

**Melanie Schulze Tanielian**

## FEEDING THE CITY: THE BEIRUT MUNICIPALITY AND THE POLITICS OF FOOD DURING WORLD WAR I

### **Abstract**

World War I in the Ottoman Empire was a humanitarian disaster of unprecedented scale. By 1916 in the Greater Syrian provinces, men, women, and children were dying *en masse* of a war-induced famine so devastating that popular memory still names this war *harb al-majā‘a* (the war of famine). Despite the civilian catastrophe, people’s experiences on the Ottoman home front have been only marginally explored in the scholarship. Focusing on the city of Beirut, this article highlights the centrality of food provisioning in the competition for political legitimacy in the provincial capital. Through a detailed analysis of how the Beirut municipality was represented in the city’s daily newspaper *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, I argue that for local reform-minded notables and intellectuals the war presented an opportunity to prove, both to the local population and to the Ottoman state, that issues related to the internal security and well-being of the Beirut province generally and the city specifically could be dealt with locally through existing governing bodies. The article thus traces the fierce political games played around the issue of food by various actors seeking to win the hearts of Beirutis through their stomachs.

The Ottoman Empire had been at war only thirteen days when, in the afternoon hours of 13 November 1914, a group of destitute men frantically knocked on the doors of the Beirut municipality building. The men, described in the Beirut daily newspaper *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani* (Ottoman Union) as “heads of households from among the poor of the city,” desperate and with hungry women and children waiting at home, protested that neither flour nor wheat was to be found in the city.<sup>1</sup> The shelves of stores and bakeries had been emptied and the usual four loads of grain from Aleppo had failed to arrive in Beirut that day. Not an ounce of affordable flour or wheat was left in the markets, the worried men warned municipal council members, who were taken aback by this sudden assembly on their doorstep. At the same time, other mobs of urban poor were ransacking neighborhood bakeries, seizing whatever hidden reserves they could get their hands on. Beirut seemed to be falling apart under the weight of hunger. Urban order was in danger, and the lack of food had generated precarious conditions that clearly needed to be addressed immediately to preserve peace in the city. The municipality rushed to

Melanie Schulze Tanielian is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich.; e-mail: [meltan@umich.edu](mailto:meltan@umich.edu)

solve what would become known as the “flour issue.”<sup>2</sup> Municipal council members sent a messenger to the Ottoman governor general of the Beirut *vilayet*, Bekir Sami (1867–1933), who immediately cabled his counterpart in Aleppo soliciting provisions and urging authorities to give top priority to shipping grain to the coastal capital. There was still plenty of grain in Aleppo, but transporting it to the coast would prove to be the greatest obstacle to its actual delivery.<sup>3</sup> The Ottoman government, after entering the war on the side of the Central Powers and with plans for the first Suez campaign against British troops well under way, had appropriated all railway services for military purposes, making the transport of wheat from the interior a costly nightmare.<sup>4</sup> Railway freight cars were almost impossible to obtain, and military commanders and the railroad commission demanded large bribes in order to get anything moving.<sup>5</sup>

Given these difficulties, the president of the Beirut municipality, Ahmad Mukhtar Bayhum, decided to handle the situation in person. His primary concern was to take care of the bottleneck in the transportation system that had reduced the grain supply in the city and driven prices through the roof. Fully aware that wheat and flour could be purchased in the interior regions of Greater Syria, Bayhum set out for Aleppo via Damascus in the early morning hours of 14 November to arrange a shipment of wheat and flour to feed his city. After intense negotiations, he finally secured the necessary freight cars from the military command of the Ottoman Fourth Army Corps.<sup>6</sup> With the cars lined up, Bayhum sent an urgent telegram to a Beirut merchant named Hassan Effendi, asking for the immediate transfer of five hundred Ottoman liras from the account of the Beirut municipality to purchase a “great amount” of wheat. Hassan Effendi hurried to the Beirut branch of the Ottoman Bank to transmit the desired amount to Aleppo.<sup>7</sup> Five days later, on 19 November 1914, trainloads of grain slowly made their way down the slopes of Mount Lebanon into Beirut, and according to the report in *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, the poor inhabitants of the city breathed a sigh of relief.<sup>8</sup> Hopes, it seems, were high that the municipal president’s efforts had solved the first wartime food supply crisis.<sup>9</sup>

The crisis, however, was far from over: shortages, spiraling prices, rationing, and speculation continued to characterize everyday life in Beirut throughout World War I. Indeed, by April 1915 grain and flour shortages in the city had become a matter of life and death, as the crisis culminated in a full-fledged famine (*majā‘a*).<sup>10</sup> The result was a humanitarian disaster that would claim the lives of 350,000–500,000 people in Greater Syria by the time the war drew to a close in October 1918.<sup>11</sup> According to Elizabeth Thompson, from November 1914 to mid-1916 the population of Beirut alone decreased from about 180,000 to 75,000 due to migration, forced exile, conscription, disease, and starvation.<sup>12</sup> Although Beirut was far removed from the actual battlefields, its inhabitants experienced the war firsthand. Yet it was a different war, one that continues to be referred to as *harb al-majā‘a* (the war of famine).<sup>13</sup> It is on this war that I will focus here.

#### WAR, FOOD, AND THE CITY

In all of the belligerent states, World War I was marked by struggles and negotiations over the procurement of food supplies for soldiers and civilians alike. Food was the subject of state policies and legislation, parliamentary debates, public discourse, and everyday social interactions. In Europe, the provisioning of civilians was “always on the agendas of municipal, county and central governments during the war” and justified

unprecedented state intervention into everyday life.<sup>14</sup> Government officials knew that the successful provision of basic necessities would guarantee their legitimacy in the eyes of civilians, who would support institutions that could deliver food security. It comes as no surprise, then, that in light of diminishing food supplies the feeding of civilians became a competitive and politically charged affair. This was certainly the case in the Ottoman Empire. As famine struck regions of Greater Syria, supplying food to civilians led to fierce battles over political authority. Focusing on Beirut, this article highlights the centrality of provisioning in establishing political legitimacy in the provincial capital. Through an analysis of how the Beirut municipality (*al-baladiyya*) was represented in Beirut's daily newspaper *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, I argue that for local reform-minded notables and intellectuals the war was an opportunity to prove, not only to the local population but also to the Ottoman state, that issues related to the internal security and well-being of the Beirut province in general and the city more specifically could be dealt with locally through existing governing bodies.

At the beginning of the war, the editor and owner of *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, Ahmad Hassan Tabbara, along with the paper's various contributors, highlighted Beirut's municipal authority as a central urban institution that could alleviate suffering in the city. I argue that the editor framed the municipality as a sociopolitical formation which, at that particular historical moment, was able to fulfill its major function "in response to an emergency," namely a total war.<sup>15</sup> In the pages of the newspaper, the municipality, as we will see, became what might be described as a Foucauldian *dispositif*, that is, a mechanism driven by an emergency and able to manipulate a heterogeneous set of forces and develop them in a way that would improve the situation. Or, in the words of Paul Rabinow, we may think of it as "a device whose purpose was control and management."<sup>16</sup> The municipality's urban managerial position, as depicted in the newspaper, included its ability to direct a variety of actors who had a stake in food provision and distribution for the benefit of the city's inhabitants, in particular the poor. This picture, no doubt more invented than real, was created to garner the loyalties of the local population. The municipality was a strategic site for showcasing the competence of local leaders and convincing the city's inhabitants of the possibility of increased autonomy from the Ottoman central government.

This political campaign, I argue, can be gleaned from the paper's *hawādith al-mahalliyāt* (local news/events) section, despite strict Ottoman censorship of the press. It is here, I suggest, that local politics were practiced and, under the guise of "daily city talk," a locally governed public sphere was imagined.<sup>17</sup> *Al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*'s editor, while subject to certain restrictions, published articles that announced, discussed, debated, and influenced the revision of municipal policies. However insignificant local news reports may seem in the broader context of the war, they were no doubt a "contemporary mirror of what people were reading."<sup>18</sup> A close look at the local news section allows us to delineate the editor's view of the immediate world around him, his local political ambitions, and the news that was consumed by the urban population; perhaps most important, it opens a tiny window onto everyday life in the city.

