen, "Soma on the world Stage," 233.

[12]Eric Weitz, "From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions," *The American Historical Review* 113 (2008): 1313-1343, 1320.

people  independence.  It was the intention of the French and British to utilize the language of the PMC and the civilizing mission as a cover for colonialism.  While the PMC did mostly serve French and British intentions, it did provide "an opening for reform-minded organizations and individuals in the metropole, and the rhetorical and sometimes the institutional tools for anti-colonial activists in the colonies." [13]

Susan Pendersen argues that the League of Nations drew upon the rhetoric of the civilizing mission to obfuscate European power imperialism while satisfying the tenants of Wilsonian self-determination.[14]  Laura Robson describes the League of Nations as a body that, "on paper," was constructed to be the first world organization slated with maintaining global peace, but in reality, protected the interests of its "most important constituents, the British and French Empires."[15]  Despite the lack of military or fiscal support, the League was able to accomplish these goals with the creation of a bureaucracy which ensured that international agreements and minority protections were maintained, as well as supervising the Middle East Mandate System.  The enforcement of minority protection was not equal for all nations.  Minority protections were formulated to ensure that basic human rights were maintained, however, these treaties only applied to Eastern European countries, but not Western Europe.  The League of Nations often permitted French and British interference in their mandated territories on the grounds of minority protection, but protections of minorities only extended to "groups with an already established history of national or protonational consciousness developed in the

[13]Ibid., 1341.

[14]Pedersen, "Settler Colonialism at the Bar of the League of Nations," 114.

[15]Laura Robson, *States of Separation:  Transfer, Partition, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Berkley: California University Press, 2017), 25.

European diplomatic exchanges of the late nineteenth century."[16] In the Middle East, the application of such policy meant that Christians with nineteenth century ties to European powers, like the Lebanese Maronites, received protection and Muslim minorities like Lebanese Shi'i were not considered.[17]

The Permanent Mandate Commission was fraught with the same contradictions which embroiled the League of Nations. The PMC was billed as a vehicle created to prevent mandatory powers from oppressing political and religious freedoms, yet it often did the opposite. Most historians have concluded that the mandates were no more than colonies and that the PMC complimented France and Britain's oppressive policies. [18] The Commission comprised of nine, supposedly qualified, members who were meant to be impartial to the policies of their own country's government. Committee members did not have term limits and often served for many years. Of the nine members of the PMC, only four were intended to represent the mandatory powers to ensure that the mandatory powers did not have undue influence over the decisions of the PMC. The principal task of the PMC committee members was to utilize the reports and petitions compiled by mandatory officials in the mandated territories to construct their own reports on a variety of aspects of administration within mandated territories. Areas of administration examined by PMC committee members included developments in liquor traffic, labor, education, and public health within the mandated territories. These reports were then

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[16] Laura Robson, *States of Separation: Transfer, Partition, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Berkley: California University Press, 2017), 28.

[17] Ibid., 24-30.

[18] See Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Thompson, *Colonial Citizens.; Michael Provence, The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).

submitted to the mandatory powers for comment. Then, the contents of the members' reports were summarized and presented to the League of Nations General Council. The General Council scrutinized these reports and the mandatory powers negotiated with a member of the PMC, who was not a citizen of a mandatory power, over recommendations for policy changes.[19]

While the PMC's independence was often challenged by France and Britain, who had undue influence within the League of Nations, the imperial competition within the League and some of the members dedication to its original mission allowed it to become a body that could, at times, be critical of imperial policies.[20] The PMC was designed to work independently from the rest of the League of Nations and the mandatory powers, yet most of the members of the PMC had a close relationship with their home country's foreign policy establishments. This often meant that instead of acting as "international watchdogs," members of the PMC often served as the representatives of their home country's foreign office.[21] Nevertheless, because the members of the commission were so entrenched within their respective home-country's foreign policy establishments, they often negated each other's ambitions. Additionally, because the PMC's work came under the scrutiny of the public eye, the members often felt pressure to uphold the tenants of the League of Nations. Susan Pendersen argues that the combination of these factors meant

[19] Robson, *States of Separation,* 24-30.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Pedersen, "Settler Colonialism at the Bar of the League of Nations," 115.

that the Permanent Mandates Commission was more independent than the architects could have imagined.[22]

One of the principle sources of frictions between the League of Nations General Council and representative members of the PMC was the implementation of policy changes which resulted from petitioning.[23] Petitions were a source of great consternation for the mandatory powers who had an incentive to dampen their effects. France took concrete steps to stunt the impact which petitions had on the League of Nations and the international community. To start, petitions which were written anonymously were not accepted by the PMC. Secondly, petitions, which were first submitted to the Mandatory powers, were not always forwarded to the PMC if the mandatory power found them "trivial" or "repetitive." Additionally, France and other powers were permitted to comment on the petitions before they were presented to the PMC. These comments were often so vociferous, that the PMC felt pressure not to hear a petition at all. Crippling the integrity of the petition process further, was a 1926 denial of a PMC request to listen to the petitioners in person.[24]

Despite some issues petitions present as a historical source, scholars like Keith Watenpaugh have argued that documents contained in the League of Nations Archive, including petitions, has been underutilized while also being "enormously valuable." He claims that "the structures of [the archive's] information collection and its bureaucratic

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[22] Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 60-70.

[23] See PMC reports to the League of Nations General Council, *League of Nations, Documents and Serial Publications 1919-1946 on Microfilm*, held in the Library of Congress's microfilm room.

[24] Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians*, 60-70.

machinery meant that it served as a repository for extensive engagement on the part particularly of local elites from a variety of institutions, organizations, and communities across the mandated territories."[25] Because the work of the League and the PMC was subject to public scrutiny, with "the commission's reports to the council, the council and assembly debates over the report, and even the deliberations about the petitions [being] published in French and English and reported in the newspapers," petitions which were not sent back to the PMC for possible policy recommendations still fell under of the scrutiny of the international public forum and the League's General Assembly.[26] While some petitions never made it out of the hands of the mandatory powers, most of them did and they often challenged the legitimacy and motives of the mandatory powers. Italian commission member Alberto Theodoli was charged with admitting petitions and did so liberally. He relished embarrassing Britain and France because of Italian resentment towards the imperial powers for excluding Italy from mandatory power membership.[27]

It is impossible to argue that petitions provide a comprehensive view of the range of opinions parents had regarding their children's education. The fact that some petitions never reached the PMC and the contents of some petitions were doctored is problematic. However, to ignore this voluminous archive of petitions would be to miss an opportunity to capture voices which can contribute to an understanding of Lebanon and Syria during the mandate period. If read within the context of the colonial archive, petitions are an invaluable source of middle-class voices. Laura Robson has argued that as the colonial powers were imposing policies which were against the interests of the local population,

[25]Robson, *States of Separation,* 186.
[26] Pedersen, "Settler Colonialism at the Bar of the League of Nations," 116.
[27]Pendersen, "Soma on the world Stage," 235.

people learned "to make extensive use of the legal language and bureaucratic mechanisms of the League itself to press their cases against the machinations of mandatory authority."[28] Hence, by utilizing the petitions, historians can uncover the grievances of local actors. Robson, herself, has made exceptional use of the petitions to highlight the diverging visions of the future of nationalism from people within a mandated territory and their respective diasporic communities.[29] It would be irresponsible to claim that these petitions captured the voices of all those in mandate Syria and Lebanon, but they clearly provide valuable insight into the thoughts of the Sunni Middle Class.

Who were the Petitioners

Most of the petitions received by France, and later forwarded to the PMC, originated from the mandate's urban centers. In Lebanon, Beirut and Tripoli were hotbeds of petition activity, and in Syria, petitioners were appealing to mandatory officials for improved access to educational resources in Damascus, Homs, Hama, and Aleppo. There are very few petitions which originate from villages or rural areas. This data corroborates Philip Khoury's conclusions made in his masterpiece, *Syria and the French Mandate*. He argues that the French disrupted a preexisting political power balance in the region between the urban center and rural environs, which flowered in the final years of the Ottoman Empire. During the end of the Ottoman period, urban elites were in control of government institutions allowing them to exploit the fruits of the

[28]Robson, *State of Separation,* 5.
[29]See Robson, *States of Separation.*

countryside. This pattern was disrupted when the French sought to strengthen the nobility in the countryside to serve as a "counterweight," to the power of urban elites. The French challenge to urban power was a source of consternation among urban elites, prompting them to spark political movements which aimed to restore the traditional power balance.[30] Educated members of the mandate's middle class built a political alliance with the urban elites within organizations like the National Bloc.[31]

The middle class-elite alliance and the shifting political winds of the mandate-era explains the overwhelming number of petitions concerned with Syrian independence and the unification of the Syrian and Lebanese territories. Petitions focused on education, however, may reflect the concerns of the non-elite segments of the middle class because educational access was not a concern of the urban nobility.[32] Keith Watenpaugh, who writes on Aleppo's middle class, makes a compelling argument that the concerns of the middle class reflected those of the subaltern elements of society because of their desire to be "modern." Watenpaugh argues that a pillar of middle class modernity was participation in activities which improved life for all segments of society.[33]

Keith Watenpaugh analyses the history of Aleppo's emerging middle class during the years of 1908-1946 in *Being Modern in the Middle East.* In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a middle class emerged in the future mandates of Syria and Lebanon. According to Watenpaugh, the middle class distinguished themselves from the

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[30] Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 9-10.

[31] Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East*, 213.

[32] A.L. Tibawi, *Islamic Education: Its Traditions and Modernization into the Arab National Systems* (New York: Luzac & Company LTD., 1972), 73.

[33] Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East*, 8.

"Sunni Muslim oligarchy" and Aleppo's lower classes by "incorporating into their daily lives and politics a collection of manners, mores, and tastes, and a corpus of ideas about the individual, gender, rationality, and authority activity derived from what they believed to be cultural, social, and ideological praxis of the contemporary of metropolitan Western middle class." The middle class utilized a modernist framework to participate in politics; fighting for full citizenship, the production of culture and knowledge, not just for themselves but for society at large.[34]

Watenpaugh argues that, with the arrival of the French, middle class Alepines were further integrated "into the transnational networks of trade, commerce, and thought" as they continued to build upon precepts of "secular citizenship."[35] An aspect of the middle class's trans-national integration was the introduction to western education which precipitated the growth of a middle-class lexicon which now included nationalist language and concepts. The elite and middle-class, alike, quickly realized over the course of the 1920s, they would need to employ a nationalist political language to achieve their ends, which explains the preponderance of nationalist language found in petitions sent to the PMC.[36]

While many members of the middle class harbored resentment against the urban nobility, they did join forces with the nobility to fight French polices within the National Bloc. The National Bloc espoused a language of Syrian nationalism and actively fought

[34]Ibid.

