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## AN OTTOMAN ARAB MAN OF LETTERS AND THE MEANINGS OF EMPIRE, *c.* 1860

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper returns to one of the germinal texts of nineteenth-century Arab political thought, Butrus al-Bustani's *Nafir Suriyya* ('The Clarion of Syria'). A series of broadsides published between September 1860 and April 1861, these reflected on the confessional violence that had rent apart Mount Lebanon and Damascus in mid-1860. As scholars have suggested, Bustani – now regarded as one of the pre-eminent thinkers of the nineteenth-century Arab *nahda*, or 'awakening' – here offered a new vision of Syrian patriotism, which formed part of a longer reflection on political subjectivity, faith, and civilisation. But, this paper argues, these texts can also be read as reflections on the changing workings of empire: on the imperial ruler's duties and attributes and his subjects' obligations and rights; on the relationship between state and population and capital and province; on imperial administrative reform; and on the dangers foreign intervention posed to Ottoman sovereignty. Drawing on the languages of Ottoman reform and ethical statecraft, as well as on imperial comparisons, Bustani argued against the autonomy some counselled for Mount Lebanon and for wholesale integration with the Ottoman state. These texts offer grounds for methodological reflection and for writing Ottoman Arab thought into broader histories of imperial political thought.

### I Introduction

In late September 1860, the Ottoman port of Beirut was still a city reeling from war. In the last days of May, brutal fighting had broken out between the Christian and Druze inhabitants of Mount Lebanon, whose ranges overhung the Mediterranean littoral. The conflict lasted barely a month. By the end of June, Druze fighters had prevailed over their opponents, leaving Christian localities like Zahleh and Dayr

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al-Qamar in ruins. The fighting in Mount Lebanon was soon followed by violence in Damascus, where crowds attacked the city's Christian quarters for two weeks in July, provoking panic on the coast.<sup>1</sup> Now, as summer drew to an end, the traces of war were still everywhere about Beirut. Thousands of refugees remained in makeshift settlements on its outskirts. In the pine forest to the south of the city lay the headquarters of the French expeditionary force that had landed in August, charged with restoring order after the 'crime[s] against civilisation' of the summer.<sup>2</sup> In Beirut itself, the Ottoman state's special envoy to its Syrian provinces, Fuad Paşa, established an extraordinary court to try Druze accused of having orchestrated the violence against Christians. On 22 September, several leading Druze notables gave themselves up for trial after three months at large. Four days later, the members of the international commission tasked with restoring peace to Syria met for the first time.<sup>3</sup>

It was amidst this tumult that a broadside appeared in Beirut on 29 September, just three days later. Under the title *Nafir Suriyya*, or 'The Clarion of Syria', its author urged his fellow Syrians to remember that 'you drink the same water and smell the same breeze, and the language that you speak and the earth on which you dwell and your interests and habits are but the same'. If 'you are now still drunk with drinking the blood of your brothers in the homeland and heedless of the enormity of the disasters that have befallen you, there is no doubt you will soon awaken from this foolishness and take stock of the meaning of ... the general interest'. Its author's intent, then, was 'to guide you to knowledge of your interest and the welfare of your country and to move your hearts to express the principles of true faith (*diyana*) in which you are believers'.<sup>4</sup>

More broadsides were to follow in a similar exhortatory, predicatory style over the coming months. In all, eleven appeared between September 1860 and April 1861. These ranged in content from attempts to consider the war's causes and to tally up the material and moral losses – and gains – it had occasioned, to appeals to provide urgent relief to those who still remained homeless as autumn turned to winter, disquisitions on the meaning of war, civil war and civilisation, and programmatic statements on the future government of Mount

<sup>1</sup> Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *An Occasion for War: Civil Conflict in Mount Lebanon and Damascus in 1860* (Berkeley, 1993), 193. This remains the best account of the war of 1860, alongside Ussama Makdisi, *The Culture of Sectarianism: Community, History, and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon* (Berkeley, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Anon., *La Question d'Orient. Un Homme et une solution* (Paris, 1860), 5. On this intervention, see Fawaz, *Occasion for War*, 164–92; Davide Rodogno, *Against Massacre: Humanitarian Interventions in the Ottoman Empire, 1815–1914* (Princeton, 2011), 91–117.

<sup>3</sup> Fawaz, *Occasion for War*, 181ff., 196.

<sup>4</sup> Al-Mu'allim Butrus al-Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*, ed. Yusuf Quzman al-Khuri (Beirut, 1990), 10–11.

Lebanon. But they returned insistently to their central themes, harping on the need to reform Syria's society and administration and to expunge prejudice from its inhabitants' spirits, replacing it with the genuine faith from which patriotism and concord could spring. All bearing the pseudonym *muhibb li-l-watan* – the 'lover of the homeland' – these were the work of the man of letters Butrus al-Bustani (c. 1818–1883).<sup>5</sup>

It is no exaggeration to say that Bustani occupies a pre-eminent – not to say canonical – position in the overlapping fields of Arab intellectual and literary history and the history of Arab political thought.<sup>6</sup> Born into a Maronite Christian family in the southern reaches of Mount Lebanon, he was educated at the Maronite seminary of 'Ayn Waraqa. In the 1840s he fell in with the American missionaries who had recently established a station in Syria and converted to Protestantism, his break with the Maronite Church consecrated by the martyrdom of his fellow convert As'ad Shidiyaq. As Ussama Makdisi has shown, however, this traumatic event only reinforced Bustani's belief in freedom of conscience and his 'ecumenical' sense that a diverse range of religions were all 'equidistant

<sup>5</sup> For an English translation, see the excellent Butrus al-Bustani, *The Clarion of Syria: A Patriot's Call against the Civil War of 1860*, transl. Jens Hanssen and Hicham Safieddine (Berkeley, 2019). I rely here on Yusif Quzma al-Khuri's 1990 Arabic edition, Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*. On the importance of treating these texts as broadsides, see Hala Aujj, 'The Implications of Media: A Material Reading of Nineteenth-Century Arabic Broadsides', *Visible Language*, 53 (2019), 20–49.

<sup>6</sup> The literature is vast, but see in particular George Antonius, *The Arabic Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (1938), 63–8; Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (Cambridge, 1962); Abdul-Latif Tibawi, 'The American Missionaries in Beirut and Butrus al-Bustani', *St Antony's Papers*, 16 (1963), 137–82; Leon Zolondek, 'Socio-political views of Salim al-Bustani (1848–1884)', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 2 (1966), 144–56; Butrus Abu Manneh, 'The Christians between Ottomanism and Syrian Nationalism: The Ideas of Butrus al-Bustani', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 11 (1980), 287–304; Jan [Jean] Dayah, *Al-Mu'allim Butrus al-Bustani: Dirasa wa Watha'iq* (Beirut, 1981); Stephen Sheehi, 'Unpacking Modern Arab Subjectivity: Reading al-Mu'allim Butrus al-Bustani's Nafir Suriya', *Arab Studies Journal*, 6 (1998), 87–99; Sheehi, 'Inscribing the Arab Self: Butrus al-Bustani and Paradigms of Subjective Reform', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 27 (2000), 7–24; Rana Issa, 'Biblical Reflections in the Arabic Lexicon: A Very Modern Translation Phenomenon', *Babylon Nordisk Tidsskrift for Midtostenstudier* (2012), 56–63; Nadia Bou Ali, 'Butrus al-Bustani and the Shipwreck of the Nation', *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 16 (2013), 266–81; Maya Issam Kesrouany, 'Stranded in Arabic: Robinson Crusoe in Beirut', *Comparative Literature Studies*, 52 (2015), 289–317; Jeffrey Sacks, *Iterations of Loss: Mutilation and Aesthetic Form, al-Shidiyaq to Darwish* (New York, 2015), 78–90; Rana Issa, 'The Arabic Language and Syro-Lebanese National Identity: Searching in Butrus al-Bustani's *Muhit al-Muhit*', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 62 (2017), 465–84; Nadia Bou Ali, 'Blesseth Him That Gives and Not Him That Takes: Butrus al-Bustani and the Mercy of Debt', *Modern Intellectual History*, 16 (2019), 443–69; the critical essays by Jens Hanssen and Hicham Safieddine in Bustani, *The Clarion of Syria*, trans. Hanssen and Safieddine; Peter Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation in the Arab Nahda* (Cambridge, 2020); and Ussama Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence: The Ecumenical Frame and the Making of the Modern Arab World* (Oakland, 2021), 64–74.

from a universal god', and he eventually broke with the 'Bible-men', as the missionaries were known locally.<sup>7</sup> Over the course of a long and busy life, Bustani was variously a translator, lexicographer, encyclopedist, orator, publisher and educator. He founded and ran learned societies, schools, printing presses and newspapers, and among his many published works were a new translation of the Bible, prepared with the American missionary Cornelius Van Dyck, primers in Arabic grammar and arithmetic, an edition of the Abbasid poet al-Mutannabi, a dictionary, a vast, multi-volume encyclopedia, and Arabic renditions of *Robinson Crusoe* and *Pilgrim's Progress*.<sup>8</sup>