This approach shifts our understanding of World War I from a war that happened *to* the region to one that happened *in* the region. Despite the demographic catastrophe caused by the war, the experiences of civilians in Ottoman cities have until recently received little scholarly attention, especially compared to the vast literature on civilians

in European cities during the war.<sup>19</sup> My goal here is to push the expanding historiography on the Ottoman home front further and explore the war as a socioeconomic and political event that was both destructive *and* formative in the civilian realm.<sup>20</sup> Other scholars have understandably emphasized the war’s “dehumanization and disruption of normality” in the social, economic, political, and cultural domains.<sup>21</sup> Most studies dealing with “dehumanization” focus on the Armenian genocide, which is the subject of a distinct historiography on World War I in the Ottoman Empire. Considering the horrors of systematic mass deportations and the massacres of over a million Armenians by the Young Turk regime, this focus comes as no surprise. The literature ranges from causal explanations to examining the genocidal process, narrating survivors’ social and psychological traumas, and discussing humanitarian interventions on behalf of women and orphans.<sup>22</sup> Studies of wartime experiences in the Syrian provinces have focused similarly on the destructive nature of the war. Najwa al-Qattan’s work on Ottoman conscription policies (*seferberlik*) reveals the war’s totalizing nature. She not only outlines the devastating effects of *seferberlik* but also highlights the changing meaning of this term—as it acquired a civilian dimension in its Arabic rendition (*safar barlik*)—and its potency as a metonym for the war as a whole.<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Thompson has argued that the extremely high rate of mortality during the war disrupted gender relations, resulting in a crisis of paternity.<sup>24</sup> Others have discussed the war as a moment of “identity crisis” in the Arab provinces, a time when Ottoman wartime policies provoked resentment against the government, leading to the “alienation” of the Ottoman collective.<sup>25</sup>

The war, however, had another side, one often overshadowed by the high drama of battles and deaths. This article draws attention to the war’s “unanticipated emancipatory” opportunities through the lens of provincial urban politics and local wartime food policies.<sup>26</sup> Food cannot simply be understood as a biological necessity, that is, as nourishment needed for physical survival; it is also a site of social, cultural, and political negotiation. In times of famine, food becomes the center of a political field that bridges micro- and macrohistorical processes, as individuals, families, cities, and states struggle for provisions.<sup>27</sup> I argue that focusing on food allows us to move beyond the “catastrophe and aftermath” paradigm toward a modes-of-resilience analytic, illustrated in fierce political competitions over loyalties. The provisioning of civilians, as we will see, delineated local politics, opened opportunities to assert power, and perhaps even pushed the state to legislate an empire-wide provisioning scheme to eliminate local competition.

#### BETWEEN THE REAL AND THE IMAGINED: THE MUNICIPALITY IN THE PRESS

Provisioning Beirut was no easy task. While all Ottoman cities faced war-induced challenges, Beirut can be described as a city under siege. Reliant on food supplies from abroad and from the interior, the movement of which had been interrupted by the Entente naval blockade as well as by Ottoman monopolization of transportation and wartime requisitioning, the city struggled for survival. Widespread profiteering, the influx of thousands of desperate Armenian refugees escaping the genocidal campaign of the Young Turk government, and swarms of greedy locusts gobbling up the crops, amplified human suffering.<sup>28</sup> Faced with these difficulties, all attempts to adequately feed the

city's inhabitants, including those of the municipality, eventually failed. According to memoirs, consular reports, missionary papers, the private correspondence of staff and faculty of the Syrian Protestant College (SPC, later the American University of Beirut), the reports of Ottoman officials, and the records of local philanthropic societies, food shortages were already an everyday reality in November 1914, and became ever more severe as the war dragged on.<sup>29</sup>

Nevertheless, the Beirut daily newspaper *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani* represented the municipality's efforts positively and generally praised its endeavors in guaranteeing the provisioning of civilians, in particular the urban poor. An examination of the paper's content as well as its silences from 1 November 1914 until it ceased publication in January 1916, paying special attention to its portrayal of the Beirut municipality, is revealing on many levels.<sup>30</sup> First, despite harsh censorship, food—and in particular the shortage of food—was a regular news item. Approximately one-third of the 324 preserved editions include articles related to urgent questions surrounding food, mostly published under the heading "local news." Food-related news hardly ever made it onto the front page, which was reserved for international and regional war-related events. Relegating "food" to page two or three of the paper did not undermine its importance but rather framed it as a local issue. The headlines of the numerous food-related articles ranged from "The Price of Sugar," to "No Fear of High Meat Prices," to "The Flour Problem," to simply "Flour, Flour."<sup>31</sup> Second, slightly over 80 percent of food shortage articles—those including keywords such as food, flour, wheat, sugar, coffee, or rationing—focused on the efforts and "successful" campaigns of the Beirut municipality and the locally stationed Ottoman governors. Third, it is worth noting that news about the relief efforts of civil societies and international agencies—an area I have explored in detail elsewhere—were almost entirely omitted; this silence, I suggest, was as significant in endowing the municipal council with political legitimacy as were the articles that actually focused on the council.<sup>32</sup> Considering the content and the extent of food-related coverage, there is no doubt that what emerges in the pages of *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani* is a picture of an urban institution capable of dealing with wartime exigencies, that is to say, of a *dispositif*.

The question must be raised: if the efforts of Beirut's leaders were in vain, why do we find such a positive representation of the municipal council in the newspaper? It could simply relate to Ottoman censorship and the editor's desire not to offend the authorities, since a discussion of extreme shortages in the city would negatively reflect not only on the municipality but also on Ottoman officials and by extension the state. The Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) was no doubt serious about preserving a positive image of the Ottoman state. Already in November 1914, military authorities announced that news about the war could be published only if it came directly from the war ministry. Any publication of information thought to endanger the Ottoman war effort or to present the state as failing in its responsibilities to citizens would incur a fine of one hundred to five hundred Ottoman liras. The editor permitting such publication would face a prison sentence of one to three months.<sup>33</sup>

Government attempts to censor the press were not new to Beiruti intellectuals. Tabbara, a member of the Beirut Reform Society (*Jam'iyyat Bayrut al-Islahiyya*)<sup>34</sup> and the Decentralization Party (*Hizb al-Lamarkaziyya al-Idariyya al-‘Uthmani*),<sup>35</sup> had experienced firsthand the government's intolerance of oppositional voices before the war. In April 1913, he and his paper came under fierce attack from the Ottoman government.

In early 1913, the Beirut Reform Society outlined a program that detailed the various functions of local government and proposed to limit Ottoman authority in the Arab provinces to foreign, economic, and military affairs.<sup>36</sup> This public articulation of a reform proposal was possible under the governorship of Adham Bey, who, in line with the liberal ruling party that had appointed him, “was inclined toward political solutions.”<sup>37</sup> After its coup in Istanbul on 23 January 1913, the CUP, alarmed by developments in Beirut, reinstated its loyal member, Abu Bakr Hazim, as governor.<sup>38</sup> Eager to undermine the opposition, Hazim ordered the Reform Society’s clubs closed immediately upon his arrival in the city on 8 April 1913. The provincial reformers, in response, called for a general strike. Both Ahmad Tabbara and ‘Adb al-Ghani al-‘Uraisi, the editor and owner of *al-Mufid*, provoked the governor’s anger by publishing the defiant call for the strike in their papers.<sup>39</sup> Hazim responded with a raid on the papers’ offices and threatened the men with arrest. This encounter would appear to be a good reason to avoid future confrontation. Fear of government crackdowns, however, only partially explains Tabbara’s later actions, especially since he did not seem an easily intimidated man; during the crisis of 1913, he continued to secretly publish his paper despite the official ban and the constant threat of arrest.<sup>40</sup> Rather, the editor’s decision to portray Beirut’s wartime municipal council as a functioning, reasonable, concerned, and moral governing body was a calculated move. These editorial interpretations of municipal actions, made public in *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, should be seen in the context of local demands for reform and autonomy, the editor’s politics as a prominent member of reformist parties, and his close political, and most probably personal, links to members of the municipal council, in particular its president Ahmad Mukhtar Bayhum.

The Beirut elite’s desire for increased autonomy at a time when the Ottoman state desperately sought to centralize control of the empire, I believe, is cautiously reflected in the stories of municipal provisioning published under the strict eyes of Ottoman censors. Choosing to elevate the municipality as an exemplar of local competence and as the chief provider of food is not all that surprising, as the institution was originally created to meet local needs. Although modeled on urban reforms in Istanbul, the Beirut municipal council was primarily born out of “local contingency necessitated” by the refugee and public health crisis in the aftermath of the 1860 civil war.<sup>41</sup> Under Beirut’s political leadership, it became the most important urban institution in the years leading up to 1914. Still, in the prewar period, it was not unusual for local newspapers to question the council’s effectiveness in areas such as urban planning and market control. This changed during the war; critiques were no longer directed at the efforts of the municipality itself but rather at various actors who did not heed its suggestions or commands.<sup>42</sup>

#### THE POLITICS OF FOOD: PRICES, PROFITEERS, AND THE URBAN POOR

Food shortages, especially of flour and wheat, continued to be the city’s most pressing issue, despite the municipality’s initial efforts in November 1914 to guarantee the transfer of grain from Aleppo to Beirut. Indeed, on 21 November 1914, only a few days after the press had jubilantly announced the end of the first food crisis, large crowds, once again driven by hungry stomachs and bare dinner tables, gathered in front of bakeries and stores. Reporting on upheavals in the city, an article in *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*

attributed the shortage to the “sad fact” that merchants were taking advantage of their position in the supply chain. Some Beiruti merchants had apparently diverted carloads of flour—which were not directly supervised by the municipality—into Mount Lebanon, where they could sell them at a higher price.<sup>43</sup> The results were a depleted market and inflated prices in the city.<sup>44</sup> Reading or hearing this news, Beirutis no doubt would have agreed with Berthold Brecht’s assertion that “famines don’t just happen; they are organized by the grain trade.”<sup>45</sup> According to the reports, the municipality, heeding the people’s anxieties and fearing widespread riots, again intervened to guarantee unhindered interdistrict trade, assuming that this would solve the problem.