[35]Ibid., 216, 212-221

[36]Ibid., 236; Extracted from a Report by M. R. Chambour, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, CPM 1806.

the French for independence. Part of their efforts included the formation of a general strike in 1936, which influenced the leftist government in France to ratify a Syrian constitution. The French based the Syrian constitution on an Iraqi model which terminated formal British rule for that mandated territory in 1932.[37] Watenpaugh argues that in the years leading to the ratification of the constitution, rights based citizenship was an important part of the Middle-Class vocabulary, but that these ideas faded when the French failed to ratify the constitution after the leftist French coalition back in Paris, which proposed the constitution in the first place, fell apart.[38] An examination of petitions regarding education challenges this conclusion, however, for as late as 1938, Circassians in Syria were petitioning for the right to have their children educated in their native language on the grounds of the rights promised to them in the constitution.[39]

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Watenpaugh argues that the Alepine Middle Class should serve as a model of other urban middle-class communities throughout the mandate-era Middle East. These people were predominantly Sunni, well-versed in the language of the League of Nations, politically and socially active, and, who along with the urban notables, were consequential actors in the Syrian nationalist resistance against the French. Yet, this middle class distinguished themselves by maintaining an arms-length distance from the French state. The middle class's access to the colonial state thrust them into a

[37]Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East*, 213.
[38]Ibid., 252.
[39]Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East, 213, 252;* Extracted from Report by M. Sakenobe, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications 1919-1946 on Microfilm*, held in the Library of Congress's microfilm room, CPM 2070.

mouthpiece role. They viewed themselves as responsible for erring the grievances of broader colonial society to the French and the League of Nations. Thus, it is critical to examine the middle-class voice within the broader French mandate context. Because educational access was a cornerstone of middle-class ideals, petitions addressing education serve as a window in which scholars can per through to deepen their understanding of these individuals' conception of citizenship and nationalism. Congruently, a middle-class perspective can serve as a lens in which to pen a more comprehensive history of education during the mandate period, a topic that has not garnered much attention by mandate historians.

## Mandate Historiography: Education's Absence, and the Resistance Narrative

Education does have a presence in mandate historiography, albeit limited. Historians, including the field's titans like Elizabeth Thompson and Philip Khoury, have generally relegated education to a secondary position within their broader discussions. Not since A.L. Tibawi, a former official within Mandate Palestine's Department of Education, published *Islamic Education: Its Traditions and Modernization into the Arab National System,* has a comprehensive history focused on mandate-era Lebanese and Syrian education been attempted. There has been a handful of articles published on the subject, including Hilary Falb Kalisman's "Bursary Scholars at the American University of Beirut: Living and Practicing Arab Unity," and J.M. Dueck's "Educational Conquest: Schools as a Sphere of Politics in French Mandate Syria, 1936-1946." Additionally, Ela Greenberg's *Preparing Mothers of Tomorrow: Education and Islam in Mandate Palestine,* while not focused on Lebanon and Syria, does grapple with the mandate-era

educational experience in Palestine. Some of her conclusions should be considered when analyzing the educational experience in Palestine's neighboring territories to the north.[40]

Education first appears within mandate historiography in Albert Hourani's *Syria and Lebanon: A Political Essay,* published in 1946. Hourani, who writes within an East Vs. West framework which dominated the Zeitgeist at the time of his writing, argues that it was through education which westernization first arrived on the shores of the Levant. While acknowledging that the French did not meet the educational needs of the citizens in Lebanon and Syria and that some private educational institutions hurt nationalist ambitions by not utilizing Arabic as the language of instruction, Hourani sheds a positive light on French educational policy, comparing it favorably to the Ottoman system.[41]

It was not until 1972, when A.L. Tibawi published *Islamic Education: Its Traditions and Modernization into Arabic Nationalist Systems,* that a comprehensive history of mandate-era education appeared in the scholarship. Tibawi, relies on records from the League of Nations Permanent Mandate Commission, French and British archives, and his own experience as an official in Palestine's department of education to write a history which details the curriculum, structure, and student demographics of private and public schools found throughout the mandate-era Middle East. In addition to presenting troves of data, Tibawi reaches conclusions regarding general policy, and the

[40]See J. M. Dueck, "Educational Conquest: Schools as a Sphere of Politics in French Mandate Syria, 1936-1946," *French History* 20 (2006): 442-459; Ela Greenberg, *Preparing the Mothers of Tomorrow: Education and Islam in Mandate Palestine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Tibawi, *Islamic Education;* Hilary Falb Kalisman, "Bursary Scholars at the American University of Beirut: Living and Practicing Arab Unity," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42 (2015).

[41]Albert Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon, a Political Essay* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 1, 3, 83-84.

priorities of the colonial state which governed the educational experience. Like Hourani, Tibawi concludes that, in Lebanon and Syria, private institutions founded by French citizens laid the groundwork for a French claim over the territory. He argues that these schools were largely founded on a mission to inculcate the indigenous population with French culture. Tibawi's most important intervention in this work is his argument that the French created a bifurcated educational system which facilitated "cultural chaos" helping to divide the Lebanese national community and consciousness. Tibawi's research on mandate-era education became invaluable to later historians like Philip Khoury, Ela Greenberg, and others who have grappled with the history of mandate education. [42]

While Philip Khoury is not directly concerned with education in Mandate Syria, a discussion on any aspect of mandate historiography cannot be approached without addressing his work, *Syria and the French Mandate.* Khoury writes within a nationalist framework which has come to dominate mandate historiography. His primary subjects are the elite classes which led the National Bloc, and other nationalist and Pan-Arab movements, who he argues were the primary actors within the sphere of international politics. Unsurprisingly, Khoury's discussion on education pertains to the elite experience and education's impact on nationalist sentiment. Regarding nationalist sentiment, Khoury argues that the extension of education to the upper and Middle Classes, which he insists began during the late Ottoman period and continued during the French Mandate, spurred the growth of nationalist and Pan-Arabism movements across Syria. He argues that Ottoman institutions, created to train an elite class to preside over

[42]Tibawi, *Islamic Education,* x-xi, 107, 108-110, 133-137, 141-142.

a modern Ottoman bureaucracy and military, instilled national sentiment in those exposed to this new method of education which emerged during the final years of the Ottoman Empire. Another facet of Khoury's conversation on education is the history of resistance movements' birth within the walls of Syria's few secondary schools. Scholars writing after Khoury, like Michael Provence and Laura Robson focus on these resistance movements and the educational backgrounds of Khoury's elites.[43]

Historians like Provence have continued to examine Syrian and Lebanese elite and the nationalist and Pan-Arab movements they led, but other historians have shifted their focus away from the elites while continuing to write within a nation-state framework. Elizabeth Thompson, with *Colonial Citizens,* sparked a trend in which historians finally began to utilize alternative frames of analyses to write their mandate histories.[44] Thompson utilizes gender and expands beyond the nation-state framework to capture the subaltern experience of the Mandate-Era. She makes the case that the Syrian and French mandate was a glorified colony.

Thompson fleshes out the French divide and rule strategy exercised in their mandated territories and argues that French colonialism extended itself into the classroom, proposing the idea that access to educational resources was dependent on one's position on a colonial hierarchy. The emergence of this hierarchy was, in part, due to a significant an influx of resources in the region. An expansion of educational capital

[43]Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*.

[44]See Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005); Michael Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Hilary Falb Kalisman, "Bursary Scholars at the American University of Beirut: Living and Practicing Arab Unity," *Middle Eastern Studies.*

resulted in higher literacy rates in Syria and Lebanon than had existed during the Ottoman period, but demand for educational access remained unsatisfied. Thompson argues that along with shortages of other state resources, a lack of educational opportunity compelled parents, to resist the policies of the colonial authorities.[45] Other historians like J.M. Dueck utilize Thompson's colonial hierarchy in her analysis. She concludes that the classroom was a place where indigenous actors and colonial administrators negotiated access to educational capital. Furthermore, Dueck contends that foreign private schools created instability because they embodied the colonial policy which favored minorities at the detriment of the Muslim majority.[46]

The instability which Dueck describes partially manifested itself in the various anti-colonial resistance efforts which were waged during the Mandate Era. Philip Khoury was the first to focus exclusively on anti-colonial resistance in Mandate Syria. He argues that notables developed Syrian nationalism to achieve independence on their own terms, and that the movement coalesced within the same political system which existed during the Ottoman-era, when notables acted as the middleman between the Sultan and the population. During the mandate-era, the High Commissioner replaced the Sultan in Khoury's equation. Khoury argues that the notables were the fulcrum of change in Syrian society during the mandate period, but that they leaned on new cultural and societal institutions in the Mandate period, including "secondary schools, universities, and youth organizations." Khoury paints an incomplete picture of anti-

[45]Thompson, *Colonial Citizens,* 1, 1-17, 78-79, 105, 166-16, 282.

[46] J. M. Dueck, "Educational Conquest: Schools as a Sphere of Politics in French Mandate Syria, 1936-1946," *French History* 20 (2006): 442-459.

colonial resistance, however, for his narrative excludes women, the middle, and lower classes from the political equation.[47]

While Khoury's focus is placed squarely on the elites and their resistance efforts, Elizabeth Thompson and Keith Watenpaugh expand their nets to include other classes of people. Watenpaugh brings the middle class into the narrative by examining the modern behavior of the Syrian and Lebanese middle classes. He argues that the middle class, "excluded by customary practices and political theory form structures of power… contested its exclusion and asserted its right to equality, citizenship, and political participation in the idiom of modernity." Watenpaugh argues that "nationalist metanarratives, like Khoury's, "eclipses forms of resistance in the everyday: the unglamorous-and often those acts of resistance particular to women and ethnic and religious minorities." By being modern, its members declared their intention to take a preeminent role in the production of knowledge and culture, not just for themselves, but for society at large."[48]

Elizabeth Thompson also expands the net of resisters by focusing on women and the working class. Thompson uses the term "subaltern" to describe the resistance taken on by the workers, women, and Muslims. Thompson too, looks at the classroom as a site of resistance. She points to the women who dominated the teaching profession in Lebanon and Syria and their ability to open private schools that ran counter to the French

[47]Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate,* 20-23, 217-218.
[48]Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East,* 8.

attitudes expressed in the classrooms of missionary schools, and foreign private schools.[49]

Laura Robson is one of the few historians who uses petitions to the PMC as a primary source to trace the resistance movements in the inter-war Middle East. Robson's contribution to the Middle East resistance narrative is that petitioners inside and outside of their homelands had differing views of the future of the Middle East.[50] Michael Provence also acknowledges the importance of petitions to anti-colonial resistance during the inter-war period, saying that petitions were "the singular feature of the mandate regime that they could not be simply thrown away."[51] Pendersen too views petitioning as a form of resistance.[52]

Nadya Sbaiti focuses on the classroom itself as a site of resistance. In her microhistory examining three separate schools from three separate systems, Sbaiti utilizes personal letters and school archives to demonstrate that teachers themselves resisted the policies of the Service de l' Instruction Publique within the classroom. Sbaiti concludes "the multiplicity of actors within the domain of education turned the space of school into a site for resistance to what was often perceived as cultural imperialism via language and education as a cornerstone for forging their own versions of national identity."[53]

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[49]Thompson, *Colonial Citizens,* 96, 98.
[50]Robson, *States of Separation,* 170.
[51]Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation,* 2018.
[52]Pendersen, "Settler Colonialism," 116.
[53] Nadya Sbaiti, "If the Devil Taught French: Strategies of Language and Learning in French Mandate Beirut," in *Trajectories of Education in the Arab World: Legacies and Challenges,* ed. Osama Abi-Mers (Philadelphia: Routledge, 2009), 69, 76.

