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Akram Fouad Khater

“HOUSE” TO “GODDESS OF THE HOUSE”:
GENDER, CLASS, AND SILK IN 19TH-CENTURY
MOUNT LEBANON

“Are you going to behave like a factory girl?!” With this phrase, an 1880s peasant in Mount Lebanon not only admonished a daughter, but also encapsulated the social and economic transformations which were altering the notions of family and society, and the gender roles underlying both. Typically enough, these transformations came about between 1843 and 1914 as a result of the interaction between the local peasant economy and European capitalism. Modernization and dependency narratives of such an encounter follow the line of “tradition” versus “modernity,” with Europe ultimately dictating an inevitable outcome to its absolute benefit.¹ Yet closer examination reveals the story in Mount Lebanon to be far more complicated. In particular, gender replaces this artificial bipolarity with a triangular struggle among peasant men, peasant women, and European capitalists. Furthermore, rather than being historical victims, women and men in Mount Lebanon—with intersecting and diverging interests—worked to contour the outcome of their encounter with Europe and to take control over their individual and collective lives. While the equation of power was most definitely in favor of European merchants and capitalists, the struggles of these peasants were not for naught. Rather, as I will argue in this paper, their travails made the outcome multifaceted and less predictable than European capitalists would have liked it to be.

At the center of this story is silk. Between 1843 and 1914, “Syrian” silk became an internationally traded cash crop of paramount importance in the economy of the mountain. In the process, radical changes were wrought on two basic elements of the social structure: class and gender. This occurred in two economic arenas: the industrial manufacture of silk thread in Mount Lebanon and the export of silk cocoons to Europe. The first activity emerged in 1843 at a European-owned factory and reached its height in the 1880s with a plethora of Lebanese-run factories; the industry descended into bankruptcy thereafter, finally all but disappearing around World War I. At the heart of this economic venture was the silk factory, which employed mostly young women. Seemingly innocuous, this was in fact a dramatic event which gave rise to a new female working class that transgressed existing sexual mores and gender roles, and which provided the first major crisis for the patriarchal order.

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Exporting silk also brought Mount Lebanon and its peasantry into direct contact with European markets and their fluctuating fortunes. While the previous route was taken by only the most desperate of peasants, the great majority of inhabitants of Mount Lebanon traveled this road between 1862 and 1890. Along this route, silk cocoons were exchanged for European goods, with a rising net debt that kept the peasants raising more silkworms. Thus, when the silk market began to falter in the 1880s, the repercussions were greatly felt among the peasant population, leading many men to emigrate to the Americas to reverse the trend of loss of land and restabilize their social situation and identity. In doing so, more than 100,000 men (in a population that did not surpass 400,000 by 1900) left their sisters, daughters, and wives behind to deal with poverty, the social stigma of being women alone, and the responsibility of managing both the men's and women's tasks of daily life.

Faced with this second and larger crisis of patriarchy, women responded in a multitude of ways. Elucidating the responses to these two crises of patriarchy, and their effects on the ideals and structures of gender relations in Mount Lebanon, will be the focus of this paper. I will argue that the intertwined socioeconomic and patriarchal crises produced, in the course of the 19th century, new definitions of classes and gender roles. Specifically, I contend that these transformations brought about the rise of the cult of domesticity within the confines of an emerging middle class, which juxtaposed itself with a peasant class, whose women continued a tradition of working outside the home.

THE STORY OF SILK

In 1843, Antoine-Fortuné Portalis established the first mechanized silk factory in the village of Btater, of the Matn district, in Mount Lebanon. This was one of the first steps in incorporating the mountain's economy into that of the European-dominated world capitalist system, and toward the rise of the silk crop to a level of dominant prominence in the lives and livelihoods of the Lebanese peasantry. This history has been described extensively in other scholarly works,² so it will suffice here to provide a brief outline of the story of silk in Lebanon.

Perhaps the quickest way to demonstrate the exponential growth of sericulture in Lebanon is to point out some comparative statistics. Mulberry trees are essential ingredients for sericulture, because silkworms feed exclusively on the leaves of these trees. Aside from the purpose of feeding silkworms, there is little other use for mulberry in agricultural production. Therefore, the cultivation of mulberry trees provides a good indicator of the growth in sericulture. In the early part of the 19th century, slightly more than 3.3 million mulberry trees were planted in Mount Lebanon; yet, on the eve of World War I, there were 28 million of those trees in the *Mutaşarrifiya*, with an additional 9 million in the *vilayat* of Beirut.³ In other words, mulberry trees increased more than tenfold in the span of eighty years. More significant than the number of trees is the actual area that they occupied within the mountain. The percentage of land that these trees took up increased from about 10 percent to more than 40 percent during the same eighty-year period.⁴ With mulberry trees covering so much of the arable land during the last quarter of the 19th century, silk naturally came to play a dominant role in the agricultural economy of Mount Lebanon.

Financial figures relating to the sale of silk thread and cocoons confirm the rising importance of silk. Between 1836 and 1857, silk's share in the exports from Beirut hovered around 22 percent, but never exceeded 36 percent, of the total goods shipped out of that port. Even as late as 1857, silk accounted for less than 25 percent of the total 40 million French francs' worth of exported material.⁵ This began to change soon after the 1860 civil war, which opened the Lebanese economic doors wider to European capitalists. In 1873, for instance, silk accounted for 275 million of the 335 million piasters worth of exported goods, or 82.5 percent of the total exports.⁶ Thereafter, sericulture continued to occupy a position of primacy in the export trade of Mount Lebanon, so that even in 1911, when sericulture was in decline, silk provided 62 percent of the exports of Mount Lebanon.⁷ Thus, silk went from being a supplemental product that helped support a peasant family to an essential cash crop upon which the Lebanese peasantry depended for their very survival.

This dramatic increase in the cultivation of mulberry trees and silk worms was generated by an intersection of French and indigenous economic interests. From the French side, increased weaving of silk textiles in the 19th century required supplies of silk thread that could not be totally satisfied by European sericulture. This was especially the case after 1865, when a blight decimated French and Italian sericulture and industrialists of Lyons and Marseilles needed to find alternative supplies for their factories. The presence of European silk-spinning factories in Mount Lebanon, regular and inexpensive steamboat service between Beirut and Marseilles, diminution of tariffs and customs on exported silk thread, and the rise of French political prominence in Lebanese internal affairs after 1861 convinced these industrialists to choose Mount Lebanon as one source of silk. For the peasantry, increasing production of silk and selling it to the French made economic sense. During the 1840s the price of one *oka* (1.228 kilograms) hovered around 12 piasters; by 1857, the French merchants were paying 45 piasters per *oka*, and those prices persisted with minor changes through the 1870s. On another level, cultivation of mulberry trees was the most feasible way by which individual peasant families could increase their landholdings. Landlords intent on increasing their profits from sericulture needed peasant labor to terrace and plant *mawāt* (literally, “dead”) lands. In exchange for their investment of five to seven years of labor, peasants would acquire one quarter of the new *jlal* (terraces) of land through *mughārāsa* contracts.⁸

While French need for cocoons fertilized the proliferation of mulberry trees and sericulture, French demand for silk thread encouraged the industrialization of silk spinning in Mount Lebanon. Before the 1840s, most silk spinning in the mountain was carried out by *hilālīs* (itinerant spinners) who used hand-powered spinning wheels, which the French called *roue arabe*. However, French silk factories required a stronger and more evenly spun silk thread than could be obtained using these traditional methods. This led to the establishment of silk factories in Mount Lebanon bent on profiting from satisfying the requirements of French industrialists. By 1862, for instance, there were 33 Lebanese-owned filatures alongside the European ones.⁹ Twenty-three years later, the number had increased to 101, and by 1893, there were 149 Lebanese-owned factories in Mount Lebanon.

Such a strong shift toward raising silkworms and producing silk thread pulled the Lebanese Christian peasants into the folds of the French capitalist market.¹⁰ This occurred at the levels of production and prices. At the beginning of the silk season,

before a single cocoon was harvested, representatives of French mercantile houses would fan out throughout the mountain advancing money to the peasants for their purchase of silkworms. “Les courtiers,” as Ducouso called these representatives, “are inclined to advance peasants the little money that they might need at exorbitant [interest] rates.”¹¹ These cash advances tied a peasant to a particular trading house, and at the same time increased his or her debt, as the actual yield of silkworms was subject to fluctuations that were frequently lower in value than the borrowed money. Moreover, because mulberry trees and silk production took inordinate amounts of land and time away from raising subsistence crops such as wheat and lentils, peasants were often forced to borrow even more money simply to supply their families with food. Such loans were incurred at the usurious rates of 36 percent and even 40 percent.¹² Therefore, it was not unusual after 1860 for a peasant family to begin the year in debt and end it similarly.¹³

If debts tied the Lebanese peasantry to French capital, it was the uncertainty of crops and fluctuating prices that kept them from effectively breaking that bond. In terms of production of silk, several factors contributed to unpredictable and unstable crops. Weather, suitability of the silkworm eggs and incubation conditions all contributed to the annual yield of silk cocoons. For instance, in 1868 the French consul general reported that “for many years now the silkworm eggs coming from Syria have not been successful [in producing silkworms].”¹⁴ In 1875, unseasonable rain and cold weather in May ruined at least half of the silk crop. Finally, as one observer remarked in 1906, “most of the years the [silkworm] crop is not good because of the unsuitability of these [hatching] places that were generally very humid.”¹⁵ Together, these factors led the French Consul General to report in 1890 that the “growers [of silkworms] in Syria have suffered in these last years from a progressive diminution in the volume of cocoons [harvested].”¹⁶