In this chaotic situation, the editor seized the opportunity to situate the municipality as a mediating body between the central authorities in Istanbul, the Ottoman governor of the Beirut province, and the city’s merchants. An article published on 21 November 1914 outlined the council’s functions. Faced with continued difficulties in transport, the provincial administrative council, the Beirut municipality, and some members of the Beirut Chamber of Commerce met under the supervision of the Ottoman governor, Bekir Sami, to discuss the problem of speculative hoarding and how to put an end to it.<sup>46</sup> The men agreed that the solution was to assure an abundant supply of grain to both Beirut and the surrounding districts, which for several reasons required the involvement of the central authorities. First, Beirut’s leaders needed funds; the Beirut municipality had declared bankruptcy in 1913, and money had been in short supply ever since.<sup>47</sup> Second, to ensure that grain shipments were forthcoming from other areas, an order had to be issued in Istanbul, especially as the local authorities in Damascus and Aleppo had banned grain exports from their districts.<sup>48</sup> The responses from the capital were positive. The director of the Ottoman Bank in Istanbul agreed to deposit ten thousand Ottoman liras into its Beirut branch, and the Interior Ministry promised a daily shipment of at least eight trainloads of grain.<sup>49</sup> Assuring the public that there was no reason “to fear any deficiencies in terms of this basic necessity in the future,” *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani* euphorically attributed the end of yet another food crisis to the great accomplishments and negotiation skills of the provincial governor and, more important, to the president of the municipality.<sup>50</sup> Once again, it seemed that the political competence of the local leadership had ensured the provision of food and a larger catastrophe was successfully avoided.

In addition to continuous issues with transportation, destabilizing speculation by Beirut’s merchants had become a problem. By the winter of 1914 price increases were a serious concern, according to eyewitnesses, and continued to be so through the war. For example, in May 1917, Edward Nickoley, an employee at SPC, reports:

It is true that businessmen have exploited to the full the situation created by the war. Many struggling merchants have become fabulously wealthy, having accumulated their wealth as a result of the dire necessity of the poor and suffering. Many have abandoned their previous business pursuits to speculate in provisions and go in for money changing. Prices were raised, as stock on hand diminished each increase in the former, placing the commodities farther beyond the reach of the people who need them.<sup>51</sup>

This, however, is not to say that the local government made no attempts to deal with profiteering and speculation. In an article on 3 December 1914, *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani* alerted its readers to price hikes, suggesting that the city government would set reasonable

prices for whatever limited supplies remained on the market. As demands for increased government control may not have sat well with everyone, the article was cautious in addressing the issue. Prices, it argued, needed to be “fair” not only to consumers but also to merchants. It was not advisable to simply restrict merchants; rather, it was desirable for everyone if a compromise could be found between the interests of businessmen and consumers. “If we request a fair limit for all prices, it is only in the interests of both sellers and buyers.”<sup>52</sup> Price hikes here were not blamed on greedy merchants, but rather on overall confusion. The merchants, the article argued, did not know at what price to sell and the buyers did not know when and how much to buy. The author urged the municipality to put an end to this confusion and encouraged the council by expressing great confidence in its ability to determine proper sales prices. By interpreting the municipality’s actions as unhostile toward the city’s merchants, the author precluded any negative responses from the business community. Framing the municipality as acting in everyone’s interest, the author not only positioned it as a fair and incorruptible institution but also opened the possibility for the municipal council to act despite its close connections to merchants in the city. That the council would heed these recommendations was almost taken for granted, as the article expresses gratitude in advance for its efforts.<sup>53</sup>

The council first dealt with imported goods that were most affected by the Entente naval blockade, such as coffee and sugar.<sup>54</sup> It was not uncommon for the prices of these goods to double from one day to the next, and at times they even fluctuated over the course of a day. For example, a *roṭl* (or 2.5 kg) of sugar could be bought for twelve *ghurūsh* on 2 December and sold the very next day for twenty.<sup>55</sup> An *uqqa* (or 1.3 kg) of coffee rose from thirty-five to fifty *ghurūsh*, and a standard size can of kerosene from sixty to seventy *ghurūsh*.<sup>56</sup> A day after the newspaper voiced concerns about price gouging, the municipal council ordered the most prominent sugar, coffee, and kerosene merchants into its office to discuss trade practices for their commodities. The city authorities then set up a commission comprised of members of the municipality and the Beirut Chamber of Commerce with the task of suggesting fair prices for both imported goods and basic necessities such as flour and wheat. Intervention into the economy was not unprecedented in Ottoman history. On the contrary, the state had historically played an active role in controlling the market. Suraiya Faroqhi has shown how the regulation of prices played a part in creating an intricate Ottoman provisioning network in the 16th and 17th centuries.<sup>57</sup> In that period, centrally appointed Ottoman qadis, in close consultation with merchants and craftsmen, set prices. The detailed price lists were publicized and enforced by specially appointed government agents.<sup>58</sup> Well into the 18th century, the state continued to play a protective role, “often at the expense of merchants,” and especially in relation to basic necessities such as bread. But state control over the economy decreased as the empire was integrated into the global economy.<sup>59</sup> By the outbreak of World War I, the Ottoman economy was governed by a free market, which as Şevket Pamuk has argued continued to hold sway until the authorities legislated an empire-wide provisioning scheme in July 1916.

As was the case from the 16th through the 18th centuries, price controls implemented after the outbreak of World War I were interventionist in nature and emanated from local urban settings. But now the main agents directing negotiations were locally elected urban institutions rather than centrally appointed Ottoman qadis. The focus was on provisioning

the urban population, and local governments fixed prices in cooperation with merchants. The fact that council members were elected, came from upper-class, often merchant, backgrounds, and were frequently involved in reformist politics, meant that municipal intervention in the market in general, and in setting price limits in particular, involved a delicate balancing act. For example, the fact that the municipal council initially paid attention to luxury goods, unaffordable to average workers, perhaps partially speaks to their position. After all, council members were dependent on the franchise of upper- and middle-class men, who for the most part voted along the lines dictated by their community leaders. Moreover, nominations for council candidacy generally depended on the good will of powerful and rich community leaders and the endorsement of imams, priests, and *mukhtārs*.<sup>60</sup> Considering these groups' lobbying powers, it is not surprising that the council prioritized luxury goods. Still, the suggested price list published in *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani* on 6 December 1914 not only delineated fair prices for coffee and sugar, but also included wheat, flour, bulgur (cracked wheat), butter, milk, soap, and so forth.<sup>61</sup> This move illustrates the municipality's broader responsibility to assure everyone's well-being. The commission had decided to reduce prices to their levels prior to a steep increase on 2 December. These newspaper articles certainly suggest that the municipality was on its way to successfully managing the instabilities of the market; an image was created of an urban institution that took up a negotiating position between the city's inhabitants and merchants and demonstrated its ability to satisfy a diverse set of actors.

The price list, however, was not accompanied by any legal order or enforcement mechanism, which ultimately rendered it ineffective. In the absence of strict government controls, commodities disappeared from retail stores and were sold on the black market at the highest market prices.<sup>62</sup> This problem sparked a debate in *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*. Prominent intellectuals, positioning themselves as voices of the public, insisted that the municipality exercise the kind of surveillance and control over prices that heads of households paid to their families and possessions. On 7 December 1914, in an open letter to the Beirut governor, the intellectual Yusuf ‘Abd Allah Susa expressed his concern and frustration. The practical implementation of price controls on "daily necessities" (*al-hājiyyāt al-darūriyya*) had failed, despite, as he put it, the great efforts of the municipality.<sup>63</sup> Susa alerted readers that Beirut's commerce was in the hands of a small number of individuals—one in a thousand—who took advantage of the population's most dire needs, affecting its moral and physical strength. He blamed wholesale merchants for hoarding. Sometimes, he wrote, these merchants stored goods for two to three weeks, until the market was completely devoid of the product, so that consumers would pay whatever the merchants' greed demanded. Wartime profits on grain sales had reached up to 300 percent, he wrote, to the obvious detriment of the urban poor. At the same time, Susa praised the municipality for attempting to curtail the rising costs of living. He reminded the public that the municipality had demonstrated that all its projects were geared toward the well-being of the city.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, he pointed out, the last time the municipality legislated prices, merchants continued to sell their goods at exorbitant rates. According to Susa, for some men greed trumped any moral obligation to the community.

