



Education in Lebanon during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Catalyst for Multiple Modernities?. Beirut: Orient-Institut Beirut, Leibniz-Institut für Europäische Geschichte Mainz, Deutsches Historisches Institut London, 19.04.2012-21.04.2012.

Reviewed by Julia Hauser

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (June, 2012)

This international workshop focused on educational institutions in Lebanon from the Ottoman period to the French mandate, asking whether their remarkable heterogeneity may be interpreted as a case of “multiple modernities” (Eisenstadt).

The first panel dealt with the question of how education changed the face of the city and the variety of institutional and material forms it took. CHRISTINE LINDNER (Balamand) analyzed early educational encounters between American missionaries and Arabs by drawing on three case studies: Assad Khayat, Rahil Ata and Charlie Smith. The different type of instruction received by these students drew upon established educational practices of the region, showing the ad hoc nature of the missionaries’ work. In concluding, Lindner underlined the importance of domestic space as an important site in these examples.

MAY DAVIE (Tours) looked at education from an architectural perspective, illustrating the evolution of the buildings for schools in Beirut. While foreign schools initially exceeded local ones in shape and size, both shared utilitarian architecture and a limited sphere of influence. Gradually, the foreign schools developed a new kind of dominating architecture characterized by prominent visual signs and appropriated aspects of Ottoman architecture. Educational architecture, Davie argued, did not speak one uniform language of

modernity but came in a variety of forms and shapes.

MARIA BASHSHUR ABUNNASR (Amherst) combined an architectural approach with a microhistoric focus on the Syrian Protestant College (SPC) upon Ras Beirut. Showing the extent to which New England educational architecture was adapted, Abunnasr argued that SPC employed models: the “All in One” prototype adapted from Princeton College, and the “College Row” typical of Yale and Amherst Colleges. Despite these direct influences, the inhabitants of Ras Beirut used these structures for their own purposes in a way unexpected by the American missionaries.

MICHAEL DAVIE (Tours) analyzed the spread of missionary education in late Ottoman Beirut from a topographical point of view. According to Davie, missionaries chose sites for their educational establishments as a way to ensure both visibility and surveillance. While the SPC presented itself as an open structure, its situation within the city enabled it to exert visual control. French establishments, on the other hand, were often modern in their interiors, but defensive and cut off from their environment on the outside.

In his keynote lecture, BENJAMIN FORTNA (London) looked at changes in education from the late Ottoman Empire to the early Turkish republic, stating that ruptures from the past were not as

radical as suggested by contemporaries in their representation of Ottoman educational methods as violent and backward and Mustafa Kemal as the 'educator-in-chief'. Fortna argued that while buildings and methods adapted from Western European models were used to visually convey a message of modernity, religious schools did not disappear in the course of the expansion of public schools. Emphasizing that texts function as mirrors of educational change, Fortna traced the changing relationship between the text and audience, and the emergence of new practices and functions of reading.

The second panel focused on discourses on education. NADYA BOU ALI (Oxford) presented a paper on Butrus al-Bustani's national vision of education. The Nahda, Bou Ali contended, was less comparable to the Renaissance than to the Enlightenment, with Bustani's conception of language reform regarded as the basis for a nation's civilizational progress. Bou Ali argued that Boustani's encyclopedia illustrates the idea of language as a mirror of society.

MAGDA NAMMOUR (Beirut) dwelt on the perceptions of female education in the Levantine press at the end of the 19th century, tracing the evolution of the discourse on female education from the insistence on the education as a right to a critique of the educational system. She referred to Butrus and Selim al-Bustani's emphasis on the instruction of women to fulfill their role of men's helpmeets and their children's first educators. Self-Orientalist positions were central to modernist discourses on female education in late Ottoman Syria in that they presented the local education for women as deficient to Europe.

BUTROS LABAKI (Beirut) provided a broader perspective of the evolution of the educational system in Lebanon. By emphasizing the crucial role of the different religious communities, Labaki outlined the schools each of these communities founded in Lebanon since the 19th century. Through statistical data, he showed the divergent,

but yet comparable way by which education was used for social mobility.

The third panel centered on the influence of gender on education, specifically women's education. JULIA HAUSER (Göttingen) discussed the appropriation of arguments for female education in late nineteenth century Beirut. Local establishments borrowed missions' rationale for female education: girls needed to be educated if society was progressing since they were the first educators. In focusing on the foundation of the Alliance Israélite Universelle school for girls in Beirut in 1878, Hauser argued that the history of schools must be analyzed within a multirelational field.

