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ROOTS AND ROUTES: THE PATHS OF LEBAÑESE MIGRATION TO FRENCH WEST AFRICA

ANDREW KERIM ARSAN

We have no way of knowing when the first migrant from present-day Lebanon arrived in West Africa. Some amongst the Lebanese of Dakar still clung in the 1960s to tales of a man, known only by his first name — ‘Isa — who had landed in Senegal a century earlier (Cruise O’Brien 1975: 98). Others told of a group of young men — Maronite Christians from the craggy escarpments of Mount Lebanon — who had found their way to West Africa some time between 1876 and 1880 (Winder 1962:300). The Lebanese journalist ‘Abdallah Hushaimah, travelling through the region in the 1930s, met in Nigeria one Elias al-Khuri, who claimed to have arrived in the colony in 1890 (Hushaimah 1931:332). The Dutch scholar Laurens van der Laan, combing in the late 1960s through old newspapers in the reading rooms of Fourah Bay College in Freetown, found the first mention of the Lebanese in the Creole press of Sierra Leone in 1895 (van der Laan 1975:1).

However, it seems clear that organised migration from particular localities towards West Africa began only in the very last years of the nineteenth century. From the turn of the century onwards, Maronites from the Matn locality of Bayt Shabab, Greek Catholics from Sur, and Orthodox from Baine ‘Akkar began settling in the more prosperous regions of colonial Afrique Occidentale Française, or AOF — a federation which encompassed Senegal, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, French Soudan (now Mali), Dahomey (present-day Bénin), Mauritania and Niger. They were soon joined by growing numbers of Shi’a from Sur and localities like Juwayya and Zrariyya scattered through Jabal ‘Amil, the backcountry of this once thriving port. By 1939, around 6,000 Lebanese migrants inhabited AOF. These men and

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women became produce traders and shopkeepers, buying up rubber or groundnuts from African producers, to whom they supplied consumer goods — textiles and clothes, processed foodstuffs, alcohol, matches and the like. While women kept home and shop, men engaged in the business of trade — bartering and pawning, lending and borrowing. I will examine in this article the factors which led these men and women to head towards West Africa, and which helped to shape their settlement patterns.

It has long since become a commonplace of migration studies that ties of kin and place — those familiar ‘structures of feeling’ — helped to lay down networks and circuits of movement, of cyclical travel and return migration which drew men and women towards new locales. Driven by their desire to disrupt the Crévecœurian narratives of uprooting and assimilation propounded by scholars like Robert Park and Oscar Handlin (1952), who stressed the strenuous efforts of atomised individuals to melt into their host society, historians and sociologists like Donna Gabaccia, Rudolph Vecoli and Charles Tilly uncovered the ways in which migration was a collective undertaking — and one often directed towards the reconstitution of familiar surroundings through chain migration and marriage strategies (see Baily 1999; Gabaccia 1984; McDonald and McDonald 1964; Tilly and Brown 1968; and Vecoli 1964 and 1983).

This tendency has, in turn, manifested itself more strongly still in the work of scholars like Alixa Naff and Akram Khater who have sought to uncover the history of Eastern Mediterranean migration towards the United States (Khater 2001; Naff 1985). For Naff and Khater have been influenced not only by the enjoinder of historians of Italian-American life like Vecoli and Gabaccia, but also by the strong stress anthropologists and historians of the Eastern Mediterranean have long put on the importance of kin, locality and confession — the holy trinity of ‘land, people and religion’, as Anne Fuller put it, binding the community together (Fuller 1961:6).

However, these aspects of quotidian life were not universal proscriptions, understood and implemented in the same way by all — ‘neat little box-like arrangements of non-contradictory categories and unproblematic behaviours’, as Marshall Sahlins has put it — but constantly open to interpretation, contested and manipulated (Sahlins 1985:27). Like the text of a play, different actors read, and performed, the strictures of kin and confession in different ways — some choosing to stress certain aspects, others excising or passing over passages they found particularly troublesome (see Sewell 1999). While family relations and marriage alliances certainly did help to draw migrants from Mount Lebanon towards West Africa, they
did not simply serve as blueprints for the reconstruction of familiar communities. ‘Family, village, and religion’ certainly did provide ‘the markings of [migrants’] communities’, as Akram Khater has argued (Khater 2001:10). But they did not always do so in straightforward ways. And nor were they the sole determinants of an individual’s decision to migrate and choice of destination. Rather, as I will argue here, a complex concatenation of factors pulled growing numbers of people towards AOF and determined their settlement choices there.

Lebanese migrants continued well into the twentieth century to trade stories of the pioneers who had reached Senegal or Guinea before the 1890s, seeking with these tales to claim primacy for this or that village or region. However, it is clear such precursors were few and far between. What is more, it seems probable these shadowy figures — young men from Hadath al-Jubbe, far up in the higher reaches of Mount Lebanon, or the market-town of Dayr al-Qamar — had little intention of making Dakar or Conakry their final destinations (Winder 1962, 300).

Some early migrants to AOF seem to have made the relatively short crossing from the Canary Islands — having likely been dumped there by Spanish or Italian steamships heading from Barcelona towards Latin America. In November 1905, the Government of Guinea returned to Tenerife five ‘Syrian subjects’ who had disembarked in Conakry without proof of identity (JOGF 1905: 577). But most, however, probably arrived directly in Dakar, which had served since the 1860s as a coaling station for French ships heading towards Brazil and Argentina — favoured destinations for the many thousands of men and women who left the Eastern Mediterranean from the 1880s onwards (see Seck; Pasquier 1960). Some amongst this thronging mass, finding themselves uncertain of entry to these states or without enough money for the full fare to Santos or Buenos Aires, disembarked in West Africa on the recommendation of shipping agents in Marseille — or were forced to do so, having been duped into purchasing a ticket for only part of the passage (Desbordes 1938:14). Indeed, these stranded, lonely figures were not alone in having their fates decided by unscrupulous brokers and ship captains. As one observed noted, many were those Lebanese migrants who were “sent to Sierra Leone or to Capetown [sic]”, believing they were headed for America (Naff 1985:97). Others still alighted in Dakar as they returned to the Eastern Mediterranean from sojourns in Latin America and — unwilling or unable to go back home just yet — chose to remain in West Africa (Muruwwa 1938:196). One Lebanese man in Dakar told me of his
grandfather who, returning to Beirut in 1912 after a spell in Venezuela, left ship for a night on the town in Dakar. Stumbling back, rather the worse for wear, towards the port the next day, he realised the vessel had left without him; hung-over and without a way to get home, he chose to stay on in Senegal. He cannot have been alone in doing so.

These are, of course, tales of contingency and happenstance, which reveal the somewhat haphazard nature Eastern Mediterranean migration to West Africa retained, in some instances, until the First World War. But they also point to the ways in which migration followed the routes devised by French, British and Italian shipping lines. Eastern Mediterranean migrants were directed down particular paths, and towards particular destinations. By the ways and byways these took. Had the Messageries Maritimes and the Société Générale des Transports Maritimes not frequented Dakar, rather than Tenerife or São Vicente, it seems unlikely that Lebanese migration to West Africa should have taken on the importance it did.

Moreover, these stories remind us of the significant role the various entrepreneurs who serviced the needs of migrants played in determining their fate and ultimate destinations. Shipping agents, as we have seen, had not only become a conspicuous presence throughout Mount Lebanon and the adjoining areas by the turn of the century, but had also formed etiolated networks stretching far beyond the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean. These chains of brokers and hostel-keepers, strung out along the paths of migration, concentrated in the main European hubs of steam transport — and, more particularly, in Marseille. After all, migrants often had to spend long days and weeks awaiting a ship which might carry them to the New World. Walking, lost, the streets of a foreign place, often with only a smattering of French or English words and a little money to get by, these men and women provided a ‘ready-made clientele’ for the coaxes who worked the docks of Marseille. As one traveller recounted in 1891, new arrivals were “accosted […] by an individual who invited us to follow him, telling us he would lead us to an inn where we could stay at a good rate, at 20 centimes per person per night” (Naaman 2004:107).