In his attack on the profiteers, Susa employed a complex moral language contrasting the wholesale merchants' greedy personal interests with the good and "humanitarian"

intentions of the municipality, which was working for the collective destiny of the city. The editor of *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani* presented civilian sacrifice as a communal moral necessity, appealing to Beirut’s upper classes to share the sacrifices of the urban poor, who could not find any affordable flour.<sup>65</sup> It was clear that the source of scarcity and shortages, at least to a certain extent, was the greed of men. Blaming scarcity on merchants certainly is not unusual.<sup>66</sup> All wars have their profiteers, individuals who “with their boundless appetites and cynical attitudes to the suffering around them” seek to make exorbitant profits.<sup>67</sup> However, it is important to note that when mention was made of merchants in the newspaper, their identities were usually left ambiguous. For example, when discussing those who diverted trains into Mount Lebanon, the report referred to them simply as “some merchants” (*ba‘d al-tujjār*).<sup>68</sup> By contrast, accounts written after the war often openly blamed merchants’ greed, and some did not hesitate to name families who had profited. In his postwar memoir, Yusuf al-Hakim devoted an entire chapter to the misdeeds of greedy merchants.<sup>69</sup> Antun Yamin, in his account of the war, lists the Sursuq family among others who benefited from the war.<sup>70</sup> There is also no doubt that in private conversations people blamed specific individuals directly, even during the war. For example, Bayard Dodge, the chief of the American relief efforts, claimed in a discussion with the German consul of Beirut that Michel Sursuq, a notorious wartime profiteer, “refused to sell grain bought at 40 piasters . . . for less than 250 piasters, even to save some of the children fed by the American relief organization.”<sup>71</sup> Yet, when it came to wartime coverage of profiteering in *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, writers talked about merchants in general terms. For example, Susa simply criticized the behavior of “wholesale merchants” (*tujjār al-jumla*), without mentioning Sursuq or any other merchant by name. Instead of making a direct accusation, he relied on his audience to make the appropriate judgment, but why?

This ambiguity is not merely a general trend in the paper’s reporting but is also, I argue, a reflection of Tabbara’s own political allegiances and his sensitivity to the council members’ multiple social positions and interests. Jens Hanssen, in his study of Ottoman municipal biographies, notes that the majority of municipal council members were “merchants, entrepreneurs, bankers, or real estate owners.”<sup>72</sup> In addition, prominent merchants like Michel Sursuq were also members of the Beirut Reform Society; this alleged wartime profiteer was thus linked both to council members such as Ahmad Mukhtar Bayhum and to editor Hassan Tabbara. Sursuq’s political connections, I would argue, placed him outside the scope of legitimate criticism. Another prominent example is the president of the municipal council, Ahmad Mukhtar Bayhum, who was from an important Beirut merchant family. The Bayhums had been involved in the trade of agricultural products since the 18th century and were among a Muslim minority of export merchants. Before the war the family had conducted vigorous trade with Europe, a business that was generally dominated by non-Muslims.<sup>73</sup> The Bayhums also had a long history of political involvement in the city. Mukhtar Bayhum’s father’s cousin, Muhyi al-Din Bayhum, was an original member of the municipality, and hardly a year passed without at least one Bayhum occupying a seat on the council.<sup>74</sup> One of the most important changes in Beirut’s municipal politics may even be attributed to the appointment of a Bayhum; after Muhammed Bayhum was appointed president in 1893, the municipal council was no longer dominated by men with an Egyptian military or engineering background but rather by local merchant notables.<sup>75</sup>

Ahmad Mukhtar Bayhum was also an important member of the Beirut Reform Society. Along with Beirut notable Salim Salam and others, he pressed the Ottoman government for reforms at the provincial level. In 1913 he traveled to Paris as a member of the Reform Society's Beirut delegation with Salim Salam, Michel Sursuq, Khalil Zaynieh, Ayub Tabet, and the editor of *al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, Ahmad Hassan Tabbara.<sup>76</sup> As the scion of a merchant family, a member of the municipality, and a political reformer, Bayhum is an example of a man whose interests were determined by his complex social position. On the one hand, his family ran a trade business, which put it in the position of potentially profiting from war shortages; on the other hand, as a member of the municipal council, Bayhum had a moral obligation to ensure the well-being of the city. His close relationship with Tabbara made it unlikely that the latter would publish articles overly critical of the municipality or portraying all merchants as profiteers.

Considering the position of municipal council members as both reform politicians and members of important merchant families, Susa too avoided making blunt accusations that could potentially destabilize the municipality's position. After all, it was likely that council members themselves, or some of their close associates, were taking advantage of the wartime situation. Instead, Susa employs the language of a moral code centered on communal sacrifice on behalf of the city's poor; his idea of well-being was living well not simply in a material sense but also in a moral sense that called for human decency.<sup>77</sup> For Susa, the municipality had to regulate the marketing of all basic commodities as well as morality in the city. At stake, after all, was keeping the famished poor alive (*sadda ramaq al-faqīr al-jā'i*).<sup>78</sup> To achieve that goal, Susa suggested the municipality take a complete inventory of essential commodities and then set fair prices according to their availability. More important, he recommended that the municipality take control of all wholesale distribution of flour and wheat, restricting private merchants to retail transactions. This, he proposed, would bring prices back to a reasonable level and prevent wholesale merchants from monopolizing the market.<sup>79</sup> The author framed his proposed municipal appropriation of wholesale transactions as a moral obligation, as compassion for the poor, and as an honorable attempt to save the lower classes from starvation. Susa rendered his critique of the municipality's inaction in a most flattering tone, and reminded council members that Beirutis had not forgotten the municipality's efforts in the earlier transport crisis. Susa did not condemn trade in general; he left room for men like Bayhum to position themselves as "moral" merchants not interested in taking advantage of the situation. Susa's suggestion that the men of the municipality take over wholesale business expressed his trust that not all merchants were wartime profiteers; rather, he trusted that the merchants linked to the municipal council would work for the greater good of the city.<sup>80</sup> This sentiment was further elaborated the next day, this time on the front page. The author—now anonymous—insisted that merchants would respect the by-then widely publicized price list because the municipality took the cost of living of the poor into consideration when drafting it. Yet despite the open encouragement of the paper, the municipality did not take an inventory of wheat or flour, nor did it immediately take over the wholesale grain business to eliminate hoarding; instead, until the early spring of 1915, it resorted to jawboning, urging merchants to adhere to the prices suggested by the municipal commission.

DISCIPLINING THE MARKET: REGULATION, SURVEILLANCE,  
AND PUNISHMENT

In the spring of 1915, food supplies further decreased as an invasion of desert locusts gobbled up every green twig and gnawed away at fruit and olive trees, while most grain was requisitioned to feed Ottoman soldiers on the Palestine front.<sup>81</sup> Realizing the danger and its own responsibility for the community's survival, the municipality finally intervened boldly in the city's food market. According to reports in *al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, the municipality imposed punitive measures, including monetary fines and imprisonment, to dissuade Beirut's merchants from selling commodities, in particular grain and its derivatives, above the assigned prices. Council members, as mentioned above, had hesitated to enforce price limits out of fear of alienating their electoral base, the city's community leaders, and their own family members. Likewise, the editor of the newspaper was hesitant to issue demands more stringent than his appeals to merchants' social consciousness. But in 1915, with an ever-decreasing grain supply, the paper highlighted the municipality's managerial and control mechanisms. Whether or not it matched reality, a picture emerged in the paper of a council ready to abandon its loyal base of merchants by cutting them out of the grain trade and taking over the wholesale distribution of grain. The municipality, at that moment of impending emergency, appeared as a powerful institution. Reports were published that the municipal council had bought wheat and flour and set up a functioning security apparatus. When trainloads of grain and flour arrived in Beirut, the municipality stationed policemen throughout the city to receive the precious cargo. The wheat and flour were then distributed to vendors at wholesale prices set by the municipality, and storeowners were ordered to sell the provisions at fixed prices. To be eligible to retail wheat or flour, vendors had to procure permission from the police. The gathering of the "poor and desperate in front of the stores was tangible proof of the great need."<sup>82</sup> The municipality apparently responded adequately; the paper praised its efforts and cheered at the prospect of the poor being able to obtain wheat at a decent price, especially when the municipality assured the public that the retail price would not exceed the limit it had set in December 1914: five *ghurūsh* per *royl*.