Finally, the price of the silk cocoons mattered as much as the yield, and to the further detriment of the Lebanese peasantry, the price was controlled from Marseilles and Lyons. This was such an accepted fact that the French Consul General would simply note in passing in 1879 that “since it is the state of harvests in France and Italy which regulates the market in Syria, we have noticed considerable fluctuations this year in the price of cocoons and silk [thread].”¹⁷ Overall, some patterns can be discerned in the changes in silk prices between 1788 and 1914.¹⁸ Between 1788 and 1848, the price of one *oka* of silk rose slowly, with few fluctuations, from 4 to 12 piasters. Yet, right after the introduction of French silk factories into the mountain and the expansion of exports to France, the price of silk increased at an unprecedented rate. Between 1850 and 1872, for example, the price of one *oka* of silk cocoons rose rapidly from 15 piasters to 45.5 piasters, which represents an average annual increase of more than 1.4 piasters.¹⁹

Such leaps in prices were driven by the rising demand for silk by French factories. Moreover, the mushrooming of silk factories in the mountain itself created a larger need for local silk. However, this phase, which was accompanied by a great expansion in mulberry-tree cultivation, was short. First, beginning in 1875 the French started to import greater quantities of silk from East Asia—specifically, from Japan and China. These cocoons tended to be of better quality and even cheaper than those grown in Mount Lebanon. This trend became even more pronounced

by 1890. Second, the Lebanese silk factories were, by the end of the 19th century, scaling back their operations or even closing down. In part, this was due to the fluctuation in world silk prices. It was also due to the fact that these producers could not procure the capital necessary to modernize their equipment to compete with European silk manufacturers, which left them with high operational costs and low-quality silk.²⁰ Because of these factors, the price of silk cocoons hovered around 22 piasters per *oka* through the 1880s, and after the 1890s they fell to the 19-piaster mark, from which they never recovered.

Lebanese Christian peasants were caught trying to survive in the midst of these market swings. In good years, there was enough profit for the small grower to pay debts, buy more meat, and enjoy some imported luxuries. But in bad or even ordinary years the peasant became more and more indebted. Lebanese peasant men found themselves struggling not to lose their land because of their debts, while procuring sufficient funds to pay for their families' daily needs. Few options were available to fulfill these criteria. For those most desperate for cash—generally, those who had little if any land—the solution was to send their daughters to the silk factories. Alternatively, for the majority of peasant men unable or unwilling to opt for this solution, emigration became the only possible way out of debt and into a better life.

‘ĀMILĀT OR “FACTORY GIRLS”

When Antoine Fortuné Portalis opened his factory in Mount Lebanon, he needed workers to transform cocoons into an exportable silk thread. Peasants presented the only readily available pool of labor in the area. His task was to transform them from farmers accustomed to working according to “peasant time”²¹ into industrial laborers whose schedule was dictated by a clock linked to the exigencies of European markets. Until 1850, men exclusively were employed in this and other European-owned factories, but within eight years women constituted by far the majority of workers. The reason for this shift was ostensibly because “women had nimble fingers.” More to the point, male peasants proved most unsuitable to the needs of these factory owners. Men, whose identity and honor was tightly linked to tilling a plot of land, were most hesitant to be seen in a factory. This severely limited the supply of male labor available to factory owners.²² Only those few who did not own even a small piece of land reluctantly accepted factory work. Yet even they were uncooperative in following the dictates of a foreman and an artificial work schedule, and generally voted against becoming proletarians by staying home. In fact, many European factory owners complained to the French Consul General that after training some peasants in the skills necessary for industrial work and providing them with cash advances for their seasonal labor, they would disappear into the mountains.²³ By 1858, these difficulties made factory owners look toward women for their supply of labor.

Women in Mount Lebanon had much to recommend them to factory owners. First, because of the prevalent hierarchical division of labor that undervalued female work, women could be paid less and worked harder. For example, in 1851 a male worker was usually paid 4 to 5 piasters per day, compared with the 1 piaster that a

female worker earned.²⁴ Second, the hierarchical social structure of power which placed women beneath men²⁵ fit well into the pyramidal division of labor in silk factories, with male owners and foremen, on the one hand, and women workers, on the other. The transfer of the gendered division of labor from village to factory was facilitated in several ways. For European factory owners, recruiting proved very difficult at first because of the social taboos against contact with strange men. In the early 1860s, they circumvented this problem by recruiting young girls from European-run orphanages, whom they could incorporate into a paternalistic institution by becoming surrogate patriarchs. In some Lebanese-owned factories, this transfer was made easier because they started out operation as family enterprises both in capital and labor,²⁶ and many of the women who were first employed to spin the silk threads were relatives of the owner of the factory.²⁷ In this manner, the owner extended his patriarchal control over his female relatives from the house into the factory.

Even when factory owners began recruiting their labor from outside the clan,²⁸ the patriarchal division of labor within the factory persisted. Employing a predominantly female work force deflected some of the criticism leveled by the Maronite church against mixing the sexes on the factory floor. The church and Maronite elite had, as early as 1866, complained vociferously to the French Consul about the practice of employing men and women to work side by side in silk factories owned by French industrialists.²⁹ While the practice continued, Maronite factory owners were reluctant to incur the anger of their socially and politically powerful church, and for that reason preferred to hire women almost exclusively, with few male overseers.³⁰ In addition, and more importantly, factory owners thought young women less likely to dispute wages or organize protests against the terrible working conditions in the factories because of the transplanted patriarchal structure. Thus, by the early 1880s, 12,000 unmarried women and girls were working in factories outside their villages, while a mere 1,000 men were employed exclusively as overseers. This number represented 23 percent of the total population of women of working age, and it meant that, on average, one out of every five families had a daughter working in these factories.³¹

With the alienation of female work in silk factories from its original familial context, new definitions of gender and class intersected in the “factory girl,” a derogatory term that consecrated the feminization of factory work. Dissolving silk cocoons and spinning their threads became tasks specifically associated with women, as *‘āmila* (female worker) and silk spinner became synonymous terms. The only masculine term employed within the milieu of silk factories was *nazzār*, or overseer, while outside a man was a *shaykh*, *tājir* (merchant), or *fellah*. At the same time, the term *‘āmila* established the boundary between “well-to-do families whose girls went to high school and those who were poorer and whose girls worked in the factories.”³² Hence, working in a factory came to be understood socially as poor women’s work.

It is clear why the factory owners preferred to hire women; the question remains, however, of why peasant families who ostensibly considered their honor sacrosanct allowed their young women to work in these silk factories. The answer is

twofold: Money was needed, and honor was malleable. For those peasant families who were most destitute, factory work provided a source of essential income. In the 1860s, when a poor peasant family earned no more than 950 piasters per year, a young woman’s additional wages of 275 piasters would be more than welcome.³³

While survival pushed the poorest peasants toward new means of acquiring cash, concepts of honor and shame do not seem to have stopped many men from sending their daughters to the silk factories. Honor was never really a static or monolithic idea and institution which cut equally across class lines. Rather, as John Davis successfully argues, “honor is a system of stratification.”³⁴ Wealth and status endow their owners with virtue and honor, while the poor have to contend with whatever is allotted them by their equals and superiors. In practice, a man of superior honor—that is, a landowner or a *shaykh*—could insult a peasant of lesser honor with relative impunity, whereas such an insult between equals could lead to bloodshed.³⁵ It follows that the higher the social position of a family or a family line, the more visible was its honor and the more crucial it was for its male members to safeguard. Hence, among the *shuyūkh* of Mount Lebanon—Christian and Druze—women were much more cloistered than among the poorer peasant families, whose women had to work in the fields and walk to the *‘ain* exposed to eyes of strangers.³⁶ In sexual terms—which is what honor is most closely associated with—an extramarital relationship between a couple from the *shuyūkh* class could lead to blood-letting and long-lasting feuds, while poorer peasants had to contend with either forcing the man to marry the daughter, or, if that failed, accepting cash compensation.³⁷ Finally, any shame that was associated with women’s work in factories was counteracted by the fact that income from that work allowed men to continue their “honorable” work in the fields. In other words, the poorest male peasants sacrificed their daughters’ reputations to retain their social identity as peasants, from which they derived their immediate and individual honor.

All of these factors made women’s work in the factories economically indispensable; socially, however, that work had repercussions. One of the consequences of sending women to work in the silk factories was immense social pressure on the families involved. The shame that was imposed on these young women because of work became so much a part of the peasant culture that father or mother who wanted to scold a daughter would say, “Are you going to behave like a factory girl?”³⁸ Reproachful and even spiteful village gossip of purported indecent behavior among the *‘āmilāt* (the plural of *‘āmila*) tarnished the honor of the peasant family. Such sanctions were more a reflection of the perceived threat that women’s work in these factories posed to the existent social structure and mores than signs of concern for the welfare of the families involved. This threat was serious enough for the Maronite church to try to prohibit women from working in the silk factories by circulating an ecclesiastical letter that described factory work as immoral for women.³⁹ When that proved ineffective, the church resorted to pleading with the French ambassador in 1867 to pressure the French owners of these factories to abstain from hiring women.⁴⁰ Nor was the outcry only ecclesiastical in nature: Some wealthier peasants and many more *shuyūkh* petitioned the Maronite patriarch and government to put an end to women’s employment in the

factories. In other words, women's factory work had unleashed a crisis in patriarchy, and, by transgressing into the "male" sphere, threatened to undermine the idealized gender roles.