In light of such commitments, scholars have tended to treat Bustani as the archetypal Arab reformer, whose work strove to explore the central questions of the *nahda*, or cultural 'awakening' of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: how to refurbish the Arabic language to make full use of its vast lexical possibilities? How to renovate Arab culture under the emergent conditions of capitalist modernity and craft a new Arab subject capable of progress and civilisation? How to engage with the West without losing oneself? And how to give coherent shape to an Arab or Syrian nation?<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Bustani has often been regarded as a proto-nationalist, whose writings laid the foundations on which later, fuller constructions of Syrian and Arab identity were built.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence*, 66. See Tibawi, 'The American Missionaries in Beirut'; Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca, 2008); Christine B. Lindner, 'Negotiating the Field: American Protestant Missionaries in Ottoman Syria, 1823 to 1860' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> On Bustani's associational life, see Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 30–36, 42–7; Butrus al-Bustani, *Al-Ĵam'īyya al-Suriyya li-l-'Ulum wa al-Funun* (Beirut, 1990); and Yusif Quzma Khuri (ed.), *A'mal al-Ĵam'īyya al-Suriyya 1868–1869* (Beirut, 1990). I am grateful to Peter Hill for providing me with a copy of the latter. On his educational work, see Jens Hanssen, 'The Birth of an Education Quarter: Zokak El-Blat as a Cradle of Cultural Revival in the Arabic World', in *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut: The Quarter of Zokak El-Blat*, ed. H. Gebhardt (Beirut, 2005), 143–74; and Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford, 2005), 164–71. On his publishing and journalism, see Ami Ayalon, *The Arabic Print Revolution: Cultural Production and Mass Readership* (Cambridge, 2016), 36–8; and Elizabeth Holt, *Fictitious Capital: Silk, Cotton, and the Rise of the Arabic Novel* (New York, 2017), 18–19.

<sup>9</sup> For critical reflections on this scholarship, see Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss, 'Introduction. Language, Mind, Freedom, and Time: The Modern Arab Intellectual Tradition in Four Words', in *Arabic Thought beyond the Liberal Age: Towards an Intellectual History of the Nahda*, ed. Jens Hanssen and Max Weiss (Cambridge, 2016), 1–38; Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 1–17; Stephen Sheehi, 'Towards a Critical Theory of al-Nahdah: Epistemology, Ideology and Capital', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 43 (2012), 269–98; Shaden Tageldin, 'Proxidistant Reading: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of the Nahdah in US Comparative Literary Studies', *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 43 (2012), 227–68.

<sup>10</sup> For treatments of Bustani that frame his work in such terms, see Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 99–101; Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville, 2004),

This view is, to a significant extent, founded on readings of *Nafir Suriyya*. These broadsides bore the deep imprint of the violence and dislocation Bustani had lived through. But they also form part of a longer reflection on citizenship, faith and community, on sin, duty and judgement, and on language, culture, civilisation and ethics, which left its inflection on earlier writings such as his translations of *Pilgrim's Progress* and the Bible, or his 'lecture on the morals and mores of the Arabs'.<sup>11</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that they have lent themselves to the view that they were, at heart, meditations on the meaning of *patria* – and, in particular, articulations of a Syrian patriotism which Bustani hoped could supplant the fanaticism that had rent asunder local society.<sup>12</sup> In part for this reason, they have acquired canonical status in Arabic political thought. Generations of readers have come back to them, seeking in their words the means to build a future after war and to construct a secular politics founded on fraternity among fellow citizens.<sup>13</sup>

I want to return here to the *Nafir* to complicate these readings. As much as evidence of Syrian patriotism, I contend, these texts show Bustani as an imperial political thinker.<sup>14</sup> By this, I mean not just that, as scholars have long since shown, his primary loyalty lay to the end with the Ottoman Empire, nor that his sense of Syrianness did not conflict with this broader commitment but was fortified by it.<sup>15</sup> After

46–57; Nadia Bou Ali, 'Corrupting Politics', in *Islam after Liberalism*, ed. Faisal Devji and Zaheer Kazmi (2017), 47–8.

<sup>11</sup> For an English translation, see Stephen Sheehi, 'The Culture of the Arabs Today', in *The Arab Renaissance: A Bilingual Anthology of the Nahda*, ed. Tarek el-Ariss (New York, 2018), 5–13.

<sup>12</sup> Abu-Manneh, 'The Christians', 294. On the couplet of *watan* and *gharad*, see Jens Hanssen, 'Wataniyya as an Antidote to Sectarianism', in Bustani, *The Clarion of Syria*, 53–62, esp. 60.

<sup>13</sup> See for instance Yusif Quzma al-Khuri, 'Kalimat ila al-Qari', in Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*, 5–7. For more on this, see Jens Hanssen, 'Nafir Suriyya in Arabic Historiography', in Bustani, *Clarion of Syria*, 35–44.

<sup>14</sup> On imperial political thought, see David Armitage, *Foundations of Modern International Thought* (Cambridge, 2013); Duncan Bell, *The Idea of Greater Britain: Empire and the Future of World Order, 1860–1900* (Princeton, 2007); Duncan Bell (ed.), *Victorian Visions of Global Order: Empire and International Relations in Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2007); Richard Bourke, *Empire and Revolution: The Political Life of Edmund Burke* (Princeton, 2015); Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, 1999); Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment against Empire* (Princeton, 2003); Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Liberal Imperialism in Britain and France* (Princeton, 2005); Pitts, *Boundaries of the International: Law and Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2018); Andrew Sartori, *Liberalism in Empire: An Alternative History* (Oakland, 2014). For an effort in this direction by a historian of the Middle East, see Thomas Philipp, 'From Rule of Law to Constitutionalism: The Ottoman Context of Arab Political Thought', in *Arabic Thought*, ed. Hanssen and Weiss, 142–66.

<sup>15</sup> Hourani, *Arabic Thought*, 101; Abu-Manneh, 'The Christians', 289–91; Jens Hanssen and Hicham Safeddine, 'Butrus al-Bustani: From Protestant Convert to Ottoman Patriot and Arab Reformer', in Bustani, *The Clarion of Syria*, 28–9; Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 96.

all, as Ussama Makdisi has reminded us, the only surviving portrait of Bustani, painted a week before his death, shows him wearing the fez of the Ottoman reformer, a *majidiyya* imperial medal proudly pinned to his chest.<sup>16</sup> More than this, I argue that the *Nafir* evinced a deep concern with the central questions of imperial governance: what should be the relationship between the imperial capital and the provinces in a polity characterised by its territorial extent and demographic variety? On what basis could the imperial state build an effective and cohesive system of government? What path, in other words, should administrative reform follow? What rights should imperial subjects possess, and what were the duties incumbent upon them? And how could the Ottoman state thrive in a world of empires, at a time when other polities were increasingly encroaching upon its sovereignty? To answer these questions, Bustani resorted not just to the language of the Tanzimat itself, which he wove into his own political vision, but also, it would seem, to older conceptions of ethical governance which still inflected Ottoman languages of state into the nineteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, I argue that Bustani's broadsides were also an attempt to puzzle through a more immediate, practical and local question: what future should the government of Mount Lebanon pursue after the disaster of 1860? Here too Bustani fell back upon empire, rejecting the autonomist visions of Maronite clergymen and French diplomats and military officers in favour of wholesale integration into a reformed Ottoman state. In short, Bustani was not simply concerned here with limning a new vision for the 'integration of Syrian society' within the 'framework' of Ottomanism, but also with establishing a new relationship between local society and imperial state.<sup>18</sup>

## II Bustani as a thinker of empire

Reading Bustani as a thinker concerned with the changing workings of empire allows us to see him as a figure who lived in his own times – times that were, as the phrase has it, deeply out of joint – rather than as a pioneer whose writings foreshadowed later ideas of the nation. To make sense of Bustani's writings, in other words, we must read them synchronically, and not teleologically as links in a chain of conceptual transmission broken by the tragedies of the Arab twentieth century or proleptically as 'earlier "anticipations" of later' ideologies and

<sup>16</sup> Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence*, 44.

