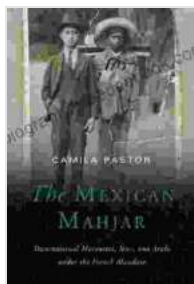


Transnational Maronites, Jews, and Arabs Under the French Mandate: A Socio-Cultural History of Interdependence and Conflict



The Mexican Mahjar: Transnational Maronites, Jews, and Arabs under the French Mandate by Ariel Lawhon

★★★★☆ 4.3 out of 5

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The French Mandate period (1920-1946) in the Levant was a transformative era, marked by significant political, social, and cultural changes. This article examines the transnational connections and interactions between three major communities in the region: Maronites, Jews, and Arabs. It explores their shared experiences, cultural influences, and the tensions that arose amid the complex dynamics of the French colonial presence.

Shared Experiences and Interdependence

Despite their distinct religious and cultural identities, Maronites, Jews, and Arabs living under the French Mandate shared numerous experiences and forms of interdependence. They shared urban spaces, often living in close proximity or overlapping neighborhoods. This physical proximity fostered social and economic interactions, leading to the development of shared markets, networks, and institutions.

For example, in Beirut, a significant center of trade and commerce, Maronites, Jews, and Arabs worked together in various industries, including textiles, banking, and tourism. They established joint businesses, professional organizations, and cultural associations. These interactions contributed to a sense of shared identity and common interests, transcending religious and ethnic boundaries.



Cultural Influences and Exchange

The French Mandate also facilitated cultural exchanges and influences among Maronites, Jews, and Arabs. The French educational system, which emphasized French language and culture, played a significant role in this process. Many Maronite, Jewish, and Arab intellectuals embraced French culture, adopting its ideas, literary styles, and artistic sensibilities. This led to the emergence of a hybrid cultural landscape, where traditional and modern elements blended to create new forms of expression.

In literature, Maronite, Jewish, and Arab writers explored themes of identity, belonging, and the search for home within the context of transnationalism and colonial influence. Poets and novelists from these communities engaged in literary circles, influencing and inspiring each other's works. Artists and musicians experimented with new styles, incorporating both Western and Eastern elements into their creations.



Tensions and Conflict

Despite the shared experiences and cultural exchanges, tensions and conflicts also marked the interactions between Maronites, Jews, and Arabs under the French Mandate. The French colonial policy of divide and rule often exacerbated existing sectarian divides, leading to political and economic competition among the communities.

In Lebanon, Maronites enjoyed a privileged position under the French Mandate, which recognized their cultural and political autonomy within the newly established state. This favoritism sparked resentment among some Jewish and Arab communities, who felt excluded from political and economic opportunities. In Mandatory Syria, the French played off Arab nationalists against Maronite minorities, fueling tensions that sometimes erupted into violence.



The French Mandate period in the Levant was a complex and transformative era that shaped the socio-cultural landscape of the region for years to come. It brought together Maronites, Jews, and Arabs in

unprecedented ways, fostering shared experiences and cultural exchange but also exposing underlying tensions and conflicts. The transnational connections forged during this time continue to resonate today, offering insights into the complexities of identity, belonging, and the intricate relationships that define human societies.



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