

TWO | The “Apple of Discord”

The Btekhmay Rally and the (Ephemeral?) Subversion of Mount Lebanon’s Politics of Space (1965)

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1. Introduction

Over the years, the spatiality of the mountain has occupied a central place in the succession of foundational mythmakings accompanying the emergence of modern Lebanon. First, the earliest forms of Lebanese nationalism stemmed from claims on the spoils of the mountain emirate. Second, when the ideal and then the political borders of the “nation” were enlarged to encompass the coastal cities, the Akkar, the South, and the Beqaa, the mountain space, was retained as the custodian of the most authentic Lebaneseness, providing legitimacy for the succession of sectarian political orders ultimately defined by the National Pact (1943). In these makings and unmakings, the attribution of a specific political-symbolic function to the mountain went hand in hand with the functional attribution of a specific social-political essence to the subaltern subjects who inhabited it and over which the nationalists sought to impose their sovereignty. In the “ideologies of the mountain”¹ that dominated Lebanese nationalism until the 1920s, the representation of the mountaineers corresponded to the unredeemed Christians who had protected—and, hence, preserved—the purity of the mountain from alien (most notably, Sunna) attempts of conquests (Beydoun 1984, 161–208). In the colonial

narratives, they had been a cradle of persecuted religious minorities whose freedom and integrity needed to be paternalistically protected from external (Sunna) threats. Finally, in the narratives of the “ideologies of the city,” which ultimately shaped independent Lebanon, they were the genuine, laborious peasants providing a moral compass to the hectic “Phoenician” merchants of the city, so they did not lose themselves in the chaos of the global trading world. In this latest framing, the image of the mountain refuge and Christian bastion was substituted with that of the Switzerland of the Middle East, an image more suitable to performatively represent the new political and economic turn (the so-called Merchant Republic) (Gates 1998) that the country, now standing on its own two feet, undertook (Salibi 1988, 130–50).

The affirmation of the image of Lebanon as the Switzerland of the Middle East mirrored the political and economic victory of the urban trading center over the inherited rural peripheries on which this center earned and built its sovereignty. In this new order, as the socioeconomic fabric of rural Lebanon was inexorably disrupted and reshaped by new forms of aggressive commercial capitalist exploitation, its mainstream representation was crystallized in the romanticized immobility of the Rahbani brothers’ mountain folklore, around which the newborn state built and canonized its popular culture (Stone 2003).

The inherent contradiction between the peasants’ living conditions and their folkloric representation was disruptively foregrounded on 26 September 1965: in the village of Btekhmay, a demonstration of solidarity organized by the Lebanese Left to champion the struggle of the apple growers of Mount Lebanon against agricultural monopolies brought the agrarian question (and, with it, the sociogeographical peripheries that the economic policies of independent Lebanon were producing) straight into the center of the Lebanese political arena.

In 1974, sociologist Henri Lefebvre introduced the groundbreaking concept of space as a social product shaped by complex interactions between human intentions, needs, interests, and, especially in capitalist societies, the global political economy (Lefebvre 1991). According to Lefebvre, space is produced by three types of activities (the so-called spatial triad): *spatial practices*, that is, the social practices pertaining to both production and reproduction by which the space is materially produced (the *perceived*); the *representation of space*, that is, how space is instrumentally *conceived* as a coherent “order” by those who dominate it through the means of abstraction; and the *representational space*, that is, the space of the *lived* experience of those who inhabit it and use it through its

associated images and symbols (Lefebvre 1991, 33–45). In capitalist societies, the dominant form of space is produced by the (urban) “centers of wealth and power,” that is, the space of the bourgeoisie and capitalism. This space is quintessentially epitomized (and institutionalized) in the nation-state. It endeavors to mold the (rural-peripheral) space, which is politically and economically controlled by mobilizing knowledge and technology, symbols, expertise, violence, and norms, with the primary aim of fostering its own interests at the expenses of the other groups—first and foremost, by subjugating differences (Lefebvre 1991, 49–53). It is also the space defined by the triumph of the conceived over the lived or of the dominated over the appropriated space. In other words, it is the space directly shaped and signified by those who make use of it (Lefebvre 1991, 163–69) and whose compresence and inherent conflict represent the terrain where class struggle is inscribed, thus preventing “abstract space from taking over the whole planet and papering over all differences” (Lefebvre 1991, 55).

In the scholarly literature on modern Lebanon, the spatiality of the mountain has been predominantly investigated in relation to the emergence of Lebanon as an independent nation-state and the development of its sectarian institutions and conflicts (Rabah 2020; Khalaf 2013; Fawaz 1994). There has been a particular—though not fully exclusive—focus on the transitional period stretching from the end of the emirate’s era under Bashir II to the institution and demise of the Mutasarrifate (Makdisi 2000; Khater 2001; Akarlı 1993) and the role played by the representation of the mountain in the Christian-driven Lebanese nationalist ideologies (Firro 2003; Kaufman 2004a), including in underpinning the hegemonic aspirations and class interests of the (Christian) organic intellectuals² who produced them (Hartman and Olsaretti 2003). Much less attention has been devoted to studying the mountain as a lived and dominated social space, contributing—here, we argue—to keeping the sociopolitical history of post-Ottoman Mount Lebanon alienated from that of its rural inhabitants.