For the "factory girls," work outside the house brought a dissonant combination of economic and social gains and setbacks. For the first time in their lives, these young women were earning cash for their work: Their work in the fields and at home had never been directly remunerated, and the crops harvested were the property of the family as a whole and not that of a single individual. In contrast, their work in the factories became individually distinguishable and its cash worth clearly defined. However, this transformation did not completely separate these women's interests from that of their families. Rather, until the end of the 1870s, women's work was part of an overall familial strategy that was meant to insure the survival of the collective unit in the changing social and economic circumstances. Still, in an economy where money was fast becoming the nexus of society, the earnings of the "factory girls" translated into buying and, to a smaller extent, social power. Through their work, these women gained a greater sense of their individual self-worth and abilities.

One example of this new awareness can be found inside the factories. Between 1860 and 1880, some of the women who worked in the silk factories were hired through male intermediaries, and others were employed through family connections.⁴¹ Men would negotiate all wages and terms of work. At times, they even pulled the women out of the factories when they were not satisfied with what they got from the factory owner. This setup was in effect another form of patriarchal control that competed with the control that the factory sought to impose upon the women. Toward the end of the 19th century, factory owners, seeking to "rationalize" women's work and avoid competition over its control, began hiring women directly. This was possible because of the greater availability of trained female silk workers, and the desire of these women to negotiate their own contracts. Without the patriarchal buffer of an intermediary, these women had to struggle, directly and constantly, with employers who were trying to extract more labor. Similarly, the *ʿamilāt* tried to use the limited skilled labor pool to their advantage in negotiating salaries.⁴² For instance, some women, after promising to work for one factory owner, would at the last minute threaten to go over to a competitor's factory if the wages weren't raised.⁴³ Slowing down the pace of work and producing lower-quality silk were also commonplace tactics used by workers.⁴⁴ Ultimately, by the 1890s the *ʿamilāt* were resorting to strikes as a way to claim control over their labor.⁴⁵ One such strike took place when a French tobacco company would not provide its women workers with paid vacations. After a week, the workers won all of their demands, which included twenty days of paid vacation and fourteen months of pay per year—the extra being considered bonus.⁴⁶ Silk factories, then, provided an arena where young working women could challenge patriarchal and capitalist authority—outside their families—without fearing extreme social reprimands. The gains they achieved in a new public sphere did not guarantee a parallel success at home; they did, however, serve to highlight the difference between women's control in the factory and their relative powerlessness within the family.

By the end of the 19th century, this obvious discrepancy pushed some of the factory women to try to gain more. This time it was the matter of deciding how to use their wages. Initially, when young women started working in the silk factories they would give most of their wages to their parents, who would decide what to do with them. But by the 1890s, many were keeping most of those wages to themselves. One contemporary proverb lamented how "all that the brunette makes [in silk factories] she spends on lipstick and makeup."⁴⁷ Other evidence also points to the fact that the *amilāt* were increasingly using their income to purchase gold and other precious items for their dowry.⁴⁸ Of course, before the time of wage-earning, young women did have a trousseau, but this was made up of home-woven items made from whatever silk threads were left over. Such a situation required little in the way of decision-making; the leftover silk could be used to make clothes and little else. However, with money the decision became more complicated, and it centered on a greater proportion of buying power and social prestige. One can argue that factory girls were able to keep their money to themselves only because it was justified as a strategy that would better their marriage chances. At a time when available single men were becoming scarce, such a strategy fit the need of the family as a whole, socially and economically, to marry off the young women. But even under such circumstances, young women were in essence laying claim to their wages and their labor. In other words, these young women had acquired the power of independent and individualized decision-making, something they had not quite enjoyed before.

Yet the women did not necessarily view factory work as absolutely liberating. Along with the wages they earned came physical hardships and social problems. Being crowded into a small area with little light and ventilation and pots of boiling water was not healthy. According to Ducouso, what Dr. Villermé had noted about women workers in France around 1825 could easily have been a description of the lot of Lebanese women spinners in the late 19th century.⁴⁹ In that report, Dr. Villermé wrote,

It is difficult to give [a complete] picture of the miserable aspects of the lives of women employed in spinning silk, of the horrible deformations of their hands, of the bad state of health amongst many of them, and of the repulsive odors which attach to their clothes, infects the workshop and strikes all those who approach it.⁵⁰

Nor was the pace of the work enjoyable. Although hard work was nothing new to these women, there was variety and social interaction in traditional daily work. In the factories, work became a monotonous repetition of spinning silk threads from sunrise to sunset, or anywhere from ten to twelve hours daily. On average, seventy to eighty women were cramped into an area no bigger than 200 square feet with a six-foot ceiling, working around fifty basins that belched hot steam around the clock. The spinning machines were far too noisy to sustain conversation. The only breaks in the monotony were a half-hour break for lunch and two shorter breaks during the morning and afternoon. Very few women could have found this work liberating. In fact, many *amilāt* registered their dissatisfaction with "a good deal of indolence and very little interest [in their work]." The same European

observer of this “sorry state of affairs” went on to recommend instituting a system of penalties and rewards, and “tight surveillance” to “*make them produce silk of good quality.*”⁵¹

Socially, the *‘amilāt* felt the disapproving pressure in stares when they went to work, or when they walked to the village’s water source. The stigma that came to be attached to the work and lives of the *‘amilāt* was not only burdensome, it also threatened their chances of marriage. “Tainted” as they were by contact with male strangers, and relegated to an inferior class within peasant society, some young women saw their chances for marriage diminish. These chances were further reduced by years spent behind silk-spinning wheels. Parents who were loathe to lose their daughters’ crucial wages kept them in the silk factories long past the prime years of “marriageability” for women, which was between the ages of sixteen and twenty.⁵² Paradoxically, marriage was the only way for these women to attain a respectable social position, so these women found themselves strained between new economic realities and pre-existing social expectations.

“GODDESS OF THE HOUSE”

After 1880, several developments made this dilemma applicable to the lives not only of the *‘amilāt* and the poorest peasant families, but also to the lives of most other peasant women. First, the relative prosperity of the 1860s and 1870s had given rise to greater levels of consumption among the peasantry and to increased expectations about the standard of living. Evidence of this development can be found in the records of imports of “luxury” items to the port of Beirut. For example, the importation of sugar into Beirut rose from 1.3 million kilograms in 1868 to 3 million kilograms in 1887, and jumped to 5 million kilograms just a year later.⁵³ Demand for red tiles, used to cover the roofs of houses, doubled between 1887 and 1892; only twenty years earlier, one could hardly find a single red-tiled roof on the mountain.⁵⁴ Rice, which was celebrated in the popular saying, “Rice is King, and bulgar wheat went and hanged itself” (i.e., rice is the luxury of foods, whereas bulgar wheat is coarse), experienced a rise in the level of consumption among Lebanese peasants. The consular reports of the 1840s do not mention rice among the items imported into Beirut; by 1888, however, the reports recorded 8 million kilograms brought in through the port of Beirut alone.⁵⁵ Similarly, European cotton and woolen textiles, which were considered a “luxury item,” were not in much demand around 1854, but by the 1890s calicos and other English, Austrian, and French textiles were imported into Mount Lebanon to the tune of 20 million francs.⁵⁶ Even watches and clocks, which were unheard-of before, were making an inroad into peasants’ pockets and houses by the turn of the century.⁵⁷

At the same time, a dramatic increase in population—which translated into a decrease in land resources—and depreciation in silk prices combined to frustrate expectations of a better life. For instance, between 1783 and 1860, the population of the mountain had risen from 120,000⁵⁸ to only about 200,000—an increase of about 67 percent.⁵⁹ In comparison, by 1913 the number of people in Lebanon amounted to 414,800, with another estimated 175,600 Lebanese residing in North and South America—an increase of 195 percent in a period of only fifty-three

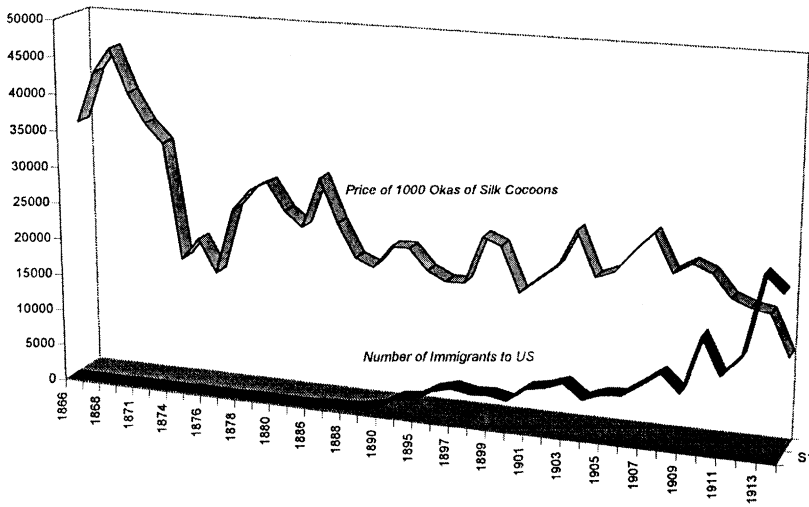


FIGURE 1. Comparative statistics of immigration and silk prices (in piasters).

years.⁶⁰ Population pressure, which reduced inheritance to “a branch on a tree” by the end of the 1880s, thus worked to limit the possibilities for a generation of peasants who were born in the 1860s and 1870s. As young peasant families inherited smaller and smaller plots of land, they also had to contend with decreasing prices of silk. While the impact of this decrease was not immediately felt, over time it produced a sense of malaise. The decrease and stagnation of silk prices—in combination with rising expectations and population—produced a major socioeconomic crisis for a large number of the Christian Lebanese peasantry. As the chart shown in Figure 1 demonstrates, many young men responded to this crisis by emigrating to the Americas in search of their livelihoods.