Mandate histography has evolved substantially from the time Hourani wrote his first essay detailing the history of the mandate-era in Lebanon and Syria. Yet, historians have yet to truly flesh out the impact educational policy had during the French mandate, and how much of society experienced it. Laura Robson has proven that petitions written to the League of Nations Permanent Mandate Commission are valuable when writing a history of the mandate era and can be used to address some of the holes in the historiography.[54] While having some limitations, petitions which represented parental appeals to promises of unfettered access to education made by the French and the League of Nations can fill a void in mandate historiography and provide a more nuanced view of mandate education than that laid out by Tibawi's extensive statistical data. These petitions provide a personalized look of the consequences of French educational policy, as well as education's actual and perceived role within national and pan-Arab movements. Crucially, these petitions place mandate-era Lebanese and Syrian education, and actors associated with it, including parents, students, school administrators, and French officials at the center of a national and international resistance effort.

…

At the center of the thesis is the middle-class community's view of the educational landscape laid out in front of their children and a broad-based resistance effort which centered around petition writing addressing the shortfalls of the mandate-era

[54]Robson, *State of Separation,* 141-152. In Robson's final chapter she utilizes petitions to reveal the differing opinions of ethnic communities residing in mandated territory and their diasporas.

educational system. Chapter Two captures the petitioner view of education by fleshing out the contents of the petitions and placing them in a proper historical context. The petitions paint a picture of an educational landscape which was absent of the educational resources needed for the Sunni population to participate in a Post-Ottoman world dominated by the nation-state. These petitions also demonstrate that parents were cognizant to the reality that their Christian counterparts, located on a higher rung of the French hierarchical ladder, were provided with the tools needed to dominate the politics and society of Syria and Lebanon for a generation. The final chapter places petitions addressing education at the center of a broad-based resistance. It argues that the act of petitioning was a form of resistance which involved a significant number of middle class individuals, woman, students, and teachers.

Chapter 2: Expanding Educational Infrastructure, Limiting Opportunity: How Petitioners Viewed the Educational Landscape

By the PMC's final annual meeting in 1938, Robert de Caix could no longer hide the deplorable condition of state education in the Levant. In the 1938 meeting, Dannevig an important authority in European educational circles,[55] attacked De Caix on a series of fronts including girl's education, Muslim education, and rural education. After analyzing the 1938 education report to the PMC, Dannevig decried girls and village education saying the situation was "deplorable." She noted that "classes were very big: as the average number of pupils per class was forty-nine. Moreover, the small percentage of pupils who went on to show that standard education in the territory was low." De Caix could not help but to recognize Dannevig's criticisms by saying that "the shortage of schools in the territory was not surprising, because that Syria was a poor country." Later in the meeting, Dannevig questioned the lack of educational opportunity considering Article Twenty-One of the of the Syrian Mandate charter, which guaranteed education to all children and made primary schooling compulsory. De Caix could only respond by saying that "Article Twenty-One of the Constitution laid down a principle rather than a stipulation to be applied immediately-which was impossible for budgetary reasons."[56]

[55]Susan Pedersen, "Metaphors of the Schoolroom: Women Working the Mandates System of the League of Nations," *History Workshop Journal* 66 (2008), 193.

[56]Extracted from the Minutes of the Thirty-Fifth Session Held at Geneva from October 24th to November 8th, 1938 Including the Report of the Commission to the Council, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, C.418.M.262.

The Permanent Mandate Council dismissed al Moutsy's petition citing Article Six of the mandate charter. They argued that French interference in *Waqf* affairs was necessary to uphold the article which, ironically, stipulated that the Mandatory Power was not to interfere with the administration of *waqf.*[57] Additionally, the General Council dismissed the petitioners concerns regarding schools saying that those petitions were the fruit of a propaganda campaign targeted against a specific school inspector in the Latakia region and that co-education was necessary to compensate for the lack of educational facilities in the country. Al Moustsy's and other petitions to the League of Nations Permanent Mandate Commission paint a reality in which the French are forcibly omnipresent in the Sunni community while other confessional communities were free of such a suffocating presence.[58] French *waqf* policy demonstrates that, in comparison with their Christian counterparts, the Muslim community had little control over their institutions which were limited by the state and were subjected to cultural oppression. These realities were reflected in the classroom experience.

When the French landed in Beirut in 1918 they inherited an education landscape which, before the commencement of World War One, was in the midst of a chaotic modernist transformation resulting in the proliferation of multiple educational systems.[59]

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[57]"French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon," *The American Journal of International Law* 17, no. 3 (July: 1923) 177-182.

[58]Extracted from a Report by M. Palacios. L*eague of Nations Documents and Serial Publications 1919-1946 on microfilm*, held in the Library of Congress's microfilm room, *CPM* 1688.

[59] A.L. Tibawi, *Islamic Education: Its Traditions and Modernization into the Arab National Systems* (New York: Luzac & Company LTD., 1972), 47-84; and see Nadya Sbaiti, "If the Devil Taught French: Strategies of Language and Learning in French Mandate Beirut," in *Trajectories of Education in the Arab World: Legacies and Challenges,* ed. Osama Abi-Mers (Philadelphia: Routledge, 2009). In this article, Sbaiti argues that before the French Mandate of Syria and Lebanon there were multiple

During the final years of Ottoman rule, Istanbul began constructing schools which opened their doors to children of all confessional communities, but in reality, these schools mostly served Muslim children. Christian children mostly attended the private foreign institutions which excluded Muslim communities through financial obstacles or segregation. When the French arrived on the scene, this general framework was not deconstructed but altered. State resources were shifted from public institutions to private ones which already had independent funding sources. The French's shifting priorities towards private schools and away from the public school is consistent with the major transformation of Syrian and Lebanese society after the French occupation. That is, the shift in the distribution of welfare to Christian groups and state authority to Muslim communities.[60]

Petitions from 1933 through 1938, after a treaty was ratified between the National Pact and the French government which promised a greater degree of independence for Syrian nationalists, shed light on the desperate situation of parents attempting to provide their children with the intellectual tools necessary to build a state in the ashes of the former Ottoman territory.[61] Middle class petitioners were faced with few educational options for their children, and could not escape the overbearing presence of the state,

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educational systems present during the closing days of the Ottoman era; a private system, foreign system, and state system. She argues that over the course of the mandate, these systems transmitted different national identities to students.

[60] Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 11-12.

[61] See Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate (*Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 386-394. In this section, Philip Khoury explains that a high degree of tension emerged after Ponsot and other French leaders promised greater Syrian independence but failed to live up to that independence. This tension is reflected in the tome of the petitions.

even in religious private institutions. Petitioners made earnest appeals to the international order for an expansion of adequate educational opportunities but were also aware that their efforts were mostly fruitless.

Delving into the middle-class petitioner perspective places a tangible face on the troves of educational data provided by Tibawi. Additionally, the petitioner perspective supplies depth to Thompson's "Colonial Civic Order" by exploring her model within the educational realm. This perspective also dispels any notion that the French contributed to the educational advancement of the largest segment of the colonial population an argument presented, at least in part, by Philip Khoury and Albert Hourani. While the French did expand educational resources during the mandate era, petitioners clearly understood that they were sold an inferior bill of goods which made it more difficult for these communities to find a united political voice to carve out a political presence in the post-war Middle East.[62]

To build a petitioner perspective, it is crucial to place their concerns in the proper historical context. After establishing rule, the French High Commission continued many of the educational policies set out by the Ottomans. Thus, the Ottoman educational environment must be revisited before describing the mandate situation. To draw a comprehensive picture of the mandate-era educational landscape form the perspective of the petitioners, it is crucial to superimpose petitioner views onto the data provided by the League of Nations to fill in the holes left by Permanent Mandate Commission reports.

[62]See Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*, 410-411; Albert Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon, a Political Essay* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 1, 3.

The Ottoman Model and French Diversions

Petitioners were cognizant of the shifts in the societal hierarchy happening right beneath their feet. Dr. Chichakli, who was amongst the most prolific writers of those petitioning to the PMC during the French Mandate, recognized that Sunnis occupied a secondary status during the French regime. In a 1936 petition, Chichakli laments:

> "The Syrian people, who formed a part of the Ottoman Empire, without distinction between themselves and the Turkish people in respect of all rights and obligations, enjoyed full suffrage rights for all councils and assemblies, controlled revenue and expenditure and levied taxes through their deputies in the Ottoman Chamber. Their Constitution was safeguarded, their resources protected, and their liberty respected. There were no customs barriers between themselves and the other parts of the empire … At the present time Syria, which was united, has been turned into several states with various ministers and governments, assisted by advisers and deputy advisers. There is not a single Syrian department which has not at the side of it another French department."[63]

When instituting their educational policies, the French navigated within an Ottoman framework which emerged in the final years of the empire.[64] Modern Ottoman education dates to 1869, with the passage of the Ottoman Education Law, which was part of several modernizing reforms undertaken by the Sublime Porte known as the *Tanzimat*. The decree created dual military and civil systems, called for the creation of am *ibtidaiye,* or primary school, in each village, a *rusdiye,* or middle school, and an *idadiye* or *sultani* (preparatory school) in each provincial capital. At the middle and preparatory level, schools were classified as either military or civilian. Under the new law, students who attended both primary and secondary school received a total of six years of instruction. A select number of students would then undertake three more years of education which

[63] Extraction from a Report by M. Palacios, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications 1919-1946 on microfilm*, held in the Library of Congress's microfilm room, *CPM* 1688.