Moreover, the editor stressed the council's commitment to ensuring that vendors obeyed the price limit and did not commit food fraud, since the increasingly regular arrivals of wheat still presented opportunities for profiteering at the retail level. Opportunities to take advantage of those in need had trickled down the socioeconomic ladder to bakers and policemen,<sup>83</sup> especially since the municipality was unable to employ enough manpower and had to rely on local police and bakers as its representatives on the ground. Already in November 1914, the municipality's finances had been so dire that it was forced to dismiss fifteen sergeants in charge of implementing its orders.<sup>84</sup> The council was understaffed and had to rely on local police to supervise distributions and sales. These policemen, it seems, often looked the other way as bakers sold bread at black market prices right under the nose of the city council. The newspaper denounced a number of Beirut bakers and storeowners who could not resist trying to make some extra cash by charging more than what the municipal council permitted, or by stretching their wares; for example, some retailers would mix ground coffee with finely ground barley and chickpeas. The purchase of flour became ever more hazardous, as it was stretched

at times with sand, sawdust, and more dangerous additives.<sup>85</sup> Food fraud was a daily occurrence, growing worse as the war dragged on. During June and July 1915, a large number of people in Beirut suffered from nausea and dizziness. One substance mixed with wheat was the darnel grass plant, which grows plentifully in Greater Syria and is often called “false wheat” due to their resemblance to each other.<sup>86</sup> The consumption of darnel causes a feeling of drunkenness and in some cases may result in death; in Beirut, it affected enough people to warrant mention in the press. Another common additive was bitter vetch or *julubban*, grown as animal feed and not suitable for human consumption.<sup>87</sup> In some cases the bread produced by the city bakeries contained no wheat at all, but was “dirty and black; the view of it simply spoiled one’s appetite.”<sup>88</sup> Moreover, people often complained about the bread sold under the municipality’s supervision as being “an unwholesome mixture of barley, corn, millet, and even earth and tares.” At times bread purchased from local bakeries would turn moldy within a day; white bread was black on the second day, and grey or purple by the following evening.<sup>89</sup>

To put a stop to the shady dealings of bakers and storeowners, the municipality issued a statement, published in *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani* on 9 April 1915, that anyone who sold above the set prices would be arrested.<sup>90</sup> The paper reassured the public that these punitive measures were legitimate; under the headline, “In Punishment There Is Life,” the editor made his approval of the previous week’s actions clear and issued a warning to anyone who even thought of circumventing the law. Referring to the Qur’an, he imbued the municipal council with the highest authority by linking its legal actions to divinely sanctioned and life-giving punishment.<sup>91</sup> In a follow-up article, the paper urged the municipality to continue publicizing the prices at least twice a week so that sellers and buyers would not forget them, and expressed the hope that the council “would come down on the merchants after the arrival of shipments and set just limits to flour prices.”<sup>92</sup> Action followed. For example, the municipality fined some bakers for selling a single loaf of bread for a *matlik* (about eight *ghurūsh*), whereas prior to the war a whole *rotl* of bread could be bought for ten *ghurūsh* or less.<sup>93</sup> In another instance, the Beirut police arrested two men, Ibrahim ibn Husayn and Tawfiq ibn al-Haj, for selling a *rotl* of wheat for five *ghurūsh* and twenty-five *para*. Exceeding the municipal price set at five *ghurūsh* by only a fraction of a *ghurush*, the men were imprisoned.<sup>94</sup> The arrests and their subsequent coverage in the newspaper were meant to serve as a clear deterrent and a show of the municipality’s strong executive power. However, it seems that the council only cracked down on small-time vendors, as the names of those arrested for fraud did not include the large merchant families, such as the Sursuqs, Bayhums, and Salams, some of whose members sat on the municipal council.

#### SILENCING THE COMPETITION

While the pages of *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani* were filled with news related to food and food supplies, it made no mention of alternative modes of relief, such as the American Red Cross (ARC) chapter in Beirut. Staffed by American diplomats, missionaries, and educators associated with SPC, the chapter had met in December 1914 and inaugurated a sizable relief campaign the following month.<sup>95</sup> Funded by international and local donations, the committee was eager to deal with the “distress among the civilian population.”<sup>96</sup> Beirutis readily took advantage of aid offered by the ARC; between

January and August 1915 the main office, located across from SPC, handled about fifteen hundred applications for aid per month. Bayard Dodge, head of relief, writes, “we see as many women as time allows for, which must average about sixty,” in the headquarters each day.<sup>97</sup> Generally a student volunteer would stand at the bottom of the stairs to hold back the crowd, while others would assist in prescreening the women and act as ushers.<sup>98</sup> American female volunteers screened aid applicants for their place of residence, assessed their need, and determined whether applicants would receive money, food, or work assignments. In addition, according to Dodge’s reports, each of the other ten American relief stations processed about four hundred aid applications per week.<sup>99</sup> From the correspondence of the relief volunteers, it seems that the American effort was well organized and well financed, and assisted a sizable number of people. However, in the course of the eighteen months under consideration here, *al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani* mentioned the work of the ARC in Beirut only once.<sup>100</sup> This was when the ARC decided to work in close cooperation with the municipality; an article on 14 January 1915 announced that the municipality had engaged some recipients of American aid to repair and clean roads.<sup>101</sup> This coverage did not do justice to the ARC’s role in providing food, work, and money to poor and starving Beirutis, at least prior to August 1915. The paper’s editor, wishing to highlight local self-sufficiency, would likely have wanted to avoid showcasing foreign aid campaigns, which had the potential of undermining the envisioned status of the municipality as the provider of sustenance for the urban poor.

#### THE TIDE TURNS

After June 1915, articles mentioning the municipality’s role in feeding or attempting to feed the city decreased. With the war escalating, famine devastating Greater Syria, and soldiers dying by the thousands from disease, the Ottoman state grew ever more nervous, a condition that was personified in the paranoid ‘Azmi Bey and his superior Jamal Pasha. During the summer of 1915, Jamal Pasha became increasingly suspicious of an impending anti-Ottoman Arab rebellion in Greater Syria. Ottoman authorities discovered documents left behind by the French consul, which named individual Beirutis, including Hassan Tabbara, as having sought to conspire with the French against Ottoman rule.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, according to the commander of the Fourth Army’s intelligence services, ‘Aziz Bey, Tabbara had a good relationship with the French consul in Beirut before the war and continued to have contacts with him even after the French were expelled in 1914. Supposed communication with an enemy nation, along with membership in the Decentralization Party, was reason enough for Jamal Pasha to have Tabbara court marshaled.<sup>103</sup> In January 1916, the Ottoman authorities shut down his paper, and he was executed a few months later on 6 May 1916.

Ottoman assertion of power in the province had been increasing even before Tabbara’s execution. This was clearly visible in the area of provisioning. The Beirut province’s new and ambitious governor ‘Azmi Bey knew that filling peoples’ stomachs would ensure their loyalties. Arriving in Beirut in the early summer of 1915, he took matters in hand almost immediately. He set out to undermine reformist agendas in the city by asserting control over food, outlawing foreign relief work, and setting up his own (ultimately insufficient) provisioning scheme for the city. His goal was to eliminate political competition and assert power in the Beirut province.

The governor began by sidelining the municipal council as the city's chief provisioner. According to a letter sent from the Beirut police chief to SPC president Howard Bliss, the central authorities' plan to take a more active role in provisioning was in place by April 1915. The letter alerted Bliss that "the imperial government has taken certain decisions concerning the distribution of flour among all the residents of Beirut," including putting the director of the police—a loyal pawn of the new governor—in charge of registering all inhabitants of the city.<sup>104</sup> On 4 June 1915, an announcement was published in *al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani* under the heading "How Is Flour to Be Sold in the City?" The newly appointed director of police explained the project. First he would conduct a census to record the sizes of families and the ages of their individual members. Then he would divide the city into seventy-two districts, and in each district a special shop would be selected to sell flour. Shopkeepers would be provided with a book including all the names of the families assigned to his store. To avoid fraud, each individual family was to receive a paper showing the names and ages of its members. Each day the head of the family could appear at the store and purchase the amount of flour allotted to his family.<sup>105</sup> The rations assigned by the director of the police were as follows: every person over the age of fifteen would receive 480.13 grams of bread per day; those between three and fifteen would receive 320.09 grams; and children under the age of three were not assigned any ration.

