

Iliya Harik on Lebanon and Egypt in light of his critics

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I.

Iliya Harik is well known among historians, sociologists, and political scientists of the middle east to have extensively covered modern Lebanon and Egypt. What is less known, however, is why he moved rather swiftly, as soon as he completed in 1964 at the University of Chicago his doctoral dissertation in political science on nineteenth-century Ottoman Mount Lebanon, to study rural politics and the conditions of the peasantry in Egypt under Nasser's dictatorial rule. The links between Lebanon and Egypt in Harik's work seem *prima facie* there, but they haven't been thoroughly explored neither by researchers interested in his work, nor probably by Harik himself for that matter. Yet, it is indeed those links between nineteenth-century "feudal" Lebanon, in conjunction with Lebanon's post-independence liberal parliamentary régime, on one hand, and Egypt's peasantry and its mobilization under Nasser, on the other, that need to be examined, linked, assessed and critiqued. The picture that will emerge would in all likelihood not be indicative of Harik's work in its totality, but would nevertheless reflect the dilemmas faced by a generation of social scientists of the post-World War II era contemplating the backwardness and failures of the Arab world and the eastern Mediterranean, and already by and large disillusioned by revolutionary politics and its concurrent mass mobilizations of peasants, workers, state employees and army officers. By the time the young Harik was immersed in his fieldwork in Lebanon as a doctoral student, and may have already at the time been seriously thinking of permanently settling in North America for a tenured academic position, rather than staying in his native land, the eastern Mediterranean and the Arab world at large,

had already gone through two major debacles, the 1956 Suez crisis, which de facto led to the consolidation of Nasser's *mukhābarāt* rule, and the spread of Nasserism as an ideology in the Arab world; followed by the 1967 six-day war fiasco, which destabilized the iron-clipped régimes, without, however, evincing their grip on society and delegitimizing them completely. However, what is puzzling is that such massive failure did not lead to any minor or major régime change throughout the Arab world, nor to the street revolts that we have been recently witnessing since December 2010. Harik himself, who had made extensive contacts with official authorities and locals alike to conduct research in specific localities of rural Egypt in the mid-1960s, had to interrupt his research in June 1967, only to return the following summer of 1968, probably puzzled by the fact that the state political machinery was still intact in place; yet it did change in aspects that he had to account for. One major shift may have been a suspicion nurtured towards the state and its failed policies, in particular the failure to industrialize, democratize, and improve the status of education, illiteracy, the family and women. By the time Harik was working on his doctoral dissertation, and few years later on Egypt, there was already a disillusionment with revolutionary politics, the monolithic one-party state protected by its intelligence services, and a politics that relied on faked mass mobilization by state apparatuses; yet, there were no signs, as is more evident today, that such apparatuses were on their way to being outlawed by mass disillusionment and protest. Harik did not, however, proceed with a critique of ideology and its disillusioned politics (the way the likes of Fouad Ajami and Sadeq Jalal al-Azm proceeded¹). Having learned in his doctoral dissertation how to conduct an analysis of social structure the hard way, Harik moved from social history in a tradition in line with the French Annales school (even though he seldom refers to them directly), to sociology and political science, looking at the second half of the twentieth century, when the so-called cold war was at its height, for indications as

¹ Fouad Ajami, *The Arab Predicament: Arab Political Thought and Practice since 1967*, 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press, 1992; Sadeq Jalal al-'Azm, *al-Naqd al-dhati ba'da al-hazima*, Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1967.

to why such failures became so well rooted, and the Arab world was increasing looking as if locked in an impasse. That he therefore bypassed ideology, within a multidisciplinary and comparatist perspective, is certainly what makes his work more valuable to us, that is, to those who think in terms of social and economic structures as key components for understanding societies and civilizations. But how much of Harik's work is still valuable to us today, namely for those who still operate within the social sciences of this early and anxious 21st century? Could Harik's views and his respective methodologies on Lebanon and Egypt, which he had worked out for his own fieldwork in the 1960s and 1970s, be significant to us? The task that I'm setting here is therefore one of partial evaluation and assessment, as not all the works of Harik will be scrutinized. To begin with, we need to understand the methodology behind such works as feudal Lebanon and the mass mobilization of the peasantry in contemporary Egypt, which could be very different, considering regional and period differences. Are such works symptomatic of modernization paradigms and the regional area studies that were common in American scholarship in the post-Second World War era, or are they more deeply rooted in the classics of the social sciences, hence their time framework and the anxieties of the moment are not their essential features? Second of all, I will address such concerns not only based on my own research (which on Mount Lebanon overlaps with that of Harik²), findings, and personal criticisms, but also on those of others whose research also overlapped with that of Harik, and who leveled criticisms against him, at times severe and devastating. I will focus on two criticisms in particular: one by the late eminent French orientalist Dominique Chevallier (full disclosure: I completed my own doctoral dissertation with Chevallier at the Sorbonne in 1986), and the other by Timothy Mitchell, the British scholar who taught at New York University for a long time, and is now part of the faculty at Columbia University. I must admit that the choice of two well known scholars is at the same time eclectic, as it reflects personal interests of mine, and poses problems in particular when it comes to the timing of

² See my *Grammars of Adjudication: the economics of judicial decision-making in fin-de-siècle Ottoman Beirut and Damascus*, Beirut: Institut Français du Proche-Orient, 2007.