Statistics from the records of the U.S. Bureau of Immigration indicate that these immigrants were generally not the poorest of the peasants; rather, they came more from among the middle peasantry. For example, in the period between 1899 and 1903, a “Syrian” immigrant brought with him or her an average of \$31.85, as opposed to the \$12.26 that a Polish immigrant carried with him or her.⁶¹ Based on these figures, one can argue that the Lebanese immigrants were people who had some land, but not enough to satisfy their growing needs and expectations of life in the villages. At the same time, they could pool enough resources to send one or two members of the family to the Americas. This massive outflow of men precipitated a second and more major crisis for patriarchy in the mountain, a crisis that manifested itself in different, yet related, problems for married and unmarried women.

We do not have exact statistics about the number of married Lebanese peasants who emigrated to the *mahjar*. However, enough left wives and children behind to raise concern about the status of the family in the minds of religious and secular leaders. For the most part, this concern centered on the disappearance of husbands overseas. This “evil” of emigration was real enough for priests to give sermons admonishing men not to leave alone for the New World, and threatening excommunication to anyone who failed to return after five years.⁶² Some priests went so

far as to require an emigrating man to sign a contract promising to return for his family.⁶³ While the numbers of such recorded incidents were fairly small, the threat they posed weighed heavily on the minds of those left behind.

Even for families that were reunited, the years of physical separation and financial deprivation took a toll. Leading separate lives, linked only by occasional letters, the families found it difficult not to drift apart. This is not surprising when wives had to work harder than ever to support their families, and, in addition, were left with the burden of upholding the “honor” of the family by themselves. Thus, some married women who felt thoroughly oppressed by their marital situation chose the well-trodden path of emigration to the New World. Although again there are no exact statistics about the numbers of women who made up this phenomenon, references to such incidents are common enough in the literature from the later 19th century to suggest a small trend.⁶⁴ These *hijrahs*, or separations, were equivalent to divorce in a religious community in which perpetual marriage was obligatory and expected. As such, these incidents represented dramatic departures from the norm in gender relations. For the woman to “divorce” the man was much more than a slap in the face; it was an outright rejection of his control, which was sanctioned by village traditions and practice. In other words, these women regarded the years of separation as defaults on the “patriarchal bargain,”⁶⁵ which assumed the active presence and support of the man in return for his position of power. Even if few in number, such incidents dramatically highlighted the pressures that new market forces and emigration brought to bear on “traditional” patriarchy.

These pressures threatened not only the male structures of power but also those of women. As Deniz Kandiyoti argues in her article “Islam and Patriarchy,” women in a “classic” patriarchal structure develop a series of strategies that allows them to maximize their own life chances within an unfavorable structure.⁶⁶ For instance, while taking on the onerous task of reproducing a male for the family—and all the possible problems that this entails—a mother expected in return filial devotion at a later stage in life. As a bedouin matriarch put it:

May they always be blessed with happiness
the sons of my sons with me in their midst.⁶⁷

Similarly, a young bride accepted subservience to her mother- and father-in-law with the prospect that, at a later stage in her life, she should be the one administering a household with daughters-in-law. While there were always women who suffered because they were infertile, or because they had abusive husbands or neglectful sons, they were merely considered “‘unlucky’ . . . anomalies and accidental casualties in a system that otherwise made sense.”⁶⁸ Moreover, women’s vested interest in the existing patriarchal bargain did not necessarily engender feelings of subjugation. In discussing these issues for women in Oman, Unni Wikan states that “rather than reflecting subjugation, these constraints and limitations [veil and sexual segregation] are perceived by women as a source of pride and a confirmation of esteem.”⁶⁹ Thus, most Lebanese Christian peasant women saw the breaks in the patriarchal structure not as openings to new possibilities, but, rather, as threats to their social and economic well-being.

The departure of husbands to the Americas only put a greater burden of economic and social responsibility on their wives' shoulders, and without any concomitant social benefits, these women sought to reunify their families at all costs. At the same time, young single women had the added worry of finding a groom as a necessary step toward entering the adult social world and fulfilling the duty that they had been told was theirs: raising a family. With the villages emptying of prospective husbands, these women saw their chances for marriage dwindling.

To avoid the unsavory prospect of being “preserved in vinegar,” as the popular saying recommended for those women who did not get married by the age of twenty,⁷⁰ young women and their families adopted various tactics. In 1908, one observer noted one such approach with disdain: “the expatriation to America . . . [has caused] the families of a girl to offer large sums of money to [a prospective] groom, and to renounce their social rank and titles to give their [daughter's] hand to an obscure groom with no money, . . . [who most likely was] much older.”⁷¹ Another, more common tactic was to go where the supply of men was more plentiful than in the villages of Lebanon—namely, the *mahjar*. Women who chose emigration used the accepted quest for marriage to legitimize their ventures beyond the physical and social boundaries of the village. Thus, between 1899 and 1914, 47 percent of the total number of Lebanese immigrants to the United States—or 72,605—were women.⁷² Other destinations received a variable number of women between 1880 and 1914: In Australia, there were three women arriving for every four men; two of ten immigrants to Argentina were women; and 41 percent of those Lebanese arriving in Brazil were women.⁷³ While about half of these were married women accompanying their husbands, the other half were single or widowed women who went alone to the New World seeking to accumulate wealth and “to increase their chances for marriage as villages emptied of single men.”⁷⁴

These numbers are all the more dramatic when one considers that not a single Druze woman left Lebanon before the 1920s. Cultural and religious differences cannot account for this discrepancy, as before 1860—and even as late as the 1880s—Druze and Maronite communities shared many cultural elements. The main variation in the histories of both communities stems from the fact that the Druze community remained outside the market economy that was being constructed in the mountain. Consequently, the patriarchal structure of the Druze community was not subjected to the same critical pressures of female employment or male emigration.⁷⁵ It was mainly Lebanese Christian women, then, who struggled against the impact of the commercialization of the silk industry by adopting new tactics for marriage, and by trying to maintain the family system that defined them in their social roles as individuals.

However, instead of completely safeguarding “tradition,” this process forced a redefinition of gender relations, marriage, and, ultimately, of the family in the *mahjar* and back in Mount Lebanon. Reasons for this are easy to discern. Families were spread over continents, communicating rarely and briefly through letters that took months to arrive. Sons who accumulated wealth in the Americas became the main providers for their families back in Mount Lebanon, and as such acquired greater status within the hierarchy of the family. Previously obsequious letters filled

with supplication for their father's benevolence were replaced with terse chastisements from sons who were unhappy with the financial decisions of their elders.⁷⁶ Marriages that normally required the blessing of a whole clan were by necessity being arranged hastily in New York City or Springfield, Massachusetts, by the groom and maybe a cousin or two, at most. Debates about the role of women and marriage in the Americas occupied the transplanted communities and their magazines and newspapers. For example, the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Hoda* published between 1899 and 1908 a series of articles dealing with the appropriate age for marriage, evils besetting separated families, and arranged versus romantic marriages.

Even those emigrants who went back to the village for a "traditional" arranged marriage with a relative, could no longer abide by "traditional" gender roles. When they returned to the *mahjar*, most husbands, if not all, soon learned that their wives had to work outside the house. As seamstresses, as peddlers on the road, and as store workers, women worked long hours to insure the survival of their families.⁷⁷ One emigrant put it aptly when he said, "mother had a lot of pride but when the family needed help she went to work because the family came first."⁷⁸ At the same time, these economic realities brought about a crisis for men raised with different notions of women's social and economic roles. Some tried to prohibit their women from working, but few could afford the luxury of such a classically patriarchal practice when they were so close to poverty and destitution. Such paradoxes were the subject of articles and editorials in Arabic newspapers and magazines that sought to dispel concern over women's labor by arguing that a woman's honor, "like pure gold," will not be tarnished by work.⁷⁹

Work was hardly the only point of crisis for emigrant families. Arranged marriages, for daughters and sons, increasingly came under attack from a second generation of emigrants frustrated with "old customs" and wishing to opt for "romantic love." Supporting this criticism of the old patriarchal structure were "intellectuals" of the community such as A. Hakim, who decried the "pathetic" custom of arranged marriage in an article in the *Syrian World*. In his article, "The Marriage Problems among the Syrians," he praised the

modern method of personal choice [of a spouse]. . . . Marriage which is the basis of happy family life, which in turn is the basis of the property and progress of the nation, should be our principal concern in our present stage of transition. For upon the outcome of our efforts along this direction will depend either the improvement of the status of the race or its deterioration.⁸⁰

Clothes were another battlefield. Closets became the repository of "Westernization," with "shorter skirts and loose waists replacing the cumbersome long skirts and tight bodices."⁸¹ New hairstyles—including short hair for few brave souls—lipstick, and other implements of "modern" self-decoration became tools for burrowing underneath the foundations of classical patriarchal control. As a result of these historical developments, wife and husband had to redefine themselves as individuals, and their relationship to each other and to their sons and daughters. In other words, a new patriarchal bargain was negotiated which defined the family for a new class taking root in the *mahjar* that was subsequently grafted onto the society of Mount Lebanon.