[64] Tibawi, *Islamic Education,* 26.

would prepare them for instruction at either an imperial civil (*Makteb-I Mulkiye-i Shane*) or military service academy (*Mekteb-I Ulum-I Harbiye*). These academies were in strategic cities, like Baghdad and Damascus, throughout the Ottoman Empire.[65]

The 1869 decree created a new imperial system which ran parallel to three existing ones; the traditional *Kuttab*, confessional private schools, and the missionary system. Missionaries had a presence in Syria and Lebanon dating to the Crusades. Foreign missionary schools were especially important to the development of the educational system during the French Mandate. While missionaries had been present in the Levant since the Crusades, in the mid and late nineteenth century competition between British, Russian, American, and French missionaries, Catholic and Protestant, intensified leading to the proliferation of their schools. Missionaries at the helm of these institutions were protected under the numerous capitulation agreements the Ottoman Empire held with various European Empires allowing them to maintain control over classroom curriculum. Additionally, missionary schools were protected by the *millet* system, an Ottoman concept dating back to the origins of the Empire which allowed religious minorities to maintain authority over a variety of community affairs, including education. These conditions allowed missionaries to have an outsized influence in Syria and Lebanon.[66]

Historians including A.I. Tibawi have argued that missionary schools helped solidify divisions among religious sects in Syria and Lebanon. He argues that "by their

[65]Michael Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 18-19

[66]Tibawi, *Islamic Education, 62-65.*

very nature foreign schools were sectarian. The Protestant schools in particular, contributed to the creation of new sects in an already sectarian environment."[67] These foreign schools were mostly only opened to the Levant's religious minorities and were also better funded than the state schools. Other private schools, established by the native population, were opened to Christians and Muslims but were usually reserved for upper-middle and upper-class children.[68] The main beneficiaries of this disparate school system were the children of Christian minorities who attended school at a significantly greater rate than Muslim children on the eve of World War I.[69] Following WWI, the Levant's educational landscape remained bifurcated and mostly segregated along sectarian lines. In rural regions the *Kuttab* was still dominant, but cities and towns were populated by private native and foreign schools as well as the remaining skeleton of the old Ottoman educational organization.[70]

Shortly after the establishment of the mandate, the French were already making their impact on the Levntine educational landscape, but they tended to work within the existing framework, shifting resources from one school system to the other by instituting a few crucial changes. The French immediately established the Service de l' Instruction Publique, which was "the largest administrative institution in Syria and Lebanon."[71] This

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[67]Ibid., 64

[68]Nadya Sbaiti, "If the Devil Taught French: Strategies of Language and Learning in French Mandate Beirut," in *Trajectories of Education in the Arab World: Legacies and Challenges,* ed. Osama Abi-Mers (Philadelphia: Routledge, 2009), 63.

[69]Tibawi, *Islamic Education,* 62-65; A.L. Tibawi, *Arab Education in Mandatory Palestine: A Study of Three Decades of British Administration* (London: Luzac &Company, LTD, 1956), 21-23.

[70]Tibawi, *Islamic Education,* 83.

[71]Sbaiti, "If the Devil Taught French: Strategies of Language and Learning in French Mandate Beirut," 62-63.

body's authority was comprehensive. It supervised every aspect of educational life including, school openings, teacher training and staffing, student enrollment, hygiene, curriculum, and language of instruction. Officials from The Service de l' Instruction Publique mandated that French was taught in every school in Syria and Lebanon angering parents across the region.[72]

The French were able to control the narrative inside of mandate classrooms utilizing a variety of strategies. Beginning in 1924, all schools, public and private, were required to submit "'a copy of [the school's] curriculum and a list of the textbooks to be used.'"[73] Schools were also subjected to inspections from the High Commissioner's Office for Hygiene, Health, and Proper Moral Development which ensured that French was taught in every classroom.[74] Additionally, the French ensured that their syllabus was implemented in primary schools, public and private, because all students needed to pass baccalaureate exams administered in French to matriculate up the educational ladder.[75]

In Lebanon, the French made minimal efforts to revive schools ravaged by the hardships experienced during WWI when many of the private institutions serving Muslim children were closed. Instead, the French expended most of the little resources appropriated for educational purposes to public primary schools. These primary schools were never well funded and attended by almost entirely Muslim children, and over the span of the 1920s, funding for these institutions decreased. In 1919, the budget of the Department of Education was 200,000 Syrian Liras, and in 1924, it was reduced to

[72]Ibid. 63.
[73]Ibid.
[74]Ibid.
[75]Tibawi, *Islamic Education*, 135-136.

124,712 Syrian Liras. Another aliment inflicting the public system was a lack of trained teachers and opportunities for education beyond the primary level. A teacher training college was not opened until 1925 and there were very few if any secondary school options for students wishing to attend. Funding for public education remained woefully poor throughout the decade and reattendance rates were abhorrently low. In the final report on education to the PMC, the French reported only 177 primary schools housing which housed 19,323 students throughout Lebanon.[76]

In neighboring Syria, the educational options for most of the population was not much better. Again, there were very few options for secondary education and those options were limited to French schools. Like in Lebanon, the French had control over the curriculum, textbooks, and staffing and other important issues through the Service de l' Instruction Publique. Schools were also subjected to regular inspection by the French authorities. In the 1922-1923 school year, the first school year of the French administration, there were 17,000 primary-school students. By 1938, when the final Department of Education report was released, that total only had increased to 58, 867.[77]

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After occupying the Levant, the French built upon an existing educational structure which already encouraged sectarianism. Nadya Jeanne Sbaiti argues in her dissertation that during the mandate period in Lebanon, and to a lesser extent Syria,

[76]Ibid., 133-138.

[77] Tibawi, *Islamic Education,* 141-144.

separate educational systems fostered several ideas of national consciousness.[78] Despite the ethnic isolation which an Ottoman educational framework, tainted by the privileges granted to foreign schools, promoted, the modern imperial system did encourage nationalist thought which crossed sectarian lines.[79] When developing their state schools, the Ottomans desired to cultivate a pan-Ottoman identity, but these schools soon became gardens which fostered alternative national thought during the mandate period. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the death of the Pan-Ottoman dream with the rise of Ataturk and the birth of Turkish nationalism, many of the same leaders who became acquainted during their Ottoman education would shift their sympathies from an Ottoman to a pan-Arab, and Syrian nationalism.[80] The sectarian nature of the educational system also allowed the French to prioritize educational resources to one sect at the expense of the other, which left mostly the Muslim middle and lower classes at a significant disadvantage compared to their Christian and upper-class counterparts.[81]

## The Petitioner's Colonial Education

By 1930, tensions over educational opportunity boiled over when Maronite Prime Minister Emile Eddie decided to take budgetary measures and close one-hundred public schools. This sparked a conflagration which led to the eventual downfall of the Eddie coalition. The closures mostly affected the Sunni populations in the Lebanese coastal

[78]Nadya Jeanne Sbaiti, "Lessons in History: Education and the Formation of National Society in Beirut, Lebanon"(PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2008), 35.

[79]Michael Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 14.

[80]ibid.

[81]See Tibawi, *Islamic Education.*

towns of Tripoli, Sidon, and Beirut. Muslim leaders in these towns were already worried about the state of their children's education before the school closures. While many middle-class families had a tradition of sending their children to private Christian school in pursuit of an education, middle-class leaders were aware of France's "mission civilistoire" and rightly assumed that it was an affront on Arabic culture and language.[82]

In January of 1930, teachers and other dismissed school employees took to the streets and the press to resist the closures. By the end of the month, the streets of Tripoli were flooded with protesters and the PMC was overwhelmed with petitions addressing the school closures. Ahmad Zaki Afiuni, journalist for the Syrian newspapers *al-Sha'b* described the closures of the schools as an attack on the community saying:

> The Muslims of the Syrian coast and in Lebanon cannot tolerate this crime committed against them by the Lebanese government, nor approve the criminal reorganization it is carrying out, especially the reorganization of public education in which 101 schools were closed in a country's who's inhabitants number fewer than 800,000 and in which Muslims are discriminated against, deriving thousands of Muslim children of the right to learn, to be enlightened, and to live.[83]

Parents protesting the Eddie school closures made many of the same complaints that petitioners would make in the final years of the French mandate before WWII. Particularly, petitioners were disgruntled by the reality that they had little autonomy over their children's education and that their children were not provided the opportunities their taxes were supposed furnish. More generally, these petitions paint the sense of futility many in the middle class felt regarding their inability to shape their children's educational destinies and the lack of political power they possessed.

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[82]Meir Zamir, *Lebanon's Quest: The Road to Statehood* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co LTd., 1997), 76-82.

[83]Ibid., 78.

A petition written by Dr. Chichakli addresses two of these issues. Writing to the PMC from Hama in September of 1934, Dr. Chichakli and M. Mohamed Mourtada Keilani complained about the interference of the Minister of Education in the affairs of the Dar el-Ulm school, a secondary school in Hama. Signed by over 1,500 of Hama's residents, the petition voiced the community' s concern with the Minister of Education's direct intervention in the creation of a committee which was to govern the school's affairs. Dr. Chichakli was an influential member of the community and nationalist leader who led efforts to organize the petition after the Liwa Administration Council, a French-appointed council which voted on the matter, did not elect him onto the council. The French, as they would in other situations, justified their intervention on the basis of alleged neglect of the Dar el-Ulm on the part of school officials. This is one of several examples where French appropriated the authority of a trusted local education official replacing them with individuals loyal to the colonial project.[84]

The most common theme of petitions in regard to education during the final years of the mandate is that parents felt like their children did not receive their fair share of educational resources as tax-paying citizens. One of these complaints was lobbed at the French commission by Mohammed Adi Bkhaled of Tripoli, who was writing on the behalf of several others. He was writing about the lack of government schools in Syria, and that Christian schools were receiving subsidies while Muslim schools did not.[85]

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[84]Extracted from Report by M.N. Sakenobe, Petitions Dated September 26th and 28th, 1934, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, CPM 1667.

[85]Extracted from Report by M. Sakenobe, *League of Nations Documents and Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, 216.M.118.