In line with Lefebvre’s view that the history of a space is, above all, the history of the mutual interactions between the lived and the conceived, as well as “their links with the spatial practice of a particular society or mode of production” (Lefebvre 1991, 42), this contribution seeks to offer a brief (albeit partial and fragmentary) historical overview of the politics of space that have shaped modern Mount Lebanon as a dominated social space. The chapter assumes the “spatial diversion” operated by the Btekhmay rally as the latest step and the broad term of reference of

its examination, with the double aim of reintegrating the long-neglected history of the post-Ottoman mountain's peasantry with the history of Mount Lebanon, and exploring the historiographical implications that a Lefebvrian spatial analysis might have.

2. Lebanon as the Mountain: A Historical Overview of the Representations of Mount Lebanon

When Lebanon achieved full independence in 1946, Lebanese society was mostly rural. Although Beirut was already a cosmopolitan trading city, the core of the country's social life was centered in the plethora of villages that, from the deep North to the South and the Beqaa, were home to at least two-thirds of the Lebanese population. Most people lived off the land, which gave subsistence to about 50 percent of the country's population (Issawi and Dabezies 1951, 395; Gates 1998, 130). Most of these peasants were small landowners working their own plot for subsistence either to commercialize the (scarcely productive) crops or surpluses for the local markets.³ Large forms of land tenure were concentrated in the central Beqaa, the Akkar plain, and the coastal areas of South Lebanon, which were cultivated for the most part by sharecroppers representing about 25 percent of the remaining peasant population (Nasr 1978, 6).

In one of the few scholarly articles of the period dealing with the subject, Aff Tannous (1949) describes Lebanese villages as tiny but dense conglomerates of dwellings developing around the *saha*, the square, which also hosts the main religious buildings. Agricultural land extended in all directions from the central group of dwellings and was divided up into patchwork plots along familial lines. The rhythm of villagers' everyday life was marked by their work in the fields with extended family and the village community. A deep faith shaped the villagers' societal model and value system. Tannous identifies this set of basic elements as the quintessential fundamentals of Lebanese national identity, which has been shaped over the centuries by the villagers' deep attachment to the land and "the community life that has developed on it" (1949, 157).

Although the geographic scope of the article virtually encompassed the entirety of Lebanese territory, the rural archetypical model that Tannous describes coincided, for the most part, with that of the mountain.

The close association of authentic Lebaneseness with the spatiality of Mount Lebanon is as old as Lebanese nationalism. The earliest examples in this regard date back to the mid-1919 century, when Maronite histo-

rians like Archbishop Nicholas Mourad began to identify the foundational cornerstone of a distinct Lebanese nation in the refuge role that the mountain has historically played for Levantine religious minorities (Makdisi 2000, 82–84). Among them, Christians were assumed as the sect entitled to retain power due to their alleged primacy in defense of the mountain against alien (Sunna) assailants. At that time, the territory of Mount Lebanon was experiencing a bloody transition from a rigid feudal sociopolitical order, first embodied in the emirate (1516–1840) and later in the transitional *qaimaqamiyah* (1842–60), to the postfeudal, protonational Mutasarrifate (Makdisi 2000, 2). Amid these rapid transformations, Mourad’s work expresses the hegemonic aspirations of the established Maronite dominant groups (the church and the feudal notables) over the spoils of the Bashir II emirate against the Druze feudal notables who had traditionally ruled the area. The terms of their nuclear nationalist discourse were grounded in the new meaning attributed to sectarian identity “as the only viable marker of political reform and the only authentic basis for political claims” fostered by what Usama Makdisi defines as the “colonial encounter” between “a self-styled ‘Christian’ West and what it saw as its perennial adversary,” that is, an “Islamic’ Ottoman Empire” (Makdisi 2000, 80–83), first through Western travelers and diplomats and later through missionaries, traders, and armies.

This dominant framing underwent important tropic shifts after the institution of the Mutasarrifate, when the foundational topos of the mountain refuge began to progressively encounter the collocation of the earliest emergence of a distinct Lebanese nation back to Phoenician times. The first systematic elaboration of this new narrative was provided in 1902 by Boulos Nujaym. It quickly gained popularity among the new generation of urban Christian nationalists who, from Beirut, Cairo, and Paris, began to advocate for an independent Lebanese state that might be achieved with France’s backing. It would include the crucial coastal cities of Beirut, Tripoli, and Sidon, as well as the agricultural outposts of South Lebanon, the Akkar, and the Beqaa—that is, “historical Phoenicia,” whose integration was perceived as increasingly urgent to fully liberate the possibilities of development constrained by the geographic boundaries of the Mutasarrifate (Kaufman 2004a, 39–49).⁴ In this case, too, the colonial encounter played a crucial role. In 1860, under the auspices of Napoleon III, an archaeological mission led by Ernest Renan “discovered” the original sites of Phoenician civilization (Kaufman 2004a, 20–26). The findings of the mission were quickly embedded in the orientalist agenda of the Jesuit French missionary schools, where most of the

aforementioned generation of Lebanese nationalists received their education, including the newly established Saint Joseph University of Beirut. Saint Joseph's Jesuit orientalists played a crucial role in providing the arguments to reassess the dominance of the Christian mountain according to increasingly secularized, "objective" ethnohistorical terms and challenge the claims for a united Syrian-Lebanese state championed by the rival Arab nationalists (Kaufman 2004a, 29–36). More importantly, they offered the scholarly basis to underpin the historical justification for the territorial claims advanced by France over Syria and Lebanon after the First World War, in the wake of Sykes-Picot agreements (Kaufman 2001; Firro 2004, 1–27; Salibi 1988, 135). The great architect of this shift was Père Henri Lammens. Most of Lammens's long and prolific scholarly activity at Saint Joseph University was devoted to "discovering" Syria, which was conceived as a "natural country" just waiting to be policed and whose ethnocultural purity was preserved only in the unsubdued Lebanese mountain areas (Salibi 1988, 130–36). The Lebanese nationalist and the French colonial project merged at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, where the Lebanese delegation formally presented the project of Greater Lebanon with its territorial borders, which had previously been the object of internal (and external) debate (Kaufman 2004a, 79–86).