such criticisms, or the time framework out of which they have emanated. For instance, Chevallier's take on Harik's doctoral dissertation developed when the former was completing his own Doctorat d'État at the Sorbonne in the 1960s on 19th-century Mount Lebanon. In this instance, the critique is not only between rivals who happen to have been working on the same subject, but more importantly, there is not that crucial time distance that would have enabled the criticism to mature beyond the methodologies of the 1960s. By contrast, between Harik and Mitchell the framework is entirely different: Mitchell is known for his work on Egypt in the 19th and 20th centuries,³ but on grounds totally different from Harik, as he lacked the first-hand experience that the latter had developed in his fieldwork on Egypt; their methodologies are for all purposes different (Mitchell's focus is solely theoretical and lacks any serious fieldwork), and more importantly, Mitchell's take on Harik comes a couple of decades after the publication of the mass mobilization of the Egyptian peasantry, hence benefits from the time lag that it took to witness the fall of the Berlin Wall, the dominance of the American social sciences across the Atlantic, and the infatuation of the latter with French deconstructionism and German critical theory. In many respects, Mitchell understands Egypt, as it developed under Muhammad Ali and then liberated itself from the British yoke, through the critical apparatuses of French postmodernism, in particular the likes of Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, while the Harik of the 1960s and 1970s, when he made his reputation as scholar, was into development and modernization theories that were mostly common in U.S. academic circles. I'm sure that Harik became well aware of the infatuation of the American social sciences first with the Frankfurt School critical theory (from Walter Benjamin to Jürgen Habermas), then with French postmodernism, and as an outcome of the latter, with the critique of Orientalism as led by the likes of Edward Said.⁴ The three combined have probably replaced what was in the post-War era a leftist Marxism. As we'll see, Mitchell comes

³ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, University of California Press, 1991; *Rule of Experts: Egypt, techno-politics, modernity*, University of California Press, 2002.

⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, Vintage, 1979.

with a critical apparatus that combats that of Harik on many different grounds, representing a global assessment of development and modernization theories based for the most part on continental critical theories.

II.

All of this seems very far from Harik's early doctoral research on Mount Lebanon under the Ottomans. We therefore need a little *détour* to see where we can fit all this together. Even though there were no two provinces of the Ottoman Empire that would look similar, the empire has been conceived by historians as a single unit managed by a bureaucratic center in Istanbul, receiving various broad descriptions as to the essence of its sultanic rule. Marshall Hodgson coined the terms of "military patrimonial absolutism" in conjunction with the "qānūn consciousness" that acted as the ideological forefront to the bureaucracy.⁵ Yet, if patrimonialism defines a condition whereby families and households were granted privileges in return for services to the sultan, his household and bureaucracy, and may well apply to the Ottoman empire, absolutism certainly confuses the whole issue, as it assumes a total control from the sultanic center to the forces on the ground. It would thus imply a situation somewhere between France under Louis XIV and Muscovite Russia under the Romanovs. Yet, as Reinhard Bendix has persuasively argued, even the former would not qualify to full absolutism, considering that once we analyze the regional forces on the ground, we realize that they served the central state only on the condition that they were kept autonomous within their own communities. By contrast the Russian Romanov state had to consolidate itself by sapping the social powers and reducing their local authority.⁶ The Ottoman system was neither French nor Russian in that regard, as it lacked the delicate centralization of the former and

⁵ Marshall Hodgson, *Venture of Islam*, vol. 3, Chicago: University Press, 1977, book 5, chapter 3.

⁶ Reinhard Bendix, *Kings or People: Power and the Mandate to Rule*, University of California Press, 1980, chapters 4, 10 and 13.

the delegation of power to individuals and families in the regions, which were simultaneously autonomous and acted as French state officials. The Ottoman system also lacked the absolutism of the Russian monarchy, as it left too much power to the provinces, tribes, and various urban groups. It is, indeed, such an autonomy of local power that Harik explores for 19th-century Mount Lebanon. One of his main arguments is that the land tenure régime at the time, known as the *iltizām*, which implied auctioning state *miri* land on a three-year contract that was renewable, was only good as a taxation and collection system, hence was *not* political. Let us note here that the *iltizām* in Mount Lebanon was the de facto tax-farming system since the conquest of the region in the early 16th century (1516), hence it did not replace at a later stage the familiar *timar-sipahi* system, which was predominant in the empire in the 16th–17th centuries.⁷ What is important here for our purposes, namely the criticism that will be leveled against Harik by the likes of Chevallier, is that he assumes that the land tenure system in the empire fails to feed for a *political* infrastructure that would have provided the *a'yān* nobility with a degree of autonomy and a hierarchy within the regional structure of local power—what would have turned the *a'yān* into an aristocracy. In other words, if the land grant system did not push for any political hierarchy, then what did politics consist of in the provinces, and more specifically in the area of Greater Syria? What was political power in cities like Aleppo and Damascus, if the *a'yān* of those cities were only tax-farmers without genuine political power?⁸

The issue that Harik was wrestling with regarding the *a'yān* of the Ottoman Empire, and more specifically those of the urban centers in Bilād al-Sham, in conjunction with their fellow *muqāta'jīs* in Mount Lebanon, was that of *delegation* of political

⁷ Abdul-Rahim Abu-Husayn, “The *Iltizām* of Maṣṣūr Furaykh: A Case Study of *Iltizām* in Sixteenth Century Syria,” in Tarif Khalidi, ed., *Land Tenure and Social Transformation in the Middle East*, Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1984, 249–256.