So large were the numbers of Eastern Mediterranean migrants passing through Marseille that many agents and hostel owners came to target them specifically (see Lopez and Têmîme 2007). By 1902, around a third of the establishments offering accommodation to migrants catered largely to these men and women (Nasser 1986:29). What is more, many of these were themselves owned by Eastern Mediterranean entrepreneurs – the first of whom, Nicolas Faris, had settled in Marseille as far back as 1890. These
establishments were clustered together in the narrow alleyways of the Panier, the old neighbourhood above the port. There could be found the hostels of Faris Abu ‘Arab, on Boulevard de la Major; Antoine Nimis, Rue de la Torte; the Greek or Levantine Lefteris on Rue de la Mure; Auguste Nimbo and César Basso, Rue de la Bonnerie; Milhim Skaff, rue des Phocéens; and Ibrahim Samsur, whose Hôtel d’Afrique was on the tiny Traverse du Mont de Piété (Naaman 2004:108).

These hostel-keepers did more than simply offer accommodation to migrants — who were, for all the promises proffered in advertisements or the smooth patter of dockside coaxers, piled by the dozen into each “absolutely bare” room, and left to sleep on a hard floor (Naaman 2004:108). They also provided migrants with the means to exchange the “Asiatic accoutrement” in which they had arrived for European garb (Nasser 1986:34), swapping the “fez and waistcoat” of the mountain villager for “a suit of linsey-woolsey and a hat of hispid felt” (Khater 2001:56). And they supplied these travellers “various objects like linens and utensils of all sorts […] which they take with them, either for personal use or to sell them on to their coreligionists already established in America” — or, more likely, to peddle along the roads of Vermont, or the streets of Freetown (Nasser 1986:34).

Such goods came, of course, at a cost: in 1902, one informant put the cost of accommodation and food at twenty-five francs, and that of “various purchases and clothes” at seventy-five francs (Nasser 1986:34). Akram Khater, meanwhile, has estimated migrants were likely to spend some four dollars in the course of a stay lasting, on average, around two weeks. Migrants were little helped by the rampant profiteering in which these entrepreneurs indulged. While sleeping quarters bore little resemblance to the comfortable vision painted in advertisements, they cost around ten times more than the promised thirty para (Khater 2001:55). Nicolas Faris, who ran, by 1895, a “store of off-the-peg clothes”, bought each suit for sixteen francs before selling it on for around forty to his “unfortunate” costumers (Naaman 2004:108).

Nonetheless, these entrepreneurs fulfilled an essential function — not least because they possessed the capacity to make travel arrangements for migrants, supplying them with the means to move on from their limbo in Marseille. It was not merely gain which encouraged shipping agents and brokers in Beirut to sell migrants only a ticket for Europe, or two tickets — the first for Marseille or Genoa, the second, exchangeable in their port of call, for their final destination. Rather all — migrants and entrepreneurs — were
well aware of the rapidly shifting nature of the stock of information on which migrants depended to choose their destinations. The advice of self-interested operators, but also knowledge of changing economic conditions or entry requirements gleaned from conversations with fellow travellers, often led migrants to alter their plans during their stay in Marseille. As the grand reporter Albert Londres put it in the 1920s, the migrant ‘would go where he could – his fate would be played out in Marseille’ (Londres 1980:78).

However, hostel-keepers were not puppet-masters, pulling the strings drawing migrants towards particular destinations — far from it. They were engaged in a complex call-and-response with these men and women, tailoring their services to their changing predilections and desires. The name of Ibrahim Sansur’s establishment, the Hôtel d’Afrique, was, on one level, an allusion to Marseille’s vaunted status as the porte de l’Afrique — France’s doorway to Africa (see Courdurié and Durand 1998; Daumalín 1992; Simpson Fletcher 1999). But it may also have been an attempt to capture migrants headed for AOF. By the close of the First World War, some establishments had certainly begun to cater specifically to men and women travelling for this particular destination. In 1917, the ‘Amili Mahmud Burji opened a hotel near the port for those headed for West Africa — alongside a trading house with interests in Senegal (Naaman 2004:108). This was a sign of the growing importance of this particular stream of migration. While many of the men and women who passed through Marseille in the interwar years continued to favour Latin American destinations like Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, two of the three remaining Eastern Mediterranean establishments catering to new arrivals — the Hôtel du Levant and the Hôtel du Mont-Liban — drew a significant share of their business from the constant stream of migrants travelling to and from West Africa (Nasser 1986:28-9).

Indeed, the expansion of Lebanese migration to AOF which began towards the turn of the century was no mere effect of happenstance or the trickeries of ticket brokers. Rather, the growing number of Eastern Mediterranean men and women in Guinea — from a mere eighteen in 1897 to some 986 in 1910 — was a sign that a few had come to favour West Africa over the United States or Brazil, and to call upon others to follow them down the paths they had plotted to Conakry. Thus, the French administrator Jules Poulet found in 1911 that more than half of all those living in Guinea hailed from a single locality: the small Maronite town of Bayt Shabab in the Matn.

Migration from this locality had picked up after the return from West Africa of fifty-one men. Reporting that the thriving rubber trade allowed
them to 'collect [in Guinea] the same sum as in America in a third of the
time', they brought back some two million francs between them, which they
used to buy land and build handsome, red-roofed houses. Many others were
impelled to follow their lead, and within a few years some 800 of the town's
1,250 male inhabitants had migrated to Guinea and neighbouring Sierra
Leone. Such was the amplitude of this outflow that Bayt Shabab — the
'home of the young' — came to be rechristened, in a bittersweet
acknowledgment of its changed demographic composition, as Bayt 'Ajaza —
the home of old age (Saliba 1983:39).

The inhabitants of Bayt Shabab were not alone in regarding the trading
posts of AOF as favoured destinations. By the mid-1900s, Greek Orthodox
and Catholic, Maronite and Shi'a migrants from the Jabal 'Amil port of Sur,
and the villages in its hinterland like Juwayya, had begun to set up businesses
in Dakar, Thiès and Conakry. Alongside these two preponderant streams ran
a third, smaller rivulet from the large Greek Orthodox village of Bainu, deep
in the harsh recesses of the 'Akkar region — but, perhaps, near enough to the
port of Tripoli to enable some to take the paths of migration. Such migration
was, moreover, not limited to AOF. Migrants from these three regions flowed
into Sierra Leone too, in the years before 1914: Greek Orthodox and
Maronites from Rahbe and the Tilal villages of 'Akkar; Maronites from the
Matt; and Shi'a from the localities of Tibnin, Bint Jbail, and Nabatiyya,
market-towns lying inland from Sur (van der Laan 1975:235-36; Aswad
1992:170). Some amongst the latter group, too, seemed to regard West Africa
as a place of easy profits, using the capital they accumulated there to sponsor
others headed for the assembly-lines of Ford in Detroit (Aswad 1992:170). By
1914, then, migration from these localities towards Senegal, Sierra Leone, and
— especially — Guinea had become an organised, purposeful undertaking.