While Bkhaled was not accurate in his conclusion, private schools did, indeed, receive an astonishing amount of funds in comparison to state schools, considering that state schools were strictly reliant on government funding. In addition to alternative sources of funding, private schools did receive nearly a third of the government funds that state schools received. Many petitioners questioned why private institutions were funded at all and recognized that their children had less of an opportunity than Christian children to attain a high-quality education.[86]

In a later example, French officials appropriated authority of *waqf* from the intended proprietor sparking the ire of the community. M. A. Sarmini, writing on behalf of Aleppo's Executive Committee of *Waqfs,* was concerned with the Aleppo Municipal Government's plan to transform the *Osmanieh* Waqf in Aleppo, which is described as being "very rich in property and land" and was home to several schools, into public gardens. The French government describes the properties of this massive *waqf* as being in a state of "all kinds of poverty and disease are rife, in a deplorable state of dilapidation and neglect." The French defense for their actions is telling for it speaks directly to Thompson's "Colonial Civic Order."[87] The French made their decision to supersede traditional authority of the *waqf* based, in part, on the basis that the proprietor, who was a woman, did not properly care for the property, and that Christians and Jews were placed at a disadvantage because members of those communities were charged with higher rents. *Waqf* were foundational parts of Muslim society and petitioners clearly saw that the

[86]Ibid.

[87]See chapter 1 for a detail description of the "Colonial Civic Order."

French were inhibiting their ability to govern the community according to their own customs.[88]

Language of instruction was also a major source of contention in the French mandated territories. While the mandate charter guaranteed that communities could select the language of instruction within schools, French was still prioritized in many of the state schools and matriculation exams were administered in French. Some groups, like the Sunni linguistic minority Circassians, were not given the freedom to teach children in the language they desired.[89] In a petition written to the PMC, Khaled Daghestani writing for the Circassians of Hama and Homs pleaded to the council for the ability to teach children in their native tongue, arguing that since arriving from the Caucasus in 1870 the community remained loyal to their own traditions and the state. Again, the Sunni Circassians, like the Sunni Arabs in Tripoli, saw themselves on a lower rung of the societal latter and an inability to instruct children in their native tongues was manifestation of that reality.[90]

In her work on linguistics in mandate-era schools, Nadya Sbaiti argues that language instruction within schools was a way the French established their colonial rule in the country. She argues that parents and students saw the French language as a

[88]Extracted from a Report by M. Palacios, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, 1806.

[89]Minutes of the Twenty-Seventh Session Held at Geneva from June 3rd to 18th, 1935, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, C. 251.M.123.

[90]Extracted from Report by M. Sakenobe, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, C. 216. M.119.

"foreign 'face' of a reviled colonizer."[91] Sbaiti also argues that, in the mandate's urban centers, the Arabic language was seen as inferior and that its status signified the lowly status Arabs occupied in the societal hierarchy, for familiarity of the French language and subjects was required to climb the ladder of educational attainment. While petitioners viewed their children's educational future bleakly, the French commission and the members of the Permanent Mandate Council viewed the educational landscape of Syria and Lebanon with rose-colored glasses.

## The French Commission's View of the Educational Landscape

While petitioners saw inequity in the mandate educational system, the French in their reports to the Permanent Mandate Council argued that great progress had been made on the educational front since their arrival, and that children of all confessions had ample educational opportunities. Throughout much of the 1930s, French representative to the PMC, Robert De Caix, who also served as the Lebanon's high commissioner until 1923, along with other committee members made positive conclusions regarding the data found in the annual Department of Education reports. The committee members characterized school openings and an increase in children attending school as remarkable progress despite the fact that the percentage of students attending state schools remained the same as it did during the Ottoman era.[92] In a meeting of the PMC during the Summer of 1935,

[91]Sbaiti, "If the Devil Taught French," 68.

[92]Thompson, *Colonial Citizens,* 79: Utilizing French and Ottoman archival sources, Thompson concludes that only 39% of schools in the region were state schools. She argues that this resulted in a far greater proportion of Christians and Lebanese attending school than Syrians and Muslims because there were more private schools in Lebanon and they were mostly opened to Christians.

De Caix and Norwegian PMC representative Valentine Dannevig pointed to the increased number of primary schools and a 1933 law which mandated the construction of primary, secondary, and especially technical schools as evidence of the French's positive impact on education in the region. De Caix remarked that "Syria was in advance of the financial resources of the territory."[93]

De Caix and other committee members also attempt to shed a positive light on the French efforts in the educational space by highlighting the number of the students attending private schools, even while admitting that virtually all the students attending those schools where Christian minorities and foreigners. This analysis by the committee members downplays the dire statistics found in the government's own reports regarding Muslim students. In the report the committee references, there was approximately 96,850 Muslim students taught in 806 schools across Syria and Lebanon compared to the 132,537 students taught in foreign and private schools which mostly served Christian religious minorities.[94]

## Conclusion: A Colonial Education

As WWII began, the educational landscape of the Levant looked much the same as it did during the Ottoman Era. There were separate school systems which featured

[93]Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 157; Minutes of the Twenty-Seventh Session Held at Geneva from June 3rd to 18th, 1935, *League of Nations Documents and Publications on microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, C. 251.M.123.

[94]Ibid.; Report to the League of Nations for the Situation in Syria and Lebanon (year, 1934), Republic of French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room.

varying curricula serving different confessional communities. A deeper analysis into the Levant's educational landscape, however, uncovers crucial developments in the space during the Mandate-Era. Elizabeth Thompson argues that the crux of this change centered around the reality that "the mandatory state subsidized the private, Christian schools heavily, making them in fact quasi-state schools." Thompson concludes that private schools, especially the French foreign and Maronite schools could not have survived without these subsidies.[95]

Petitions submitted to the French Ministry and later brought in front of the League of Nations Permanent Mandate Council demonstrate that petitioners were aware of the reality painted by Thompson, but they also show that while the state was shifting resources away from schools which served the Muslim majority, the French ministry was also asserting an authoritarian presence within schools by controlling the language and curriculum within the classroom. The French did this effectively by administering baccalaureate exams in French, inspecting schools in the name of preserving hygienic standards, and appropriating authority from community leaders through the destruction of traditional Islamic institutions like *waqf.*

After the League of Nations bestowed the Lebanese and Syrian mandate to France, the mandatory state worked within an educational landscape which comprised of four systems; the private, foreign, *Kuttab,* and state systems. These educational systems were already built upon sectarian lines and emitted different cultural traditions. Utilizing the machinery associated with the Service de l' Instruction Publique, the French

[95]Thompson, *Colonial Citizens,* 79.

distributed an educational good along sectarian divides according to a particular group's position on the colonial hierarchy.

The petitioners recognized their reality and were keenly aware that state benefits were being shifted away from them. On multiple occasions, petitioners complained of the resources distributed to private institutions and the lack of educational opportunities provided to their own children based on what they paid in taxes. One petition from a list of seventeen which originated from Beirut, Tripoli, and Saída with signatures from members of the middle class including from "property owners, traders, and manufacturers of those towns, which were annexed to the former Mount Lebanon," highlights that "82 per cent of the revenue of the Lebanese Treasury is collected from the provinces annexed to the former Mount Lebanon…80 per cent of the expenditure under the Lebanese budget goes to the inhabitants of the former Mount Lebanon: this is allotted to them in the form of salaries, road repairs, grants for the promotion of summer pasturage, grants to municipalities, schools, hospitals, etc."[96]

The petitions written to the League of Nations Permanent Mandate Council do not only paint a picture of the educational landscape but also highlight the strategies and types of anti-colonial resistance, including petition writing itself, which centered around the public-school system. Public schools have a crucial role to play in the story of anti-colonial resistance because many resistance movements were born in public schools and

[96]Petitions (Seventeen in All), Dated November and December 1933, From Inhabitants of Beirut, Tripoli, and Säida, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, CPM 1527.

because the issue of public education was one which galvanized much of the Syrian nationalist community.

Chapter 3: Artifacts of Resistance

In the Spring of 1934, Syria's Prime Minister and President were on a tour through the north of the country passing through the cities of Damascus, Homs, and Latakia. On their journey, the officials were intercepted several times by angry protesters, many of whom were "schoolboys" attending school at the local *tajhiz*, or secondary school. The French responded to the protesters with overwhelming violence, devastating secondary schools and universities while detaining hundreds of people. According to French officials, the cause of the demonstrations was the pardon of two assailants who were thought to have committed an assault on nationalist leader Ibrahim Hanano.[97]

Described as nationalists, these "schoolboys" held demonstrations against the state preceding the government officials' visit. During the officials' visit to Damascus, protestors "broke into the mosque," where the ceremonies were held, "and penetrated as far as the platform and seats reserved for the high dignitaries on the republic." As the dignitaries left the mosque, students and other young people "threw various missiles at the police," resulting in the arrest of one hundred eighteen protesters. This incident was one of several episodes in the struggle between Syrian nationalists and the mandatory power. Petitions written to the PMC demonstrate that the

[97] Extracted from a Report by M. Palacios, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, CPM 1593.

anticolonial struggle against the French was fought in the classroom as well, as the Sunni community struggled to maintain autonomy over their children's education.[98]

Philip Khoury, argues that students became politicized at state secondary schools. Students attending these schools interacted with faculty who received their training in Europe and from across the Arab world. These teachers presented their pupils with nationalist ideologies, inspiring them to flood the streets in protest of France's oppressive presence.[99] While these students took to the street, many other students, teachers, and parents turned to other resistance tactics. Some in the community placed their political clout behind the petitioners writing to the League of Nations' Permanent Mandate Council. Petitioners writing to the League were equipped with the language which governed the international body and broad-based support amongst members of their own community as they appealed to the French nation and the international community for an improvement in the community's educational rights.

Petitions submitted to the Permanent Mandate Council not only detail the French mandatory government's failure to provide an adequate education to most of the former Ottoman territory's population but are also artifacts of resistance. As artifacts of resistance, these petitions represent a broad-based effort on the part of the Sunni Muslim majority which was fought on multiple fronts. The petitioners, and those they represented, railed against the policies of the French mandatory government, the international order embodied in the League of Nations, and the privileged position of

[98]Ibid.

[99] Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 410-412.

confessional minorities within the colonial hierarchy. Historians have often placed Syrian nationalists and their organized demonstrations at the center of the mandate-era resistance narrative, but the petitions highlight another side of the story. Petitions submitted to the PMC demonstrate that it was not simply political activists in the community protesting the repressive policies of the French colonizers, but that parents, students, and others were also resisting; not with "missiles" but with their words and support. Although the PMC reports associated with the petitions demonstrate that the committee mostly ignored the pleas of the petitioners, the petition writers were still able "to exploit the publicity value of the petition process." Petitions became part of the international public discourse because many PMC debates were in the focus of the European and American presses.[100]

While the petitioners' efforts may have failed to achieve many tangible results, their voices remain an important piece of the resistance narrative, and the story of the League of Nations and the mandate-era. These petitions demonstrate that a large contingent of middle-class Sunnis actively resisted the policies of the French mandatory government, the League of Nations, and the mandate system. The petitions were the vehicle utilized by the community to resist the colonial order imposed on them and provided the petitioners and the people they represented with a way to participate in a global resistance.