With the League of Nations assigning the mandate over Syria and Lebanon to France, the project of Greater Lebanon was ultimately imposed as a *fait accompli*. Leveraging the well-rooted notion of Lebanon as a multicomunal *asile*, the state was endowed with a Maronite-dominated sectarian system of power-sharing, underpinned by a constitution in 1926, and legitimized through two censuses in 1921 and 1932. Owing to the early association with France, Jesuit-educated Lebanese nationalists were immediately integrated into the Mandate apparatus and occupied most of the administrative positions and political posts. This was a pivotal step in shaping the structure of the new state according to their political, economic, and cultural interests. The most influential group was the one clustering around *La Revue Phénicienne*. Founded in 1919 by the poet and writer Charles Corm, the group had already played a key role in providing arguments to the champions of Greater Lebanon at the Paris Peace Conference (Kaufman 2001). During the Mandate, two major ideological streams emerged, each organically connected to one of the two groups of Christian elites embedded in the Mandate power system: the first, linked to the Maronite (mountain) notables guided by Emile Eddé was the Corm-led protectionist "mountain" stream, with Phoenicianism remaining intimately bound to a Maronite-centered idea of Lebanon as

an Eastern Christian bastion and the cradle of Western civilization that had to be preserved (Kaufman 2004b).

The second stream was "urban," pluralistic, and linked to the city's Christian (not exclusively Maronite) and commercial-financial bourgeoisie, who progressively earned a dominant position in both the economy and the state apparatus. The major and most influential exponent of this current was Michel Chiha. Chiha was a prominent Chaldean banker from Beirut and belonged to one of the most influential merchant families in the capital. Thanks to his socioeconomic background, he was used to boosting ramified relations with both Muslim and non-Maronite Christian elites by starting with the business terrain. In the early years of the Mandate, he actively participated in parliamentary politics and was tasked by French authorities with running the commission to draft the Lebanese constitution (Hartman and Olsaretti 2003). This compelled him to find a nationalist formula that could also appeal to the Muslim citizens and notables of the annexed territories, who were still largely reluctant to accept the solution of Greater Lebanon. Moving from this specific positionality, he reframed Lebanese identity as a distinct "Mediterranean variety" shaped over centuries by the constant interplay between the necessary openness to the world provided by the sea and the protective function of the mountain. While the former has shaped Lebanon's innate vocation to cosmopolitanism, trade, and mobility since Phoenician times, the latter has progressively endowed the country with its specific ethnoreligious peculiarities, including consociationalism as a major source of political stability, of which the Muslim heritage is an integral part (Chiha 1949). In so doing, the mountain as a refuge and a Christian bastion was substituted by Nerval and Lamartine's seductive image of Lebanon as the *Suisse du Moyen-Orient* (i.e., a harmonious consociation of sectarian cantons). Christian dominance was implicitly assessed by leveraging the earlier settlements in the mountain, which necessarily made them more adherent to the "real" national culture. These propositions were summarized in 1942 in the essay *Le Liban aujourd'hui* (Chiha 1949).⁵ At that time, in the context of the Second World War's dissolution of the French Mandate, Beshara al-Khouri was willing to agree with Riad al-Solh on the National Pact, which would lay the political and institutional foundations for an independent Lebanon. As a result, Chiha's nationalism was assumed as *the* nationalist mythmaking of the postcolonial state, providing legitimacy for both the new sectarian order set up by the pact and—as we will see later on—the irresistible transition to the Merchant Republic (Traboulsi 2007, 104–8).

3. The Folkloric Peasant versus Peasant Lived Pasts: Peasant Life during the Mutasarrifate

Within Chiha's framing, the representation of the spatiality of Mount Lebanon was reengineered according to two precise new functions. On the cultural side, the custodian of the most authentic "Lebaneseness" was the harmonious and laborious village life. The latter's function was to provide the "Phoenician" urban trader with a moral compass, so he would not lose himself in the hecticness of the cosmopolitan world. On the productive side, it was rethought as the tourist embodiment of the "Switzerland of the Middle East"—that is, as the privileged destination for Arab and Lebanese summer vacationing where one could find a little idyllic rest from the hecticness of the metropolis (Maasri 2016).

This new double function found its quintessential expression in the Baalbak International Festival. The festival was established in 1956 under the auspices of President Camille Chamoun to make the majestic ruins of the Jupiter Temple the site from which to give continuity and bring about the historical role played by Lebanon "in the development of culture and civilization" since "immemorial time."⁶ In 1957, the festival added "Lebanese Nights" to its program to offer its international audience a taste of the purest and most authentic Lebanese national-popular culture, crystallized in its folkloric tradition. The task of bringing it to the stage was given to the Rahbani brothers, whose music plays with the iconic Fairouz immediately became the most powerful and representative image of Lebanon within and beyond its borders (Stone 2007, 13–31).