⁸ Albert Hourani, “Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Notables,” in Polk and Chambers, *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East*, Chicago University Press, 1968, 41–68.

authority from the imperial center and the sultan's household in Istanbul to the regional a'yān; a delegation that is often described in Ottoman historiography as the "age of a'yān," which presumably was characteristic of the late 18th century; an evolution that was prompted by the weakening of the traditional households (*kapı*), the commercialization of land and agriculture, and the autonomy that the iltizām system provided to tax-farmers, many of which were a'yān.⁹ If, as Harik believed, the iltizām tax-farming system was nothing but a tax- and rent-collecting enterprises, then the whole notion of "delegation" of power would in this instance simply prove pointless, as it would be a delegation dispossessed of any political imperative: Why would the a'yān accept tax-farming without the risk of delegation of political power? Why would they limit themselves to the role of tax-farmers? In theory, the Ottoman sultan as ruler of the empire nominally owned the whole realm of landed property as miri land (land that belonged to the emir), but in practice the territorial possessions of the sultanic household were the main source of revenue and of favors in peace and war, which had to be auctioned as iltizām to the highest bidding families; however, the same families managed to keep their land holdings unchallenged for decades in a row, which is an indication, as some historians have argued, of political delegation. To be sure, these possessions were scattered, and the realm as a whole was governed through various forms of delegated authority, which is described by historians as an era of "decentralization." Sultans were typically torn between the need to delegate authority and the desire not to lose it. They were frequently driven to appeal to the personal loyalty or consecrated obligation of those to whom they had delegated authority in order to buttress their own position. The internal balance of powers, in particular when it came to the status of minority non-Muslim *millet*s (Christians, Armenians, and Jews), was also influenced by alliances or conflicts with outside powers, a condition greatly affected in early times

⁹ Karen Barkey, *Empire of Difference: The Ottomans in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, chapter 6.

by the absence of stable, clearly defined frontiers.¹⁰ Harik's take on the political and socio-economic infrastructure of the Empire is that he wanted to dissociate for the empire at large the *political* act of delegation to the urban a'yān–multazim class from its tax-farming functions. Indeed, he has repeatedly argued, as he did in the introduction to the Arabic translation of his 19th-century Lebanon book, that the iltizām tax-farming as an institution lacked any political connotation.¹¹ However, and herein lies the main crux of the argument, such political connotations *did* exist for Ottoman Mount Lebanon, a politicization of the system that Harik would describe as “feudal.” Hence Harik uses here “feudalism” in tandem with its European connotations, namely, that it was a hierarchical system of grants, duties, and obligations, which provided the grantees with privileges for the services towards their overlords, and with much political leeway, that is, regional autonomy. Hence, from this perspective, the Lebanese muqāta'jīs *were* indeed political beasts, while the a'yān–multazims of the Syrian Sunni cities were not. In other words, the internal contentions over the distribution of authority had visibly achieved a political status in Lebanon while they failed to do so in the Syrian hinterland. In Lebanon there was a feudal hierarchy that implied contracts and obligations between muqāta'jīs, mudabbirs (the lords' assistants), farmers and peasants, all of which mediated by the Maronite Church. In the Syrian hinterland by contrast, the urban a'yān did not connect well with their peasants, leaving them at the mercy of intermediary multazims and aghas. Hence in the Syrian system the a'yān played the role of prime multazims that negotiated their contracts with the central state and local governor, even though they managed the process of the iltizām on their own.¹² Unlike

¹⁰ Bendix, *Kings or People*, 7.

¹¹ Iliya F. Harik, *al-Taḥawwul al-siyāsī fī tārikh Lubnān al-ḥadīth*, Bayrūt: al-Ahlīyah lil-Nashr wa-al-Tawzī', 1982.

¹² Timur Kuran. *The Long Divergence. How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, 79, notes that “In contrast to Europe, no aristocracy developed in Turkey, or the Arab world, or Iran. Although the prevailing inheritance system was not the only factor at work—expropriations and opportunistic taxation played important roles—what matters is that it contributed to wealth fragmentation.” Harik would argue that, in contrast to Greater Syria, and

Lebanon, therefore, the peasantry was mostly under corvée labor, overworked, and chronically unable to pay its taxes on time. In spite of this, the Syrian hinterland never witnessed the kind of peasant revolts of Mount Lebanon. Harik's method consists in separating Lebanon from its Syrian hinterland, by buttressing its feudal infrastructure. That was probably in preparation for studies he had in mind on contemporary 20th century Lebanon, and maybe even Egypt, as witnessed by the rapid pace of publications between 1968 and 1975, a brief period that covers the three books¹³ under discussion. Harik must have therefore made up his mind on Ottoman Lebanon, contemporary Lebanon, and rural contemporary Egypt, rather early, probably when working on his doctoral dissertation. But for what purposes exactly? What was the common thread that motivated him in less than a decade to conduct three different studies that do not seem *prima facie* to be well connected? Let me suggest here the theme of "modernization," even though Harik to my knowledge did not propose such connection between the three works under study. Broadly speaking, I understand modernization as the passage from a nineteenth-century agrarian infrastructure to one that intends to be technicalistic and industrial; and Harik's intuition was indeed to realize that "feudalism" was a key prerequisite for this "liberal" "capitalist" passage between the old and new modern orders.

When Harik published in 1968 his doctoral dissertation on Mount Lebanon there was little social history of the region at the time. What he probably did not realize is that there were, in parallel to his own study, several others in process, and that were to be published soon, all of which he will briefly address in his introduction to the Arabic translation in 1982: the works, all of which based on doctoral dissertations,

the bulk of the empire, Lebanon did develop an aristocracy, thanks to a multitude of social and political conditions, hence his thesis on Lebanon's presumed feudalism, which at its core assumes the existence of an aristocratic group.

¹³ Lebanon in the 19th century, the 1972 Lebanese electoral system, and Egypt's peasantry under Nasser.

of Toufic Touma,¹⁴ the Russian orientalist I. M. Smilyanskaya,¹⁵ and the French Orientalist Dominique Chevallier. It is, indeed, with the latter that Harik's work would become the most contentious.