<sup>17</sup> Marinou Sariyannis, *A History of Ottoman Political Thought up to the Early Nineteenth Century* (Leiden, 2019); Linda Darling, *A History of Social Justice and Political Power in the Middle East: The Circle of Justice from Mesopotamia to Globalization* (Abingdon, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> Abu-Manneh, 'The Christians', 288.

imaginings of the Arab nation.<sup>19</sup> The ‘problem-space’ in which these texts took form was one that was shaped by the existence of empire.<sup>20</sup>

It is not just that, as Ussama Makdisi has suggested, Bustani was in many ways the ‘embodiment of the Tanzimat’, a figure whose works echoed the ‘civilising’ impulse of Ottoman reform even as they offered a less hierarchical and more ‘secular [and] liberal’ vision of ‘coexistence’ than that which imperial reformers were willing to countenance, reversing the Tanzimat’s ‘negative imperative ... to *not discriminate* into a positive injunction to *respect diversity*’ as the foundation of active ‘citizenship’.<sup>21</sup> More than this, his thought during these fraught months was concerned as much with the state as with society, giving rise to a series of urgent reflections on the workings of government, the shortcomings and potentiality of imperial reform, and the respective duties and expectations of imperial state and subject. His writings took as their own, to a degree hitherto unappreciated by scholars, both the *dirigiste*, rationalising ethos of the Tanzimat – the ‘reorganisation’ of the state, as the Ottoman military and administrative reforms of the mid-nineteenth century are known – and the older languages of virtuous governance on which it drew.<sup>22</sup> As Hala Auji has recently suggested, this was reflected even in his broadsides’ visual grammar, which shared ‘numerous ... similarities’ with the Arabic translation of the 1856 decree Bustani prepared at the American Missionary Press in Beirut. For Auji, it is no coincidence that Bustani referred to his text as a *layyiha* or ‘bill’, the same term that contemporaries used for the Ottoman decrees posted in public squares, for the original copies of the *Nafir* ‘resemble’ his setting of the 1856 edict ‘more than they do any other extant print medium from this period’.<sup>23</sup>

At the same time, Bustani’s answers to the fundamental questions thrown up by imperial governance were shaped by the intensely eventful and traumatic political and social context in which he wrote.<sup>24</sup> This, too, posed urgent questions. Scholars have largely focused on the broader

<sup>19</sup> Quentin Skinner, ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, *History and Theory*, 8 (1969), 3–53, at 11.

<sup>20</sup> David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham, NC, 2004), 4.

<sup>21</sup> Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, 187; Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence*, 67.

<sup>22</sup> For a recent synthetic account of this period, see Douglas A. Howard, *A History of the Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge, 2017), 227–77. For a restatement of an older view, see Carter V. Findley, ‘The Tanzimat’, in *The Cambridge History of Turkey*, vol. IV, *Turkey in the Modern World*, ed. Reşat Kasaba (Cambridge, 2009), 9–37.

<sup>23</sup> Auji, ‘Implications of Media’, 35, 39–42.

<sup>24</sup> R. G. Collingwood, *An Autobiography* (Oxford, 1970 [1939]), 29–43; Quentin Skinner, ‘A Reply to My Critics’, in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, ed. James Tully (Cambridge, 1988), 284. On Bustani’s participation in relief efforts in 1860, see Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*, 166.

consideration to which Bustani returned repeatedly: how to salve the wounds of civil war and construct a new compact for a Syrian society rent apart by fanaticism? But it is clear that Bustani was also concerned with the question of Lebanon's future government, and of how best to overcome the ruinous legacies of a system that had given rise to the bloodletting of 1860.

Until the 1830s, Bustani's home region had been subject to a complex system of layered governance, in which local-born potentates enjoyed considerable fiscal and military powers.<sup>25</sup> In the early nineteenth century, this system was dominated by one man, Bashir al-Shihab, who had concentrated political and economic power in his own hands, curbing the authority of Druze dynasties like the Junblat, while bolstering that of Christian families like the Khazin and encouraging the activities of Christian merchants in market towns like Dayr al-Qamar and Zahleh.<sup>26</sup> This was an order founded on the dominance of an elite structured around complex gradations of rank, status and faction – and not around religious difference.<sup>27</sup>

The Egyptian occupation of Syria from 1830 to 1840, and the establishment of direct Ottoman rule in 1840, precipitated the collapse of this 'old regime'.<sup>28</sup> From the 1840s onwards Ottoman officials and European diplomats created a new political system for the mountain, founded on the assumption that religion was fundamental to its inhabitants' sense of self and that the confessional community should therefore serve as the basic building block of public life. Far from reflecting ancient distinctions, this gave rise to a distinctly novel 'culture of sectarianism'. As newfangled ideas of popular sovereignty and religious difference bled into each other, the mountain's Christians increasingly came to think of political representation and rights in the terms of popular sovereignty.

<sup>25</sup> On early modern governance, see among others Abdul-Rahim Abu-Husayn, *Provincial Leaderships in Syria, 1575–1650* (Beirut, 1985); Abu-Husayn, *The View from Istanbul: Lebanon and the Druze Emirate in the Ottoman Chancery Documents, 1546–1711*; Stefan Winter, *The Shiites of Lebanon under Ottoman Rule, 1516–1788* (Cambridge, 2010); Heather Ferguson, *The Proper Order of Things: Language, Power, and Law in Ottoman Administrative Discourses* (Stanford, 2018), 196–232.

<sup>26</sup> See William Polk, *The Opening of South Lebanon, 1788–1840: A Study of the Impact of the West on the Middle East* (Cambridge, MA, 1963); Iliya Harik, *Politics and Change in a Traditional Society: Lebanon, 1711–1845* (Princeton, 1968); Richard van Leeuwen, *Notables and Clergy in Mount Lebanon: The Khazin Sheikhs and the Maronite Church, 1736–1840* (Leiden, 1994); Fruma Zachs, *The Making of Syrian Identity: Intellectuals and Merchants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut* (Leiden, 2005), 11–38.

<sup>27</sup> Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 28–50.

<sup>28</sup> The phrase is Ussama Makdisi's: Makdisi, *ibid.*, 51. On the Egyptian occupation of Syria, see Polk, *The Opening of South Lebanon*, 83–212; Khaled Fahmy, *All the Pasha's Men: Mehmed Ali, His Army and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Cambridge, 1997), 1–40; Caesar Farah, *The Politics of Intervention in Ottoman Lebanon, 1830–1861* (2000).



By the late 1850s, Maronite clerics and laymen argued that Christians' demographic dominance, as well as the Shihabs' supposed conversion to Christianity, gave them the right to govern.<sup>29</sup> Christian commoners like the muleteer Tanyus Shahin, who in 1858 led the people of Kisrwan in revolt against their Khazin landlords, combined this communitarianism with a growing sense that elite families, whether Christian or Druze, had usurped the people's right to govern themselves. Shahin thus demanded not just 'full equality and complete freedom' from the landlords' exactions, but also the 'liberation of Christians from their servitude'.<sup>30</sup> Such language only exacerbated existing tensions over land and labour in mixed regions like the Matn and the Shuf, feeding a cycle of mutual recrimination that culminated in the conflict of 1860.<sup>31</sup>

Bustani's texts were a reflection on this tortuous history and an attempt to envision another future. As such, they sought to provide an alternative not just to local visions of reform and restoration, but also to the recommendations of the international commission constituted to 'seek the origin and cause of these events ... [and] suggest modifications to the current order of things ... in the government of the Mountain'.<sup>32</sup> Here, I argue, empire provided the answer as much as the question. For Bustani's later broadsides can be read as a rebuke to those who proposed cleaving off the mountain from Ottoman sovereignty and keeping its government on a confessional basis. Where Maronite clergymen and European diplomats and military officers called for the creation of an autonomous, if not independent, political unit, governed on a religious basis, Bustani counselled the mountain's subjection to the writ of a reformed and reforming Ottoman state.

At the same time, we should be wary of too reductive and temporally narrow an understanding of context, which regards reflective writings entirely as epiphenomenal products of their political and economic circumstances.<sup>33</sup> For the *Nafir* can also be read, not just as reflections

<sup>29</sup> Carol Hakim, *The Origins of the Lebanese National Idea 1840–1920* (Berkeley, 2013), 13–65.

<sup>30</sup> Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (2012 [2007]), 31.

<sup>31</sup> Marwan Buheiry, 'The Peasant Revolt of 1858 in Mount Lebanon: Rising Expectations, Economic Malaise and the Incentive to Arm', in *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East*, ed. Tarif Khalidi (Beirut, 1984), 291–301; Caesar Farah, *The Road to Intervention: Fiscal Politics in Ottoman Lebanon* (Oxford, 1992); Ussama Makdisi, 'Corrupting the Sublime Sultanate: The Revolt of Tanyus Shahin in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 42 (2000), 180–208.

<sup>32</sup> 'Protocole de la première séance de la commission de Syrie, tenue à Beïrout, le 5 octobre 1860 (19 rébiul-ewel 1277)', in I. de Testa, *Recueil des Traités de la Porte ottomane avec les puissances étrangères depuis le premier traité conclu en 1536, entre Suléyman I et François I, jusqu'à nos jours* (8 vols., Paris, 1864–94), vi, 106.