What emerged was a *mélange* between an objectively “middle-class” family and a subjectively peasant one. Enough variations of this mixture emerged to make labels such as “middle-class nuclear family” of little use in describing the new and amorphous class and family. However, some patterns and trends allow us to define some general characteristics that distinguished these two new social structures from their original roots. More to the point, this distinction became more dramatically clear upon return of the emigrants from the *mahjar* to Mount Lebanon.⁸²

Back in Mount Lebanon, the returned emigrants consciously distinguished themselves as the middle class which straddled the gap between the upper-class urban elite and the mountain peasants.⁸³ Their houses blushed with wealth as the new Italian-made red tile supplanted the old mud and thatch roof;⁸⁴ communal sleeping gave way to private bedrooms that separated parents from children;⁸⁵ Ford Model-T’s were stubbornly pulled by donkeys to the villages over rocky paths; and European utensils cut into new foods imported from the Americas. For men, gold watches dangled from European-style jackets, and the Turkish fez replaced the peasant *labbada*. For women, kerchiefs decorated with gold coins were replaced with stylized coifs, and long skirts were replaced with dresses that revealed far too much for some contemporary observers.⁸⁶ An interspersed “ya know?” in the midst of Arabic speech and an assumed accent made it obvious where one resided with regard to the line dividing those who had emigrated and become “modern” from those who were still peasants. All of these changes were symbols of new roles and identities for members of this new amorphous class which distanced it from its peasant roots. In this sense, fine clothes not only signaled new wealth but also separated the returned emigrants from physical labor in the fields; their houses not only elevated them symbolically above the rest of the village, but their doorsteps also separated tilled fields from smooth white tile.⁸⁷

Material life was not alone in separating members of this new class from peasants surrounding them in villages. Labor, or lack thereof, served to highlight the newly constructed social boundaries within villages. Returning for the most part with a modest wealth to the villages where the cost of living was definitely lower than New York or Buenos Aires meant that emigrants no longer had to labor on the land. Instead, many purchased land and hired peasants to till the soil, plant the trees, and harvest the crops. Other, more adventurous emigrants invested money in mills, soap factories, stores, and other small-scale businesses and industries. Very few, if any, returned to be peasants. Moreover, most sought an urban future for their sons by providing them with a “useful” education—that is, foreign languages, Arabic, and mathematics—with the hope that they would acquire official positions with the government or with a merchant.

Gender roles that were “renegotiated” in the Americas were equally imported and touted to distinguish emigrant from *jurdi*.⁸⁸ In the process of repatriation, these roles went through yet another transformation. While their mothers had toiled for years in the fields of the mountain and the markets of the Americas, women of this new class were shunted into the private domain of the “new” home. Their work no longer entailed direct financial sustenance of the family but the management of a household and the running of a social salon where material consumption was

placed on public display, and where such new etiquette as “do not put up your feet in someone’s face” and “do not pick your nose or fingers in public, or stick out your tongue” became de rigueur.⁸⁹ Rather than being the drudges of society, women of this new class came to be seen by some men and by themselves as essential to the moral and spiritual development of society. As one contemporary wrote in 1913, “[T]here is no one like women in organizing the social structure and preserving its order and morals and advancement of its virtues, particularly because they are *rabbāt* [goddesses] of the family and the home.”⁹⁰ To help in these endeavors, and ensure “progress toward modernity,” many male reformers advocated educating young women in religion, Arabic, home economics, and child-rearing so they could better manage the home and household budgets and educate their children.⁹¹ Such proclamations and the labors of missionary as well as indigenous nuns culminated in a higher rate of education among girls in Mount Lebanon than anywhere in the surrounding regions of the Middle East and North Africa.⁹²

Within this new environment, many women went from being “The House” to “Goddess of the House.”⁹³ Ideologically, this was an elevation in status in the sense that it placed women in control of the household. Educationally, it opened up some new intellectual and practical possibilities for few women of this new class.⁹⁴ Yet in practice, this new position placed the majority of “middle-class” women outside the fiscally productive sector of the family by isolating them in an enclosed private sphere. Women of this hybrid middle class lived in social circles where work was associated with producing cash, and where at the same time they were not allowed to engage in such labors because of the new sense of propriety.

CONCLUSION

During the second half of the 19th century, Mount Lebanon became integrated into a European capitalist system. This integration occurred through the commercialization of sericulture and the establishment of silk-reeling factories. Both elements of this process, as well as other factors such as population increase and growing taste for European goods, created a greater and sometimes desperate need for cash among the peasantry. One solution, which was adopted by about the poorest one-fifth of the population, was to send a daughter to work in the silk factories. In the short run, this strategy allowed poor male peasants to resist their own proletarianization. In other words, the income derived from women’s work at these factories allowed their fathers to retain their social identity as peasants who live off the land, and as men who work the fields. On the other hand, association of factory work with women’s work kept men from entering the country’s only industrial sector and limited their source of income to the land. When the prices of silk cocoons dropped dramatically in the early 1870s, and then depreciated because of high inflation in the 1880s and 1890s, men could no longer effectively contribute to their families’ livelihoods. The only way out was to leave for the New World. From 1884 up to World War I, about 100,000 Christian peasant men went straight from the ranks of the peasantry to peddling in the streets of Fort Wayne, Indiana, and Bogotá, Colombia. While away from the villages, these men

could no longer attend to their patriarchal responsibilities as sons or husbands, even if they wished to do so. Physical distance removed them from their daily social obligations and moral prescriptions; at the same time, their economic power gave them greater prominence than they might have had if they had remained in the village.

Women’s experience of this process diverged from that of men. Whether they worked in silk factories, were married to help their families financially, or were left behind by their husbands or brothers to manage their families’ daily lives, many women were in effect pushed beyond the prescribed confines of gender roles by a confluence of external capitalist pressures and internal male peasant resistance. These women, who had previously been barred from the male sphere of society, were suddenly thrust by historical circumstances into that arena as heads of households or as relatively independent individuals. In all cases, they were required to make decisions in a way rarely done before. The added responsibilities and the absence of male support made life more difficult, and emptied the existent patriarchal system of much of its *raison d’être*. If some women saw in these circumstances an opportunity to escape or even challenge the patriarchal structure, many more believed that the solution for the crises lay in recuperating their traditional social roles as wives and mothers. To do so, thousands saved the income from their labor as dowry, and tens of thousands traveled with family, or even alone, to the Americas in search of the security of the family.

The labors and voyages—physical and psychological—of Lebanese peasant men and women changed their expectations of material life, and pushed them even further beyond the sphere of the clan into the realm of the individual family. Although collective assistance and community spirit persisted to some degree even in the *mahjar*, these “new” families struggled alone more than ever. Socially more distant from the extended family, and economically more independent—for better or worse—these families had to forge a new future and culture all their own. Materially, this culture was displayed in larger subdivided homes, in European-fashioned clothes, in new foods, and in clocks that “cuckooed” *franji* (Western) time. Moreover, new money invested in land, higher education for children, and the purchase of bureaucratic jobs separated members of this amorphous class from those who still had to till the land for living.

Within the middle-class family, a new division of labor emerged that prescribed new gender roles: Women were to be mistresses of the house, whereas men were masters of the outside world. Of course, in earlier times, peasant women were associated ideologically with the house. However, that association—along with other social practices and language—was meant to denigrate women. Furthermore, the reality of peasant daily life belies that association, with women’s work visibly ensuring the economic survival of the family through either their labors in the field or their wages from factory work. In contrast, the ideological distinction between the public and private spheres in the emerging Lebanese middle-class world of the early 20th century came closer to economic reality. Women’s work was stripped of economic value and remuneration—thus independence—while ironically being allocated greater social worth than ever before.

NOTES

¹See, for example, Boutros Labaki, whose work includes “La filature de la soie dans le sandjak du Mont-Liban: une expérience de croissance industrielle dépendante (1840–1914),” in *Economie et sociétés dans l’empire ottomane: fin du XVIII^eme* (Paris: C.N.R.S., 1983), and *La soie dans l’économie du Mont Liban et dans son environnement arabe: 1840–1914* (Beirut: Publications de l’Université Libanaise, 1979). Dominique Chevallier was among the first historians to attempt a social history of Mount Lebanon that centers around sericulture with his book, *La Société du Mont Liban à l’époque de la révolution industrielle en Europe* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1971).

²Some of the historians who have recorded this history are Labaki and Chevallier, both mentioned in note 1. More recently, Kais Firro published an article entitled “Silk and Agrarian Changes in Lebanon, 1860–1914,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 22 (February 1990): 151–69. Also, see Akram F. Khater, “She Married Silk: A Rewriting of Peasant History in 19th Century Mount Lebanon” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1993).

³Labaki, “La filature de la soie,” 126.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Chevallier, *La Société du Mont Liban*, 196, 226.

⁶Roger Owen, *The Middle East in the World Economy 1800–1914* (New York: Methuen & Co., 1981), 161.

⁷Labaki, *La soie dans l’économie du Mont Liban*, 129.

⁸*Mughārasa* translates literally as “co-planting.” Under such contracts, a peasant would terrace and plant a particular plot of land with mulberry trees and tend to it for about eight years, until the trees finally matured. In the meantime, the peasant was allowed to plant around the trees crops for his own use, as long as they did not harm the development of the trees. The landlord would supply all the necessary equipment and seeds for the planting process. When the trees matured, the peasant would own one-quarter of the land and the landlord would acquire the other three-quarters.