As Christopher Stone notes, the type of folklore—and, hence, the metonymic embodiment of *the* national culture—that the Rahbani brothers' music plays helped to canonize was intimately associated with the Christian mountain village. Their plays were usually set in what was commonly considered the halcyon days of Lebanon's "recent" national past: the days of the Fakreddine II emirate and, above all, of the Mutasarrifate. These eras were crystallized in a nostalgic spatial-temporal bubble where the temporary alteration of village harmony because of an external disturbance (e.g., conflict with another village, an alien robber, the Ottoman army, etc.) offered the background plot for the unfolding of Fairouz's (reconciliatory) love story. Life and feelings were portrayed as genuine, simple, and childlike, with rural misery romanticized and polished to serve the entertainment expectations of their bourgeoisie audience (Stone 2003). This constructed representation of rurality, however, had much more to do with Lebanon's political present than the mountain social past.

When the Mutasarrifate was instituted, Mount Lebanon had just emerged from two decades of recurring rural and sectarian strife. The waves of unrest were exacerbated by the sociopolitical backlash of Mount Lebanon's transition to capitalism, driven by the integration of the mountain in the French-dominated global circuits of the silk economy in the middle of the century. At the time of integration, Mount Lebanon was administered according to the *qaimaqamiyah* system, which envisioned a separation between the upper and the lower parts of the region as two distinct administrative units under the jurisdiction of a Maronite and a Druze *muqataaji* (tax farmers) family, respectively. In both administrative units, most of the population were Maronite landless peasants cultivating mulberries on the terrains of the church or the *muqataaji* families themselves, according to different sharecropping arrangements. Political and economic power was exercised through tax farming (the *iqtaa*), paid to the *muqataajis* predominantly in the form of parts of the harvests. Peasants were also subjected to various forms of corvées, embedded in a rigid system of social hierarchies and statutory distinctions (Makdisi 2000, 38–45).

In 1843, at the suggestion of Austrian chancellor Klemens von Metternich, the Porte imposed this sectarian administrative system as a compromise solution to appease the rivalries of Maronite and Druze *muqataajis* for control of the mountain. The two factions were actively backed by France and Great Britain, respectively, in the broader context of an intense imperialist competition to earn economic and political control over the Ottoman Levant. The imposition of the *qaimaqamiyah* solution, however, did nothing but exacerbate sectarian competition, as well as inter-*muqataaji* rivalries for control over the respective communities (Traboulsi 2007, 24–29). A further element of instability was soon added by the coeval erosion of their dominant economic position in favor of an emerging modern bourgeoisie of urban Christian traders and brokers, which succeeded in capturing the marketing of raw silk to France and securing de facto control over several important trading towns. Furthermore, because of the rapid monetization of economic relations, *muqataajis* became increasingly dependent on merchants' moneylending (Saba 1976). This caused a severe backlash on the taxes imposed on peasants and provoked growing discontent.

This set of overlapping tensions ultimately exploded between 1858 and 1860. On Christmas Eve 1858, discontent over taxes and rent sparked a peasant uprising against the al-Khazen *muqataaji* family in the Kesrawan district, Upper Mount Lebanon, led by muleteer Tanyos Chahine. Following the revolt, the al-Khazens' lands were requisitioned

and redistributed among the peasants and commoners. They established a self-governed *Hukumah al-Jumhuriyyah* and organized it according to a subaltern understanding of the *Tanzimat* as the foundation of equal rights among commoners (*ahali*) and feudal notables (*ay'an*) (Makdisi 2000, 96–117). In 1859, fearing that the revolt would spread to Lower Mount Lebanon, the Druze *muqataajis* began launching preemptive attacks against the Maronite *ahali* under their administration, thereby sparking sectarian strife all over the mountain. Fierce Maronite-Druze confrontations also erupted in Damascus, triggering a mutual fueling of fighting (Traboulsi 2007, 33–36; Makdisi 2000, 117–46).

Both Kesrawan's experience of self-government and the intracomunal conflict were definitively sedated by the military intervention of Napoleon III in the summer of 1860. The decision to send troops came in response to the double urgency of quickly restoring the silk trade and exploiting the window of opportunity to finally consolidate imperialist control over the area by ensuring the Maronite *protégés* had control over the mountain. The litmus test for this imperialist end was epitomized by the addition of the Renan archaeological mission to the military expedition. This reflected the tradition consolidated after the Napoleon I expedition to Egypt of underpinning military control with the acquisition of scientific knowledge of areas occupied (Kaufman 2004a, 22). The expedition paved the way for a substitution of the *qaimaqamiyah* system with the postfeudal and protonational Mutasarrifate, established in 1861 with the enactment of the *Règlement Organique* (Traboulsi 2007, 42–44). Along with securing Maronite dominance in a new postfeudal system of sectarian power-sharing, the institution of the Mutasarrifate readjusted the political structure of Mount Lebanon to the new social hierarchies that the transition to capitalism had produced, shifting the site of political power from feudal notables to the modern Maronite commercial and administrative bourgeoisie of *ahali* descent produced by the spread of the French missionaries and economy. Furthermore, the autonomous fiscal system with which Mount Lebanon was endowed readjusted the distortions that had prevented the full capitalist exploitation of silk production.