<sup>33</sup> Omnia El Shakry, 'Rethinking Arab Intellectual History: Epistemology, Historicism, Secularism', *Modern Intellectual History*, 18 (2021), 547–72. See also Peter E. Gordon,

on and of the moment, but as interventions in a ‘historically extended ... argument’, a discursive tradition full of ‘alteration’ and disagreement.<sup>34</sup> As I will argue, there are tantalising signs that Bustani drew upon older ideas of ethical and wise government, refurbishing them to make them fit for his own times. It is clear, then, that categorical distinctions between intellectual reflection and political engagement, which treat one or another of these as determinant, are of little help here.<sup>35</sup> For Bustani’s writings of 1860 were at once commentaries on the pressing concerns of the present and attempts to construct a normative basis for political and ethical conduct. As such, they present an opportunity to rethink the workings of context and the relationship between praxis and norm-making, while integrating Ottoman Arab thought into broader histories of imperial political thought.<sup>36</sup>

### III Writing the Tanzimat: imperial patriotism and civic responsibility<sup>37</sup>

Much of the case for Bustani as a Syrian patriot rests on the *Nafir Suriyya*, which recent scholarship continues to treat as an attempt to imagine an ‘Arab national subject’ and a new ‘positive definition of the nation’ for ‘Levantine society’.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, even those who acknowledge the imperial dimension continue to treat him as, ultimately, ‘the first Syrian nationalist’.<sup>39</sup> There is no disputing that these eleven broadsides were, at a fundamental level, concerned with elaborating a new kind of local community of feeling. After all, as their title suggests, it was for Syria that they sounded the alarm. Equally suggestive is the epithet Bustani gave his pieces: *wataniyyat*, or patriotic letters. Each opened in the same way,

‘Contextualism and Criticism in the History of Ideas’, in *Rethinking Modern European Intellectual History*, ed. Darrin McMahon and Samuel Moyn (Oxford, 2014), 35–55.

<sup>34</sup> David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton, 1999), 10.

<sup>35</sup> Andrew Arsan, ‘Under the Influence? Translations and Transgressions in Late Ottoman Imperial Thought’, *Modern Intellectual History*, 10 (2013), 375–97, at 384–5. See also Hussein Omar, ‘Arabic Thought in the Liberal Cage’, in *Islam after Liberalism*, ed. Faisal Devji and Zaheer Kazmi (2017), 17–18.

<sup>36</sup> For efforts in a similar direction by historians of international law, see Lâle Can and Michael Christopher Low, ‘The “Subjects” of Ottoman International Law’, *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, 3 (2016), 223–34; Aimee M. Genell, ‘The Well-Defended Domains: Eurocentric International Law and the Making of the Ottoman Office of Legal Counsel’, *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association* 3 (2016), 255–75; Umut Özsu, ‘Ottoman International Law?’, *Journal of the Ottoman and Turkish Studies Association*, 3 (2016), 369–76.

<sup>37</sup> I borrow here from Milen Petrov’s notion of ‘speaking Tanzimat’. Milen Petrov, ‘Everyday Forms of Compliance: Subaltern Commentaries on Ottoman Reform, 1864–1868’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 46 (2004), 730–59.

<sup>38</sup> Sheehi, ‘Unpacking Modern Arab Subjectivity’, 88; Bou Ali, ‘Butrus al-Bustani’, 267.

<sup>39</sup> Abu-Manneh, ‘The Christians’, 294.

with a call to Bustani's 'fellow countrymen' – *abna' al-watan*, 'the sons of the homeland' – a form of address that he used repeatedly to punctuate each new section. And each had the same signature, *muhibb li-l-watan*, 'lover of the homeland', anonymity here a function of Bustani's desire to stress patriotism as an article of faith.<sup>40</sup> What's more, Bustani made explicit the scope of this 'homeland'. In September 1860, he declared that 'Syria ... with all its plains and desolate places, its coastlines and mountains, is our homeland. And the inhabitants of Syria, of various religious persuasions and origins and groupings are the sons of our homeland.'<sup>41</sup> By his last broadside, Bustani had distilled this still-complex vision of patriotic belonging into a purer formula, writing simply of 'the people of Syria, our countrymen'.<sup>42</sup>

The evidence that these texts were, first and foremost, expressions of a new understanding of Syrian patriotism appears overwhelming. I do not want to suggest, therefore, that such readings are somehow wrong-headed; on the contrary, they are entirely legitimate. But I do want to add another layer of interpretation here, by arguing that, nested within these dense, allusive, sometimes repetitive texts, there was also another vision of belonging to the Ottoman Empire, or *mamlaka*. This worked its way into Bustani's language and shaped his sense of the relationship between society, homeland and state as one that was fundamentally hierarchical and founded as much on duties as on rights.

Thus, Bustani redeployed the political language of Ottoman reform, with its conception of the state as a benevolent protector, even when he was considering the ties binding the territorial *patria* to its inhabitants. In his fourth broadside, Bustani wrote that first among the 'obligations the homeland owes its people' was 'security for their most important rights, their [life and] blood, honour, and wealth (*damihim wa 'irdihim wa malihim*)'.<sup>43</sup> As Peter Hill has pointed out, these were the self-same rights enshrined in the 1839 Gülhane edict, with its call for 'new laws' that would ensure the 'security of life and soul and the preservation of honour, conscience, and wealth' – *emniyet-i can ve mahfuziyyet-i irz u namûs u mal*.<sup>44</sup> The 1856 reform edict that so impressed Bustani reaffirmed the imperial state's commitment to protect the 'life, wealth ... and honour' of 'all the subjects of our realm without exception'.<sup>45</sup> Bustani's order of priorities here, then, is precisely that of imperial

<sup>40</sup> See for instance Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*, 9–11.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>44</sup> Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 109. [www.muhammedbalci.com/hukukdunyasi/belgeler/233.pdf](http://www.muhammedbalci.com/hukukdunyasi/belgeler/233.pdf) (last accessed 10 April 2021).

<sup>45</sup> [www.muhammedbalci.com/hukukdunyasi/belgeler/231.pdf](http://www.muhammedbalci.com/hukukdunyasi/belgeler/231.pdf) (last accessed 10 April 2021).

reform. Even when seemingly absent from Bustani's vision, the state remained a presence, haunting his prose and shaping his conception of what the people were owed.

What has not hitherto been appreciated, however, is that Bustani's subsequent invocation of 'civil, moral, and religious rights, not least the right to freedom of conscience in the matter of religious persuasion (*hurriyyat al-damir fi amr al-madhab*)', was also an invocation of the 1856 decree, with its commitment to guaranteeing 'every denomination (*mezhab*)' 'perfect freedom' of belief.<sup>46</sup> This is not to claim that Bustani's stress on freedom of religion was not born of his own experience as a Protestant and his grief at the martyrdom of his fellow convert, As'ad Shidyāq.<sup>47</sup> Rather, it is simply to suggest that Bustani voiced this commitment in the language of imperial reform. Neither of these two contexts – the eventful, lived, intensely affective context of personal and local experience, and the linguistic, normative context of imperial decrees and administration – took precedence over the other in Bustani's writings. On the contrary, they were interwoven to create a powerful vision of the rights and duties of the individual subject.

Here, Bustani was not pushing the state to go further than it was prepared to go or sketching out a new horizontal conception of Syrian citizenship.<sup>48</sup> Rather, he was urging his fellow Syrians to regard the rights enshrined in the decrees of 1839 and, especially, 1856 as their own – to enjoy freedom of religion, but also to remember that these rights should not be abused or misconstrued, and that they entailed duties and constraints on individual subjects' comportment. Jens Hanssen is thus certainly correct to argue that Bustani was promoting here 'a contract of rights and duties between the inhabitants and their homeland'.<sup>49</sup> This is plainly apparent from Bustani's insistence that 'the people have binding rights and claims (*huquq*) on their *patria*, just as the *patria* [imposes] obligations on its people'. But if the people were to be given 'a hand in the affairs' of their country, it was precisely because this 'responsibility' would increase their 'concern for its progress'.<sup>50</sup> This, then, was a vision of 'active citizenry' that placed a great deal of weight on commitment to the commonweal.<sup>51</sup> 'Love of the homeland' should take precedence over 'religious fanaticism', and Syria's 'welfare'

<sup>46</sup> Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*, 22; [www.muhammedbalci.com/hukukdunyasi/belgeler/231.pdf](http://www.muhammedbalci.com/hukukdunyasi/belgeler/231.pdf) (last accessed 10 April 2021).

<sup>47</sup> Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 109; Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven*, 199–205.

<sup>48</sup> Ussama Makdisi, 'After 1860: Debating Religion, Reform and Nationalism in the Ottoman Empire', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 34 (2002), 601–17, at 606–8; Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 101.

<sup>49</sup> Hanssen, 'Wataniyya as Antidote to Sectarianism', 58.

<sup>50</sup> Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*, 22.

<sup>51</sup> Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 109.

over ‘personal inclinations’ – *ghayyat shakhsiyya*, Bustani using here, in his punning, allusive way, a term also connoting error and sin.<sup>52</sup> Bustani clearly did conceive of his Syrian compatriots as rights-bearing subjects. His understanding of these rights, however, was closely modelled on that of the reforming Ottoman state. What’s more, he saw these rights as always entailing concomitant duties – to one’s fellow countrymen, to the homeland and, as I will argue below, to the imperial state.