We are now ready to address Chevallier's critique of Harik. As expected, Chevallier would address Harik only through the latter's contention of 19th-century Mount Lebanon as a "feudal" society. Why such a narrowing? Why should only Lebanon's "feudalism" become the main contentious issue? The reason is that Chevallier wants to conceptualize Lebanon within the broader socio-economic infrastructure of the Ottoman Empire, while granting it a uniqueness of its own. Harik by contrast underscores Lebanon's "feudal" uniqueness first and foremost, in order to underscore its *political* infrastructure, only to proceed forward with a thesis that would *depoliticize* the rest of the élites of the Syrian provinces of the empire. Thus, when Chevallier looks at Harik's démarche and methodology, the contention is strong:

In a recent article, Ilya F. Harik¹⁶ attempts to compare the organization of 18th-century Mount Lebanon to that of an abstract model of medieval Europe instead of situating it in the context of systems and structures in the middle east and the rest of the Ottoman Empire. The confusion to which all his démarche leads to is even more acute than his superficial knowledge of medieval Europe. Such an error doubles within a certain tendency that aims at separating the becoming of Lebanon from those of other Arab countries and its Ottoman past. Harik thus designates the *muqāta'a* under the name of

¹⁴ Toufic Touma, *Paysans et institutions féodales chez les Druses et les Maronites du Liban du XVIIe siècle à 1914*, Beirut: Université Libanaise, 2 vol., 1986 [1971].

¹⁵ I. M. Smilyanskaya, *Krestyanskoe dvizhenie v Livane* (Moscow, 1965), Arabic translation, Dar al-Farabi, Beirut, 1972.

¹⁶ "The Iqtā' System in Lebanon; A Comparative Political View," *The Middle East Journal*, autumn 1969, vol. 19, 405–421.

iqṭā'—and which he translates as “fief”—a connotation that was only used in the 15th and 16th centuries, for example, in the work of Salih b. Yahya, but very little in the Lebanese documents of the 18th and 19th centuries, even though the two terms belong to the same root and practically synonymous by the 18th century, and even though the population of Mount Lebanon was living in a milieu that conserved the old juridical traditions respected by the Turks, which amounted to an integration within the fiscal administration of the Empire. Harik, however, refuses to bow to such evidence, and sees in the *iqṭā'* only a political system—while transforming the word “political” with an such an imprecision that it becomes mythical.¹⁷

While such a harsh critique may seem like hairsplitting among two eminent professionals of the same region, it signals an important debate, first, within Ottoman historiography, and second, within Lebanon itself, as to the uniqueness of the Lebanese model within the broader Ottoman worldview, and more recently, the Arab world at large. Notice how Chevallier narrows down the debate to the use of *iqṭā'*, whose Arabic root is the verb *qata'a*, which literally means to cut, to assign, or

¹⁷ Dominique Chevallier, *La société du mont Liban à l'époque de la révolution industrielle en Europe*, Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1971, 84–85: « Dans un article récent, Ilya F. Harik cherche à comparer l'organisation du mont Liban au XVIIIe siècle à un modèle abstrait de l'Europe médiévale, au lieu de la situer exactement dans les systèmes et structures du Moyen-Orient arabe et de l'Empire ottoman ; la confusion à laquelle aboutit toute sa démarche, est d'autant plus sensible que sa connaissance de la féodalité occidentale est superficielle. Cette erreur se double d'ailleurs d'une certaine « tendance » qui vise à séparer le destin du Liban de celui des autres pays arabes et du passé ottoman. Harik désigne la *muqāṭa'a* par le nom de *iqṭā'*—qu'il traduit par « fief »—, mot qui est utilisé aux XVe–XVIe siècles encore, dans Sālih b. Yahyā par exemple, mais fort peu dans les documents libanais des XVIIIe et XIXe siècles ; bien que les deux termes aient la même racine et soient pratiquement synonymes dès le XIIIe siècle, bien que la population du mont Liban vive dans une serre conservant de vieilles traditions juridiques respectées par les Turcs, il y a une évolution à l'époque ottomane dans le sens d'une intégration à l'administration fiscale de l'Empire. Mais Harik se refuse à admettre cette évidence, et il ne voit dans l'*iqṭā'* qu'un système politique—en entourant bien entendu le mot « politique » d'une imprécision qui rejoint le mythe. »

to grant a *muqāta'a*, the fiscal unit granted to the *muqāta'jīs*, that is, those responsible for the collection of various taxes and rents. It is the abundant use of all such terms in the texts of the period that pushed Harik to conceptualize the Lebanese *iqtā'* as one of feudalism rather than basic tax collection, or in other words, it all boils down to a crucial distinction between the *iltizām* (or previously the *timar*) of the Ottoman system at large, on one hand, and the Lebanese *iqtā'* on the other. Chevallier claims that even though the term *iqtā'* was indeed used in the Lebanese texts of the early Ottoman period, it ceased to be so by the 18th and 19th centuries.

I view both Harik's notion of Lebanese "feudalism," and Chevallier's critique as insufficiently developed for an in-depth treatment of the Ottoman political and economic infrastructures; and in terms of what took hold of the social sciences since the 1970s, they both lack an in-depth textual analysis for a micro documentation of the "patrimonial" and "feudal" realities of Ottoman societies. To begin with, we need to contrast between a social system that was prebendal and patrimonial, like the bulk of Ottoman societies, and one that was feudal, along the lines of European feudalism, Tokugawa Japan, and possibly Mount Lebanon. Patrimonialism emphasizes rule through peremptory commands by the sultan, his servants (including the Janissary corps), and his household. Even if we are led to believe that by the 17th–18th centuries the "household" became the central unit for the reproduction of professional networks, and that the sultan's household was more placed within a competitive circle than standing on its own, patrimonialism was still under such circumstances the system that was the norm. Moreover, even if for the same time framework, that of "the age of a'yān," as it's often labeled by historians, the center of command has loosened a bit, the regional a'yān were a long way from qualifying as the feudal overlords that were common in parts of Europe of the middle ages.¹⁸

¹⁸ Barkey, *Empire of Difference*, chapter 6.