By the end of the century, about 90 percent of the cultivable land of the Mutasarrifate was devoted to mulberry cultivation, with plantations expanding further to the Beqaa, the Akkar, and the Sidon hinterland. In addition, locally owned spinning and rallying workshops mushroomed across the territory (Firro 1990). Furthermore, new capitalist-oriented sharecropping agreements allowed many peasants to own small land

plots directly. In this new order, prices for harvests were established before the beginning of the harvest season by local brokers linked to French houses, who also advanced peasants the capitals to carry out cultivation at exorbitant interest rates (Khater 1996, 325–48). As a result, coping with chronic indebtedness became the core of peasants' everyday life and triggered a massive wave of emigration to the New World. Between the institution of the Mutasarrifate (1860) and 1913, an estimated 100,000 single male peasants left Mount Lebanon for the Americas, that is, about one-third of the entire population (Tabar 2010, 3). The women who remained provided cheap labor for the rallying and spinning workshops, disrupting established patriarchal structures (Beinin 2001, 64–65; Khater 1996).

4. Rethinking the Nation, Reengineering the Mountain: Rural Lebanon in the French Mandate Order

The highest price for the exploitative booming of the silk economy was paid during the First World War (Farshee 2014). By the end of the 19th century, subsistence agriculture in the Mutasarrifate had virtually disappeared because of the aggressive monoculturalization of the mountain. Consequently, the mountain became structurally dependent on the Syrian hinterland for basic food supplies, including wheat. When the First World War broke out, the Porte blocked the major routes connecting Mount Lebanon with Syria to hinder the advancement of European troops. This act unleashed severe food shortages and triggered the starvation of about half of Mount Lebanon's inhabitants (Thompson 2000, 19–24).

The trauma of the Great Famine played a crucial role in shaping the borders of Greater Lebanon. Nevertheless, the Mandate authorities still refused to implement sustained agricultural policies. As Roger Owen affirms, the French decision to split Lebanon from its natural hinterland flowed from the view that the country played a major economic role as the leading commercial and financial entrepôt between France and the rest of the Levant. This vision was part of a broader project of economic domination aimed at consolidating the French neomercantilist *économie de traite* in the two controlled states. This would be achieved by keeping the hinterland as the main landfill for French finished goods and the extraction of raw materials, on the one hand, and Beirut as the headquarters for the operations of triangular trade and the consolidation of French financial penetration, on the other hand. To that end,

the main bulk of the investments were channeled toward expanding the banking sector and developing Beirut's infrastructure and telecommunication facilities (an expansion of the port, construction of the airport, empowerment of phone and telegraph lines, etc.), implemented via the French-owned Franchise Holding and Common Interest Societies, which controlled the public services and the key strategic economic activities (Gates 1998, 13–34).

As for rural Lebanon, most of the early Mandate efforts rationalized the land tax and tenure system, with the double aim of maximizing wealth extraction and favoring the emergence of a class of mid-farmers to be used as social base (Williams 2015). However, the latter project was quickly abandoned in favor of patronizing the landed rural notables of the annexed territories, who became the main receivers of the (scarce) projects of agricultural development and aid. Likewise, the ambitious cadastral reforms failed to produce a “progressive” privatization of land tenure and greater fiscal equality, thus adding further tax pressure and disrupting collective land tenure systems (the so-called *mushaa*) in favor of big landowners (Hanna 2004). Also, due to the extent of the devastation caused by the First World War and enduring pandemics, agricultural production, and rural living conditions failed to fully recover.

The economic conditions of rural Lebanon were further aggravated by the irreversible crisis in sericulture throughout the 1920s because of the competition between the Chinese and the Japanese and the advent of rayon (Févret 1949). Owing to new political and economic priorities, when the Great Depression gave the last big blow to the silk industry, French authorities made little effort to promote alternative crops or to offer means of sustenance to peasants formerly engaged in the silk industry. Instead, it was a priority to reconvert the mountain as a leading destination for summer vacationing, at the suggestion of the New Phoenicians (Kassir 2010, 304–9; Gates 1998, 34). Agricultural development was left to private initiatives, which were able to drive expansion in the fruit and tobacco sectors. However, while fruit generated profits mostly for the big landowners on the coast, the profits of the expanding tobacco economy were quickly seized by the Mandate authorities throughout the 1930s via the Régie Co-Intéressée Libanaise des Tabacs et des Tombacs. This contributed to making the workers' mobilizations in the tobacco sector one of the main sites of subaltern resistance to the Mandate. In 1924, the village of Bikfayyah, in Mount Lebanon, became home to the first Lebanese working-class labor union, the Union of Tobacco Workers in Bikfayyah, representing the earliest nucleus of the future Lebanese

Communist Party and the starting point for the emergence of a combative, anticolonial labor movement (Couland 1970). Twelve years later, the protests of tobacco farmers in Jabal Amil against the *Régie* monopoly quickly escalated into a broader anticolonial intifada (Abisaab 2009).

Both tourist expansion and the tobacco economy failed to compensate for the silk losses. Furthermore, because of the lack of investments to implement irrigation and mechanization, harvests and crops remained highly susceptible to adverse weather conditions. As a result, between 1921 and 1932 alone, about 80,000 Lebanese citizens—the majority of them from Mount Lebanon (Dubar and Nasr 1976, 60)—emigrated, and those who remained became increasingly dependent on remittances for their everyday survival. Those who returned with a higher status were no longer eager to work the land, preferring instead to use their money to secure a modern education and a middle-class urban life for their children (Khuri 1969).