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1 Paris, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Turquie, Syrie-Liban, Nouvelle Série (hereafter
MAE TSL NS) 115, Couget to Cruppi, Beirut, 13/04/1911.
2 Paris, Centre d'Accueil et de Recherche des Archives Nationales, Fonds AOF, Ancienne
Série (hereafter CARAN AOF AS) 21 G 33 [200 M 1099-1100], 'Copie de lettre non
envoyée', n.d. [1918].
3 Dakar, Archives Nationales du Sénégal, Fonds AOF (hereafter ANS AOF) 11 D 3/37, 'ÉTAT
DE L'IMMIGRATION SYRIENNE DANS LE CERCLE DE THIÈS — ANNÉE 1924'.
4 The census of foreign residents conducted by the government of Guinea in late 1918 provides
valuable information on migration to the colony in the years before 1914: CARAN AS 21 G
38 [200 M 1100-1101], 'Recensement des Étrangers Résidant en Guinée Française Indiquant:
1) Leur pays d’origine 2) La date de leur arrivée dans la colonie 3) Leur situation dans les
maisons qui les emploient 4) Renseignements généraux sur leur manière d’être', Conakry,
28/10/1918.
This was an enterprise driven by a keen sense of the economic opportunities to be found in West Africa, and directed by ties of family and friendship. At times, these movements conformed to the simple, familiar, patterns of chain migration — clusters of population forming in gradually extending concentric circles, as migrants called first upon their spouses, siblings and children, then upon their more distant kin (Choldin 1973:166-67). Mustafa As'ad and his eldest son Musa arrived in Guinea from Sur in 1909, settling in Conakry; they were joined in 1911 by Musa’s younger brother Darwish then, in 1918, by the youngest of Mustafa’s sons, ‘Ali. In 1917, ‘Abdallah Hamid, requested permission for his brother’s son, Muhammad, to join him in Dakar from Mexico.’ A year earlier, the Dakar merchant Joseph Gananet — perhaps a Hispanic rendering of the Arabic Ghanim — had requested visas for his parents-in-law, Amin Hajj and his wife, ‘currently resident in Buenos Aires’, to settle in Senegal. Such moves seem entirely predictable strategies for giving business operations strength in numbers — and for reconstructing the comforting ties of families.

Indeed, such movements did not only involve male relatives. Women — and children — were among the first few migrants who set up stall in the port-cities of Senegal and the trading posts of French Soudan at the turn of the century. Gabrielle ‘Akar, for instance, arrived on 10 June 1900 in Rufisque with her brothers, Habib and Najib, to join their youngest sibling, Philippe, there since 1897. Jean ‘Isa, who lived in Saint-Louis at the time of the yellow fever epidemic of 1900, was accompanied by his wife Mariam, ‘the mother of two little girls’.. Mariam, like Zarifa Maruni, and Farida and Sultana Nasif — the other women amongst the twenty-four migrants then in Saint-Louis — was listed as a colporteur, or hawker. As students of Eastern Mediterranean migration to the United States have long been aware, such women clearly played an active part in migrant commercial life (see Gualtieri

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6 CARAN AOF AS 21 G 38 [200 Mi 1100-1101], ‘Recensement des Étrangers Résidant en Guinée Française Indiquant: a) Leur pays d’origine b) La date de leur arrivée dans la colonie c) Leur situation dans les maisons qui les emploient d) Renseignements généraux sur leur manière d’être’, Conakry, 28/10/1918.

7 CARAN AOF AS 21 G 44 [200 Mi 1103], Abdoulay Hamit ['Abdallah Hamid] to Délégué of the Governor of Senegal, Dakar, 05/10/1917.

8 CARAN AOF AS 21 G 43 [200 Mi 1102], Gananet to Governor-General of AOF, Dakar, 15/10/1916.

9 CARAN AOF AS 21 G 32 [200 Mi 1099], ‘État de santé des Syriens actuellement à Rufisque’, 07/07/1900.

10 CARAN AOF AS 21 G 32 [200 Mi 1099], ‘État nominatif des Syriens présents à Saint-Louis à la date du 30 Août 1900’.
2004; Khater 2001; Naff 1985; and Shakir 1997). By no means all Lebanese migrants to AOF — even in this movement’s earliest years — were ‘men without women’ (Harney 1978), who had left their wives and children behind to wait or were still too young to be married before their departure (Brettell 1986; Khater and Khater 1993). Wives and children, nephews, parents-in-law — all were called upon to join Lebanese migrants.

However, it would be wrong to regard the chains of migration as forged only of the sturdy stuff of kin. The Mansur brothers took on in 1917 a certain Grégoire Abu Hatab as an accountant for the business they had established in Grand-Bassam, in Côte d’Ivoire.¹¹ These men were bound neither, it seems, by parentage nor by shared origins: while the Mansur were most probably from Mount Lebanon, like their employees Spiro Sa’d and Habib Shuqayr,¹² Abu Hatab was born in Damascus in 1886.¹³ But he had going for him his status as a former Greek Orthodox priest, his string of appointments — first as an attaché to the Russian legation in Buenos Aires, then as an employee of the Forges et Chantiers de la Méditerranée in Marseille, and finally as an interpreter at the Russian embassy in Paris — and his obvious erudition: as well as speaking Arabic and Russian, which he had perhaps picked up during his theological studies, he wrote French correctly, if rather clumsily.¹⁴ For all his credentials, the relationship between Abu Hatab and the Mansurs rapidly fell apart — Abu Hatab leaving after only a few months to join the employ of César ‘Abdu in Dakar.¹⁵ Nevertheless, it is a sign that kin was not always all-important. Reputation and respectability — a man’s learning and station in life — might equally serve as justifications for calling upon him.

Furthermore, it is telling that while Joseph Gnamet’s parents-in-law were established in Buenos-Aires, and ‘Abdallah Hamid’s brother lived in Mexico with his family, Abu Hatab was resident in Paris, after spells in Buenos Aires and Marseille. The lines of communication migrants

¹¹ CARAN AOF AS 21 G 44 [200 Mi 1103], Ministry of Colonies to Governor-General of AOF, Paris, 24/07/1917.
¹³ CARAN AOF AS 21 G 44 [200 Mi 1103], Abu Hatab to Délégué du Gouvernement du Sénégal, Dakar, 08/11/1917.
¹⁴ CARAN AOF AS 21 G 44 [200 Mi 1103], Ministry of Colonies to Governor-General of AOF, Paris, 24/07/1917.
¹⁵ CARAN AOF AS 21 G 44 [200 Mi 1103], Abu Hatab to Délégué du Gouvernement du Sénégal, Dakar, 08/11/1917.
established were not simply highways directly connecting their hometowns and villages to Guinea or Senegal. Rather, they were joined by a series of branch roads to various other nodes of Lebanese migration, elsewhere in West Africa, of course, but also in Latin America, Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean. In early 1919, Joseph Qustantin requested administrative permission for his brother ‘Id, living in Mopti in Soudan, to join him in the Guinean town of Kankan. That same year, Antoine ‘Abdu asked that his brother George be allowed to spend a few months with him in Dakar on his way from Freetown to the Eastern Mediterranean. That families like these should have been spread out across both French and British West Africa is unsurprising; as we will see, their commercial undertakings often depended upon such dispersion.

Less expected, perhaps, is the extent to which these circuits of kin and commerce ran well beyond West Africa itself. In early March 1917, Ibrahim Zughaib, who had lived in Senegal for some seven years, requested permission to leave the colony for New York. He had, he explained, been without work for a year and, seeing his health growing steadily worse, felt certain he could not spend an eighth winter in Senegal. He ‘begged’, then, in his broken French, ‘your high personality’ to ‘grant me this permission to go to New York to be amongst my relatives and family’. He was not alone in seeking to get away for a while. In August, Marie Qastun, who resided with her son Hanna in Dakar, requested permission to visit her brothers Michel and Elie in the Argentine province of Cordoba for ‘a few months’. But these leaves of absence were not only occasioned by the desire for a ‘change of climate’, or the pangs of family. That same year, Michel Salman — then working as an accountant for Ibrahim Hallaq in Thiès — requested permission to head for Marseille to see to the ‘hotel for migrants’ he had established there after a first spell working for Hallaq in M’Bour in 1913. These letters, and many more, reveal the extent to which the ties of kin and

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16 CARAN AOF AS 21 G 33 [200 Mi 1099-1100], Joseph Constantin to Governor-General of AOF, Mopti, 28/01/1919.
17 CARAN AOF AS 21 G 33 [1099-1100], Antoine Abdo to Governor-General of AOF, Dakar, 01/02/1919.
18 CARAN AOF AS 21 G 44 [200 Mi 1103], Ebrahim Zougaïb [Ibrahim Zughaïb] to Governor-General of AOF, Dakar, 16/03/1917.
19 CARAN AOF AS 21 G 44 [200 Mi 1103], Marie Gastoune [Qastun] to Governor-General of AOF, Dakar, 04/08/1917.
20 CARAN AOF AS 21 G 44 [200 Mi 1103], Commissioner of Police to Administrateur de Cercle, Thiès, 10/03/1917.
business were stretched out across the long distances of the mahjar.