Four days after the police chief's explanation, the editor of *al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani* raised concerns and criticized the governor's decision to put the police chief in charge, a decision that ultimately reduced the power of the local municipal council. The paper also questioned the chief of police's methods. Among the concerns voiced was that the distribution shops, selected by him, were inadequate for the size of the population. How was it possible to make flour available to nearly "150,000 inhabitants" living in "close to 20,000 houses" through only 72 stores? Moreover, the paper pointed out, some families were assigned to shops far from their residences, even when they lived near a different distribution center. Parts of the city were outside the perimeters of distribution centers altogether, and some families were not given the proper papers. The flour sold was second-rate or worse and cost five *ghurūsh* and thirty *para* per *rotl*, which the report deemed unfair to the poor, the plan's supposed beneficiaries.<sup>106</sup>

The rationing scheme did succeed in making distribution less chaotic. According to an eyewitness, before the system was implemented it was very dangerous to join the large crowds in front of the mill near the municipal building waiting to get a share of flour; the desperate souls waiting for a cup of flour shoved and pushed to get to the front. When a woman dropped her child, it was immediately trampled to death.<sup>107</sup> However, by the spring of 1915, a more organized rationing system seemed to be in place. Dr. Ra'if Abi al-Lam, who was a medical student at SPC during the war, reports:

Food was controlled and issued at appointed government places throughout Beirut. It was a ration system with fixed prices. The *mukhtār* of each district in the city issued a certified document stating how many people were in each family. Then one person from each family would go to the distribution center and present the documents, which entitled him and his family to a certain amount of wheat according to the family's size.<sup>108</sup>

The caloric value of the assigned rations was about 1,800 calories for an individual above fifteen years of age and 1,200 for a person between three and fifteen. This, according

to German army officer Fritz Grobba, amounted to about 49 percent of average prewar consumption.<sup>109</sup> Although not at starvation level, the rations were insufficient to prevent long-term malnutrition.

The rationing scheme illustrates the Ottoman governor's efforts to assume responsibility for feeding the city. But that was not all. In August 1915, the governor ordered the suspension of all foreign relief work in the city, and informed the ARC in Beirut that "any one desiring to distribute charity could do so openly through the municipality . . . otherwise no distribution could be made."<sup>110</sup> What followed were arrests of relief workers, intimidation campaigns, and in some cases expulsion to Anatolia.<sup>111</sup> Meanwhile, the municipality, through which the distribution was to be carried out, no longer posed a political challenge to the governor. The latter had dismissed the elected council under Ahmad Mukhtar Bayhum, and replaced it with an appointed committee under 'Umar Da'uq, "who remained far from political activities."<sup>112</sup> In late 1915 the governor expanded his command over food by creating a Beirut grain syndicate. Under the leadership of the grain exporter Mustafa 'Izz al-Din, a number of merchants received the governor's permission to purchase wheat and flour in the interior, on the condition that they not charge prices above a 10 percent profit. Unable to compete with Aleppo merchants, however, the syndicate crumbled soon after its establishment.<sup>113</sup> 'Azmi Bey organized other government-sponsored relief projects, including thirteen soup kitchens around the city. These projects demonstrate the centrality of food in establishing political legitimacy in an urban setting. By hijacking provisioning, the governor sought to sideline any competition to his, and by extension the state's, power. Reverend George Curtis Doolittle was certain as to 'Azmi Bey's motives: "Azmi's hatred of American influence led him to stop the activities of the Red Cross in Beirut . . . his desire to enhance Turkish prestige was probably the reason why he assented to the establishment of relief work at government expenses."<sup>114</sup>

While the government continued to regulate prices and sought to distribute food, it is clear that its efforts were unsuccessful in stemming the tide of starvation in the city. The more fortunate could see "the poor hungry [people] sitting and watching their bodies become thinner and thinner, until they no longer even had the strength to lift their hand to beg."<sup>115</sup> By 1917, "starving people [were] lying about everywhere, at all moments children were moaning and weeping, and women and children were clawing over garbage piles, ravenously eating anything."<sup>116</sup> The governor's attempt to sideline competition in the city seems to have been more successful, not only because he prevented foreigners from distributing food in the city, but more importantly because he smothered local reformist ambitions. His increasing control over urban government is visible in the thematic shift in Hassan Tabbara's newspaper before its closure in 1916. As mentioned above, news reports about the municipality decreased in the summer of 1915, suggesting that the editor no longer saw it as an institution capable of dealing successfully with issues related to the internal security and well-being of Beirut's inhabitants.

#### CONCLUSION

During the first year of the war, the reformist Ahmad Hassan Tabbara used his newspaper *al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani* to convince readers that the Beirut municipality was the most able, as well as the most appropriate, institution to guarantee the provisioning of the city in

a time of scarcity. He appealed to the moral obligation of the council's members to ensure communal rather than individual survival, and in particular the survival of the poor. He sought to illustrate to both the city's inhabitants and the central state that any wartime problem could be managed locally. Representing the municipal council as a capable institution, and carefully maneuvering the political and business interests of its members, Tabbara, under the censor's eyes, made a strong statement, one that could easily be overlooked by focusing on the destructive nature of the war.

Examining Beirut's urban microcosm allows a reframing of the war as a process of sociopolitical interactions and of the municipality as a governing body that positioned itself as deserving of Beirutis' loyalty. The city thus became *the* political space in which negotiations over civilian access to food took place; at the heart of this process in Beirut, at least initially, was the municipal council. For the people on the ground this meant that government was not an abstract state intervening in their daily lives but rather comprised local city officials who acted with a measure of autonomy. Of course, Beirut's municipal council was not immune to the interventions of central state representatives, in particular those of the Ottoman provincial governor. Nor was the council the only mechanism for governing access to food, especially if we consider alternatives such as civil society and foreign organizations, including the American Red Cross. But the reformist editor Tabbara tried to convince his readers that the municipal council was the most trustworthy political body. On the pages of *al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, he painted an image of the Beirut municipality as the paradigmatic political form suited to governing both food and the city. Tabbara's project to make the war an opportunity for local self-governance, so promising in its early months, was extinguished when he and thirteen other reform-minded men were led to the gallows in the early morning hours of 6 May 1916.<sup>117</sup> It had been a fleeting moment of political potential, which appeared for an encore performance when Beirut's political elite—led by Ahmad Mukthar Bayhum and Salim Salam and dragging along the municipality's new president, 'Umar Da'uq—raised the banner of the short-lived independent Arab state on the Grand Serail in the heart of the city on 6 October 1918. The banner was replaced by the French tricolor only four days later.<sup>118</sup>

#### NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> *Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, 14 November 1915; see also Nicholas Z. Ajay, "Mount Lebanon and the Wilayah of Beirut, 1914–1918: The War Years" (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 1973), 351.

<sup>2</sup> How widespread these attacks on the bakeries were, and whether they can be considered riots, cannot be established from this account. *Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, 21 November 1914.

<sup>3</sup> According to Fritz Grobba's study, the grain harvest of June 1914 was higher than average and sizable resources were thus available in the interior of Greater Syria at the outset of the war. Wartime exigencies, however, led to rising prices and declining supplies over the winter of 1914–15. Even as the situation deteriorated, flour and grain could still be purchased in the interior in late 1915. For example, a government-sponsored grain syndicate of Beiruti, Aleppine, and Lebanese merchants, while failing to secure transport, was able to purchase grain in Aleppo after November 1915. Fritz Grobba, *Die Getreidewirtschaft Syriens und Palästinas seit Beginn des Weltkrieges* (Hannover, Germany: n.p., 1923), 18; Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, "The Famine in Syria, 1915–1918," in *Problems of the Middle East in Historical Perspective: Essays in Honour of Albert Hourani*, ed. John P. Spagnolo and Albert Hourani (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1996), 237–38.

<sup>4</sup>For example, before the war, a railway car could be hired for about twenty Ottoman liras; in 1914, it cost sixty. Grobba, *Die Getreidewirtschaft*, 18.

<sup>5</sup>Schilcher, "The Famine," 237.

<sup>6</sup>Ajay, "Mount Lebanon and the Wilayah of Beirut," 351.

<sup>7</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, 17 November 1914.

<sup>8</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, 20 November 1914.

<sup>9</sup>Although the shipment was the result of a combined effort of the Ottoman governor, the Beirut municipality, and merchants, the paper credited the president of the municipality Ahmad Mukhtar Bayhum for its success. *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup>For a more detailed account of the causes of the famine, see Schilcher, "The Famine," 234–50; and Melanie Tanielian, "The War of Famine: Everyday Life in Wartime Beirut and Mount Lebanon" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2012), 19–50.

<sup>11</sup>It is impossible to account for the number of people who died from starvation, or to distinguish between those who died from hunger and those who died of diseases such as typhus, malaria, and cholera. As for total mortalities, the numbers vary greatly. George Antonius estimated that close to 350,000 people died in Greater Syria. See Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1965), 241. In her study of German sources, Linda Schilcher raises the number to close to 500,000. See Schilcher, "The Famine," 229. For a more detailed discussion on mortalities, see Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privileges, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 21.

<sup>12</sup>Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 20.

<sup>13</sup>Anis Frayha, *Qabla an Ansa* (Beirut: Dar al-Nahar, 1979), 49.