Owing to the new political importance of demography for the historical justification of a Maronite-dominated, sectarian Lebanon, the French authorities zealously included this second wave of *émigrés* in the emerging state's sectarian politics of citizenship (Maktabi 1999). Rural emigration and misery were embedded in the politics of representation of the hegemonic Lebanese nationalist discourse as essentialized ontological categories expressing Lebanese spirit and moral temper, with their material roots sublimated in a romantic cloud of mysticism, adventurism, and/or ineluctability. As such, as the borders of the nation were ideally and juridically extended to any corner of the world where there was a (Christian) Lebanese, and the nature of deprivation and the meaning of the diaspora were "dematerialized" to serve the political and economic interests of those who were responsible for its enduring unfolding. In particular, by the eve of the Second World War, these interests coincided with the urgency to get rid of the economic burden the French presence had become vis-à-vis the economic aspirations of the commercial-financial bourgeoisie, of which Chiha was an integral part and the organic intellectual. The outbreak of the Second World War offered a favorable window of opportunity for them to reach their goal, as it created the enabling conditions for those elites to take the lead in the independence process and engineer the political structure of the independent state to secure them the lion's share of political power (Traboulsi 2007, 104–8). Consequently, the economic policies of an independent Lebanon were shaped according to their desiderata, finding once again in Chiha's nationalist discourse the legitimizing framework to turn the

implementation of a self-serving laissez-faire into a founding pillar of Lebanese identity.

5. The Merchant Republic and the Disaggregation of the Rural World

With the burden of the French presence definitively left behind, the commercial-financial oligarchy that captured the bulk of political and economic power⁷ centered most of its economic policies on creating an economic environment able to fully liberate the economic potential of Beirut's intermediary role. During the presidential mandates of Beshara al-Khoury (1946–52) and Camille Chamoun (1952–58), the remnants of the economic ties with Syria were quickly dismantled, as was the inward-oriented war economic system set up by the Allied troops to face the subsistence needs from the Second World War. In the same spirit, to fully enable the expansion of triangular trade and complex intermediary financial activities, the Lebanese market was heavily deregulated in favor of a laissez-faire environment (Gates 1998, 80–135). In so doing, the development of productive activities was definitively subordinated to the dominant commercial-financial sector, in whose favor most of the private and public investments converged (Dubar and Nasr 1976, 93–104).

The economic impact of these policies on the socioeconomic fabric of rural Lebanon was devastating. Owing to the heavy competition of imported basic foodstuffs, which led to lose custom duties being imposed, most of the private investments in agriculture converged toward highly specialized cash-crops for the neighboring Arab states (fruits) or the local transformation industries (tobacco, sugar beets). In the Akkar plain (potatoes), the coastal areas (citrus), and the Beqaa (sugar beets), investments came for the most part from urban or émigré traders in search of new businesses, who began to massively acquire large estates from former absentee landlords or declining feudalists to be devoted to intensive capitalist exploitation. This triggered a rapid disappearance of sharecropping, with former sharecroppers turned into hyper-exploited waged laborers or simply evicted from their former domains and replaced with cheaper Palestinian refugees or seasonal immigrants from Syria (Nasr 1978, 6–10). Aggressive capitalistic penetration began to quickly erode the living conditions of small and medium landowners, who became increasingly dependent on traders, brokers, and monopolists who succeeded in capturing the management and distribution of agricultural facilities (Nasr 1978, 6–10). People's living conditions were further burdened by the structural lack of basic infrastructures, utilities,

and public services, which the Beirut-centric economic policies of the Merchant Republic had failed to fulfill. This was particularly the case of the peripheral areas annexed to Greater Lebanon, which, contrary to the mountain, had not even enjoyed the collateral fruits of colonial welfare and proximity with the capital.

The size of the geographical divide was officially on display in 1960 in the findings of the IRFED (Institut de Recherche et de Formation en vue du Développement) mission, which showed that in the formerly annexed territories, most of the rural localities lacked the most basic facilities such as water, electricity, telecommunications, and even rudimentary forms of primary education and health services (République Libanaise 1960, 56–62). The mission was launched in 1959 by the freshly appointed president Fouad Chehab to detect and scientifically address the socioeconomic and developmental needs of the country. The mission was part of a broader project of reform by the state to adjust the socioeconomic and sectarian distortion that had triggered the short civil war of 1958 (Traboulsi 2007, 133–37; Gendzier 1996). Based on the results, the president inaugurated sustained developmental projects in favor of rural Lebanon (electrification, expansion of the telecommunication and road networks, etc.), including an ambitious plan for agricultural development aimed at enhancing irrigation and providing credit to small farmers. Paradoxically enough, however, the projects ultimately ended up further accelerating agro-capitalist penetration, impressing the definitive push to the ongoing process of disaggregation of the rural world (Picard 1988, 145–58).

Owing to the early infrastructural advantage, the first area to experience the effects of aggressive external capitalist penetration was Mount Lebanon. During the post-Second World War reconversion, the cash crop that had earned the lion's share was apples. The earliest commercial orchards had been established throughout the 1930s on the initiative of wealthy urban businessmen of rural origin who started arranging plantations on their own land. The high profits generated by the marketing of their first harvests during the Second World War encouraged both urban merchants and the small and medium peasants who had become orphans of the silk industry to follow suit. Another important input was the boom in Beirut, as well as the temporary absence of foreign competition to satisfy the growing regional demand (Jones 1963, 247). Thanks to this favorable combination, the sector greatly expanded. Between 1953 and 1964, apple production rose from 53,000 to 125,000 tons per year (i.e., +400 percent), and the turnover of exports alone reached a quota

of 18 million LBP, equivalent to about 8 percent of the overall value of national exports (IBRD 1955, Table 6; IBRD 1969, Table 8).