For while Bustani’s fourth broadside focused on the relationship between the Syrian land and its people, at other moments he strove to consider their place within the overarching structures of imperial rule. This is true not just of rote invocations of imperial munificence like that which opened his second broadside in September 1860, with its praise for Sultan Abdülmecid’s ‘beneficent intentions’ to ensure ‘comfort, security, and justice’ for all members of his ‘flock’ ‘without exception’.<sup>53</sup> At a more fundamental level, Bustani’s stress on the relationship between the territorial homeland and the imperial state shaped both his aetiological analysis of Syria’s maladies and his prescriptions for a ravaged society. This is apparent from his fifth broadside, in which he considered at length the causes of the events of 1860. It was not just that Syria’s inhabitants were ‘a cluster of tribes of varying places, temperaments, prejudices, and interests, the majority of whom care not for the general interest’. To compound matters, the ‘peripheries of the land were far from the centre of government, that is to say the capital of the empire (*mamlaka*)’ and their ‘governance was left to groupings (*aqwam*), many of whom, as history informs us ... did a great deal of harm to the lands under their rule, perpetrating acts of corruption and destruction’.<sup>54</sup>

The effects of this were plain to see ‘when we open ... a book giving news of this land’ – perhaps, as Peter Hill suggests, Tannus Shidyaq’s chronicle *Akhbar al-A‘yan fi Jabal Lubnan*, which Bustani had recently edited.<sup>55</sup> For Syria’s history was ‘full of wars and disasters’, and ‘blind’ ‘prejudice’ stains every page ‘like a black ugly spot’. ‘This malicious principle’, Bustani went on, ‘takes on a different colour in each age.’ In earlier times, it had attached itself to ‘names like Qaysi and Yamani and then Junblati and Yazbaki’ – for Shidyaq the main factions of elite politics in early modern Mount Lebanon.<sup>56</sup> ‘More horrid’ still was

<sup>52</sup> Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*, 22.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>55</sup> Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 114. Tannus Shidyaq, *Kitab Akhbar al-A‘yan fi Jabal Lubnan*, ed. Butrus al-Bustani (Beirut, 1859).

<sup>56</sup> Kamal Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (1988), 115–17. Axel Havemann, *Geschichte und Geschichtsschreibung im Libanon des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts: Formen und Funktionen des historischen Selbstverständnisses* (Beirut, 2002).

‘the form’ that prejudice had taken ‘these past few years, when it had consumed once-sacred epithets like Nazarene [Christian] and Druze, and then Muslim and Christian’. For Bustani, local prejudices – whether of faction and family or religion – had for too long been the motive force of Syrian history. For all that there were many people of ‘morals and quality’ among its inhabitants, left to its own devices Syria could not but succumb to this ‘evil’. Only one path could provide real ‘hope of progress and civilisation’ and allow the inherent ‘qualities’ of the majority to prosper: ‘plac[ing]’ the country under special measures, by imposing ‘reforms (*tanzimat*) befitting the time and circumstances, and whose aim is the welfare of the land and the comfort of the subjects’.<sup>57</sup>

On the one hand, it is clear that the *Nafir* was an ‘antisectarian’ appeal to ‘build a cohesive and “civilised” Syrian society’.<sup>58</sup> In such passages, Bustani developed a searing historical critique, both of the ‘old order’ that had prevailed until the early nineteenth century and the new ‘culture of sectarianism’ that emerged from the 1840s on. As dangerous as a system of government founded on inherited status and rank was one built on the confessionalisation of social life, the reduction of religious belief to sectarian prejudice, and the elevation of prelates to the position of temporal rulers. Both were equally ruinous, stymieing Syria’s potential for civilisation. On the other hand, it is rather less certain that what he aimed for was a new ‘social contract’ in which Ottoman ‘absolutist monarchy’ would give way to the ‘logic of the modern nation-state’.<sup>59</sup> For it is striking that Bustani did not see the imposition of direct Ottoman rule as in any way responsible for the events of 1860. On the contrary, he regarded this violence as, at least in part, born of Syria’s political autonomy and remoteness from the centres of imperial sovereignty. Nothing could be done to overturn the tyranny of distance. But it could still be hoped that the *watan* – the homeland – could be integrated more fully within the *mamlaka* – the imperial realm – through a programme of thoroughgoing and just reform, which would expunge for once and for all the forces of prejudice from Syria.

#### IV Against autonomy: Mount Lebanon in the *Nafir*

Indeed, this was not the only instance in which Bustani’s language provides evidence of his endorsement of effective imperial reform as the only means of salving Syria’s wounds and restoring order to Mount Lebanon.

<sup>57</sup> Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*, 26–7.

<sup>58</sup> Jens Hanssen and Hicham Safieddine, ‘Introduction: Translating Civil War’, in Bustani, *Clarion of Syria*, 2.

<sup>59</sup> Bou Ali, ‘Blesseth Him That Gives’, 11, 24.

In November 1860, he reiterated his call for ‘appropriate laws and just reforms, which suit the circumstances, the place and the time’.<sup>60</sup> At one level, this appears a straightforward use of the stock phrases of administrative parlance, with their rote invocation of the need to devise ordinances befitting the time and place.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, however, this can be read as a call to place Mount Lebanon in the grip of a strong, reforming central state. It is in this light that we can read Bustani’s calls for ‘appropriate laws (*shara’i mutfiqa*) and just reforms (*tanzimat ‘adila*)’. The measures needed to address Mount Lebanon’s predicament were not, for Bustani, the bespoke protocols devised by partisans of Mount Lebanon’s administrative autonomy. Quite the opposite: the moment demanded that the state fulfil the commitments spelled out in grand edicts like those of 1839 and 1856 and continue with the thoroughgoing reorganisation, rationalisation and homogenisation of government. In other words, the reformed administration of Mount Lebanon and Syria should follow the imperial norm, rather than the devolved exception.

This is apparent from Bustani’s insistence that the empire’s laws and regulations should not be ‘admixed with confessional laws’ and that ‘judgments [should] consider the particulars of the case and not the person’. Legislation should be ‘rigorous, vigilant, and capable of keeping each [subject] within his limits’. But it should also ‘look equally on every class of subject, granting no recognition to religious sects other than that accorded to their members’ religious, moral, and civic rights, and the defence of these rights as such, and not by virtue of their connection to any person or group’.<sup>62</sup> Here, Bustani can again be seen restating the programme of the 1856 reform edict, with its commitment to erasing ‘every distinction or designation tending to make any class whatever of the subjects of my Empire inferior to another class, on account of their religion’, to ensuring freedom of religion, and to creating mixed courts for the judgement of ‘all commercial, correctional, and criminal suits’ involving members of different religious communities.<sup>63</sup>

This too can be read as an intervention in debates on the future status of Mount Lebanon. Against those who insisted that the region should retain its own administration founded on the principle of confessional distinction, Bustani argued that it should be folded fully into an empire-wide system of universal and impersonal procedural norms that would ensure equal judicial treatment for all. Religious difference should be respected as sacrosanct, but no single confessional group

<sup>60</sup> Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*, 38.

<sup>61</sup> I am grateful to Camille Cole for pointing this out.

<sup>62</sup> Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*, 38.

<sup>63</sup> [www.anayasa.gen.tr/reform.htm](http://www.anayasa.gen.tr/reform.htm) (last accessed 10 April 2021).

should be accorded special status. To overcome the strife that had torn local society limb from limb and allow the wounds of sectarian hatred to close over, it was necessary to pursue the path of imperial reform to its fullest expression, rather than retreating into self-government founded on the weighted representation of different communities.

We do not need to look far for evidence that Bustani took seriously the potential of Ottoman bureaucracy. For his penultimate broadside treated the state as one of the primary agents of social transformation, setting out an expansive programme for a new regime of imperial sovereignty. He thus insisted on the 'need for governors to show circumspection and vigilance in the exercise of their mission, and to take steps to prevent events before they occur'. In an implicit criticism of the actions of Fuad Paşa, who had sentenced Druze notables to death on the basis of lists drawn up by Christian villagers, Bustani insisted it was not enough 'to execute the first killer ... or to pin the responsibility on the administrator of the province or district where the violence occurred'.<sup>64</sup> Far more effective than this organised score-settling was a system of government that might prevent such 'strife' from occurring in the first place. For 'the country' could find 'repose and success' only in 'secure and favourable circumstances'. This was, once again, a deliberate echo of mid-nineteenth-century imperial decrees that harped on the need for 'security'. But it was also, in a way, a rebuke of the approach Ottoman administrators had taken in 1860. What was needed was the ideal vision of reformed government presented in official pronouncements, of 'governors who believe in the right of the state and the law of the country and the people, and who possess the ability, the will, and the means, both personal and military, to implement the laws and to punish offenders', rather than the 'reliance' shown on 'principles of division' drawn from the 'dark ages of despotism'.<sup>65</sup> To pit Christian against Druze by giving in to demands for 'retribution', let alone to make confessionalism the keystone of Mount Lebanon's government, would be a mistake.<sup>66</sup>

It followed from this that 'a barrier' should be erected separating 'spiritual power from statecraft or civil power'. Whereas spiritual 'leadership' (*al-ri'asa*) was 'by nature ... invariable', 'governance [was] related to external and changing matters'. As only the latter was 'susceptible to alteration and reform', it alone was capable of bringing 'process and civilisation'. Inflexible and unresponsive to 'circumstances', religious leadership could lead only to stagnation. It was not that there was no place for religion in social life – quite the contrary. But combining spiritual and

<sup>64</sup> On Fuad Paşa's actions, see Fawaz, *Occasion for War*, 181ff.