<sup>14</sup>Jay Winter, "Paris, London, Berlin 1914–1919: Capital Cities at War," in *Capital Cities at War: Paris, London, Berlin 1914–1919*, ed. Jay Winter and Jean-Louis Robert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 8. For a discussion of state intervention in the European context, see Belinda Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>15</sup>Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus?: And Other Essays* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2009), 2.

<sup>16</sup>Paul Rabinow, *Anthropos Today: Reflections on Modern Equipment* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), 50.

<sup>17</sup>Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6.

<sup>18</sup>Rashid Khalidi, "Ottomanism and Arabism," in *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, ed. Rashid Khalidi (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 53.

<sup>19</sup>For example, Winter and Robert, *Capital Cities at War*; and Roger Chickering, *The Great War and Urban Life in Germany: Freiburg, 1914–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>20</sup>Salim Tamari, *Year of the Locust: A Soldier's Diary and the Erasure of Palestine's Ottoman Past* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2011), 7. Hasan Kayali's discussion of Jamal Pasha's wartime policies in Greater Syria confirms this assertion; see Kayali, "Wartime Regional and Imperial Integration of Greater Syria during World War I," in *The Syrian Land: Processes of Integration and Fragmentation: Bilad al-Sham from the 18th to the 20th Century*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Birgit Schäbler (Stuttgart, Germany: F. Steiner, 1998), 296–330. The literature on the formative and emancipatory effects of World War I in general is significant and includes discussions on developments in urban governance and women's entry into the workplace. See for example, Winter and Robert, *Capital Cities*; Roger Chickering, *The Great War*; Maurine Greenwald, *Women, War, and Work: The Impact of World War I on Women Workers in the United States* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1985); and Susan R. Grayzel, *Women and the First World War* (London: Longman, 2002).

<sup>21</sup>Tamari, *Year of the Locust*, 7.

<sup>22</sup>The following list of works is by no means comprehensive. For causes, see Donald Bloxham, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and Taner Akçam, *From Empire to Republic: Turkish Nationalism and the Armenian Genocide* (New York: Zed Books, 2004); for a detailed account of the deportations, see Raymond H. Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011). For discussions of survivors, see Donald E. Miller and Lorna Touryan Miller, *Survivors: An Oral History of the Armenian*

*Genocide* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1993); and Nefissa Naguib, “Nations of Orphans and Widows: Armenian Memories of Relief in Jerusalem,” in *Interpreting Welfare and Relief in the Middle East*, ed. Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Nefissa Naguib (Boston: Brill, 2008), 35–56. For international and humanitarian responses, see Jay Winter, ed., *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003); and Keith Watenpaugh, “The League of Nations’ Rescue of Armenian Genocide Survivors and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism, 1920–27,” *American Historical Review* 115 (2010): 1315–39.

<sup>23</sup>Najwa al-Qattan, “Safarbarlik: Ottoman Syria and the Great War,” in *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann (Würzburg, Germany: Argon Verlag, 2004), 163–73.

<sup>24</sup>Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 6.

<sup>25</sup>Abigail Jacobson examines the negotiation of Ottoman identity in the local context of Jerusalem, in “Negotiating Ottomanism in Times of War: Jerusalem during World War I through the Eyes of a Local Muslim Resident,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 40 (2008): 69. For a more general discussion of competing national identities, see Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*; Rashid Khalidi, *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); and Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908–1918* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>26</sup>Tamari, *Year of the Locust*, 7.

<sup>27</sup>Food, food supply policies, and civilian provisioning have played only a marginal role in the history of World War I in the Middle East. Notable exceptions include Schilcher, “The Famine,” 229–58; Şevket Pamuk, “The Ottoman Economy in World War I,” in *The Economics of World War I*, ed. S.N. Broadberry and Mark Harrison (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 112–36; Ahmet Emin Yalman, *Turkey in the World War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1930), 119–34; Salim Tamari, “City of Rifraff: Crowds, Public Space, and New Urban Sensibilities in War-Time Jerusalem, 1917–1921,” in *Comparing Cities: The Middle East and South Asia*, ed. Kamran Asdar Ali and Martina Rieker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 23–48; and Robert Mazza, “Dining Out in Times of War: Jerusalem 1914–1918,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 41 (2010): 52–58.

<sup>28</sup>For a more detailed study of Armenian refugees and deportees, see Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*, 625–80. For an eyewitness account of the locust plague, see Margaret McGilvary, *The Dawn of a New Era in Syria* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1920), 179.

<sup>29</sup>The misery in Beirut and its surrounding regions is well documented in a variety of sources. See, for example, Beirut consular reports or the unique report of the Ottoman governor of Mount Lebanon Isma'il Haqqi Bey, in Fu'ad Afram Bustani, ed., *Isma'il Haqqi Bey: Lubnan, Mabahith 'Ilmiyya wa-Ijtima'iyya* (Beirut: n.p., 1970). Many church archives, such as the daily reports of the priests at St. Paul in Harissa, provide accounts of the effects of the famine and the war on their congregations. The personal wartime correspondence of the staff of the American University of Beirut, most importantly the Howard Bliss and Edward Nickoley collections, include descriptions of the war experience. Memoirs written in the postwar period confirm the dire picture. See, for example, Antun Yamin, *Lubnan fi al-Harb: Dhikra al-Hawadith wa-l-Mazalim fi Lubnan fi al-Harb al-'Umumiyya, 1914–1918* (Beirut: al-Matba'a al-Adabiyya, 1919), 1:156–60; Shakib Arslan, *Sira Dhatiyya* (Beirut: Dar al-Talifia, 1969), 154–59; Jirjis al-Khuri al-Maqdisi, *A'zam Harb fi al-Tarikh* (Beirut: al-Matba'a al-'Ilmiyya, 1918), 68–69; McGilvary, *The Dawn*, 71, 171, 206; and Frayha, *Qabla an Ansa*, 41–51.

<sup>30</sup>The newspaper is preserved on microfilm at the American University of Beirut.

<sup>31</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-Uthmani*, 9 January 1915; 10 December 1914; 21 November 1914; 11 April 1915.

<sup>32</sup>Melanie Tanielian, “Politics of Wartime Relief in Ottoman Beirut (1914–1918),” *First World War Studies* 5 (2014): 69–82; Tanielian, “The War of Famine,” 169–205.

<sup>33</sup>*Lubnan*, 11 November 1914. According to an article in Cairo's *al-Muqattam*, only three Beirut papers still operated, under the close scrutiny of authorities, by the middle of 1916: *al-Akhbar*, *al-Balagh*, and *al-Haqqa*. *Al-Muqattam*, 8 April 1916.

<sup>34</sup>The Beirut Reform Society was founded in 1912. It brought together Muslim and Christian intellectuals and community leaders advocating “a large measure of decentralization which would leave the internal affairs of the Arab vilayets in the hand of the local people.” Kamal S. Salibi, “Beirut under the Young Turks,” in *Les Arabes par leurs Archives*, ed. J. Berques and D. Chevallier (Paris: Centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1976), 205.

<sup>35</sup>A number of Syrian and Lebanese émigrés living in Cairo founded the Decentralization Party in 1912. Eliezer Tauber, *The Arab Movements in World War I* (London: Frank Cass, 1993), 5.

<sup>36</sup>Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle*, 78; Samir Kassir, *Beirut* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2010), 241.

<sup>37</sup>Kassir, *Beirut*, 240.

<sup>38</sup>Abu Bakr Hazim Bey returned to Beirut on 7 March 1912. For a more detailed account, see Salibi, "Beirut under the Young Turks," 207.

<sup>39</sup>‘Abd al-Ghani al-‘Uraisi was an outspoken Arabist. His editorials were often harsh critiques of the Turkish nationalism espoused by the Committee of Union and Progress. See Rashid Isma‘il Khalidi, "The 1912 Election Campaign in the Cities of Bilad al-Sham," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 16 (1984): 466.

<sup>40</sup>Eliezer Tauber, *The Emergence of the Arab Movements* (London: F. Cass, 1993), 143.

<sup>41</sup>Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle*, 139.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, 21 November 1914; Ajay, "Mount Lebanon and the Wilayah of Beirut," 354.

<sup>44</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, 21 November 1914.

<sup>45</sup>Quoted in Cormac Ó Gráda and Andrés Eiríksson, *Ireland's Great Famine: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2006), 20.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid.

<sup>47</sup>Jens Hanssen, "The Origins of the Municipal Council in Beirut, 1860–1908," in *Municipalités méditerranéennes les réformes urbaines ottomanes au miroir d'une histoire comparée (Moyen-Orient, Maghreb, Europe méridionale)*, ed. Nora Lafi (Berlin: K. Schwarz, 2005), 149.