But they also show the essentially cyclical, circuitous, nature of Lebanese migration in the early years of the twentieth century. While some certainly did settle for a single destination, which they left — if ever — only for a few short holidays in the Eastern Mediterranean, others came and went constantly. Some spent a spell in West Africa, or elsewhere in the mahjar, then returned to their families, immersing themselves in their old lives for a time, before heading off again as their money ran out or their patience grew thin. Ahmad al-Hajj Hasan was one such sojourner. Having migrated to the United States, he served in the American Expeditionary Force during the last months of World War One, and was naturalised — taking the name of Frank Fayz — before returning to Qana, in Jabal ‘Amil. There he stayed till 1936, when he headed for AOF, settling first in Senegal then moving, in 1937, to Côte d’Ivoire, where he remained till 1944 — when he returned to Lebanon, through Algiers, in the midst of war.21 Hasan was, in a sense, a bird of flight coming home to roost. But while others showed similar restlessness, their peregrinations did not necessarily lead them back to the Eastern Mediterranean. Some saw no sense in returning, for their families were no longer there, but spread out, like that of the Ganamet, across the mahjar. Others, like Michel Salman, travelled where their interests called them. We would do well, then, to think of the circuits of circulation Lebanese migrants plotted not merely as chains, which pulled one family member after another from the Eastern Mediterranean towards West Africa, but as routes, which opened up the possibility to travel towards Guinea or Senegal — without, necessarily, any of the formal arrangements of chain migration, the letters and telegrams and bundles of money to pay for the crossing.

There were, in 1918, nineteen adult members of the Ashqar family of Bayt Shabab living in Guinea; eighteen of the Bijjani; fifteen of the Fakhuri; thirty-five of the Ghusub; twenty-two of the Hayik; twenty of the Qusayyir; and thirteen of the Mukarzil.22 However, the internal relations between the various members of these extended patronymic groups — each of which

21 Aix-en-Provence, Centre des Archives d’Outremer, Ministère des Colonies, Fonds Ministériel, Affaires Politiques (hereafter CAOM MC FM AP) 2303/1, Governor-General of AOF to Commissioner for the Colonies, ‘a/s Commerçant libanais Ahmed El Haj Hassan’, Dakar, 24/07/1944.

22 CARAN AOF AS 21 G 38 [200 Mi 1100-1101], ‘Recensement des Étrangers Résidant en Guinée Française Indiquant: a) Leur pays d’origine b) La date de leur arrivée dans la colonie c) Leur situation dans les maisons qui les emparent d) Renseignements généraux sur leur manière d’être’, Conakry, 28/10/1918.
traced its lineage back to a single putative ancestor — were at times blurred and complex, defying the simple schemata of chain migration theory. Some of these men and women were, it is clear, close kin. The Mukarzil, for instance, did include three sets of siblings — Joseph Mansur and Hanna Mansur, who had come together to Guinea in 1903, Nasri Joseph Ibrahim Stambuli and Millhim Ibrahim Stambuli, the first of whom arrived in 1906 and the second in 1908, and Nasif Elias Ayyub and Mme Faris Harb Mukarzil — characteristically, we do not know her name, though we do have that of her mother, Simone Nasif — who both arrived in 1905. Mme Mukarzil was married, meanwhile, to her first cousin, Faris Harb Naja, who came to the Colony in 1911, six years after his wife. Michel Matar, who arrived in 1905, and Qais Na’man Ma’ushi, who arrived five years later, were also most likely first cousins. However, these two groups of cousins were not tied by any close link — patrilineal or matrilineal — either to each other, or to the other members of the extended Mukarzil family living in Guinea.23

Thus, though these individuals all belonged to a single patronymic group, the ties of kin between them were not equally distributed. They proliferated in some directions, crossing back over each other like a set of pick-up sticks strewn on the ground, while in others they seemingly finished in dead ends, or stretched so far back in time that they defy our attempts at joining up these individuals, and seeing them as links in a single chain (see Peters 1963; Touma 1958). These men and women clearly migrated towards Guinea safe in the knowledge they would find there others to whom they were bound by a common ancestry, however tenuous, and a shared name — links which created expectations of reciprocity and rendered the enterprise rather less daunting. The path leading from a locality like Bayt Shabab towards Guinea was, by 1914, well-trodden and crowded with awlad biladna — ‘children of our country’, as the people of the Lebanese mountain called their neighbours and kinfolk (Chevallier 1971:134). However, we must acknowledge the possibility that they moved not upon the entreaty of a relative or a friend, but precisely because this destination had become so well-known — because they had heard captivating tales of the riches of Africa, or had looked on enviously as a distant cousin built a new home with his rubber money. They were prompted to head for AOF as much by familiarity as by family ties.

23 CARAN AOF AS 21 G 38 [200 Mi 1100-1101], ‘Recensement des Étrangers Résidant en Guinée Française Indiquant: a) Leur pays d’origine b) La date de leur arrivée dans la colonie c) Leur situation dans les maisons qui les emploient d) Renseignements généraux sur leur manière d’être’, Conakry, 28/10/1918.
This pattern became more pronounced still in the interwar years. Indeed, chain migration alone can hardly account for the formidable expansion of the Eastern Mediterranean population of AOF in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1909, there had been 1,110 ‘Syrians’ living throughout the Federation. In 1923, this figure had grown to 2,152. By 1936, 5,792 citizens of the Mandatory states lived in the Federation (Desbordes 1938:18). This represented a demographic lurch upwards of 269%, even as the flow of Eastern Mediterranean migration to other parts of the world was, on the whole, steadily decreasing.

That is not to say, of course, that assisted migration was unimportant: migrants in both French and British West Africa continued to call upon family members and prospective employees in this period. Fuad Khuri, who spent some time among the Shi’a of Magburaka, in Sierra Leone, in the early 1960s, found that the first Lebanese man to arrive in the town, in 1921, was a member of the Shamal patriline of Bint Jbail. His brother followed in 1924. In 1938, these two men sent for their sister’s son, and that of their paternal uncle. The sister’s son was, through his father, a Kazan, and he established that line in Sierra Leone. Then, in 1939, one of the Shamils married, on a visit to Lebanon, a Bazzi girl — and she, in turn, led other members of that family to Sierra Leone (Khuri 1965: 389).

Such a pattern of family reconstitution became increasingly common in the interwar years. The rough headcounts carried out by French administrators in 1918, and again in 1924 and 1927, reveal that most who ventured without family ties to West Africa, both before and after the First World War, were young men or boys. Some were barely adolescents when they headed for AOF — like Hanna Qusayyir, who arrived in Cayor in 1900 at the age of eleven. Few, however, were above the age of thirty — though there were exceptions to this general trend, like Georges Abu Rizq, who arrived in Senegal in 1907 a widowed forty-three year old, calling upon his thirteen-year old son Alexandre two years later. But by the 1920s many of those who had arrived before 1914 had, as they grew older, acquired some measure of prosperity — which allowed them to return to Lebanon to find a wife, or to call upon relatives.