[100]Susan Pendersen, "Settler Colonialism at the Bar of the League of Nations," in *Projects, Practices, Legacies,* ed. Caroline Elkins and Susan Pendersen (Philadelphia: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 116.

Historians like Elizabeth Thompson have utilized unconventional sources, such as political cartoons from Syrian and Lebanese newspapers, and letters from good-will societies to demonstrate that a subaltern resistance existed in a space parallel to that of the resistance of the notables which is the subject of the work of Khoury, Hourani, and many others. Laura Robson is also creative in her sourcing as one of the few scholars who analyzes petitions. She uses the petitions to shed light on the strictly political efforts of mandate citizens but does not use them to explore other important issues. Petitions which address education tell a story of the middleclass fathers, mothers, teachers, and students who were also involved in the anti-colonial resistance. Like the subjects of Thompson's work, the petitioners and those they represented induced very little structural change in the educational landscape, but they "had made their voices heard."[101] These petitions to the PMC are artifacts of a resistance which was uniquely middle class and was fought on an international and local stage. These petitions also supplement the sources utilized by Thompson to further the point that the independence efforts were waged not only by elites but also by the broader Sunni Muslim community.

Petitioners understood that if they had any hope in achieving greater independence and improved educational opportunities, they needed to engage in the rhetoric which governed the League of Nations. Their petitions are rife with the language which governed the League and petitioners utilized it to protest their disadvantaged position which was sanctioned by France and the PMC. Supporters of the petitioners, and the petitioners themselves, recognized that they were deprived of the educational

[101] Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 110.

resources granted to other confessional groups, and that the intellectual tools gifted through education were necessary to build a future nation. Petitioners who voiced their grievances against mandatory educational policy were not peripheral actors within the resistance movement rather had significant support within the community. The language utilized by petitioners, which mirrored that of the officials who forged the League of Nations, the amount of people involved in the petition process, and the petitioners' connection with the Syrian nationalist movement speak to the communal nature, sophistication, and the breadth of petitioning as a form of resistance.

From the years of 1929 to 1940, eighty percent of petitions originated from Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine. Most of those petitions addressed explicitly political concerns, but the ones that are specific to education highlight the grievances of the broader population. Susan Pendersen argues that petitions became a "medium for grievance and complaint… but the significance is greater than that. Petitions were an engine, and not simply a reflection of politics: they exposed the mandates system's logic and set in motion processes it could not contain."[102] The voice of the parents, students channeled through representatives who wrote the petitions have an important, yet underemphasized role in the narrative of anti-colonial resistance in the Levant and against the diplomats in Geneva.

Resistance has received significant attention within mandate historiography. Most of the literature, written within a nation-state context, focuses on the elites and the

[102] Susan Pendersen, "Samoa on the World Stage: Petitions and Peoples Before the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40 (2012): 231-261, 237-240.

independence movements they led. In recent years, however, authors like Robson and Watenpaugh have taken an international approach in their analysis of resistance which has allowed the League of Nation and PMC to play a role in the historical discussion, and other historians like Nadya Sbaiti and Jenifer Dueck have looked specifically at education as a site of resistance.[103]

Sbaiti, Watenpaugh, and other scholars have worked within Thompson's "Colonial Civic Order" framework to demonstrate how political actors deployed different tactics within a colonial society to resist the mandatory power.[104] Petitioner voices and the concerns over the quality of their children's education, bring the international and domestic angles of the resistance movement into the same orbit. A petition analysis highlights a connection between students and the nationalist leaders writing petitions linking the subaltern elements of the anti-colonial resistance with elite notables. By default, an analysis reliant on petition is international in scope because of petitioners' interaction with the League of Nations. Additionally, petitions indicate that a large-scale resistance effort was waged by parents, teachers, and students railing against the poor educational experience manufactured by the French. An analysis of petitions expands the conversation, initiated by Jenifer Deueck and Sbaiti, centered around teacher insistence to

[103]Nadya Sbaiti, "If the Devil Taught French: Strategies of Language and Learning in French Mandate Beirut," in *Trajectories of Education in the Arab World: Legacies and Challenges,* ed. Osama Abi-Mers (Philadelphia: Routledge, 2009); Jennifer Dueck, "Educational Conquest: Schools as a Sphere of Politics in French Mandate Syria, 1936-1946," *French History,* 4 (2006): 442-459.

[104]See Thompson, *Colonial Citizens;* Keith Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East; Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

teach in Arabic as a form of resistance, bringing the struggle to secure educational resources into that same discussion.

## Protest Framed in the Language of the League

In January of 1936, a petition signed by two-hundred fifteen fathers and tutors of Tripoli's school children was received by the PMC. Accompanying the petition was a letter written by M. R. Chambour which listed the signers' grievances regarding the educational situation of their children. In this letter, Chambour rails against the French failure to uphold Article Six of the mandate charter which promised compulsory education to all Syrian children. With instructions from the signers, Chambour voices their opinion that there were plentiful resources to fund schools throughout Lebanon. In this letter, Chambour argues, "to neglect the institution of compulsory education is not to be willing to lead the population towards the promised independence."[105]

Keith Watenpaugh argues that "to have any chance of relevance within the Palace of the League of Nations in Geneva, one had to speak the same language of modernism that imperial powers spoke."[106] Chambour and the petitioners' appeal to the French to "lead them to Independence" is likely a direct reference to the League's Civilizing mission which the organization was partially founded upon. This tenant of the League of

[105]Extracted from a Report by Dannevig, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm,* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, CPM 1867.

[106] Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East,* 236.

Nation's mission outlined the mandatory power's duty to raise the peoples of the former Ottoman Empire to a state in which they could govern themselves.[107]

In another direct appeal to the promises made in the mandate charter, Khaled Daghestani, representing a contingent of Circassian petitioners, complained in a 1938 petition that the community was not able to speak in their native tongue within their own schools. In making their appeal, the Circassians claimed they were owed protections as a linguistic minority. Minority protection was a key tenant of the mandate system and was used to justify intervention in local affairs by the mandatory powers.[108] In a report on the Circassian petitions, PMC member M. Sakenobe explains to the rest of the council that the Circassians:

> "state that repeated requests have been made to the mandatory government to recognize their social and political rights and also their minority status; and when the Franco-Syrian Treaty negotiations were opened they again appealed with a request to have their rights incorporated in the Treaty. After describing how, on several occasions since 1920, the Circassian people have been cruelly treated by the majority, the petitioners make a renewed appeal to the League of Nations and reiterate their desire to have their social and political rights guaranteed in the Treaty before its ratification by the mandatory power."[109]

In response to the petitioners, Sakenobe echoes the objections of the French mandatory government, arguing that the Circassians have been protected and that if the Circassians' rights to choose their language of instruction was restored, "Syrian unity" would be in jeopardy. In this example, the Circassians attempted to attain greater control

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[107]Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East,* 22; Eric Weitz, "From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions," *The American Historical Review* 113 (2008): 1313-1343.

[108]Weitz, "From Vienna to the Paris System."

[109]Extracted from a Report by M. Sakenobe, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, 2070.

over the classroom by appealing to one of the foundations of the mandatory system; guaranteed protection of minority rights.[110]

In a 1937 petition, activists, complained about the distribution of subsidies to private schools in Lebanon which, they claim, occurred at the expense of public schools serving the Sunni population. The petitioners contend that this policy was a direct result of a lack of Sunni representation in the Lebanese parliament. In this petition, Mohammed Adi Bkhaled and the other petitioners fought for a greater share of educational capital by appealing to the Wilsonian promise inscribed in the League of Nations and Lebanese mandate charter which guaranteed sovereignty and equitable government representation.[111]

Laura Robson, who relies heavily on petitions in her analysis, argues that various groups in the Middle East "made extensive use of the legal language and bureaucratic mechanisms of the League itself to press their cases against machinations of the mandatory authority."[112] Petitioners drew upon the language which the League of Nations and Permanent Mandate Council was built upon to advance their interests. Petitioners deployed language which focused on the necessity of attaining a state of civilization, ensuring democratic representation, and the preservation of minority rights to preserve control over the classrooms of their communities and fight for a greater share of

[110]Ibid.

[111]Petition, Dated November 25th, 1937, from M. Mohammed Adi Bkhaled and Other Signatories, Tripoli (Rapporteur: M Sakenobe), *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, 216.M.118; "French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon," *The American Journal of International Law* 17 (1923): 177-182.

[112]Robson, *States of Separation*, 170.

educational capital. The petitioning process expanded the scope of a middleclass resistance predicated on improving the educational opportunities of Sunni children into an international struggle. The driving force of this resistance by petitioning was not the skill of the petitioners but the enormous support petitioners received from their communities.

## Petitioning as a Broad-Based Resistance Movement

On October 30th, 1934, a French non-commissioned officer of the Syrian gendarmerie, conducted a search operation of a farm near the city of Hama belonging to the Barazi family. One of Hama's elite families, the Barazis, had been involved with the city's politics for generations. The search unearthed 3,000 kilograms of hash connected to the burgeoning illicit hashish trade, sparking a political firestorm. Husani Barazi, one of several owners of the farm, also happened to serve as the minister of Public Education in the Syrian government. Barazi had a complicated history with the French State and the National Bloc, which was very active in Hama. As one of the "founding fathers" of the National Bloc, Barazi was originally exiled from Syria by the French because of his activities with the organization but was later allowed to return. Then, in 1928, Barazi conceded to French demands, effectively alienating himself from the leadership of the National Bloc. [113]

[113]Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate,* 368-369; Extracted from a Report by Count De Pesha Garcia, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, C. 439,M,228; Extracted from a Report by Count De Pesha Garcia, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, 1650.