Harik would argue that the stability and gradual development of Lebanese local government were due to the long-established independence of local authorities, which the long Ottoman patrimonial reign failed to fully integrate within its own socio-political framework. Oligarchic rule came to prevail among the muqātaʿjīs and their mudabbirs (assistants), in the courts, and in the relations between lords and peasants. Such an infrastructure, different from the one present in the rest of Syria, pushed local influence and participation in “national affairs” in Mount Lebanon to new heights.¹⁹ Since this oligarchy was constructed on patron–clients relationships, while respecting inter-communal hierarchies within the system of the big muqātaʿjī families, it was solid enough to be immune from outside interference, even though the wālīs of Tripoli, Sidon, and Damascus all had their say. One can speak, then, of a “nationalization” of local politics, and compare such a “national” political formation with the Ottoman one that was preponderant in the rest of Syria, which witnessed a consolidation of aʿyān power that, in turn, was subordinated to sultanic power. Throughout the Ottoman period, the sultanic household constructed a civil and military establishment which ensured their dominance over the squirearchy of the aʿyān–multazims group. Consequently, there was no real autonomy to this latter group, and no real “national” politics either. The distinction between Greater Syria and Mount Lebanon points to the patrimonial and autocratic, on one hand, and the feudal principle of organization on the other. While the first emphasizes rule through peremptory commands by the sultan and his household servants, the second emphasizes the association between muqātaʿjīs, mudabbirs, peasants and the Maronite Church, all of which have more standing in their communities than the aʿyān of the Syrian cities. In practice, however, these two forms of rule have coexisted, in particular in Mount Lebanon, hence the difficulties encountered by Harik at separating Lebanon from the rest of Syria, and the easy criticism that he received from the likes of Chevallier.

¹⁹ Compare with medieval feudal England, in Bendix, *Kings or People*, 199.

Harik was therefore correct at looking at the experience of Ottoman Mount Lebanon as vastly superior to the rest of the empire, but he was unable to explain it as well as he should, probably because the historiography at the time failed to provide him with the clues that he badly needed, and also because of the limited conceptualization that the theme of “feudalism” received in middle eastern historiography. He must have intuitively thought that Lebanon’s 20th-century liberalism must have come from a prior experience, that of feudalism, and that it must have evolved along the lines of a dismantlement of the old feudal structure in favor of more egalitarian and commercially oriented practices. He therefore looked at Egypt as a counter Lebanon (or a counter Turkey) which only adopted feudalism late—assuming it ever did—and at a price.

Harik must have become aware of Chevallier’s critique of his own work sometime in the 1970s, since he did directly address the critique in his introduction to the Lebanese edition of his *iqṭā’* doctoral thesis. Again, here, the critique to the critique remains limited in scope. Thus, in his introduction to the Lebanese 1982 edition, which was the second one amid a prime failed attempt to get the first translation on track in the 1970s (it was burned and completely destroyed in the early stages of the long civil war), Harik admits that the social history of Mount Lebanon received more attention than he had expected since the publication of his own study, singling two in particular.²⁰ The first by the Russian orientalist I. M. Smilyanskaya, which is described by Harik as “within the common Marxist tradition,” which in this instance means that the researcher had overworked class stratification and struggle while overlooking the true nature of Lebanese *political* formations. In other words, Smilyanskaya portrays *muqāta’jīs*, *mudabbirs*, and peasants, among others, as members of various dominating and dominated classes, inscribed within a class stratification that made Lebanese feudalism possible. Within such perspective, politics becomes an infrastructural stance of the feudal infrastructure, which in turn, was based on class stratification. The difference between Harik and Smilyanskaya is

²⁰ Harik, *al-Taḥawwul*, introduction.

that the former would underscore the political, which for him meant the uniqueness of Lebanese feudalism vis-à-vis the iltizām model in the rest of Syria, and, indeed, in the Ottoman Empire at large. Before working, one more time, on such differences, let us first see how Harik responds to Chevallier.

If Harik's take on Smilyanskaya was perfectly predictable (Marxists tend to be all targeted for ignoring the political and cultural), part of his assessment of Chevallier will also be unsurprising, namely that we're into "French orientalism," and Chevallier's social history of 19th-century Mount Lebanon epitomizes the orientalist method that centers uncritically on the culture as a whole.²¹ It remains unclear, however, what "culturalist" method Harik had in mind, and why such a method would only be common among so-called "orientalists." After all, the French Annales school, as pioneered at the time by the work of Fernand Braudel (and the earlier generation of Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, who was Braudel's mentor), had also emphasized "culture" in the name of what the Annales epitomized as *histoire des mentalités*. Chevallier was therefore precisely doing what the Annales wanted any historian to do (and his earliest articles as a doctoral student at the Sorbonne in the 1950s and 1960s were published in the Annales, whose strong point at the time was precisely social and economic history; Chevallier was particularly interested in the labor of textile artisans, and how the industrial revolution had dispossessed and displaced uprooted such a traditional labor force²²), namely to document social and economic history as embedded within a *mentalité*, or what American anthropologists would call "culture," namely the set of normative values that would make a peculiar social and economic configuration possible. Such an approach was therefore predominant at the time within French historiography, and with the wide success of the Annales, it passed through to the other side of the Atlantic, pushing it inside the narrow circles of American academia and beyond. Since Harik does not

²¹ Harik, *al-Taḥawwul*, 14ff.