This, in turn, changed the gender balance of these earlier streams of migration. Women, as we have seen, had been amongst the first Eastern

Mediterranean migrants to settle in AOF at the turn of the century. Furthermore, there are tantalising hints that some migrated alone, complicating understandings of migration which have long viewed women only as the ‘appendages of husbands, brothers, and fathers’ (Gualtieri 2004: 67). Thus, one Mme Mukhaira — the commandant de cercle of Kayes noted in 1918 — had lived in this Soudan trading town with her daughter Marie since 1893 — two years before the arrival there of the first Eastern Mediterranean man, Antoine Ashqar. These women, described by the administrator as commerçants — note the masculine — seem to have worked independently. 26 It is clear, despite such exceptions, that most women did follow in the wake of male relatives or husbands. While women represented nearly a quarter of migrants in Senegal in 1900, this ratio was abnormally high for these years. In 1907, there were only forty-two women for 424 men in Guinea; children, meanwhile, represented a mere 2% of this population (Desbordes 1938:17). Women, then, were far fewer amongst Lebanese migrants to West Africa in the years before 1914 than amongst those heading for the United States — where women represented a full 32% of entrants between 1899 and 1914 (Gualtieri 2004:67). It seems this had little to do with the perceived hardships of life in Africa — after all, there were four women among the ten migrants who had reached French Soudan by 1900, going far beyond the railway into the interior of AOF (Desbordes 1938: 17). Rather, it might be accounted for by the relative novelty of this stream, and the aspirations of many of those who migrated in these years. These men, as they told Jules Poulet in 1911, hoped to put together a tidy sum as rapidly as possible before returning to the Eastern Mediterranean — and could, therefore, have had few thoughts of settling down in Conakry or Dakar, with or without their families.

However, many did do so — remaining for long, unbroken spells or, at least, continuing to shuttle back and forth between West Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean every few years. And, as they did, they began to regard their businesses as lasting undertakings rather than short-term adventures, and to yearn for the trappings of domesticity — and the respectability it brought. By 1936, women represented some 36.7% of migrants from Bayt Shabab living in AOF, and 32.3% of those from Sur. By contrast, men were almost four times more numerous amongst those who had

26 CARAN AS 21 G 38 [200 Mi 1100-1101]. 'EXECUTION DES PRESCRIPTIONS DE LA CIRCULAIRE CONFIDENTIELLE N° 44 du 12 JUIN 1918 - TABLEAU DES ETRANGERS RESIDANT AU HAUT SENEGAL NIGER CERCLE DE KAYES'.
left Qabb Elias, and nearly six times more numerous amongst those from Nabatiyya (Desbordes 1938:34). Those men who arrived from ‘Amili towns like Nabatiyya or Zrariyya in the 1920s and 1930s only began to call, in turn, for their own women and children in the late 1940s and 1950s.  

The proportion of children under the age of fifteen — while it tended to increase across the board as the 1920s and 1930s wore on, from nearly 30% in Dakar in 1935 to a full 40% two years later, from nearly 27% in Guinea in 1931 to 34% in 1936, and from 21% in Senegal in 1935 to 25% the following year — was noticeably higher in those places which had witnessed sustained migration since the years before 1914 (Desbordes 1938:18). That it was not higher still across these various communities, it seems, was largely down to the fact that many women left their children with grandparents or uncles, or sent those born in AOF to relatives or — for those who could afford it — to boarding schools in Lebanon or France. Muhammad, the son of the Dakar kola merchant Haidar Taha, attended the Shi’a ‘Amiliyya school in Beirut, dividing his holidays between their hometown of Nabatiyya and Senegal.  

Sa’id Ghandur’s son Georges, meanwhile, was schooled at the Maronite Sagesse boarding school in Beirut before returning to Dakar in 1941 on the completion of his studies. In 1918, his namesake Georges Jabre (Jabir) joined his father Joseph in Guinea at the age of sixteen, after having been brought up in Marseille.

More telling still was the far higher proportion of those over the age of fifteen born in Guinea who lived in AOF by the late 1930s — ninety-seven, as opposed to fifty-five in Senegal, and a mere twenty-four in Dakar (Desbordes 1938:32). This spoke both to the longer vintage of migration in this territory, but also to the desire of those — fathers and mothers — who had stayed behind in Conakry or Mamou, while their children returned to Lebanon, to call upon them to come and take their places, as they grew old and sought to retire in the old country. But kin did not always determine

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27 On this, see the rich series of visa requests from these years, organised by claimant, in ANS AOF 21 G 227.
29 CAOM MC FM AP 1432/1, Governor-General of AOF to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Dakar, 18/10/1941.
30 CARAN AOF AS 21 G 43 [200 Mi: 1102], Lieutenant-Governor of Guinea to Governor-General of AOF, Conakry, 20/04/1918 and 26/04/1918.
succession: Hatim Shadid, for instance, explained in a letter he sent to the Minister of Colonies in 1938 from his home in Bayt Shabab that, having contracted a ‘serious conjunctivitis’, he would no longer be able to return to Guinea, where he had worked ‘for forty years’, building a two-storey house and shop in Kankan. In light of his situation, he sought permission to send Faris Ashqar Darwish in his place to tend to his affairs.31

Eastern Mediterranean men and women, then, were clearly concerned with stitching back together ties of kin undone by distance and displacement. However, some also showed rather more business-like dispositions, returning to Lebanon as much to recruit new apprentices and agents for their shops and trading enterprises as to see their parents or seek out a wife from the home country. Haidar Taha and his partner Hasan Shams reportedly returned in 1930 from their summer sojourn in Nabatiyya with ‘eight men of that locality’ in tow.32 While French intelligence officers suspected that these were the agents of a ‘methodically organised’ ‘secret political organisation’, it is just as likely that they were prospective migrants Taha and Shams had recruited.33 Indeed, migrants certainly conducted ‘propaganda’ on their return to Lebanon, especially in the wake of good harvests — boons which gave them thoughts of expanding their businesses and seeking out reinforcements.34 Shi’a migrants in Magburaka — some 78% of whom had been sponsored to make the journey to Sierra Leone — told Fuad Khuri they had been spun seductive tales of a place “where money making is shovelling in sand, the fun of living is heightened by the easier availability of women, and where harmony and good will among the Lebanese community prevail” (Khuri 1965:389,393).

Others, meanwhile, sent news home by letter and telegram of the profits to be made in AOF. Though we have no epistolary repositories comparable to those left behind by German and Scandinavian migrants, it is clear the Lebanese men and women of West Africa attempted to maintain vicarious contact with the Eastern Mediterranean (see Barton 1975; Kamphoefer et al. 1991). Farid Anthony, who grew up in the Sawpit district