When Barazi became embroiled in the hashish controversy, his political opponents within the National Bloc quickly pounced. Following the raid, Dr. Tawfiq Chichakli, one of the preeminent leaders of the National Bloc who was famous for playing nationalist politics from the conception of the mandate, authored a petition signed by "other inhabitants of the city" which demanded Barazi's immediate removal from office. Furthermore, the French High Commissioner was forced to open an investigation of the hashish seizure because of the public outrage it caused. The investigation resulted in Barazi's acquittal, prompting Chichakli, acting as the parliamentary representative of Hama, to pen another petition signed by 454 inhabitants of Hama. In this petition, Chichaki argued to the PMC that Barazi should be immediately removed to avoid "any suspicion of intervention by the government." The popular outrage caused by the hashish controversy provided an opening for Chichakli, and other leaders of the National Bloc, to coopt the frustration of the broader Muslim community to seize back some control over the educational fortunes of the community. Petitions were that vehicle which allowed petitioners to express the broad-based frustration with the Muslim community's pitiful educational conditions to the international community.[114]

While the report associated with Chichakli's petition can be viewed as another episode in the well-documented clash between the leaders of the National Bloc and the French mandatory regime, it can also be viewed as an effort by the broader Muslim

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[114] Extracted from a Report by Count De Pesha Garcia, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, C. 439,M,228; Extracted from a Report by Count De Pesha Garcia, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, 1650.

community to seize back control of their children's education. The large number of signers and the uproar caused by the seizure indicate that the effort to remove the education minister garnered the interest of a large contingent of Hama's Sunni community. Episodes like the Hama hashish seizure demonstrate that, while the petitioners themselves may have been members of the elite, they had support from a large portion of the greater Sunni community.

The hundreds, and at times, thousands of signers featured on many petitions addressing education is one of the key indicators of a broad-based resistance movement portrayed in the petitions. For example, in the 1934 petition addressing French interference in the administration of the Dar-el-Um school had 1,500 signatures.[115] According to the PMC, the undersigned petitioners involved in the 1933 list of seventeen petitions which complain of the amount of resources available to the towns annexed to Lebanon, including educational resources, involved "the great majority of the property owners, traders, and manufactures," of the annexed towns.[116]

Massive protest of the mandatory regime's *waqf* policy is a prime example of the broad-based resistance which petitioning represented. In a report detailing petitions submitted by Ghafour Al Msouty, an advocate of Aleppo and acting secretary of the delegation of the Committees for the Defense of Muslim *Waqfs,* PMC councilman M Palacios claims that the goal of the petitioners was "to synchronize a broad, general

[115] Extracted from a report from M. N. Sakenobe, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, 1667.

[116]Petitions (Seventeen in Dated November and December 1933, from Inhabitants of Beirut, Tripoli, and Saida, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, C.489.M.214.

protest dealing with a matter which is of essential importance to the communities."[117] In the report, petitioners "describe the present situation of [*waqf*] as lamentable. Owing to the unsatisfactory and anarchical state of affairs, which cover all social activities, particularly in the spheres of worship, education, and public charity, do not reach the legitimate beneficiaries."[118]

The report written by Valentine Dannevig, which accompanied the 1936 petition signed by 215 residents of the city of Tripoli, stated that hundreds of pupils were left outside the doors of the city's limited public schools.[119] As discussed in the previous chapter, most Muslim students had few if any educational options in Lebanon. In Dannevig's account, she reports that the petitioners assert that the two boys' and girls' schools in Tripoli "cannot even admit 25% of the children of school age." This problem was compounded by the reality which the petitioners detail in the letters to the PMC; "the parents and guardians cannot send their children to the 'foreign' (private) schools because of the high fees they demanded." Dannevig elaborates further, reporting that Chambour, the author of the letter which accompanied the petition, worried that the turning away of students from schools reminded him of when the "Eddé Ministry in 1929 had ordered the closing of all Government schools in Lebanon, but that this action was prevented by unanimous protests by the population."[120] The fears of limited educational opportunity

[117]Extracted from a Report to the PMC by M. Palacios, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, CPM 1688.

[118]Ibid.

[119]Extracted from a Report to the PMC by Valentine Dannevig, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, C.500.M.313.

[120]Ibid.

presented by the teachers and fathers who signed the petitions, are born out in the annual education reports. In 1936, there were only one hundred five government primary schools and one secondary school in Lebanon, and one primary private Muslim school. That is compared the 166 private and foreign primary schools in Lebanon and seven foreign and private secondary schools which mostly served the Christian population.[121]

The dire situation facing Muslim children, the amount of people who signed onto the petitions, and the people who were affected by the lack of educational opportunities suggest that education was an issue which politically activated a large contingent of the Sunni Muslim community. The situation facing the community's children was dire, and it appears that parents were well-aware that their children lacked the opportunities of children from other confessional groups, especially in Lebanon. While many petitions are clearly outgrowths of the political activities of the national Bloc, it is also clear, that on education, members of the community who may usually abstain from political discourse were activated. Petitions also demonstrate that nationalist leaders utilized petitions as a device to protect the activities of students on secondary school campuses in Lebanon and Syria and that students, whose voices are rarely highlighted, had a critical role in the anti-colonial resistance movement.

[121] Report to the League of Nations for the Situation in Syria and Lebanon (year, 1936), Republic of French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room.

The Bloc Connection: Petitions, Students, and National Bloc Leadership

In May of 1934, the French Minister of Education approved the expulsion of five students from Hama's *Tajhiz,* or secondary school, for stealing gymnastic equipment and because they "had endeavored to induce their schoolfellows to take part in a demonstration against the Head of State and the President of the Council of Ministers during their visit to Northern Syria." This visit is referenced in the PMC report which detailed the large-scale riots discussed at the beginning of the chapter. Their expulsion induced Dr. Chichakli to write a petition which accompanied the one discussing the hashish seizure, pointing to a connection between the students, the school community, and the leaders of the National Bloc and other independence organizations.[122]

If Nadya Sbaiti's conclusion that Syrians and Lebanese viewed education as "a cornerstone for forging their own versions of national identities,"[123] national leaders likely identified schools as important space to maneuver within. Elizbeth Thompson also recognizes that from the proliferation of public schools arose middle class nationalist, anti-imperial movements.[124] She also remarks that it was many of the teachers, most of them women, who marched with the male nationalist leaders on the streets against the French regime, and that by the end of the mandate era, nationalists viewed education as a right, "claiming that an educated citizenry is a precondition of democracy."[125] Nationalist leaders clearly had an interest to petition on behalf of students and other

[122] Extracted from a Report by M. N. Sakenobe, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, CPM 1667.

[123] Nadya Sbaiti, "If the Devil Taught French," 76.

[124] Thompson, *Colonial Citizens,* 182.

[125] Ibid., 166.

members of the school community. The veracity of their efforts can be surmised in Sarmini's petition protesting French suppression of the protests against the Syrian government ministers. He defined the struggle between protesters, many of whom were students and teachers, as a "struggle between the Syrian nationalist parties and the mandatory powers."[126]

## The Permanent Mandate Council, a Vehicle of Imperialism

Like the nationalist leaders spearheading anticolonial battles taking place on the streets of mandate-era Lebanon, who Michael Provence argues "gambled and lost" in their attempt to shape the future of their country, the efforts of petitioners fighting for educational rights were also mostly in vain.[127] Reports to the League of Nations General Council detailing petitions related to education conclude, without exception, with some iteration of the phrase; "that this petition does not call for any special recommendations to the Council."[128] Susan Pendersen, who places the petitions at the center of many of her works, argues that, while there was members of the PMC like Valentine Dannevig who had an invested interest to hold France's feet to the fire, little action was ever taken on the petitions.[129]

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[126] Extracted from a report by M. Palacios, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, CPM 1593.

[127] Provence, *The Last Ottoman Generation,* 3.

[128] See discussions of petitions found within the PMC reports to the League of Nations General Council.

[129] Pendersen, "Settler Colonialism," 116.

The French deployed a variety of strategies to diffuse the potency of the petitioners' grievances when petitions were fleshed out in front of the PMC. They often cited their responsibility to maintain order to justify the clear denial of educational rights. In the petition which details the episode of the protest involving the Syrian ministers' sojourn through northern Syria, France cites its duty as a mandatory power to maintain order in the territory to deny the petitioners' claims. This was even though the French originally sparked tensions by acquitting two accomplices who were thought to have led an assassination attempt on Syrian nationalist leaders.[130] The French representative to the PMC cited France's responsibility as a peacekeeper when denying the Circassians the right to teach their children in their native tongue. He argued that such a guarantee "might encounter serious opposition from the majority in the Syrian Parliament."[131]

More frequently, French officials avoided the scrutiny of the PMC councilmembers by utilizing a modernist, orientalist language to paint a warped picture of the situation on the ground in Syria and Lebanon. In the Circassian example, France bypassed their mandate to protect minority populations by claiming that the Circassians were not a minority within the country.[132] In the Tripoli case, where over 200 parents complained of the lack of educational opportunities for their children, the mandatory power, in addition to chalking up the complaints to a political campaign led by the nationalists, argued that significant progress had been made considering the original

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[130]Extracted from report by Palacios, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, CPM 1593.

[131] Extracted from a Report by Sakenboe, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, CPM 2070.

[132]Ibid.

"state" of the country.[133] In a 1935 petition authored by Aleppo's Executive Committee of *Waqf,* the French minister denied the petitioners' claim that the French broke the promises of the mandate charter by interfering with *Waqf.* The French justified their interference because the property had fallen "victim" of "misappropriations," on the part of the *muttewali,* or proprietor. They also mention that the *waqf* was in a state of "poor hygiene" and that the *muttewali* engaged in the price gauging of properties rented to Christian and Jewish tenants.[134]

Finally, if the French did not argue in the name of maintain order or League of Nations "values" to abdicate their responsibilities the League of Nations, they relied on the fabrication that resources were inadequate to fulfill the educational needs of Syria and Lebanon. The French, in part, responded to most of the petitions broadly by claiming that they were not able to remedy the petitioners' grievances "based to a large extent on budgetary reasons."[135]

## Conclusion: Petitioning for a Better Education, A Study in Communal and International Resistance

The Permanent Mandate Commission held their final meeting in 1938, after receiving thousands of petitions from across the colonialized world, many of which,

[133] Extracted from Report by Dannevig, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, 1867.

[134]Extracted from a Report by Palacios, *League of Nations Documents and Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, CPM, 1806.

[135]Petitions (Seventeen in All). Dated November and December 1933, From Inhabitants of Beirut, Tripoli, and Saida, *League of Nations Documents and Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, C.489.M.214.

arrived from the Jordanian, Levantine, Syrian, and Palestinian mandated territories. Many of these petitions were strictly political; they expressed discontent with the mandatory power's privileges and the drawing of borders.[136] Some of these petitions, however, addressed the problem of education in the mandated territories. These petitions which originated from Syria and Lebanon, describe an effort by the Sunni community to demand a change in the educational situation of their children. Ultimately, most of the petitioner's calls fell on deaf ears, as the Permanent Mandate Commission and the League of Nations General Council dismissed their concerns outright. Susan Pendersen, who has written extensively on the inter-workings of the League and the Permanent Mandate Council, argues that "although the commission's ten members were to be named for their competence and were not to be in government employ, in practice appointees were usually formal colonial officials with close ties to their particular country's foreign policy establishments; on the commission, then, they sometimes behaved less as international watchdogs than as government mouthpieces, defending their own nation's colonial record and trying to expose the failings of other powers."[137] Robert DeCaix, the French representative to the PMC and former High Commissioner of Syria and Lebanon, was one of those PMC's members close to their country's foreign policy establishment.