<sup>65</sup> Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*, 55–6.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.



religious authority would only attract unsuitable candidates, thus corrupting both true religion and statecraft, undermining faith in these 'most important and noble' of tasks and sowing 'discord'. Under 'spiritual leaders who could agree only to disagree', 'the people' were 'like a flock without a shepherd', stripped all at once of legitimate government and spiritual guidance.<sup>67</sup>

Bustani protested – too eagerly, perhaps – that he had no particular community in mind, but spoke 'of all the many spiritual leaders of our country, Muslim and Christian, Druze, Nusayri, Isma'ili, Yazidi, Jewish, or Samaritan'.<sup>68</sup> It is hard, however, not to see this as an attack on the Maronite Church's growing pretensions to political authority. Since the 1840s, churchmen had increasingly argued that Mount Lebanon was, in history and population, a Christian land. It followed from this, both that the Maronite Church was the natural representative of the people and that the country should be governed by a Christian ruler reflecting its culture and demographic make-up.<sup>69</sup> To the dismay of men such as Tubiya 'Awn, the Maronite archbishop of Beirut, this vision of Mount Lebanon as a Christian land had slipped out of their grasp in 1860 when it was taken up by subaltern agents like the muleteer Tanyus Shahin.<sup>70</sup> Now, amidst the ruins, figures like the Maronite patriarch, Bulus Mas'ad, and the archbishop of Saida, 'Abdallah al-Bustani, attempted to reassert their control over their community, portraying themselves to Ottoman authorities and French diplomats as the Maronites' legitimate representatives.<sup>71</sup> In the *Nafir*, Bustani urged his countrymen to renege on this vision and to follow the precedent of the 'civilised countries that have taken stock of the dangers of this admixture, and who have created a separation between these two powers so that neither counteracts the other's public benefits'.<sup>72</sup>

For Syria and Mount Lebanon to be governed effectively, sovereignty over the people should not be divided among the religious leaders of each community but concentrated in the hands of the imperial state. Indeed, Bustani insisted that the sultan's 'righteous power' should reign supreme, for neither 'true religion nor statecraft (*siyasa*) provided any grounds for his subjects, whatever their background, to fail to give it due respect and consideration'. There was no room in Bustani's vision for consultation or representation. For as he explained, should imperial decrees 'be subject to the will of the people and their diverse desires and varying prejudices'

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>69</sup> Hakim, *Origins*, 13–63.

<sup>70</sup> Makdisi, *Culture of Sectarianism*, 112–113.

<sup>71</sup> Hakim, *Origins*, 65–98.

<sup>72</sup> Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*, 58.

they would quickly lose all persuasive force, holding ‘great meaning’ for some and none at all for others.<sup>73</sup> Bustani’s vision of the new relationship between the locality and the imperial centre, then, was deeply hierarchical. Against the autonomy that some were advocating for Mount Lebanon and Syria, he insisted on subjection to the singular will of the sultan, the better to break the clergy’s overweening influence over their flock.<sup>74</sup> Far from the liberal, egalitarian dispensation that some have discerned in Bustani’s writings, this was a frank endorsement of the munificent authority of an autocratic state.<sup>75</sup>

If this separation between local clerical authority and imperial sovereignty was one element of Bustani’s vision, another was his opposition to inherited status. He thus called for ‘the granting of administrative positions on the basis of merit and aptitude, rather than nationality, descent, wealth or status’. To entrust administrative office to figures of ‘lofty rank’ on the basis of the ‘majesty of the founder’ of their ‘tribe or dynasty’ was a mistake, for these figures’ belief that ‘precedence’ was theirs by right of birth and contempt for their perceived inferiors rendered them ‘unsuitable’ for office. As careful observation of the ‘conditions of states’ showed, government founded on inherited status led inexorably towards ‘decline’, while a system that accorded positions to ‘those who deserve them, and not on the basis of inheritance’ was assured of steady progress.<sup>76</sup>

It is again important to situate these arguments within a local context. Bustani was writing in February 1861, at a time when various schemes for the future of Mount Lebanon were being floated. One was that of the commander of the French expeditionary force to Syria, General Beaufort d’Hautpoul, who advocated the creation of a quasi-independent Lebanon under the aegis of Amir Majid Shihab, a scion of the family that had dominated the administration of Mount Lebanon until the 1840s.<sup>77</sup> To demonstrate the purported legitimacy of his plan, Beaufort circulated a petition through the mountain calling for the right of the Lebanese to be governed by a Christian prince and the restoration of the Shihabi dynasty.<sup>78</sup> Another was that of Patriarch Mas’ad, who shared Beaufort’s vision of an autonomous Lebanon under a Christian governor, but favoured his own candidate, Yusuf Karam, himself the son of a family of standing from the mountain’s northern reaches.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>74</sup> Hakim, *Origins*, 83–90.

<sup>75</sup> For an account that stresses liberalism in all its contradictions, see Bou Ali, ‘Blesseth Him That Gives’.

<sup>76</sup> Bustani, *Nafis Suriyya*, 57.

<sup>77</sup> Hakim, *Origins*, 83–7.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 88–90.

Here, Bustani marked his opposition to these schemes of princely government. And he did so by resorting again to the language of the 1856 imperial rescript, with its declaration that ‘all the subjects of my Empire, without distinction of nationality, shall be admissible to public employments, and qualified to fill them according to their capacity and merit’.<sup>80</sup> In weaving the rhetoric of imperial reform into his own prose, Bustani sought to ensure the creation of a new social order in Mount Lebanon and Syria by their wholesale integration into a reformed imperial polity.

### V Looking backwards: imperial ethics and just administration

In articulating this vision of the relations between centre and province and state and people, however, Bustani did not simply redeploy the language of the Tanzimat, but also an older way of thinking about governance. This is apparent from his eighth broadside. In this text, which appeared in November 1860, he wrote that among the many baleful consequences of the late ‘civil war’ was

the loss of the mutual support (*arkan*) between ruler and ruled, and between subjects (*ri'aya*) and their government. For it is well known that the trust of those who govern the matters [of state] in the people depends in great part on the trust (*irkan*) of the people in them, and vice versa.

‘Hope’ for progress, then, resided ‘on the one hand ... in the wisdom of rulers, the excellence of their administration (*husn idaratihim*), [and] the reform of their conduct towards their subjects’. But while progress was contingent on rulers’ capacity to ‘show consideration’ towards those they ruled, it also depended on ‘the people’s knowledge of their own welfare, [and] avoidance of ... excess in asking for what is forbidden by ethical government, true religion, and morals (*siyasa wa diyana wa adaban*)’.<sup>81</sup>

At one level, this vision of restraint and mutual trust did track the reforming Ottoman state’s own perception of itself. Thus, Bustani’s language here followed that of the 1839 Gülhane edict, with its declaration that only ‘new laws’ would ensure ‘excellence of administration (*hüsn-i idaresi*)’, enabling the well-protected domains to regain their ‘prosperity and strength’.<sup>82</sup> However, it is telling that this expression, which did not recur in the 1856 reform edict, was drawn from an older lexicon of

<sup>80</sup> [www.anayasa.gen.tr/reform.htm](http://www.anayasa.gen.tr/reform.htm) (last accessed 10 April 2021).

<sup>81</sup> Bustani, *Nâfir Suriyya*, 45.

<sup>82</sup> I use here Halil İnalcık’s translation in *Sources in the History of the Modern Middle East*, ed. Akram Khater (Belmont, 2011), 12; and the Ottoman text in Latin characters available at [www.muhammedbalci.com/hukukdunyasi/belgeler/233.pdf](http://www.muhammedbalci.com/hukukdunyasi/belgeler/233.pdf) (last accessed 10 April 2021).