⁹Ministère des affaires étrangères, *A. E. Correspondance Commerciale, Beyrouth*, vol. 7, dispatch no. 15 (27 August 1862).

¹⁰It is important to note that in the early stages of these developments, the French and British factory owners attempted to entice Druze peasants to work for them in the factories. However, these attempts were frustrated early on by the reluctance of the Druze community, manifested either by outright rejection of any offers for employment or by simply accepting the advance payment and then leaving for the Hawran region in Syria.

¹¹Gaston Ducouso, *L’Industrie de la soie en Syrie* (Paris, 1913), 107.

¹²City merchants and *courtiers*, who lent peasants money, would have normally obtained it from French trading houses for 5 or 6 percent, thus making a large profit off the peasantry. Henri Guys, *Relation d’un séjour de plusieurs années à Beyrouth et dans le Liban*, 2 vols. (Paris: Comptoir des Imprimeurs, 1850), 2:209. Also, *A. E. Correspondance*, vol. 10 (29 July 1890).

¹³List of Mar Yuhanna accounts for the year 1874 shows that practically every peasant who leased a plot of land from the monastery was in debt by the end of that year for an amount that varied from a few piasters to a few hundred piasters. Souad Abou el-Rousse Slim, *Le Métayage et l’impôt au Mont Liban, XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles* (Beirut: Dar El-Machreq, 1987), 250–51.

¹⁴*A. E. Correspondance*, vol. 9, no. 70, 20 January 1862.

¹⁵Muhammad Fuʿād el-Shihābī, “Tarbiyat dūd al-ḥarir,” *Al-Mashriq*, 9, 4 (April 1868): 432–67.

¹⁶*A. E. Correspondance*, vol. 10, 29 July 1890.

¹⁷*A. E. Correspondance*, vol. 9, 10 September 1879.

¹⁸Firro, “Silk and Agrarian Changes in Lebanon,” 151–69, divides the years between 1836 and 1911 into five phases of price changes. One could indeed subdivide these years in a multitude of ways depending on the issue presented. In my case, I am simply trying to show the gross trends in price fluctuations.

¹⁹Ducouso, *L’Industrie de la soie*, 108, 110–11; Chevallier, *La Société du Mont Liban*, 30.

²⁰In a comparative study—done in 1914—of the cost effectiveness of a “typical” Lebanese silk factory and an Italian factory, it becomes obvious that the more modern techniques of European factories gave them greater profits. For a Lebanese factory with eighty basins for dissolving silk cocoons, the gross profit per kilogram of (medium-quality) silk produced was in 1914 about 14.50 French francs. After deducting the cost of operations and interest on loans, the owner of a factory was left with 3

francs per kilogram. The net profit, then, was calculated to be about 6.8 percent of the total investment. If the price of silk dipped only 5 francs (out of 52 francs) per kilogram in any given year, then the silk-factory owner would lose 2 francs per kilogram. Ismāʿil Ḥaqqī Bak, *Lubnān: mabāḥiṯ ʿilmiyya wa-ijtimāʿiyya wa-siyāsiyya*, 2 vols. (Baʿabdā: Al-Maṭbaʿ al-ʿuthmāniyya, 1913), 2:599–613.

²¹For a Lebanese peasant, time was never made up of concrete and invariable blocks that could be measured and controlled in a linear progression from past to future. Such a concept would seem presumptuous in its attempt to forecast the future, and alien in its abstraction of time from the physical and emotional experiences that make up the passage of life. Instead, time was seen as cyclical in its progression, tied closely to the variation of seasons, agricultural work, and crops. Each block of time would be associated with subjective experiences that are not necessarily equal in duration or uniform in their nature. Rather than being linked in a linear continuum, these experiences were seen as independent units that did not require other points of reference in time. In other words, organization of events in sequential order was not necessarily done according to which came first in time, but according to the purpose behind the intended structure.

²²Complaints about the scarcity of manual laborers was continuously and irritably noted by French observers, even as late as the 1890s. See, for example, “Situation de l’industrie et du commerce de Beyrouth en 1892,” in *A. E. Correspondance*, vol. 10.

²³Ministère des affaires étrangères, ACG, carton no. 45, 1851.

²⁴*Ibid.* The 1 piaster per day that a Lebanese woman worker earned in a silk factory was also much lower than the wages earned by a French silk spinner, which amounted to 4 piasters.

²⁵To speak of a patriarchal structure in general would be a truism that serves little in illuminating gender relations before 1860 in Mount Lebanon. This is particularly true because change in these relations varied according to class and time. However, there is no doubt that in general women occupied a lower rung in the social order than men. In social matters, this discrepancy was manifested in customs such as Christian women praying at the back of the church, with the men in front; women eating after men finished their meals; women being expected to keep silent in the presence of men. From birth, when the arrival of a baby girl was received with the comment, “The house’s doorstep will be in mourning for forty days” (Anis Freyha, *Ḥaḍāra fī ʿariq al-zawāl: al-qarya al-lubnāniyya* [Beirut, 1957], 181), until death, at which time a man waited no longer than forty days to remarry, while a woman rarely if ever remarried (M. Feghali, “Mœurs et usages au Liban, la mort et funéraires,” *Anthropos* IV [1909]: 43), women were consciously relegated an inferior position in daily life. Linguistically, a woman’s name was rarely uttered, and when it had to be, it was accompanied by the term *ajallak*, or “excuse the bad expression.”

²⁶As Afif Tannous points out for the case of the village of Bishmizzine, filatures were started as “kinship group enterprises.” Members of the larger kinship group were proud of the factory owned by one of their compound units and were always eager to see it succeed. They also were willing to help the owners in time of need. On the other hand, it was understood in the community that owners of the factory were expected to give preference in employment to the members of their kinship group. Afif Tannous, “Social Change in an Arab Village,” *American Sociological Review* 6 (1941): 655.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸The sheer number of women workers—12,000 by 1880—makes it obvious that the factory owners had to resort to hiring women outside the family.

²⁹Des Essards, the French Consul General, sarcastically chastised two representatives of the Maronite church for their lack of action against Yusuf Bey Karam, who was rebelling against the Mutasarrif of Mount Lebanon, in the following manner: “Comment! vous menacez des foudres spirituelles, de l’excommunication les filles qui travaillent dans nos filatures, parcequ’elles ne sont pas assez séparées des garçons, et vous ne trouvez rien à faire contre un individu qui, abusant de votre nom, marche en armes sur le gouvernement de votre pays.” *A. E. Correspondance*, vol. 8, no. 43 (21 March 1866).

³⁰In a typical Lebanese silk factory, there would have been about ninety women workers, with five male overseers and three “errand boys.” For a description of such a factory and the work process, see Ḥaqqī, *Lubnān*, 2:491–503.

³¹These figures were calculated as follows: The total population around 1800 was about 300,000, half of which—or 150,000—was female. Of the total female population, the age group of 15–25 year olds constituted approximately 35 percent or 52,500. Therefore, 12,000 female workers represented 22.8 percent of that population. Moreover, assuming an average size of six per family, then we can

estimate that there were about 50,000 families in Mount Lebanon. Out of these—again estimating an average—12,000 supplied one young woman to the silk factories.

³²Tannous, “Social Change in an Arab Village,” 655.

³³David Urquhart, *The Lebanon (Mount Souria): A History and a Diary* (London: T. C. Newby, 1860), I:390. In 1848, Urquhart noted the income of a middling peasant family as being about 1,575 piasters per annum. Extrapolating from his other comments, it becomes clear that those families who were poorer did not bring in more than 1,000 per year. The wages for a young female worker are calculated at 1 piaster per day, and they worked an average nine-month stint at a factory.

³⁴J. Davis, *People of the Mediterranean* (London: Routledge & Kegan Ltd., 1977), 101.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 90.

³⁶Similarly, in Egypt and Syria peasant women went about their daily lives with only a head cover because working in a veil was not practical, and because it was much more crucial to have women labor in the fields than to veil and cloister them at home. It was the elite Circassian women of Cairo who wore veils and who lived in closed harem houses. It was strictly required of them to do so to show that their husband was wealthy enough not to require their physical labor, and—as a corollary—among the upper classes a woman’s body was her main commodity and as such had to be safeguarded to keep its prized value intact.

³⁷Tannous recounts an incident in which a young man had sexual intercourse with a woman in Bishmizzine: “The young man’s family had to submit to the mores of the group—have their son marry the girl and cover up the scandal.” However, a village leader who was opposed to the girl’s family convinced the young man to emigrate to Argentina. Afif Tannous, “Trends of Social and Cultural Change in Bishmizzine, an Arab Village of North Lebanon” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1939), 216. Although, we have little else in the way of evidence about the frequency and consequences of extramarital sex in Mount Lebanon, in comparatively similar areas—Vila Velha in southern Portugal and Pisticii in southern Italy—we find current examples of wives of peasants (those of “inferior” honor) copulating with their “honor superiors” in exchange for money, and without further detracting from their families’ honor. Davis, *People of the Mediterranean*, 92.

³⁸Tannous, “Trends of Social and Cultural Change,” 656.

³⁹Maurice Chehab, *Dawr lubnān fi taʿriḥ al-ḥarir* (Beirut: Publications de l’Université Libanaise, 1967), 48–49.

⁴⁰In January 1866, the French Consul General Bernard des Essards sarcastically chided two Maronite clergymen about their lack of action against Yusuf Karam by saying, “How [is it that you can’t control Karam, a Maronite rebel!] You threaten the girls who work in our factories with excommunication because they are not separated enough from the boys, and you find yourself incapable of doing anything against one individual who is abusing your name, and marching with an army against the government of your country!” A. E. *Correspondance*, vol. 7 (1864–67).