31 CAOM MC FM AP 1432/1, Hatem Shadid to Minister of Colonies, Bait Shabab, 02/12/1938.
32 CARAN AOF NS 21 G 23 [200 Mi 3023-24], Commissaire de Police of Kaolack to Commandant de Cercle of Sine Saloum, Kaolack, 22/10/1930.
of Freetown, told in his memoirs of the way his father’s ship had been met by the town’s Lebanese inhabitants, who would customarily convene on the Government Wharf to ‘enjoy the invigorating sea-breeze’ and talk business, but also to greet new arrivals ‘from whom they obtained the latest news and perhaps an occasional letter or parcel of Lebanese fruits and foodstuffs’ (Anthony 1980:16). And they themselves sent word to relatives as often as they could — by passing a message with a returning friend, perhaps, or by telegram. In early 1942, the Vichy administration of AOF, in an attempt to counter the ‘Anglo-Gaullist propaganda’ reaching the Libano-Syriens of the Federation,35 allowed some to sent messages to relatives and friends in Lebanon by radio.36 These short messages hardly stray beyond the anodyne, their authors perhaps penned in by discretion or the correct, conventional French turns of phrase they deployed. Nonetheless, these seemingly bland expressions of sentimentality, for all their limitations, reveal the desire of migrants to keep abreast of lives unfolding far away — with all their petty turns and cataclysmic events. From Abidjan, Muhammad and Najib Yasin assured their family in Nabatiyya that they were in good health, and asked them to send news by letter. Mme Najib Harun asked for news of her mother, Mme Veuve Gabriel Cobti (Qubti) in Sur. The Haddad family asked Mr Salem to send his condolences to his aunt. From Dabou, Georges Haddad told his wife: ‘write to me — thousand kisses for Tony’, their son.” Na’man ‘Assaf in Gagnoa asked Badi’ Hashim, headmaster of the school at Kfar Shima, for news of his son Émile — and, he added, ‘tend to his needs — will send any amount as soon as possible’.38 Indeed, imperial means of communication were used not simply to transmit such tender, short messages, but also to convey capital. Migrants from Bayt Shabab remitted more than 200,000 Francs in cheques and postal orders in 1910 alone.39 On the eve of World War Two, bank transfers from French Soudan averaged some two million Francs a year — though this figure, deemed rather

35 CAOM MC FM AP 1432/1, Governor-General High-Commissioner of French Africa to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Dakar, 06/01/1942.
36 CAOM FM AP 1432/1, Governor-General High-Commissioner of French Africa to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Dakar, 23/01/1942.
37 CAOM FM AP 1432/1, Governor-General High-Commissioner of French Africa to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Dakar, 23/01/1942, enclosures.
38 CAOM FM AP 1432/1, ‘MESSAGES EMANANT DE LIBANO-SYRIENS, DESTINES A ETRE DIFFUSES PAR LE POSTE “LA VOIX DE FRANCE”, enclosure, Governor-General to Secretary of State for the Colonies, Dakar, 30/01/1942.
39 CARAN AOF AS 21 G 33 [200 Mi 1099-1100], ‘Copie de lettre non envoiée’, Angoulvant, n.d. [1918].
‘insignificant’ by administrators, included only licit transactions.\textsuperscript{40} And they also served to inform relatives of changing business opportunities. Thus, one French administrator speculated in late 1935 that the ‘important increase’ in the number of new arrivals from the Eastern Mediterranean that year had arisen largely because established migrants, already ‘satisfied with the previous campaign, which they compared to the particularly brilliant years of 1927 and 1928’, had predicted ‘large profits’ upon the opening of the trading season in December.\textsuperscript{41}

It is clear, then, that the ‘constant movement’ of people and information ‘to-and-fro’ between West Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean ‘fed’ the growth of the Lebanese population of AOF ‘by a sort of social capillarity’.\textsuperscript{42} But it would be wrong to imagine that this movement was essentially familial, drawing in only ‘wife, children, brothers, cousins, etc.’, nor that those attracted ‘to West Africa by their wandering dispositions [were] few’ and far between by the late 1930s (Desbordes, 1938:14-15). Indeed, the torrential flow of new arrivals during the two crests of Eastern Mediterranean migration — first between 1923 and 1926, then between 1935 and 1937 — took established migrants unawares. The latter had — as an administrator noted in 1924 — at first welcomed the ‘batches of 200 or 250’ miserable souls disembarking from each new ship arriving at Dakar as ‘useful’ additions to their ranks. However, they had rapidly grown ‘weary of this […] disorganised movement’ — and wary of the competition these interlopers might present. And while some in AOF called in the mid-1930s for reinforcements, sending news home of their profits, the ‘considerable influx’ of migrants which followed — ‘many of whom had set off with no assurance of finding employment’ — surprised many.\textsuperscript{43}

Some of those who headed ‘off for adventure’ in the Federation without kin or connection there may have heard of the relatively high commodity prices prevailing in West Africa in the mid-1920s and mid-1930s in the old way, from migration agents in the village square, or on the docks of Beirut and Tripoli where, amongst the catcalls of porters and boatswains,

\textsuperscript{40} ANS AOF NS 10 F 14, ‘RENSEIGNEMENTS concernant les LIBANO-SYRIENS en résidence au SOUDAN’, Bamako, November 1944.

\textsuperscript{41} ANS AOF NS 10 F 14, ‘NOTE RELATIVE A L’IMMIGRATION LIBANO-SYRIENNE au cours de l’année 1935’.

\textsuperscript{42} ANS AOF NS 10 F 14, Governor-General of AOF to Commissioner for Colonies, Dakar, n.d. [1943].

\textsuperscript{43} CARAN AOF NS 21 G 61 [200 Mi 3039], Governor-General of AOF to Minister of Colonies, Dakar, 26/01/1938.
brokers broadcast a constantly shifting stock of information." Others were swayed by the conversations they had with fellow steamship passengers, or the talk of Marseille hostel-keepers (Nasser 1986: 19). The mid-1920s and mid-1930s were, in any case, years of heavy migration from Lebanon — short bursts of prosperity which encouraged many to depart while they could afford it. This conviction was only reinforced — we might speculate — by the onset of insurrectionary violence in southern Syria in 1925, and in Palestine in 1936. Though this did not compel migrants to leave, it may well heightened their anxiety to get away from home in search of steadier, and more profitable, lives — especially as unrest spread from the Hawran and Galilee into Jabal ‘Amil and the Shuf.

More important still than the influence of migration agents was the unintentional role returning migrants themselves played as ‘agents of migration’. Some of these men and women, as we have seen, certainly did set out to promote migration to the Federation — showing off their ‘substantial profits’ and singing the praises of Africa. But such ‘propaganda’ also had unintended effects. Migrants who affected ‘comfort[able]’ new lifestyles, putting on the appearances which had come to be expected of the returning migrant, helped to spread a perception of AOF as a ‘land of riches’ to audiences far wider than they themselves could initially have conceived of — or wished for.

Thus, knowledge of AOF as a plausible, and potentially profitable, destination spread outwards like an oil slick from localities like Bayt Shabab and Sur in the interwar years. It is telling that many new arrivals in the 1920s came from villages and small towns like Bikfayya, Shawiyya, Qurnat Shahwan, and Qurnat al-Hamra in Matn, and Alma al-Sha’b, Naqqura, Qana and Nabatiyya, which lay along the roads which jutted out like spokes from Sur into its hinterland. Awareness of AOF, then, seems to have circulated along the networks of gossip which wound their way along the

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44 The quote is from CARAN AOF NS 21 G 142 [200 Mi 3072], ‘Interview de Monsieur le Gouverneur Général de l’AOF’, 13/05/1938. My father still recalls being shown as a young boy the dockside stonks on which the brokers of the port of Beirut stood to advertise their services.


roads of the Matn and Jabal ‘Amil.

Moreover, it reached further still, spilling out beyond the confines of these regions. The headcounts French administrators conducted in 1924 and 1927 pointed to new — or newly important — streams of migration. Men and women were now coming to West Africa in significant numbers from the port-cities of Beirut and Tripoli; from smaller Lebanese localities like the town of Qabb Elias in the Biqa’ plain, with its mixed population of Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic and Sunni, or the small Maronite villages of Ras Kifa and Karm Sadde in northern Lebanon; from the Syrian city of Homs; and from Haifa, in Mandatory Palestine.\footnote\{ANS AOF 11 D 3/37, ‘Recensement de la population étrangère de la ville de Rufisque en décembre 1927’.\} We cannot be sure, now, of the ways in which news of West Africa filtered to migrants from these various localities. Here, too, communications probably played an important part: Qabb Elias lay along the road linking Beirut to Damascus, an artery along which information could easily travel; Ras Kifa and Karm Sadde lay in the mountains overlooking Tripoli. But whatever the case, it seems clear that knowledge of West Africa was, by the 1930s, no longer confined to a few localities. Rather, it had become common currency throughout much of the new state of Lebanon, and beyond.