Islamic statecraft. For there are tantalising hints that Bustani's own understanding of the political was shaped by his engagement with this tradition. It is striking, for instance, that he expected ordinary subjects to obey not just the universal norms of religion and morals, but also the specific injunctions of *siyasa*. Now commonly translated as 'politics', this was still in the mid-nineteenth century a polysemic and fluid term, which denoted both statecraft and the administration of justice. It was in this latter sense that it was used in Khedivial Egypt, where *majalis siyasiyya* were established alongside the *shari'a* courts and granted 'discretionary powers' to adjudicate criminal cases using new bureaucratic procedure.<sup>83</sup>

At another level, however, the term evoked a tradition of reflection on statecraft that included both works of counsel for rulers such as the *Qabus-nama* and Nizam al-Mulk's *Siyasat-nama*, both written for eleventh-century Seljuk rulers, and philosophical treatises such as al-Farabi's tenth-century *al-Madina al-Fadila*, the 'ideal city' or *polis*, and Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's thirteenth-century *Akhlaq-i Nasiri*. For al-Farabi, the ultimate end of the 'royal, political art' of *siyasa* was to lead man 'to happiness by having a philosopher-king as ruler'. In Edwin Rosenthal's gloss, the sovereign should 'rule with practical wisdom and experience ... so that political ... acts encourage virtue and good behaviour' in his subjects.<sup>84</sup> In similar fashion, al-Tusi saw the duty of the 'ideal ruler' as being to 'help his subjects' to 'reach potential wisdom'. Under his 'care and protection each member of society, secure in the best place suited for him, was to ... struggle to achieve perfection'. For him, *siyasat-i mudun* – the management of the affairs of the *polis*, or statecraft – was one of the two central expressions of 'practical wisdom' – *hikmat-i 'amali*.<sup>85</sup>

We cannot know for certain whether Bustani had in mind the writings of Farabi and Tusi. As Peter Hill has noted, 'we should not assume that ... particular passages' drawn from the classical canon 'were known to' nineteenth-century 'Arab literati'.<sup>86</sup> More work still needs to be done on *nahda* thinkers' reception of *falsafa*, the tradition born of Islamic engagement with Plato and Aristotle, and the ways this shaped their ideas of ethics, virtue and the state. At the same time, we do know that the sixteenth-century Ottoman writers Kinalizade Ali Çelebi and Hasan Kafi, who drew from Tusi and other medieval Persian writers of ethics their sense of the relationship between wise government and

<sup>83</sup> Khaled Fahmy, *In Quest of Justice: Islamic Law and Forensic Medicine in Modern Egypt* (Oakland, 2018), 83 and 81–131 *passim*.

<sup>84</sup> Edwin Rosenthal, *Political Thought in Medieval Islam: An Introductory Outline* (Cambridge 1958), 119–20.

<sup>85</sup> Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam in India, c.1200–1800* (Ranikhet, 2004), 47–9.

<sup>86</sup> Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 84.

social order, were known to Bustani's contemporaries.<sup>87</sup> Kınalızade's *Ahlak-i Ala'i* was first printed at the Bulaq press in Cairo in 1833 and went through a number of editions over the course of the nineteenth century. Hasan Kafi's work was likewise reprinted three times before 1870.<sup>88</sup> Bustani's near-contemporary the Young Ottoman Namık Kemal cited both Kınalızade and Tusi, among others.<sup>89</sup> Another contemporary, the Tunisian reformer Khayr al-Din al-Tunsi, argued in a passage in which he cited the 'wisdom of Aristotle' that 'the rightful path is 'the statecraft practised by the ruler (*siyasa yasusiha al-malik*)'.<sup>90</sup>

Alongside this we must place the evidence from Bustani's own dictionary, *Muhit al-Muhit*, published seven years after the *Nafir*. There, he gave the meaning of *hukuma* – nowadays glossed as 'government' – as *arbab al-siyasa*, or the masters of statecraft. More telling still, among the definitions of *hikma* or wisdom that he listed were the following: 'justice and learning and understanding and reason (*hilm*) and prophecy and the Qur'an and the Gospels'; and 'the science of the truth of things as they are'. The 'people of wisdom', he went on, 'are the philosophers (*al-falasifa*)', or those who practise *falsafa*, a term often used for thinkers such as al-Farabi and al-Ghazali.<sup>91</sup> We must at least allow for the possibility that when Bustani wrote in the *Nafir* of the 'wisdom of rulers (*hikmat al-amirin*)' and the need to rebuild the trust of 'subjects ... in their government (*hukumatihim*)', he had these meanings and the tradition from which they sprung in mind.<sup>92</sup> More than a thinker gazing forward proleptically into the national future, Bustani appears at such moments to be grappling with this long, rich tradition of reflection on the relationship between reason, ethics and government. If the Tanzimat decrees themselves redeployed this language, as some have argued, we must be open to the possibility that so too did the *Nafir*.<sup>93</sup>

<sup>87</sup> See Sariyannis, *Ottoman Political Thought*, 66, 73–4; and Asli Niyazioğlu, 'Kınalızade Ali Efendi', in *Encyclopaedia of Islam III*, [https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/kinalzade-ali-efendi-COM\\_35605?s.num=0&s.f.s2\\_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-3&s.q=Kinalizade](https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-3/kinalzade-ali-efendi-COM_35605?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-3&s.q=Kinalizade) (last accessed 2 April 2021).

<sup>88</sup> Darling, *History of Social Justice*, 172; Şerif Mardin, *The Genesis of Young Ottoman Thought: A Study in the Modernization of Turkish Political Ideas* (Princeton, 1962), 198. See also H. Z. Ülkan, 'Tanzimattan sonra Fikir Hariketleri', in *Tanzimat: Yüzüncü Yıldönümü Münasebetile*, ed. H.-A. Yücel (Istanbul, 1940), 774; and M. A. Mehmet, 'La Crise ottomane dans la vision de Hasan Kafi Akhisri (1544–1616)', *Revue des Etudes Sud-Est Européennes*, 13 (1975), 388 n. 27.

<sup>89</sup> Mardin, *Genesis*, 82, 99.

<sup>90</sup> Khayr al-Din al-Tunsi, *Aqwam al-Masalik fi Ma'rafat Ahwal al-Mamalik*, ed. Munsif al-Shanufi (Tunis, 1972), 117.

<sup>91</sup> Butrus al-Bustani, *Kitab Muhit al-Muhit ta'lif al-Mu'allim Butrus al-Bustani ufiya 'anhu ayya Qamus Mutawwal al-Lugha al-'Arabiyya* (2 vols., Beirut, 1867), 1, 430–1.

<sup>92</sup> Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*, 45.

<sup>93</sup> Darling, *History of Social Justice*, 162. See also Butrus Abu-Manneh, 'The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript', *Die Welt des Islams*, 34 (1994), 173–203; Frederick Anscombe, 'Islam and the Age of Ottoman Reform', *Past & Present*, 208 (2010), 159–89.

## VI Looking outwards: global comparison and imperial sovereignty

At other moments, Bustani looked not backwards into tradition, but outwards across the world to find evidence in support of his argument. This is apparent from a passage in November 1860 in which he strove to distinguish between religion, understood as an intrinsically hierarchical relationship between ‘a servant and his maker’, and civil matters – *al-madaniyyat* – understood as a dual contract, which entailed at once a horizontal relationship between ‘man and his compatriot’ and a vertical engagement between the individual subject and ‘his government’. The relationship of one compatriot to another, and between subject and government, were not independent of one another. As Bustani wrote:

So long as the sons of the country do not open the doors to knowledge and industry ... they cannot wait for order along the lines of civilised countries or respect and consideration in the eyes of others, nor even in their own eyes, or expect to have the doors opened to them to lofty positions in government. For though the Arabs were, in times of old, sovereign and possessed the most well-considered positions, it cannot be hoped that they will progress higher than the rank of a scribe or translator or council member should they remain in their current position.

In short, ‘the Arabs’ owed it to each other to embark on the educational reforms Bustani had long espoused. But if this was in part because it would bring ‘order’ and civilisation to their own lands, it was also because it would allow them to earn the respect of others and integrate fully the institutions of state. Awakening their latent potentialities, then, meant nothing if it did not strengthen their ties to the imperial polity. At the same time, the Ottoman state itself needed to do more to ‘open the doors’ of government to all. For ‘God only knows how many of the current government employees’ would remain, should

the government create an order like that in the Chinese empire, for example, which does not accept anyone into government functions who is not competent, who does not possess perfect knowledge of the language of his land, and who is not expert in the laws and regulations of the empire.<sup>94</sup>

What are we to make of this comparison, made at a time when, some have argued, Bustani anxiously regarded Western civilisation as the universal benchmark by which all other societies should be judged?<sup>95</sup> To be clear, this was no empirical comparison. As Bustani was writing, much of China had been consumed for a decade by what was, by some reckonings, the bloodiest civil war in history. For four years, the Qing state

<sup>94</sup> Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*, 49.

<sup>95</sup> Sheehi, *Foundations*, 12, 14; Makdisi, ‘After 1860’, 614. For an insightful discussion of this, see Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, ch. 2.

had been confronting British and French military incursions. Its coastline was moth-eaten by the extraterritorial enclaves of the treaty ports.<sup>96</sup> But all this was beside the point, for it is clear that Bustani was writing here in the abstract. This passage, then, was fundamentally different from the comparative empirical accounts of Khayr al-Din al-Tunsi or the Egyptian Rif'at Rifa' al-Tahtawi, or even from later Ottoman writings on Meiji Japan.<sup>97</sup> Rather, Bustani saw in a stylised China the ideal type of the bureaucratic empire he longed for. This underscores the continuing openness and worldliness of mid-nineteenth-century Ottoman Arab political thought. Casting about for a normative basis for effective imperial governance, Bustani felt no need to look exclusively to the precedents offered by the 'civilised countries' of Europe and North America. On the contrary, he set his gaze eastwards across the globe.