⁴¹As most Lebanese-owned silk factories were, at least in the beginning, family operations that required the financial support of the extended kinship group, members of that lineage naturally expected to be given preference in employment. As the factories prospered and the financial status of the extended family improved, the members of the lineage came to deem factory work beneath them, and the owners of the factories looked to neighboring villages to hire female spinners. Tannous describes this process in the case of Bishmizzine, “Trends of Social and Cultural Change,” 156.

⁴²Spinning silk thread with fairly “primitive” machinery meant that the quality of product depended heavily on the skill of the *ʿāmilā*. The level of skill becomes most apparent when a cocoon is completely unspun and a new cocoon thread has to be connected. If the worker “throws” too long a thread length at too high an angle, a *shalta* occurs, or a “bump” appears in the thread. This makes the thread less appealing from a commercial point of view and hence reduces its price on the market.

⁴³ACG *Beyrouth*, Carton 45. A letter from de Figon in which he states that Scott, an English factory owner in the Matn region, took away all of his workers by paying them 4 piasters instead of the 3 piasters per day that de Figon was paying. An attempt was made to counteract this tactic by establishing a system of contracts and cash advances that committed workers—through indebtedness—to a certain factory.

⁴⁴In an analysis of the woes of the silk industry in Mount Lebanon, a contemporary observer discusses the “waste of time” of the *ʿāmilāt*. Specifically, he states that they spend 25 percent of their time—unnecessarily—in boiling the cocoons, and another 15 percent in tying threads that had broken during the spinning process. Ḥaqāī, *Lubnān*, 505.

⁴⁵Ducouso argues in *L'Industrie de la soie* (p. 162) that the increase in strikes during these times was due to “emigrants returning from the American republics where questions of labor result in frequent conflicts, or to vagrant Europeans who travel throughout Syria fomenting such ideas.”

⁴⁶Jacqueline de Villette, *La Vie des femmes dans un village Maronite libanais: Ayn el-Kharoube* (Tunis: Imp. N. Bascone & S. Muscat, 1964), 105.

⁴⁷Michel Feghali, *Proverbes et dictons Syro-Libanais: Texte arabe, transcription, traduction, commentaire et index analytique* (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1938), 237. Also, de Villette discusses how women spent their income on buying gold.

⁴⁸See also de Villette, *La Vie des femmes*, 105.

⁴⁹Ducouso, *L'Industrie de la soie*, 162.

⁵⁰Louis René Villermé, *Tableau de l'état physique et moral des ouvriers employés dans les manufactures de soie, coton, et lain*, 2 vols. (Lyons, 1825), 1:67.

⁵¹Ducouso, *L'Industrie de la soie*, 155. Emphasis mine.

⁵²M. Safi, “Mariage au nord du Liban,” *Anthropos*, 12–13:34.

⁵³A. E. *Correspondance*, vol. 7 (22 July 1868), and vol. 10 (23 January 1888 and February 1890).

⁵⁴A. E. *Correspondance*, vol. 10 (February 1890) and no. 135 (1892).

⁵⁵A. E. *Correspondance*, vol. 10 (7 April 1888).

⁵⁶A. E. *Correspondance*, vol. 5 (29 May 1854), vol. 10 (1894).

⁵⁷In the first half of the 19th century, watches and clocks were almost nonexistent in Mount Lebanon. In a letter sent in 1832 to the Father General of the Society of Jesus, Father Riccadonna, the head of the Jesuit mission in Lebanon, writes of “the great need for a pocket watch, and if possible with an alarm. Otherwise, we regulate our [prayers] by the sky.” Sami Khuri, S.J., *Une Histoire du Liban à travers les archives des jésuites: 1816–1845* (Beirut: Dar Al-Machreq, 1985), 555. We begin to see mention of imported watches and clocks in the early 1880s, but it is only in the first decade of the 20th century that we find large numbers of watches being imported. Earnest Weakly, “Report upon the Condition and Prospects of British Trade in Syria,” *British Parliament Accounts and Papers*, LXXXVII (1911), 603–817. Watchmakers were even more difficult to find. For example, in 1858 Father Bonacina asked the Father General if he might invite his brother, a watchmaker, to spend some time in Lebanon. He assured the Father General his brother would without doubt be greatly appreciated as a repairer and maker of watches. Khuri, *Histoire du Liban*, 555. It is not till the 1880s that we find a mention of a watchmaker in Mount Lebanon, specifically in Dlepta. Al-'Indarri, *Al-Muṭrān Yuḥannā Ḥabīb*, 264.

⁵⁸C. F. Volney, *Voyage en Égypte et en Syrie* (Paris: Librairie Parmantier, 1825), II:418.

⁵⁹See Chevallier's essay, “Densité Optimale et Heurt des Communautés,” in *La Société du Mont Liban*, for an excellent discussion of the different estimates given respectively by Henri Guys, Prosper Bouré, Tannous Shidyaaq, and Achilles Laurent, of the population of Mount Lebanon. Except for Guys, who seems to have exaggerated his estimates, each of the authors gave a figure that corresponded more or less to 200,000.

⁶⁰The statistics for 1906 were obtained from Ibrāhīm Bayk Al-Aswad, *Dalīl Lubnān* (Ba'abḏā: Al-Maṭba' al-ʿUthmāniyya, 1906), 705. The population figures for Mount Lebanon include emigrants who paid taxes, but those numbers were underreported by the local population, who sought to avoid paying taxes and to avoid legal problems during the periods when the Ottoman authorities prohibited emigration. For example, the population figure of 414,800 that was gathered through the census of 1913 included 124,400 emigrants, whereas other more reliable statistics show that in 1913 there were about 280,000 emigrants from Mount Lebanon. Charles Issawi, *An Economic History of the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 86; Kemal H. Karpat, “Ottoman Emigration to America,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 17 (August 1984): 202–4. Thus it seems that fewer than half of the emigrants were counted in the official census of Mount Lebanon. It follows that 175,600 emigrants were uncounted, and they are the ones mentioned in the text above.

⁶¹U.S. Congress, Senate, *Reports of the Immigration Commission: Statistical Review of Immigration 1820–1910 and Distribution of Immigrants 1850–1900*, vol. 3, table 35, 357.

⁶²In *Al-Mashriq* magazine of 1902, a story appeared recounting that a number of married men were leaving “a village” in Lebanon for “Amrika.” At one point in the story, a peasant by the name of ʿAbdallah Qazma visits the village priest to ask him to take care of his family during his absence. The priest asks ʿAbdallah whether he will take his family; when ʿAbdallah answers in the negative, the priest states, “[T]his is an action not worthy of Christians. How can you leave your wife and children

without any help or someone to take care of them?" In response, ʿAbdallah states that he will be gone for only one or two years, to which the priest scoffs, "[T]his talk we have heard from many others, and they still have not returned." *Al-Mashriq*, vol. 5, no. 12 (1902), 570.

⁶³Freyha, *Hadāra fi tariq al-zawāl*, 128.

⁶⁴One of the most famous of these cases is the flight of Jibran Khalil Jibran's mother to Boston away from an abusive and drunkard husband. Also, see my article "Assaf: A Peasant from Mount Lebanon," in *Struggle and Survival in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Edmund Burke III (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 31–43.

⁶⁵Deniz Kandiyoti defines the "patriarchal bargain" as a term that indicates the "existence of set rules and scripts regulating gender relations, to which both genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet which may nevertheless be contested, redefined and renegotiated." Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," *Gender and Society* 2, 3 (1988): 274–90.

⁶⁶Deniz Kandiyoti, "Islam and Patriarchy," in *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender*, ed. Nikki Keddie and Beth Baron (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1991), 34.

⁶⁷Quoted in Lila Abu Lughod, "Migdim: Egyptian Bedouin Matriarch," *Struggle and Survival*, 288. Fatima Mernissi's *Beyond the Veil* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) provides a very critical look at the contemporary manifestation of the mother–son relationship in urban Morocco. Compare this and other works with Margery Wolf's excellent work on Chinese women, *Women and Family in Rural Taiwan* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1972).

⁶⁸Kandiyoti, "Islam and Patriarchy," 35.

⁶⁹Unni Wikan, *Behind the Veil in Arabia: Women in Oman* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 184.

⁷⁰Safī, "Mariage au nord du Liban," 134.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²*Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1980), 130.

⁷³See Trevor Barony, "The Lebanese in Australia, 1880–1989"; Clark S. Knowlton, "The Social and Spatial Mobility of the Syrian and Lebanese Community in São Paulo, Brazil"; and Ignacio Kilch, "Criollos and Arabic Speakers in Argentina: An Uneasy *Pas de Deux*, 1888–1914," in *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration*, ed. Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi (London: Center for Lebanese Studies and I. B. Tauris, 1992).

⁷⁴Ibid. See also the *Annual Report of the General Commissioner of Immigration* for a breakdown of the number of single versus married women who came to the United States. Tannous, in "Trends of Social and Cultural Change," includes examples that substantiate this claim (pp. 210–17).

⁷⁵There are no records whatsoever that show employment of Druze women in the silk factories. In fact, many contemporary observers noted the refusal of that community to be engaged in the nascent industrial sector. See, for example, Guys, *Relation d'un séjour*, 67. As for emigration, Alexa Naff—among other scholars—notes that the Druze men constituted a very small number of Lebanese emigrants, no more than 1 or 2 percent as late as 1914 Alexa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 84–85.