ELLEN FLEISCHMANN (Dayton) likewise examined the impact of competition on missionary education, focusing on American Protestant missionary establishments for girls, which forced the American missionaries to gear their curricula to local demand. According to Fleischmann, this development exhibited the contradictions within the ideas about female education. Over time, American notions of female education became increasingly gendered in ways that lessened the value of an American education for women within the educational market of Lebanon.

JAMILA COSTI (Beirut) took a closer look at the Greek Orthodox school of Zahrat al-Ihsan. Founded by a graduate of Catholic and Protestant establishments, it combined aspects of missionary work with lay female initiative. It functioned as a charity, as the boarding school for upper-class girls funded the orphanage for destitute children, but was run by a religious community, representing the first modern female congregation dedicated to social activities within the Greek Orthodox community. This school was central to the emergence of the Syrian women's movement, as many of its first representatives graduated from this school.

CHRISTIAN SASSMANNSHAUSEN (Berlin) analyzed educational discourses and strategies in late Ottoman Tripoli. By examining the census of 1921, he reconstituted the varying degrees of education

amongst Tripoli's Muslim and Christian population, focusing on the relation between literacy, profession and the choice to educate children. To illustrate women's educational opportunities, he ended with the case of Anisa Saiba'a, a Greek Orthodox woman who studied medicine in Beirut and Scotland before practicing surgery in Egypt.

The fourth panel looked at the relationship between education and identity with regards to language, nation and religion. SOUAD SLIM (Balamand) focused on the female elementary school funded by the Russian Imperial Palestine Association in Beirut. While the school's principal, Aleksandra Czerkessova, espoused a sense of mission and an Orientalist attitude, her establishment differed in its heavy emphasis on teaching Arabic. This responded to growing nationalist tendencies within the Antiochian Orthodox community that was increasingly opposed to the staffing of the high ranks of their clergy with ethnic Greeks ignorant of Arabic.

ABDELLATIF FAKHOURY (Beirut) traced the history of the Jam'iyya al-maqasid al-khayriyya al-islamiyya, a Sunni Muslim charity association specializing in male and female education, which played a crucial role in Sunni's response to foreign Christian schools in Beirut. He explained the foundation of the organization in 1878 and illustrated how these schools' methods, teachers and contents provided both a "modern" curriculum and a religious Muslim education for students. Taking the example of five Maqasid students who went to Cairo to study medicine, Fakhoury underlined the institution's efforts in preparing their students for a changing society and labour market.

CATHERINE LE THOMAS (Paris) dealt with the educational efforts of Shi'a community. She explained late integration of the Shi'a into Lebanese society by outlining the development of their schools from traditional religious schooling to secondary schools during the 19th to late 20th centuries. Taking a closer look at two of their organizations, Amiliya in Beirut and Jafaria in Jabal

'Aml, Le Thomas emphasized parallels to other contemporary schools. Despite conflicts amongst clergy that hindered the expansion of communal educational facilities, these schools eventually contributed to a social homogenization amongst the Shi'a.

The fourth panel focused on the reception of education by students themselves. MARILENE KARAM (Paris) presented a paper on the Jewish educator and journalist Esther Moyal whose life illustrates the fluid boundaries between foreign and local schools. Moyal attended the American Beirut Female Seminary, worked as a teacher at local schools, and studied both Arabic and Hebrew from private teachers. Together with her husband Shimon Moyal, she turned to politics, assuming a staunchly Ottomanist stance. However, her activities abruptly ended after a move to Jaffa, so that her influence on the Ottomanist and Syrian women's movement has fallen into oblivion.

NADYA SBAITI (Northampton) focused on the expectations and anxieties around the baccalaureate exam from the perspective of both the French Mandate government and the Lebanese students. Starting with the students' complaints about the failure of the baccalaureate degree to secure future careers, Sbaiti examined the government's change in policy from the idea of "assimilating" students to French culture to more utilitarian concepts aimed at preventing assimilation. This was undermined however, by the rise in candidates for the baccalaureate and their complaints about the failures of the Mandate educational system.