²² Dominique Chevallier, *Villes et travail en Syrie, du XIXe au XXe siècle*, Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1982.

provide any clues as to why so-called “French orientalism” would qualify as “culturalist” in its approach, the criticism here seems a bit off-handed, in particular coming only few years amid the publication of Said’s much celebrated *Orientalism* (1979). Ironically, Said’s orientalism safeguarded French orientalism, or a brand of it, as practiced by the likes of Louis Massignon, Maxime Rodinson, and Jacques Berque, against the Anglo–American and Germanic, for having that ability to look at alien cultures from the inside. In sum, Harik’s off-handed labeling of Chevallier as being faithful to an orientalist perspective that is “cultural,” without any traces as to where such a tradition begins and ends, does not serve much his purpose in defending his own method against that of Chevallier. Suffice it to say that for our purposes here that Chevallier is situated within an Annalist tradition, one that places emphasis on the social and economic, with *mentalité* as the “culture” that would bring them together. The underestimation of politics is not so much an orientalist endeavor, as much as an Annales perspective, which is no different from the Marxism of Marx and Engels, which look at politics as a superstructure derived in the final instance from the societal infrastructures that make their very existence possible.

The core of Harik’s take on Chevallier, however, is not orientalism, not even French orientalism per se, but what he ambiguously delimits as a “legalist” method, and as if to underscore his proposal, he inserts “legalist” in English side-by-side to the Arabic *huqūqī*. What does that mean? A “legalist” method of reasoning and of reading texts, claims Harik to his Arabic readers, thinks of politics as a modern phenomenon that neither existed prior to modernity nor outside of European modernity.²³ Chevallier’s “legalism” is at stake here, which fails to perceive the *political* implications of Lebanon’s feudalism, and which does not see the system as feudal in the first place, reducing it to tax-collection, while denying its genuine feudal character altogether. Chevallier’s orientalism comes therefore side-by-side to his so-called legalism, or his legalistic approach, in that it denies a political becoming to

²³ Harik, *al-Taḥawwul*, 16.

premodern and preindustrial Lebanon. But why then denote such an approach as legal or legalistic? It could be because it looks at the contractualistic nature of Lebanese society, where various contracts between lords, their subordinates and peasants, whether legalized in writing or through custom, as providing the adequate social foundations, without, however, anything that would be “political.” The political would be provided through the coercive structures of the empire, and the autocratic rule from the center.

III.

Iliya Harik’s short book, his first in Arabic, *Those Who Govern Lebanon [Man Yahkum Lubnān]*, comes without an interrogation mark, even though the title could be taken both ways, as an interrogation on the status of the “political élites” in Lebanon in the early 1970s, and in this case a literal translation from Arabic would add the interrogation, as in *Who Governs Lebanon?*; or as a descriptive morphology (cartography) of such an élite, and in this case our former transliteration would probably make more sense.²⁴ Both ways, therefore, the title makes sense, once we consider that Harik was attempting to draw a map of the Lebanese political élite in the aftermath of the 1972 parliamentary elections, the last one before the 15-year civil war (1975–1990). Harik, who was probably on leave that eventful year of 1972 from his teaching duties at Bloomington, Indiana, closely followed those elections, drew a cartography (*état des lieux*) of Lebanon’s political élites at the time, without even realizing that it would take 20 more years, marred with violence and destruction, before the following elections would take place. I will not be able to address here what the 1992, 1996 and 2000 parliamentary elections brought in respect to their pre-war predecessors, in particular the 1972 elections carefully analyzed by Harik. Suffice it to say that in an era of “democracy without choice,” as the political scientist and parliamentarian Farid al-Khazin aptly put it, what took place back in 1972 looks in hindsight as the age of democracy. Whether Harik was

²⁴ Iliya Harik, *Man Yahkum Lubnān*, Beirut: Dar al-Nahār, 1972. When Harik quotes this book in his work on Egypt, he does so without the interrogation mark.

indeed aware of such an end to Lebanese democracy, or its curtailment amid 15 years of senseless violence, is another matter. What we know for sure is that *Those Who Govern Lebanon*, published only three years on the eve of the civil war, is written from beginning to end on an optimistic note, one that not only would not foresee that Lebanese society was on its way for a massive and violent breakup, but more importantly, that something was wrong in the Lebanese socio-political system altogether.²⁵ Should we therefore place Harik liable for that kind of lack of foresight?

What strikes a reader like myself 40 years after *Those Who Govern Lebanon* is the degree of optimism and faith that Harik professes in the Lebanese electoral system. We need to differentiate here, for purposes that would become clearer later, between the electoral system per se, which at the time, meant selecting 99 members to the parliament, on one hand, and the social structure that made possible such a parliament on the other. In fact, Harik limited himself to the electoral process itself, and fell short of an analysis of social structure. In that regard, he could not be blamed for being overtly optimistic about the electoral process, as there was no indication *at the time* that the civil war was *primarily* rooted in a problem of élite representation: in light of the Ta'if accords in 1989, all the issues that were thought to be wrong in the Lebanese system of representation, such as the unequal representation between Muslims and Christians, or the low number of representatives and their generational and regional origins, were to be addressed in the new post-civil war parliaments, beginning with the one elected in 1992, but which regrettably did not lead to a better system than the one in 1972. The reason is that obviously there was more at stake in the 15-year civil war than the parliamentary and élite systems, as the link of the war to the crisis of political representation needs a full demonstration, rather than be taken for granted.