⁷⁶For examples of such letters, see Tannous, "Trends of Social and Cultural Change," appendix.

⁷⁷For stories of individual women's contribution to the family's economic welfare, see Naff, *Becoming American*, 274–75.

⁷⁸Ibid., 275.

⁷⁹*Al-Hoda*, 5 March 1899, 15–17.

⁸⁰*Syrian World*, 3 (October 1928), 51.

⁸¹Naff, *Becoming American*, 286.

⁸²As with the rest of numbers relating to Lebanese emigrants, we really do not know for certain how many stayed in the Americas and how many returned. But from the few figures that we have, it is quite plausible to assume that about one-third of all emigrants ultimately went back to Mount Lebanon after a brief or long stay abroad. See Kohei Hashimoto, "Lebanese Population Movement 1920–1939: Towards a Study," in *The Lebanese in the World*, 65–108, for a good analysis of the data available and the problems inherent in reaching any definitive conclusions.

⁸³Although it is very difficult to calculate exactly how many immigrants made the return trip to Mount Lebanon and remained there, Naff estimates that about 25 percent returned permanently to the mountain. Naff, *Becoming American*, 114. In "Lebanese Population Movement 1920–1939," Hashimoto estimates that a little more than a third of the emigrant population went back to settle in Lebanon.

⁸⁴Such a display of wealth became popular and common enough that, in 1887, 1 million red tiles were imported from France; by 1892, this figure had doubled; see *A. E. Correspondance*, vol. 10 (7 April 1888) and a report entitled, *Situation de l'industrie et du commerce de Beyrouth en 1892*. Although many of these tiles were destined for houses being built in Beirut, a large proportion made their way to the villages of Mount Lebanon. For example, in 1888 the French Consul General in Beirut reported that houses were being built in Beirut at the rate of one per day. Using some rough estimation, even if all of these houses were designed with red-tiled roofs, Mount Lebanon would have required no more than 600,000 of the 1 million tiles imported that year. This estimate is based on the assumption that the average size of a flat house's roof was 50 square meters, or 10 meters in width and 5 in breadth. Also, the usual slant of the roof was a 7 percent grade, or an angle of 25 degrees. Given these measurements, the total surface area of a typical slanted roof would be 90 square meters. Imported tiles measured about 42 by 26 centimeters (Weakley, “Report on the Condition and Prospects of British Trade in Syria,” 157) and were laid down on the roof so that one tile covered about a third of the following one, meaning that one tile covered an area of 0.072 square meters. Therefore, it took an average 1,270 tiles to roof a house. A final multiplication of the average number of houses being built by the number of tiles per house gives a total figure of 463,550 tiles. Even if another 100 houses were being roofed in red tiles, Beirut's total consumption would have been no more than 590,550. This left about 400,000 tiles that were used in 1887 to build about 315 red-tiled houses in the villages of the mountain. Further statistics about the yearly import of red tiles into the port of Beirut between 1887 and 1911 allow us to estimate that about 2,700 houses were constructed in the villages during that period. The number of total imported tiles was obtained from the *A. E. Correspondance Commerciale* of the French Consulate General in Beirut during the years listed. It does not take into account the importing of red tiles in previous years, for lack of information. The calculations of tiles used in Mount Lebanon, and consequently the number of houses built there, are extrapolated from the ratio of tiles calculated for the year 1887.

⁸⁵At the same time that red tiles were gaining popularity, the two-level house was evolving into a more intricate abode. A further increase in the size of the house of a typical wealthy peasant to 50 square meters allowed for a greater diversification of the internal space of such a house. The large multipurpose space gave way to a number of smaller rooms, each of which had a specific use. Although there were some differences from one house to the next, in general the floor plan remained the same. The main door opened into an entry hall that led straight ahead to a central hall. This central hall was the main living room and reception area for guests; except for the central hall, this layout was much the same as that of “traditional” homes. However, there were an additional two or three rooms branching off to the side of the entry way, and this dramatically altered the layout of the house. One of these was the kitchen; the others were the bedrooms. Each of the bedrooms had a door that, when closed, effectively isolated the happenings in that room from the rest of the family. Even the terrace underwent some changes. Whereas the terrace was previously at the same level as the road that it faced, by 1890, terraces were being constructed above ground as the roof of the lower level, and were oriented toward the back of the house. This elevation necessitated a construction of a border around the terrace to keep people, particularly children, from falling. Also, at the end of the 19th century, concrete instead of packed dirt was used to surface the terraces of wealthier peasants' homes. Finally, according to many observers, the floors inside these new houses were being tiled by the 1890s.

⁸⁶Shākir al-Khūrī, *Majma' al-Masarrāt* (Beirut: Al-Ijtihad Press, 1908), 11.

⁸⁷In one story about Habib al-Doumani, who made his wealth from silk, his wife is quoted as complaining about “the tens of *shurakā'* [peasant partners] entering the house and muddying the white and red smooth tile with their boots.” Although her husband responded by reminding her that she would not have that tile if it were not for the *shurakā'*, the separation between peasant-work and middle class-home remains intact. Shukri al-Bustāni, *Dayr al-Qamar fi Ākhir al-qarn al-tāsi' c'ashar* (Beirut, 1969), 66.

⁸⁸The term comes from *jurd*, or barren back country, and it is meant as pejorative reference to peasants.

⁸⁹Al-Aswad, *Dalīl Lubnān*, 31–32.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*, 357.

⁹¹Speech by Butrus al-Bustani, originally delivered to a literary club in Beirut in 1849, and subsequently reprinted in *Al-Jinān* magazine in 1882 and 1883, and finally in the *al-Rawai'* magazine in 1929. In this speech, Butrus al-Bustani was far ahead of his contemporaries by arguing that women were not meant to be “an idol worshipped, or a decorative tool preserved at home for show.” He went

on to argue that if the status of woman or wife was not considered higher than that of a servant or slave, then the progress of families and in consequence the world, would be retarded.

⁹²Traditionally, and as late as the first quarter of the 19th century, girls' education was considered inappropriate and even immoral by peasants and *shuyūkh* alike, for it was thought to promote licentious behavior. Even Maronite nuns remained uneducated. For instance, the mother superior of the Heart of Jesus order, the famous Hindiyya Ujaimi, was illiterate and had to dictate all of her writings to the Maronite bishop, Germanos Diyab. Another testimony to this state of affairs is provided by Dr. Louis-Charles Lortet, a Frenchman who visited Mount Lebanon around 1875. In describing the nuns of the Sahel 'Alma convent, he said, "[C]es malheureuses femmes, recluses pendant la plus grand partie de l'année, sont absolument cloîtrées" and illiterate.

Protestant missions were the first to set up schools for girls in Beirut and nearby villages. The American Presbyterians led the way as early as 1826 by providing some basic education, mostly in subjects such as knitting and sewing, for about thirty girls who were in "occasional attendance" at six schools. Most of these "schools" were located in the residences of the missionaries, and the wives of the missionaries carried out the instruction. It was not until 1835 that a separate room on the mission's grounds was set aside for girls' education. This came to be known as "The Female School," and it was headed by an American schoolmistress and a Lebanese assistant, who taught on average about twenty-five girls. However, this and other girls' schools established by the American missionaries remained limited to a few well-off Christian girls. Then, in 1846, the missionaries established a boarding school for girls in Beirut, and another in Suq al-Gharb in 1858, both of which offered subsidized liberal education in the arts and sciences. The popularity of both schools induced the British missionaries to set up the Girls Training School in Shimlan.

Although credit must be given to the American missionaries for their early dedication to the concept of female education, the lead in that matter soon passed to the Catholic and Maronite nuns. The Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul, who arrived in Lebanon in 1849, were the first Catholic missionaries to set up schools for girls. By 1869, the sisters, twenty-eight from France and twenty-eight from Lebanon, had built a hospital in Beirut and an orphanage that took in young girls who were deprived of their parents by the civil war in 1860. *A. E. Correspondance*, vol. 8, annex to no. 39 (22 March 1870). In addition, the sisters established a school for young girls in 1863 that had 43 boarding students. The high cost of the school—400 francs, or 1,600 piasters, per year—made it accessible to only the daughters of well-off families from Beirut and the surrounding mountains. At the same time, the sisters established eight schools in Mount Lebanon, mostly concentrated within twenty miles of Beirut (except for two that were established in the Kisrawan region). All of the schools taught the same curriculum—French, Arabic, arithmetic, history, geography and religious instruction—and education in the eight institutions outside Beirut was free for all 569 students. Indigenously, two associations of Lebanese nuns, in cooperation with the Jesuits, were established in 1853 to further female education in Lebanon in the "proper"—that is, Catholic—direction. One of these was the Association of Mariamiyyat established in Bekfaya; the other was the Association of the Heart of Jesus in Zahlé. The first association opened schools in the areas of Kisrawan, Matn, Futuh, Jubayl, and Batroun; the second opened schools in the Biqā' valley and Damascus region. After twenty years, in 1873 both associations merged into a single entity, known as the Association of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. By 1914, the association was undertaking the education of 6,000 girls distributed over thirty schools (Ḥaqqī, *Lubnān*, 2:572).

⁹³Peasants used the term "The House" to refer to their wives, rather than calling them by their proper names.

⁹⁴It is to the first quarter of the 20th century that we can trace the rise of a new generation of women writers, such as May Ziyadeh, who brought some women's voices into the new public arena of print journalism.