ESTHER MÖLLER (Mainz) looked at extra-curricular aspects of French schools in late Mandate Lebanon. By taking into view the schools of the secular Mission Laique Francaise, Möller argued that the socio-economic perspectives offered by schools and the close relations between the schools and their graduates were necessary conditions for an active alumni network. Graduates' professional choices reflected the political change

the Lebanese adapted to and the often diverging expectations between school administrations and parents.

In his final comment, USSAMA MAKDISI (Houston) summed up the general questions of the workshop, stressing that the question whether education acted as a catalyst of multiple modernities could not easily be answered. He emphasized the way that missions and their educational models were both appropriated and rejected. Makdisi problematized the appropriateness of cultural imperialism as a concept in historical research on missions, encouraging scholars to analyze interactions of various local and foreign powers on the ground.

All in all, the workshop revealed that there is no single answer to the question of whether the schools in question were actual catalysts for modernity. Still, it showed the benefits of comparing foreign and local, state and private, secular and religious schools, which shared much more values, strategies and problems than has been assumed in most existent studies. As a consequence, future research ought to concentrate on further bringing out common aspects of as well gradual differences between these institutions so crucial to Lebanese society and identities.

Conference Overview:

Welcome: Julia Hauser (Göttingen)

Panel I: Experiencing Education: Material Culture, Architecture, and the City

Chair: Muhammad Rihan (Beirut)

Christine Lindner (Balamand): Domesticated Education: The Effects of Boarding Schools on the Construction of Identity in Late Ottoman Syria

May Davie (Tours): De l'école au Grand collège : une architecture scolaire aux messages ambigus, Beyrouth 1840-1940

Marie Abunnasr (Amherst): Impressions of New England on the Ras Beirut Landscape, 1871-1914

Michael Davie (Tours/Paris): Local and Western Educational Institutions in Beirut: Between Topographical and Symbolic Domination

Benjamin Fortna (London): Out of Empire: Education and Change in the Late Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Periods

Panel II: Creating a Discourse on Education

Chair: Ammeke Kateman (Amsterdam)

Nadya Bou Ali (Oxford): The mirror of the Nation: Butrus al Bustani and the National Pedagogy of adab

Magda Nammour (Beirut): Perception de l'éducation dans la presse levantine de la fin du XIXème siècle

Butros Labaki (Beirut): Communities, Education and Social Mobility in Lebanon

Panel III: Gendering Education: A Focus on Female Schooling

Chair: Carla Eddé (Beirut)

Julia Hauser (Göttingen): Mothers of a Future Generation: a Missionary Argument for Female Education and Its Appropriation

Ellen Fleischmann (Dayton): Contestation and Commodification. Female Education in American Protestant Mission Schools in Beirut, c. 1870–1920s.

Jamila Qusti (Beirut): Al-Nahda al-Nissa'iya al-Beiuritiya: Mussahama al- Mu'assa'at al-Tarbawiyya al-Thaqafiyya [The Women's Awakening: the educational and cultural contribution of the Greek-orthodox school Zahrat al-Ihsan in Beirut]

Christian Saßmannshausen (Berlin): Female Education between Discourse and the Access to Cultural Capital in Late Ottoman Tripoli

Panel IV: Creating 'Modern' Identities: Language, Nation and Religion

Chair: Kamran Rastegar (Medford)

Souad Slim (Balamand): The Russian School of Beirut: for a New Arabic Language

Abdellatif Fakhuri (Beirut): Al-madrassa al-maqasid al-khayriyya al-islamiyya [The schools of the Maqasid al-khairiyya alislamiyya]

Catherine Le Thomas (Paris): Shiite Education from Late Ottoman to Post-Independence Lebanon: Alternative Paths to Modernity

Panel V: "The Students Speak Back": Adapting, Applying and Resisting Educational Ideals

Chair: Malek Sharif (Beirut)

Marilène Karam (Paris): Esther Moyal (1873-1948): Aspects of a Modern Education in Ottoman Beirut

Nadya Sbaiti (Northampton): A Hierarchy of Values and the Quest for "A Better Life": Valencies of Education in Mandate Lebanon

Esther Möller (Mainz): "Not for School but for Life We Learn"? Alumni Associations and Job Perspectives of Lebanese Students at French Schools in the 1930s and 1940s

Final Discussion

Introductory statement by Ussama Makdisi (Houston)

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: Julia Hauser. Review of *Education in Lebanon during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Catalyst for Multiple Modernities?*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. June, 2012.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=36398>

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.