²⁵ Farid al-Khazin, *Intikhābāt Lubnān mā ba'd al-harb, 1992, 1996, 2000: Dīmuqrāṭiyya bilā khiyār*, Beirut: Dār al-Nahār, 2000.

In the feud between Harik and Chevallier the latter would portray himself as a professional historian who is not supposed to judge the past in terms of its present, while Harik clearly trespasses that role into political analysis of the present. Thus, while Harik portrays Lebanon's "superiority" over Syria in present times, he clearly does not wish to solely attribute it to a bifurcation that would have occurred in the last century or so, but to trace it back to Ottoman times. More importantly, the internal evolution of the Lebanese political system would only be comprehensible to a modern observer by tracing it back to Ottoman times. Herein lies the importance of the first chapter of *Those Who Govern Lebanon*: contrary to common sense, the old feudal and aristocratic family élites had dissolved a long time ago, giving birth to an aggressive middle class which is not shy at using politics—more precisely, parliamentary elections—as a stepping stone to promote itself. Indeed, such an argument prompts us to fill several gaps. First of all, regarding the becoming of the old feudal class: once it felt stranded in the limited silk economy of Mount Lebanon, it expanded elsewhere and moved to the cities, transforming Beirut into a major commercial and cultural hub of the east of the Mediterranean. As the old feudal aristocratic élite metamorphoses by the turn of the last century into an entrepreneurial venture class, it not only becomes less important politically, but more importantly, it opens Pandora's box for that sacred middle class, which was to set the professional and political norm in post-Ottoman Lebanon. By the time Lebanon became a quasi-independent state under the French Mandate, stripped of its Syrian background, the newly formed parliament would become, among others, the magnet for that dynamic middle class to visibly establish its power in broad daylight.

In the introductory chapter of *Those Who Govern Lebanon*, Harik argues that the "political élite," broadly defined as those who make decisions and have some influence, has, contrary to common sense, marginalized its old feudal aristocratic elements, while replacing them with a professional middle class: lawyers, doctors, and merchants, who for the most part received college education in Lebanon and abroad, now constitute the majority of the parliaments members since

independence, including of course those of 1972. Harik therefore not only points, statistics in hand, to such obvious facts, but seems even more interested at analyzing the roots behind that wrong perception of the Lebanese electorate: Why in spite of all facts does popular perception persists, namely that the same old families *are* indeed the most prominent and influential?

Harik shows that, contrary to popular belief, in the three parliaments of 1960–1964–1968 only 11 members out of the 99 (elected on the ratio of 5 Christians to 4 Muslims) were from aristocratic–feudal origins. The climax was at the time of the Mandate when the percentage was 22 in the majlis of 1927 and 36 in that of 1934. As to the first year of independence in 1943 the percentage dwindled to 20, until it reached the low figure of 11 since 1957. In the last 1972 election analyzed by Harik at the time of the publication of his book, there were only 7 MPs out of 99 with feudal–aristocratic origins. The figures are very similar to the parliamentary ones when it comes to the various cabinets since the Mandate or even the presidency for that matter. It is undeniable then that the old feudal–aristocratic class had lost its past aura.

The decline of the old feudal–aristocratic class, however, would only come as Harik's inaugural point, out of which he will marshal his defense of the Lebanese electoral and élite system as it had matured by the early 1970s. If those who stood as influential were from the middle class and the bourgeoisie, was that due to the professionalism of such classes, and has the profession replaced was used to be a relation between land and status? As the landowners seem to be gone, they were replaced by professionals and businessmen,²⁶ it is hence unlikely that under present circumstances the new middle class professional élite would work in favor of the popular classes in society (*ibid.*, 41). An MP is in the early 1970s on average older than their voters, more cultivated, and belonging to a higher social standing, with a respected job and a degree of wealth higher than its constituency (*ibid.*, 42).

²⁶ Harik, *Man Yahkum*, 40.

Moreover, Harik argues, the new post-Ottoman élite is of such dynamism that it proves unable to maintain its own status benefits for prolonged periods of time. For instance, when it comes to filling the cabinet positions, the families that had at least one minister in the cabinet were unable to maintain their benefits for a second or third position; and those who persevered had taken their constituency base outside their cabinet position (ibid., 46). For a lot of those individuals and their families, therefore, the parliamentary and/or cabinet status could not be *politically* maintained even from one decade to the next (or even from one parliamentary election to the next, which were set within four-year periods), and hence acted more like stepping stones for business promotion than anything else. On the other hand, the families that managed to persevere in the political spectrum did so out of geographic, regional and class distinctions; in other words, professionalism and class promotions are not enough per se to establish the *political* perseverance of a family, a fortiori within short periodical ranges, for instance, from one parliament to another. Thus, for example, the Shi'a and the Druze are known for their problems with their representatives, which for the most part were under the hegemony of their old patriarchal families, hence representing an aberration with the rest of Lebanon.²⁷ Families like Talhuq, Junblat, Arslan, Himadeh, al-As'ad and the Maronite Khazins were all privileged families that maintained their old *Stände* privileges, rather than bet on the professionalism of the new middle and upper classes (ibid., 51).