<sup>48</sup>Grobba, *Getreidewirtschaft*, 18.

<sup>49</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, 23 November and 24 November 1914.

<sup>50</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, 24 November 1914.

<sup>51</sup>Edward Nickoley, "Historic Diary, February 1917," *Edward Nickoley Collection*, box 1, file 2, Archives and Special Collections at the American University of Beirut (hereafter AUB).

<sup>52</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, 3 December 1914.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>Both Anis Frayha and Nicolah Ziadeh mention that sugar, rice, and coffee were the commodities that disappeared from the market first, or, if available, were unaffordable. See Frayha, *Qabla an Ansa*, 45; and Nicolah Ziadeh, "A First-Person Account of the First World War in Greater Syria," in *The First World War as Remembered in the Countries of the Eastern Mediterranean*, ed. Olaf Farschid, Manfred Kropp, and Stephan Dähne (Beirut: Orient-Institute, 2006), 266.

<sup>55</sup>A *rotl* is equivalent to about 2.5 kg and an *uqqa* is about half of that, 1.282 kg.

<sup>56</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, 3 December 1914.

<sup>57</sup>Suraiya Faroqui, *Towns and Townsmen in Ottoman Anatolia: Trade, Crafts, and Food Production in an Urban Setting, 1520–1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 58, 132, 221.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Onur Yıldırım, "Bread and Empire: The Working of Grain Provisioning in Istanbul during the Eighteenth Century," in *Nourrir les cités de Méditerranée Antiquité-Temps Moderne*, ed. Brigitte Marine and Catherine Virlvouvet (Paris: Maisonneuve a. Larose, 2002), 252.

<sup>60</sup>At this point there was no universal suffrage; eligibility to vote was based on annual tax payments. Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle*, 150; Hanssen, "The Origins of the Municipal Council," 149.

<sup>61</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, 4 December and 6 December 1914.

<sup>62</sup>Grobba, *Getreidewirtschaft*, 24.

<sup>63</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, 7 December 1914.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>The French press during World War I issued similar appeals to the moral obligation of communal sacrifice. Jean-Louis Robert, "The Image of the Profiteer," in Winter and Robert, *Capital Cities at War*, 104.

<sup>66</sup>Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège De France, 1977–78* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 31.

<sup>67</sup>Tarif Khalidi, "The Arab World," in *The Great World War, 1914–45*, ed. Peter Liddle, Ian R. Whitehead, and J. M. Bourne (London: Harper Collins, 2001), 289.

<sup>68</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-‘Uthmani*, 21 November 1914.

<sup>69</sup>Yusuf al-Hakim, *Lubnan wa-Suriya fi al-'Ahd al-'Uthmani* (Beirut: n.p., 1964), 249–59.

<sup>70</sup>Yamin, *Lubnan fi al-Harb*, 2:17.

<sup>71</sup>Schilcher, "The Famine," 249.

<sup>72</sup>Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle*, 157.

<sup>73</sup>Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 96–97.

<sup>74</sup>Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle*, 146–47.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 154.

<sup>76</sup>Kassir, *Beirut*, 242.

<sup>77</sup>Robert, "The Image of the Profiteer," 131.

<sup>78</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, 7 December 1914.

<sup>79</sup>Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle*, 154.

<sup>80</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, 8 December 1914.

<sup>81</sup>The locusts came from the south across the Sinai, arriving in Syria on 1 April 1915. Grobba, *Getreidewirtschaft*, 14.

<sup>82</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, 9 April 1915.

<sup>83</sup>Yusuf Amil Habash, *al-Jihad Lubnan* (Beirut: n.p., 1920), 82.

<sup>84</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, 25 November 1914; for an elaboration on the role of municipal sergeants, see Salibi, "Beirut under the Young Turks," 201.

<sup>85</sup>Ibrahim Na'um Kan'ān, *Bayrut fi al-Tarikh* (Beirut: n.p., 1963), 201.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 106.

<sup>87</sup>Historically, bitter vetch was only consumed as a last resort in times of great starvation. Grobba, *Getreidewirtschaft*, 36.

<sup>88</sup>McGilvary, *The Dawn*, 205; *al-Muqattam*, 30 March 1916.

<sup>89</sup>Habash, *al-Jihad Lubnan*, 97.

<sup>90</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, 9 April 1915.

<sup>91</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, 31 March 1915. See Qur'an: Surat al-Baqara (2:179). Muhammad Muhsin Khan's translation of the verse is: "And there is a [saving of] life for you in Al-Qisas (The Law of Equality in Punishment), O men of understanding, that you may become pious."

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, 9 April 1915.

<sup>94</sup>*Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, 13 April 1915.

<sup>95</sup>According to the secretary of the American Mission Press in Beirut, Margaret McGilvary, this was the first national chapter established outside of the United States or its dependencies. It was set up in response to the Armenian massacres in the *vilayet* of Adana in 1909. McGilvary, *The Dawn*, 83.

<sup>96</sup>The civilian relief work of the ARC was organized into three departments: employment, distribution of flour, and assistance to families of Ottoman soldiers in obtaining government allowances. The employment department was split into two offices: one for men, headed by Professor Robert B. Reed, and another for women, supervised by Anna Jessup. Both were associated with SPC. McGilvary, *The Dawn*, 68, 85; Howard Bliss, *Forty-Ninth Annual Report of the Syrian Protestant College to the Board of Trustees 1916–1917*, 18, AUB.

<sup>97</sup>Letter from Bayard Dodge to Cleveland H. Dodge, 21 January 1915, *Bayard Dodge Collection*, box 6, file 4, AUB.

<sup>98</sup>The ARC generally gave a week's portion of flour to destitute families without a wage earner. McGilvary, *The Dawn*, 89.

<sup>99</sup>SPC students tracked the individual applications, and the offices generally were staffed by native volunteers and supervised by American women, who were either employees of SPC or members of the mission community in the city. Letter from Bayard Dodge to Grace H. Dodge, 5 February 1915, *Bayard Dodge Collection*, box 6, file 4, AUB; Letter from Margaret McGilvary to unknown recipient, 1 January 1915, *Missionaries*, box 2, file 1, AUB; Tanielian, "War of Famine," 137–70.

<sup>100</sup>The ARC is mentioned on four other occasions, but all in relation to a medical expedition to the Sinai desert, not to relief in the city. SPC president Howard Bliss and Dr. Ward offered the medical mission to Jamal Pasha in exchange for permitting three British doctors to continue their work at the college in Beirut. Jamal Pasha accepted the offer and a committee was established under the direction of Dr. Ward to conduct the mission. For details, see McGilvary, *The Dawn*, 87.

<sup>101</sup> *Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, 8, 14, 15, and 22 January and 24 March 1915.

<sup>102</sup> Tauber, *The Arab Movements*, 44–45.

<sup>103</sup> An act of treachery committed by a member of the Decentralization Party, Muhammad al-Shanti, exposed the actions of the reformers. Yamin, *Lubnan fi al-Harb*, 52–53; Tauber, *The Arab Movements*, 44–45.

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in Ajay, “Mount Lebanon and the Wilayah of Beirut,” 356.

<sup>105</sup> *Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, 4 June 1915.

<sup>106</sup> *Al-Ittihad al-'Uthmani*, 8 June 1915.

<sup>107</sup> Whether the story is true or a narrative device to convey the chaotic and desperate situation in the city is unclear. See Kan'an, *Bayrut*, 156.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Dr. Ra'if Abi al-Lam conducted by Nicholas Ajay in 1964. Ajay, “Mount Lebanon and the Wilayah of Beirut,” appendix, 25.

<sup>109</sup> Grobba, *Getreidewirtschaft*, 18.

<sup>110</sup> Howard Bliss to American Consul of Beirut Stanley Hollis, 17 August 1915, *Missionaries*, box 2, file 1, AUB.

<sup>111</sup> For example, the same day the governor issued the order, Mrs. Gerald F. Dale Jr. (Mary Bliss) was arrested. McGilvary, *The Dawn*, 91.

<sup>112</sup> Carla Eddé, *Beyrouth: naissance d'une capitale 1918–1924* (Beirut: Sindbad, 2009), 40.

<sup>113</sup> Schilcher, “The Famine,” 237–38.

<sup>114</sup> George Curtis Doolittle, “Pathos and Humor of the War Years in Syria: A Book of Experiences” (unpublished manuscript, Beirut, 1920), quoted in Ajay, “Mount Lebanon and the Wilayah of Beirut,” appendix V, 263.

<sup>115</sup> *Al-Muqattam*, 30 September 1916.

<sup>116</sup> Edward Nickoley, “Historic Diary, February 1917,” *Edward Nickoley Collection*, box 1, file 2, AUB.

<sup>117</sup> Tauber, *The Arab Movements*, 49–50.

<sup>118</sup> Kassir, *Beirut*, 246–47.