However, as stressed by a report from 1959, “It would be a mistake to regard apple production as a new cottage production that is saving Lebanese village society from disintegration” (Jones 1963, 250). First, because of difficult access to credit, the small and medium farmers who had been able to enter the apple business were only those who could count on family savings, mostly migration remittances. Second, as the boom in apples significantly reduced the price of the apples, these peasants became increasingly exposed to indebtedness and the exploitation of the restricted number of traders and brokers who captured the export marketing and the distribution of the storage and cultivation facilities (e.g., fridges, pesticides, fertilizers) (Jones 1963, 252). Furthermore, the monopolistic nature of the capturing favored the consolidation of highly speculative commercial practices based on the imposition of purchase prices on peasants, which were barely enough to cover the costs of production, against retail prices multiplied by up 400 percent (Dubar and Nasr 1976, 104).⁸ Third, due to the structural underfinancing of the agricultural sector, the little public capital allocated at subsidized rates was captured by the largest firms, with small and medium peasants compelled to go to private banks or usurers, whose interests varied from between 12 percent and 15 percent (banks) to up to 50 percent (usurers) (Dubar and Nasr 1976, 105; Smith 1974, 228–29). As a result, many growers were progressively forced to abandon land or rely on a second activity to survive.⁹

6. The Lived versus the Conceived: The Btekhmay Rally and the Ephemeral Disruption of Mount Lebanon’s Politics of Space

The external exploitation of apple production did not unfold unresisted. The first wave of mobilizations began in the second half of 1964. At that time, an estimated 60 percent of Mount Lebanon residents depended on apple growing. The mobilization was sparked by an important decline in exports, which was promptly exploited by traders to decrease the purchase prices further. This pushed the growers to ask for state tutelages against private monopolies, primarily by turning the national Office of Fruit into the main intermediary for the commercialization of crops and the provision of necessary productive facilities, with the purchase price directly bargained with the growers every year according to strictly regulated procedures forbidding speculative infiltrations by external private subjects.¹⁰

Until the second half of 1965, growers’ mobilization efforts failed to catch the attention of the authorities, who simply blamed the apple crisis on the inadequacy of peasants’ production techniques. The situation changed drastically on 26 September 1965, when an emerging coalition of progressive and leftist forces, later known as the Front of Progressive Forces, Parties and Personalities, organized a solidarity demonstration in the village of Btekhay, in the *caza* of Aley. The coalition had started to form the year before, in the background of the social mobilizations that had just begun to shake the country. The leading force was Kamal Jumblatt’s Progressive Socialist Party, along with the Lebanese Communist Party and a heterogeneous array of Arab nationalist forces that were becoming increasingly influenced by Marxism (Buwari 1986, 221–26 and 239–55; Couland 1981). The demonstration was marked by a succession of speeches where solidarity with peasants and their demands was paralleled by fierce attacks on the agricultural monopolies and, above all, the *laissez-faire* doctrine that had shaped Lebanese economic policies. The event was a success: according to the newspapers of the time, between 9,000 and 20,000 people attended.¹¹

The massive participation created an incredible buzz in Lebanese economic and conservative political circles: it was the first time since the country’s independence that the official rhetoric of the “trading Lebanese” legitimizing the implementation of self-serving *laissez-faire* was unveiled in such a public, transgressive manner. The transgression sounded even more alarming when several speakers suggested socialism as an alternative to the existing order. Another central source of concern was the political weight that Mount Lebanon retained in the Lebanese electoral system, where Jumblatt, because of his powerful Druze feudal ancestry, already had a solid support in his community.¹²

To restore “the resistant force of *doxa*” against the “propulsive force of heretical criticism” (Bourdieu 1991, 131), a decision was taken to quickly convene a counterdemonstration in memory of those unruly peasants (and, more broadly, whoever might be persuaded that the existing order is renegotiable), what the real Lebanese identity is, and what it is to behave “naturally.” The counterdemonstration was to take place in the village of Nabaa Safa, in the *caza* of Chouf, which was Jumblatt’s political stronghold. Although opinion against Btekhay was mostly directed by antileftist propaganda of the right-wing, Maronite-based Kataeb party, the grand opening of the counterdemonstration was assigned to Emir Majid Arslan, the latest scion of the Druze dynasty that has historically been Jumblatt’s rival. The first part of Arslan’s speech leveraged his feu-

dal ancestry for the purported right to legitimately represent the most authentic spirit of the nation:

My dear citizens and brothers, I come here today to Nabaa Safa to tell you that I've taken charge of the Lebanese issue in the name of our ancestors, who irrigated our land with their blood, and under the guiding light of our ancient greats, who have never been greedy with this land.¹³

Once he had clarified that he was not acting on his own behalf but in his capacity as an intermediary of the spirit of the nation, he prepared the terrain to reestablish for the audience how adherence to the authentic spirit of the nation meant having a particular political behavior (or not) for the common good:

Well me, just like them: I refuse to chop cedar wood for heating; I refuse to use others' clothes to protect myself from the cold and to eat from the kneading trough whose bread is not made with the flour of my country; I refuse to import opinions, ideas, and principles as if they were perfumes to adorn my own opinions, ideas, and principles, which I choose according to the culture of my beloved country and its intimate needs and for the sake of its willing sons.