This effort at global comparison was the product, to be sure, of what Peter Hill has described as Bustani's profound wariness of 'uncritical acceptance' of Europe as the 'universal standard of civilisation' and his fear that his compatriots would lose themselves in 'blind imitation' of 'all things' Western.<sup>98</sup> But if cultural considerations were at play, so too were political ones. As Bustani stressed in February 1861, European powers' growing encroachments on Ottoman sovereignty rendered the task of reforming the state and rebuilding the trust between ruler and ruled all the more urgent. For only through fulfilling the Tanzimat's commitment to 'preserve the peace and comfort and prosperity' of its subjects could the Ottoman state 'convince them there is no need ... to have recourse to foreigners and to place their livelihoods and interests under their protection and supervision'.<sup>99</sup> Here, too, we can feel Bustani's immediate lived context pressing into the text. He wrote, after all, in a city in which those displaced by violence remained reliant on European relief efforts, and in which many profited from the silk trade with France or found

<sup>96</sup> Tobie Meyer-Fong, *What Remains: Coming to Terms with Civil War in Nineteenth-Century China* (Stanford, 2013); James L. Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham, NC, 2003). See also Ussama Makdisi, 'Diminished Responsibility and the Impossibility of "Civil War" in the Middle East', *American Historical Review*, 120 (2015), 1739–52.

<sup>97</sup> Rifa'ah Rafi' al-Tahtawi, *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by an Egyptian Cleric (1826–1831)*, trans. Daniel L. Newman (2004); Khayr al-Din al-Tunsi, *The Surest Path: The Political Treatise of a Nineteenth-Century Muslim Statesman*, trans. Leon Carl Brown (Cambridge, MA, 1967). On Ottoman views of Japan, see Cemil Aydin, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York, 2007); and Renee Worringer, *Ottomans Imagining Japan: East, Middle East, and Non-Western Modernity at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York, 2014).

<sup>98</sup> Hill, *Utopia and Civilisation*, 114, 112, 115.

<sup>99</sup> Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*, 59.

employment as dragomans or guards in European employ, as Bustani had done in the 1840s.<sup>100</sup>

It is clear that despite – or perhaps because of – his earlier entanglements, Bustani retained a deep ambivalence about the role of foreign powers in Syria. On the one hand, he wrote in January 1861, European ‘intervention’ had been ‘necessary to stop the spread of turmoil and destruction that were spreading from place to place ... like infectious disease’. There was no denying that ‘misrule and disdain for the laws are among the greatest of harms to a country, no matter what its degree of civilisation and success, as wise government and virtuous laws are like health, one only knows their value when they are lost’, so that ‘those who transgress the bounds of humanity and moderation find themselves facing the opprobrium of the entire world, and it is necessary for a foreign hand to intervene in the affairs of their country’. On the other hand,

interference by foreign hands in the political affairs (*siyasa*) of any country, and especially this country, where it strengthened the various conflicting parties ... and where the causes of disagreement on the causes of intervention varied in accordance with the religious and civil interests of the intervening parties, will be harmful to the country, even if it brings temporary benefits to some individuals.<sup>101</sup>

In this passage, Bustani again brought together the normative and the descriptive, the eventful and the speculative. Intervention in the sovereign matters of any given state, he contended, was always detrimental. But events had shown that it was especially so in Mount Lebanon and Syria, where Britain and France had shown contrasting attitudes towards Druze and Maronite, and where French endorsement of Maronite claims, in particular, had strengthened the latter’s hand. Gone here is the sense of hopeful gratitude that marked Bustani’s first *wataniyya*, in which he counselled his readers to ‘look with trust’ on the ‘allied states coming to provide them with comfort and to make them secure in their dwelling places’ and ‘wait patiently for the good deeds that the great of the world had set in motion’.<sup>102</sup> By early 1861, this optimism had been replaced by a growing sense of the dangers of foreign encroachment. If the Ottoman state appeared to him the guarantor of the welfare of Syria, then the European states that had assembled in Beirut to decide on the fate of Syria increasingly seemed not saviours and protectors, but threats to its well-being.

<sup>100</sup> See Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut* (Cambridge, MA, 1983); Boutros Labaki, *Introduction à l’Histoire économique du Liban: soie et commerce extérieur en fin de période ottomane (1840–1914)* (Beirut, 1984); Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*.

<sup>101</sup> Bustani, *Nafir Suriyya*, 52.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.



## VII Conclusion

Butrus al-Bustani's *Nafir Suriyya*, I have argued, can be read not just as a call for a new Syrian patriotism, but as a contemplation on the workings of empire. Bustani reflected at various moments on the imperial ruler's duties and attributes and his subjects' obligations and rights, on the relationship between state and population and capital and province, on the reform of imperial administration, and on the dangers foreign intervention and encroachment posed to Ottoman sovereignty. To do so, he drew not just on the language of the Tanzimat, but also on an older language of ethical statecraft, as well as on comparison with other imperial polities such as China, whose civil administration open to all the talents he saw as a model for bureaucratic governance. At the same time, Bustani offered a commentary on the future of Mount Lebanon. Here too, he stressed the importance of empire. For he counselled not just against a return to the dominance of local elites or an increased role for religious dignitaries in government, but also against the various schemes for autonomous administration floated for the region as he wrote. The only means to overcome the violence of 1860 was, he argued, wholesale integration into the reformed structures of the Tanzimat state, embracing the norms of Ottoman imperial governance rather than carving out an exception under the protection of other, European, empires.

In the end, Bustani's vision did not come to pass. By June 1861, the international commission sitting in Beirut had drawn up the basic law that would regulate Mount Lebanon's government until the First World War. Far from doing away with confessionalism, this document enshrined it as the basis of administrative order: henceforth, the region's governor would be a Christian, assisted by an administrative council made up of representatives of the mountain's religious communities. At the same time, Mount Lebanon would enjoy a significant measure of autonomy, with its own gendarmerie and fiscal system. This autonomy would be 'guaranteed' by the concert of powers, which thus gained a significant measure of oversight over its internal affairs.<sup>103</sup> Though this arrangement ensured a 'long peace' for Ottoman Mount Lebanon, it also allowed for continuing French and British intervention in its political life and the entrenchment of the logic of confessional government.<sup>104</sup> Bustani's writings, then, offer an alternative future – one that provides grounds for further reflection on

<sup>103</sup> Adel Ismail, *Documents Diplomatiques et consulaires relatifs à l'histoire du Liban et des pays du proche-orient, du XVIIe siècle à nos jours* (20 vols., Beirut, 1975–), XI, 102–11.

<sup>104</sup> Engin Akarlı, *The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon, 1861–1920* (1993). See also John Spagnolo, *France and Ottoman Lebanon, 1861–1914* (1977).

the ways late-Ottoman Arab literati reckoned with the existence of empire and on the relationship between lived and textual contexts and the relationship between political engagement and normative prescription. These are the grounds that I have tried to open up here.

Recent years have seen a revival of interest in Bustani. The last decade alone has witnessed important work by the likes of Rana Issa, Nadia Bou Ali, Peter Hill, Ussama Makdisi, and Jens Hanssen and Hicham Safieddine, whose critical edition provides English-language readers with access to the *Nafir*. This interest is in part the product of an enduring fascination with the complexities and paradoxes of Bustani's thought – and of the *nahda* more broadly – and of its complicated influence on subsequent generations of Arab thinkers. But it is also an attempt to push back against enduring Western narratives of the Middle East as a place of disorder and fanaticism, to demonstrate, once and for all, that it was not always thus, that confessionalism and sectarianism are historical constructs, mutable, motile practices amenable to context and not the fixed fittings of Arab society, and that there exists a rich tradition of what Ussama Makdisi has recently called 'ecumenical' or 'antisectionarian' thought in the region.<sup>105</sup> Understandably, then, many of these writings – even when critical of the contradictions in his thinking – have taken Bustani's chief concern to be the *patria* and the horizontal ties of concord and understanding binding the inhabitants of a shared homeland together. They are not wrong. Patriotism was integral to his political thought. But it is perhaps time that we also read Bustani as a thinker of empire, one who was also concerned with the vertical ties between imperial state and subject, with the ethical and practical underpinnings of imperial governance, and with the conditions of imperial sovereignty and the increasingly stark power asymmetries between imperial polities. In doing so, we may be true both to the context in which these haunting, allusive texts took shape and to our own tragic times of intervention and unequal sovereignty.

<sup>105</sup> Makdisi, *Age of Coexistence*. See also Hanssen and Safieddine, 'Translating Civil War', 1–2.