For some, this knowledge consisted of little more than a rudimentary geography, a list of names — ‘Guinea, Sahara, Gold Coast, Sahel, Fouta […] Ethiopia, Sudan, Senegal, Congo’ (Filfili 1973:65). Sometimes, it was even less than that. Charles Issawi, speaking in the 1940s to a Lebanese villager preparing to leave for Senegal, was told: “I am emigrating to that part of Amerka that is under French rule; it is very hot there and the people are black” (Issawi 1992:30). But such misconceptions must have been rare by this point — though they had once, of course, been common amongst Eastern Mediterranean migrants, like those who first arrived in Australia in the 1880s believing that they had landed at \textit{al Na-Yurk} (Batrouney and Batrouney 1985:21).

We should be wary, then, of treating the men and women who migrated towards West Africa as naïve rustics, utterly unaware of the world which lay beyond their mountains. Fanciful accounts certainly did spread in the 1920s and 1930s of the abundance of gold to be found in West Africa — as they had a generation or two earlier about \textit{Amrika} (Muruwwa 1938:196). However, while some may well have been gullible enough to fall for such accounts, others surely perceived their essentially metaphorical quality.
Lebanese migrants had by the interwar years — and, likely, earlier still — come to regard the lands of the mahjar not as ‘a paradise of eternal bliss, but a world in which one’s material condition could be improved through choice, work, and increased opportunities’ (Hoerder 1993:11). Indeed, while the flow of information reaching back to the Eastern Mediterranean was highly filtered — and successful migrants remained rather likelier to send news or remittances than their less fortunate peers, struggling to make ends meet and too weighed down by shame to write home — those who stayed behind were not unaware of the difficulties and disappointments of the mahjar. As Nadra Filifli put it, they ‘[knew] the stories of failure; they [knew] the names of those who returned defeated, broken, [...] ill, they [knew] the names inscribed on coffins brought back on the cargo-ships, and all the names which were erased without coffins’ (Filifli 1973:63). But this was not enough to dissuade men and women from the Matn and Jabal ‘Aml, the ‘Akkar and the Kisrwan from venturing towards Africa. The narratives of migration they heard were not for them unrealisable tall tales, which could serve only to escape for an instant the small, confined spaces of everyday existence. On the contrary, they were ‘staging ground[s] for action’, prisms through which men and women could begin to visualise new lives which lay firmly within their grasp (Appadurai 1996:7). As Filifli, who travelled towards Dakar in 1923, remembered: ‘everything seemed to point to Senegal’ (Filifli 1973:65).

The widespread dissemination of such imaginaries in the 1920s and 1930s, and the manner in which they opened up new channels of movement between the Eastern Mediterranean and French West Africa, is a reminder of the difficulties entailed in writing a linear, unitary narrative of migration. There was, in a sense, no single starting point for Lebanese migration to AOF, but a multiplicity of beginnings. As Frank Thistlethwaite pointed out in a magisterial essay first published in 1960, the ‘undifferentiated mass surface’ of migration rapidly ‘breaks down’, when peered at ‘through a magnifying glass’, ‘into a honeycomb of innumerable particular cells, districts, villages, towns’ (Thistlethwaite 1991:28). And each of these streams had not only its own chronology, but also particular patterns of movement.

Matni migrants continued in the interwar years to head for Guinea and Soudan — as they had done since the beginning of the century. Some 750 migrants from there lived across AOF in 1936. Of these, some 409 were in Guinea and another 153 in Soudan. By contrast, only 146 lived in Senegal, and a paltry eight in Dakar — despite the tempting opportunities presented
by the Federation’s capital, whose increasing importance as a nodal point for navigation and commerce drove a steep demographic climb in these years. By contrast, there were eighty-two migrants from Nabatiyya in Dakar, and seventy-five in Senegal — but none in French Soudan. The overwhelming majority of those from Qabb Elias, some 268 men and women, favoured the trading posts of the Senegalese interior (Desbordes 1938:34).

This propensity for demographic concentration went further still. Migrants with common origins did not only flock to different colonial territories; they also clustered together in particular regions. Those who lived in Mekhe and Kelle in the cercle of Cayor in Senegal were, with one exception, from the villages of Karm Sadde, Miziara and Bqurqasha, which lay along the roads winding their way through the mountainous Maronite heartlands, high in the hinterland of Tripoli. The few who lived in Casamance, meanwhile, hailed for the most part from Bayt al-Sha’ar, Dbyaya and ‘Amarat Shallhub, coastal settlements just to the north of Beirut. The subdivision of Foundiougne in the Sine-Saloum was peopled entirely by Matni migrants from Qurnat Shahwan, Qurnat al-Hamra, Shuwayya, and Dair al-Qal’a. Lebanese migrants appear not only to have sought to reconstitute families, but also to recreate the social geographies of the regions they had left behind.

Such patterns seem, furthermore, roughly to have followed lines of religious belonging as well as regional origins. Thus, the migrant populations of Senegal, Guinea and — especially — French Soudan, remained essentially Christian, despite the growing numbers of both Shi’a and Sunni flowing into AOF in the interwar years. In 1931, administrators estimated that some 854 Maronites, 472 Greek Catholics, eighty Greek Orthodox, and nine Syrian Protestants lived in Senegal, but only 390 Muslims (tellingly, they did not care to distinguish between Sunni and Shi’a).

This was not simply a function of the differing distribution of confessions across Lebanon itself — that Jabal ‘Amil was overwhelmingly Shi’a, while the Matn and the Kisrawan were heavily Christian. It would seem, from the summary headcounts conducted by administrators, that Dakar’s

Eastern Mediterranean population not only hailed in large part from Sur, but was also increasingly dominated by Shi’á. There were already thirty-nine Muslims amongst Dakar’s eighty-seven male Eastern Mediterranean inhabitants in 1918 — some 45%. While Christians remained in a slight majority directly after the First World War, their demographic share was steadily eroded with each new wave of heavy migration to Dakar. It was estimated in 1931 that around 59% of the city’s Libano-Syriens were Muslim (Bierwirth 1997: fn. 18,330). By the mid-1950s, they represented 75.5% of Dakar’s Eastern Mediterranean population (Martin 1962: table A.11). All those originally from Sur and Qana who lived in Thiès, meanwhile, were of various Christian denominations.53

At times, the comforting knowledge that neighbours shared their religion — their rites and small pious habits — seemed to play as important a role as family ties or shared origins in migrants’ decisions to alight in particular localities and regions. Thus, those who lived in the Senegalese river port of Kaolack and its hinterland hailed from across Lebanon: from Zahle and Qabb Elias in the Biqa’, Sur and Kfar Huna in Jabal ‘Amil, Antilias and al-Khirba in the Kiswan, Dayr al-Qamar in the Shuf, and Bikfaya in the Matn, and Karm Sadde in the north of the country. Each of these small bundles of population was made up of one or two families — at times no more than a husband and wife, or a couple of brothers, at others an extended group like the Hajjar and Shuwairi from Qabb Elias, or the Zakariyya from Shawiyya — which gave it an internal cohesion.54 But little seemed to bind all these men and women together. Save, that is, for religion — for all were, without exception, Uniate Christians, both Maronite and Greek Catholic.