Therefore:

Those who base their discourses and positions on these groundless foundations are the Others. Inevitably, what is right for the Others can never suit us.

The essence of the “beloved country” is unequivocally clarified by the other speakers: It is the free market, which in Lebanon is not a simple economic option among many others but “part of our National Pact and one of our sacred pillars” and, therefore, essential to the spirit of the nation. The real Lebanese are “the self-made Lebanese” who, thanks to their total adherence to the essence of their country, “have earned [their] wealth by crossing the horizons from the equator to the North Pole” and by turning their country, “deprived of any natural fossil wealth,” into something great. As a result, socialism (i.e., the “Other” that is constantly mentioned in all the speeches) as a “foreign” ideology is not only inherently alien to the essence of Lebanon but also, inso-

far as it fosters the overcoming of the free market, necessarily unsuited to address the country's needs and inherently dangerously subversive. Embracing socialism, therefore, means embracing the destruction of the nation and committing an unforgivable act of apostasy.

7. Epilogue and Conclusion

In the end, both the Btekhmay and Nabaa Safa rallies achieved limited political gains. Nabaa Safa failed to bring peasants back to the fold and was even less successful at containing the rise of the Lebanese Left. As for the apple growers, after one year of further mobilizations and bargaining, they only managed to obtain a temporary solution to the apple crisis by setting a minimum purchase price; all the issues related to the problem of monopolies remained unsolved. Notwithstanding the ephemeral immediate gains, however, the Btekhmay rally marked the inaugural act of a long chain of rural mobilizations that, propelled by the inexorable advancement of monopolistic agribusiness from the far North to the deepest South, soon became an integral part of the long decade of social struggle on the path to civil war (Traboulsi 2007, 164–67; Petran 1987, 133–38). On this journey, the peasants' transgressive reappropriation of the rural space through their mobilizations imposed a new, transgressive meaning on the relation between the center and the peripheries, striking the elite monopoly from the bottom over the social production of space and its representation. As much as most of the history of modern rural Lebanon, however, the history of this liminal time has been mostly untold and unexplored.

Echoing the narrative textures set up by the ideological representations of the mountain, the existing body of scholarship regarding modern Lebanon has tended to approach Mount Lebanon as a predominantly rural and peasant society until the institution of Greater Lebanon. Most of the historical-sociological scholarly attention has recently switched to investigating the role of Maronite mountain emigration and educational advantage in relation to the making of the urban middle class in modern Lebanon (Khater 2001). This contributed to canonizing a mainstream temporalization and spatialization and understanding of the mountain's rural-to-urban transition as primarily driven by the positive forces of upward social mobility. Our brief peasant-focused excursus into the making of modern Mount Lebanon as a dominated social space has offered us a glimpse of how, as late as the early 1960s, a substantial portion of Mount Lebanon's population was still dependent on land.

As much as the rest of rural Lebanon, their gradual abandonment of agriculture—and often of the mountain itself—was primarily triggered by the devastating effect of the rise of monopolistic agribusiness on the peasant social fabric. To get a full understanding of the exact extent of the process, its spatial trajectories, and its sociopolitical implications, however, there is still much more research that needs to be done. This might help to uncover new and as yet unexplored dynamics through which the connection between the multilayered conflicts shaping the historical development of Lebanon in such a delicate time will come into sharper focus.

Notes

1. This section adopts the notions of “ideologies of the mountain” and “ideologies of the city” as defined by Hourani (1976, 33–42).

2. In this chapter, we refer to the notion of organic intellectuals as conceptualized by the Italian Marxist scholar and philosopher Antonio Gramsci: thinking and organizing elements of a particular social class whose major function is to direct the ideas and aspirations of the class they organically belong to (Gramsci 1971, 5–14).

3. According to a study conducted by the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture in the mid-1950s and cited by Claude Dubar and Salim Nasr, 90 percent of the Lebanese population in the governorate of Mount Lebanon owned some land, and so did 81 percent in North Lebanon, 75 percent in the governorate of South Lebanon, and 70 percent in the governorate of the Beqaa Valley (Dubar and Nasr 1976, 101).

4. Other major representatives of this tendency were Shukri Ghanem and Joseph Tabet (Firro 2004).

5. Although composed in 1942, the essay *Le Liban aujourd'hui* was printed in the form of a booklet only seven years later.

6. Quotation from Camille Chamoun's speech at the opening of the first edition of the festival; excerpt from Stone 2003, 15.

7. Known as the “consortium,” this oligarchy consisted of a group of about 30 families strictly linked to each other through close familial and business ties and whose apical point was constituted by President Beshara al-Khouri and his closest circle, including Chiha, who was his brother-in-law. See Traboulsi 2007, 115–18.

8. According to Dubar and Nasr, the marketing of apples was controlled by only 25 traders, of whom the three most important ones controlled about two-thirds of the marketing.

9. In 1961–62, an estimated two-thirds of Mount Lebanon peasants relied on a second activity (Smith 1974, 223).

10. *An-Nahar*, 17 October 1965.

11. *Al-Hayat*, 27 September 1965.

12. For a political biography of Jumblatt, see al-Khazen 1988.

13. All the quotations of from the demonstration of Nabaa al-Safa have been taken from *al-Hayat*, 5 October 1965, and translated from Arabic by the author.

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