The cronyism of the PMC was one of many factors leading to the failure of the petitioner resistance. Another is highlighted by Elizabeth Thompson. She argues that the failure of the general anti-colonial resistance movement in Syria and Lebanon, was due, in part, to the internal tensions within the resistance. She states that subaltern resistance

[136]See Robson, *States of Separation.*
[137]Pendersen, "Soma on the World Stage," 115.

movements "diverged radically in their levels of consciousness and mobilization and in their visions in an ideal reformed civic order."[138] These differences led to the disintegration of many resistance movements under pressure from the mandatory power and may have been the reason why the education petitioning effort was not very consequential.

While petitioners did make their impact on the political scene, it was not through revolt, marches on the streets, or delegations to Geneva. Petitions addressing parents' concerns over their children's education point to another type of resistance which occurred right underneath the noses of French officials and the members of the Permanent Mandate Council. Petitioners engaged in a broad-based resistance movement that was fought on international and national fronts. Petitioners adapted, and keenly utilized, the language which governed the League of Nations to fight for the educational resources they viewed as necessary to build a new national identity in the post-Ottoman era. In addition to a language which was clearly deployed to coerce the international community, the large number of people who stamped their name on the petitions, the stakes surrounding the fight over education, and the petitioners' connection with the National Bloc and other preeminent resistance organizations point to a petitioning effort which represented a broad-based, fervent resistance on the part of the Sunni Middle Class.

[138]Thompson, *Colonial Citizens,* 110.

Conclusion: "The Colonial Civic Order" and Classroom Resistance

In the final meeting of the Permanent Mandate Council, access to education in the Levant was discussed just as it had been in previous PMC meetings. Swedish representative Valentine Dannevig spearheaded the conversation. Dannevig was one of the few members on the committee who advocated for the educational rights of local populations throughout the short life of the PMC and League of Nations. She commented on what she viewed as France's mixed record in providing mandatory education to all the region's children. Dannevig acknowledged the large increase in the numbers of primary and secondary official schools in the region but was disappointed with a sequestered education budget. She was especially appalled by the few opportunities girls had to receive an education. As had been done many times before, the French representative on the council, Robert De Caix, cited budgetary reasons as the cause for the dearth of educational opportunities for Syrian and Lebanese girls. Dannevig responded to De Caix's defense by exclaiming "that in any case the situation is deplorable," and noted that "classes were very big: as the average number of pupils in class was forty-nine. Moreover, the small percentage of pupils who went on to the higher school appeared to show that the standard of education in the territory was low."[139]

Based on the information found in the annual Department of Education Reports, Dannevig concluded that in a country of 2,600,000 inhabitants, "the proportion of children not receiving education, and of illiterate persons in general was certainly still

[139] Extracted from the Minutes of the Thirty-Fifth Session of the Permanent mandates Commission, *League of Nations Documents and Serial Publications on Microfilm* held in the Library of Congress's Microfilm Room, C.418.M.232.

high, especially in view of the fact that the Syrian Constitution had laid down, in article 21, the principle of compulsory and gratuitous education for every Syrian of either sex. That provision in the Syrian Constitution was no doubt very far from being applied."[140]

In the final meeting of the PMC, Dannevig laid bare the stark reality facing Syria and Lebanon's children in days preceding World War II. While some educational resources had become available over the course of the mandate period, the French fell far short of their promises to the League of Nations, and the Syrian and Lebanese people. The Syrian and Lebanese people were not ignorant to this reality. Petitions to the League of Nations tell a story of a Sunni community disgruntled with the lack of educational opportunities and resources available to their children, and the lack of control parents had over their childrens' educational destinies. It was the middle class Sunni community who had the most at stake in this battle over educational resources, and it was they who supported the elites petitioning on their behalf.

Mandate Syria and Lebanon's middle class was overwhelmingly urban, Sunni, had some degree of education, and were politically and socially active. They, like the Syrian and Lebanese notables, were involved in various resistance efforts. Yet, they differentiated themselves from the notables who worked closely with mandatory officials. Their civically-minded attitudes and restricted arms-length distance to the state, promoted the middle class into the mouthpiece role of the Sunni community. From the beginning of the mandate, the middle class and their representatives, realized that they needed to

[140]Ibid.

employ the modernist language which governed the League of Nations to work within the international system, achieve their aims, and work within the "Colonial Civic Order."[141]

Elizabeth Thompson defines the "Colonial Civic Order" as a setting of "constant negotiation of power relationships and identities" in which the state and citizens interacted. Thompson argues that the "Civic Order" was first imagined by the Ottomans who constructed a citizenship hierarchy. During the Ottoman period, the hierarchy placed Muslims on top of the societal hierarchy, but during the mandate-period this order was reversed. At the top of the mandate hierarchical order were the Christians, Lebanese, elites and men. At the bottom, were Muslims, Syrians, peasants, and women. The amount of state resources one received, including educational resources, was dependent on one's location on the hierarchy. Another integral actor within the "Civic Order" were the mediators which interacted with the French State and the locals who were tasked with distributing resources. In the educational space, these mediators were missionaries and proprietors of private educational institutions who limited access to their schools based on confession and class.[142]

Petitions sent to the Permanent Mandate Council are an undervalued source within the mandate historiography. They tell the story of an active middle class fighting for the educational rights of their children. Petitions lay out the middle class frustration with the quality of their children's education, and a middle class belief that education was

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[141] See Keith Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East; Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

[142] See Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens.*

a necessary tool in constructing a national identity and national institutions in the post-Ottoman world. Petitioners were able to navigate the Permanent Mandate Commission utilizing the lexicon which governed the League, even while some petitions were not presented in front of the Permanent Mandate Council and were doctored due to a process in which petitioners were forced to first submit their documents to the mandatory powers they were protesting.[143]

Petitioners lived with a sectarian educational landscape defined by four separate systems, serving different segments of the population; the private, foreign, traditional *Kuttab,* and the state public system. This sectarian environment was built off the traditional Ottoman framework in which foreign missionary schools were given special privileges, were opened almost exclusively to confessional minorities, and operated independently from the Sublime Port, but were also withheld from extra state funding. During the transition to the mandate period, conditions remained mostly the same, except that much of the funding that was originally appropriated to state schools was now siphoned to private schools. School funding, hygiene, education, and language requirements were enforced through the mandate's largest institution and the entity which linked these disparate educational systems, the Service de l' Instruction Publique. This massive bureaucratic machine ensured that French would remain an important language within all schools and that a there would be a focus on Western culture. This created a

[143]See Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Laura Robson, *States of Separation: Transfer, Partition, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (Berkley: California University Press, 2017); Susan Pendersen, "Samoa on the World Stage: Petitions and Peoples Before the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40 (2012).

system which fostered competing ideas of national identity and created an environment in which specific confessional groups were provided greater educational resources than others.[144]

Petitions to the Permanent Mandate Council make clear that the petitioners recognized the stark reality facing their children. The Sunni Middle Class petitioners recognized that resources were being shifted away from their schools during the mandate-era and the French state had an increasingly overbearing presence in the classroom. They also recognized that their children were deprived of the intellectual tools that their Christian counterparts received in the classroom. These petitions also point to the broad-based, intricate resistance effort waged by the elites of the Sunni community and the middle-class individuals they represented.

Petitions do not only inject the middle class perspective into the mandate story, but they are also, like a political poster, or the guns used in a revolution, the tools of the anti-colonial resistance movement. They are artifacts of the Middle-Class resistance which involved women, teachers, students, and parents. These petitions point to a resistance that was sophisticated and craftily utilized the language which governed the League of Nations. Because of the language found in the petitions, which was aimed at challenging the PMC on the promises made by the in covenant of the League of Nations,

[144] Nadya Jeanne Sbaiti, "Lessons in History: Education and the Formation of National Society in Beirut, Lebanon"(PhD diss., Georgetown University, 2008); Nadya Sbaiti, "If the Devil Taught French: Strategies of Language and Learning in French Mandate Beirut," in *Trajectories of Education in the Arab World: Legacies and Challenges,* ed. Osama Abi-Mers (Philadelphia: Routledge, 2009); A.L. Tibawi, *Islamic Education: Its Traditions and Modernization into the Arab National Systems* (New York: Luzac & Company LTD., 1972).

the large number of supporters indicated on the documents, the stakes of what was being petitioned, and the petitioners' connection with larger nationalist movements, the petitioning effort aimed at carving out a better educational future for the Sunni community's children should be viewed as a broad-based fervent resistance effort.

While the resisters' efforts were persistent, they yielded little results. The colonial government and French representative to the PMC, Robert de Caix, utilized a variety of tactics to diffuse the petitioners claims to the PMC and the League of Nations General Council. They barred the petitioners' right to an education in the name of retaining order, or budget shortfalls. Sometimes they utilized a modernist language which painted Muslim peoples as not to the level of "civilization" as other confessional groups, warping the reality on the ground in the mandated territories.

Despite the failure of the petitioner education movement, recognizing the petitioning movement as a form of resistance and gleaning the perspective of the middle class from these petitions adds a valuable chapter to the mandate story. This perspective makes clear that petitioners recognized that the educational disadvantages they faced would have major implications for the future of Syria and Lebanon. A petitioner perspective also demonstrates that the Levantine Sunni community was at a distinct educational disadvantage compared to other confessional groups because of their inability to control the narrative within their own classrooms and a simple lack of educational opportunities.

Viewing these petitions as artifacts of resistance elevates the middle-class mothers, fathers, students, and teachers of the Sunni community to international actors who were fighting the injustices placed onto them by the League of Nations and what

Eric Weitz calls “the Paris System.” They were fighting the colonization disguised in article twenty-two of the League Nations charter which called on the mandate powers to bring the people of the former Ottoman Empire to an equivalent level of “civilization.” These petitions show that Middle Class actors, who are not normally associated with the notables who are traditionally identified with the nationalist movements in Syria, Lebanon, and the other Middle East mandates, were engaged in a resistance fought on an international and national front that was sophisticated and fervent.

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