However, these men and women did not always remain cantoned in enclaves defined exclusively by religion. Both Christian and Muslim ‘Amilis — Greek Catholics from Qana and Shi’á from Nabatiyya — lived in the Senegalese coastal town of Rufisque, as they did in the Gambetta neighbourhood of Dakar. There, their shops and homes were dotted along the same streets — Rue Vincens and Rue Sandiniery, Avenue Gambetta and Rue Victor Hugo — without any apparent residential segregation.55 In this sense

at least, their existences seem different both from those led by the inhabitants of mixed towns like Sur, where different sects apparently lived either side of an "imaginary, but impossible to breach, barrier" (Mervin 2000:40), and from those of Maronite and Shi’ a rural migrants to Beirut. The latter, as Fuad Khuri has noted, tended to place confessional alignments above common origins in their choice of settlement, as they rushed into the Lebanese capital’s peripheral neighbourhoods from the 1920s onwards (Khuri 1975:55-6). We cannot know whether the lives of these mingled communities were marked by the same awkward accommodations and ambiguities which characterised relations between Uniates and Shi’a in regions like Jabal ‘Amil and Bilad Jubail. There, important dates in the Christian and Muslim ritual calendars — like Assumption or the ceremonies of ‘ashura, held to commemorate the martyrdom of Husain at the battle of Karbala — could in quieter times be occasions for shows of careful reciprocity (Peleikis 2001:409). However, the religious sentiments of each could rapidly be mobilised and reshaped into a hostile discourse of irreconcilable difference in moments of strife like the late 1850s or the early 1920s (Makdisi 2001:360-62).

Nevertheless, it seems that in West Africa, too, a certain religiosity fed, in some instances, the sense of place to which migrants clung long after leaving behind the Eastern Mediterranean. Thus, a French administrator noted in November 1944 that the Greek Orthodox of Soudan — all of them from Bainu ‘Akkar — looked upon the far more substantial Maronite and Greek Catholic communities of the colony ‘almost as foreigners’, strangers who shared neither their ways of speaking nor their religion. The migrants of Dahomey, meanwhile, who hailed for the most part from the Maronite town of Miziara, wished for Lebanon’s independence largely because they ‘dread being dominated by the Syrians’; ‘separated’ from the latter ‘by a different civilisation and by Islam’, they looked upon them with a mixture of ‘contempt and fear’. One might be tempted to dismiss such words as little more than the wilful efforts of a colonial administrator to fabricate difference. But they cannot be so easily treated this way, nor considered entirely as the manifestations of novel facts of identity, born with the Ottoman reforms of the mid-nineteenth century, which created the conditions for the ‘deployment

56 ANS AOF 10 F 14, ‘RENSEIGNEMENTS concernant les SYRO-LIBANAIS en résidence au SOUDAN’, Bamako, November 1944.
of religious heritage as a primary marker of modern political identity’ (Makdisi 2001:7). The sentiments of these migrants — hard as they are to make out through the refractions of administrative writing — seem, rather, instances of the homspun ‘ideologies of the mountain’ Albert Hourani once wrote of, hanging upon the sense of ‘a compact community’ defined by both its dwelling-place and its own particular rites (Hourani 1976:36). While far from the sole measure by which migrants defined themselves, religion seems to have fed into a deep-rooted sense of regional specificity which displacement could not do away with. Part of what it meant for these migrants to be from Bainu ‘Akkar or Miziara — or, we might add, Jabal ‘Aml or the Matn — was to be Greek Orthodox, Maronite, or Shi’a.

For all that they did matter, religious differences did little to prevent migrants from engaging in commerce across confessional lines. Indeed, while the Eastern Mediterranean men and women of AOF drew upon notions of kin, place and confession in deciding where to settle, and amongst whom to live, they did so in ways which were complex and not always consistent, confounding attempts to ascribe to them a binding allegiance to the ‘Aristotelian logic of “social structure”’ (Sahlins 1985:27). And, what is more, considerations of profit were just as important as such notions in channelling the flows of migration. The two peaks of Eastern Mediterranean migration to AOF from 1923 to 1926, and again from 1935 to 1937, coincided not only with relatively clement economic conditions in Lebanon and Syria, which might have allowed migrants to pay for the costs of departure; they also corresponded with the twin booms of the Senegalese groundnut economy. Whether those who headed for AOF in these years saw their costs covered by kin and friends in Senegal whose profits were suddenly swollen, or whether they speculated on their own displacements on hearing of these cyclical booms, a sense of economic opportunity, and an expectation of further gains, drove these men and women on.

And, moreover, they headed to where profits could be found. Gambetta, the neighbourhood in which the Lebanese of Dakar concentrated, was conveniently close to both the city’s main market and the port. Their choice of residence, then, reflected their mercantile bent — as it did in Saint-Louis, where some 80% of the town’s dwindling community still lived in the 1960s in the old commercial neighbourhoods of Saint-Louis Nord and N’Dar Toute (Camara 1968:78), and in Conakry, whose market place was ‘lined with Lebanese and Syrian shops’, which spread along its main artery, the Avenue Ballay (Afrique Occidentale Française Togo 1958:315). This
propensity was also evident at the territorial level: as groundnut production increasingly shifted in the interwar years from the Wolof heartlands of Cayor and Baol southwards and eastwards towards the regions of Sine and, especially, Saloum, Eastern Mediterranean migrants followed. In 1922, the cercles of Diourbel in Baol and Cayor-Sud produced, respectively, 85,000 and 74,000 tons — a level of output roughly comparable to that of Sine-Saloum, which commercialised 84,500 tons the same year. However, by 1930, Sine-Saloum had rapidly outstripped its former competitors, producing some 48.5% of Senegal’s groundnuts (David 1980:60). Furthermore, the commercial centre of these regions, Kaolack, benefited from its position as a river port to draw in produce from as far afield as eastern Senegal and Soudan, which travelled along the Dakar-Niger railway, finally completed in 1923; in 1933, 52% of Senegal’s groundnut exports were loaded on its wharves (Seck n.d.:11). Accordingly, the adult Eastern Mediterranean population of the cercles of Sine-Saloum stood at 250 in 1924.\textsuperscript{58} By contrast, there were 122 migrants living in the Baol,\textsuperscript{59} and sixty-six in the cercle of Cayor.\textsuperscript{60} The lack of popularity of Casamance and Saint-Louis, which lay too far to the south and north of the ‘peanut basin’, reflected more starkly still their growing marginality to the groundnut economy: they only drew in twenty and forty-eight migrants respectively.\textsuperscript{61} Furthermore, the popularity of the Sine-Saloum and, in particular, of Kaolack and its immediate hinterland only increased as the 1920s wore on — by 1927, there were some 127 adult Libano-Syrians in the subdivision of Kaolack, and 229 in the town itself.\textsuperscript{62} I have sought here to unpack the bundle of motives which drove Eastern Mediterranean migrants to head for AOF in the early years of the twentieth century, and led them to settle in particular localities. The example and injunctions and monetary assistance of friends and relatives, with whom those who stayed behind remained in permanent contact, and the desire to


\textsuperscript{60} ANS AOF 11 D 3/37, ‘Etat nominatif des Syriens installés dans le cercle du CAYOR’, n.d. [1924].


recreate — or create — family ties; these all certainly did matter in drawing Lebanese migrants to the Federation, as some sought to weave webs of relations around themselves. But just as important, perhaps, were the potent tales of profit which circulated through the villages and market towns of Mount Lebanon and Jabal ‘Amil — stories migrants told, but which were then propagated far beyond their immediate audiences, or which were spun by the migration agents and hostel-keepers strung out along the paths of migration. These helped to foster a certain vicarious familiarity with AOF, to make of it a plausible destination. And this same complex amalgam of factors — a desire for the familiar faces and accents of home, an intermingled sense of locality and confession, but also rumours of opportunity and new openings — pushed migrants to settle in particular places, or to keep moving restlessly about, coming and going within and without Africa. It makes sense, then, to think of Lebanese migrants to AOF not just as men and women bound to others by common roots, but also as fellow travellers moving along a series of routes.

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