Lebanon is known for its *tā'ifiyya*, a kind of political and juridical arrangement that grants each "confession" (*tā'ifa*) its own "autonomy" within the system. For example, within the juridical sphere, both civil and penal laws equally apply to all confessions, but when it comes to personal status (marriage, divorce and inheritance), Lebanese law acknowledges 17 different "rights," one for each

²⁷ The civil war brought new representatives for the Shi'a at large, in the form of military and bureaucratic parties like Amal and the Hezbollah, which act as mini-states within the official and battled Lebanese state.

officially accepted confessional group. In the domain of politics, up to 1972, parliaments were elected on a 5:4 ratio of Christian to Muslim MPs, which has been modified, amid the 1989 Ta'if agreements in Saudi Arabia, to an equal number of Christian and Muslim seats (63 each in the current parliament of 126). Even in an “egalitarian” system like the present one, what really matters is *how* candidates or incumbents are elected in their own conscription, which de facto implies how electoral conscriptions are mapped and defined, whether, for instance, they tend to be “large” or “small.” Largeness and smallness matter in a country where the success of, say, a Christian candidate in Kisruwan would depend not only on Christian votes in his conscription, but more importantly, on a Muslim “minority” group (enclave) within that same conscription. Thus, and that’s the crux of the matter, parliamentary law, even though it indicates how the confessional distribution of the members of parliament ought to be, with specific guidelines for each district and conscription, would not limit candidates to voters from their own confession. In short, three rules impose themselves in such a system: 1. Each one of the 17 confessions has a specific number of parliamentarians; 2. The size of each electoral conscription matters, as it determines the proportion of “outsiders” to the candidate’s own confession; and what is also of prime importance is 3. whether votes are counted on a majority or proportional basis (a majoritarian versus proportional system of counting votes).

As the Lebanese system has often been criticized for its direct reliance on the “confession” (which could be looked upon as a modern notion for “ethnicity”) as the basis for the political and juridical system, others have sought remedies either in the total abolition of “political confessionalism” (*tā’ifiyya siyāsiyya*), as if such a thing could effectively be “abolished” in an ad hoc decision; or else to improve the modes of voting, some have even pledged to transform the totality of Lebanon into one electoral unit. Harik’s views would probably look, in light of the 15-year civil war, as overtly optimistic, some would even accuse him of gross naïveté. Harik staunchly argued that the system forces voters, candidates and incumbents alike to see beyond their confession, for the simple reason that they’re not all from the same confessional group (ibid., 70). Moreover, the system forces candidates to look

closely at their conscription and locality rather than beyond them. Even the weakness of the party system has its own fortitudes, as voters and candidates look to one another in terms of what's needed for the locality, rather than, say, the confession or the party (ibid., 94), thus strengthening the ties between the member of parliament and his constituency (ibid., 105). The net outcome are the importance of local links over the national, regional, or party interests (ibid., 108).

Lebanon's long civil war did not seem to have much of an impact on the views that Harik had in mind prior to the conflict. He thus kept arguing that Lebanon's liberalism fostered economic growth, reduced class and confessional economic differences, and contributed for an equitable representation in parliament. To the obvious question, Why then the civil war?, Harik looks for regional and outside factors, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian refugee problem, which placed tens of thousands of refugees on Lebanese soil, most of which with an ever pending status, hence "stateless."²⁸ Even though such arguments tend to be common

²⁸ Harik, "Lebanon, anatomy of conflict," Hanover, N.H.: American Universities Field Staff, 1981, no. 49, 1-19:

[11] If the Lebanese war cannot be explained as a social revolution, could one then say that the government fell because the political elite failed to maintain consensus? It is clear that a breakdown in the ranks of the establishment occurred, but the reasons are not as obvious. Lebanese politics have always been marked by intense competition, rivalry, and rough tactics. Heated parliamentary elections in 1972 created a new majority yet no violence, sectarian or otherwise, was associated with the campaign, balloting, or election aftermath.

The paradox of the present Lebanese crisis is that it has taken place at a time when political integration was reaching encouraging levels and economically the country was prospering. Most significantly the system had shown sensitivity toward changing political forces. Though no formal constitutional changes were introduced for the purpose after 1943, the political weight of the Muslims in the system grew markedly. This trend can be noted first in the increase in political power of the office of Prime Minister, a position reserved to Sunni Muslims...

[12] Arguments that the elites are entrenched in the system and do not make way for aspiring leaders, consequently causing violence, are not born out of facts...

among some in the Lebanese intelligentsia,²⁹ I find them hardly convincing, and I will address them in my final critique of Harik's work.

IV.

A key element that emerges in the totality of Harik's work is the notion of class stratification in eastern Mediterranean societies, and whether such class structure would be openly competitive or closed, that is, subject to the presence of a heavily bureaucratized and militarized state apparatus, as has been the case in Egypt since 1952, and numerous Arab and Islamicate societies. Harik's first book, based on his doctoral dissertation, looked at Lebanon's defunct Ottoman feudal system positively, as a struggle between two classes, the *muqataajis* landowners, whose "ownership" of the land was only *de facto* assumed, as it was not legally granted by the Ottoman authorities. On the lower side of the social spectrum were groups of *mudabbirs*, which took care of the business of the landowners, and various categories of peasants, not to mention the institution of the Maronite church, whose clergy was very much linked to the landowners. In his feud with Chevallier, Harik points out how in Ottoman studies—and more specifically in French oriental studies—there was a failure to perceive class stratification in Lebanon as inherently *political* in its very essence—and "feudalism"-as-*iqṭā'* to Harik implies a strong political connotation that should not be underestimated. It was indeed the presence of an aristocratic ruling *élite*, the class of *muqataajis*, that made Ottoman Lebanon so

Having ruled out the class struggle thesis as explanation for the Lebanon conflict and countered the argument that the political system had failed to achieve national integration, was is left?

In simple terms, the Lebanese events were strictly political and basically an aspect of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Palestinians and Israelis have over the years carried out their extended warfare on Lebanese territory and have drawn the population into their quarrel. In addition, this warfare undermined the authority of the Lebanese government and set at odds the partners to the Lebanese concordat, the Muslims and Christians.

²⁹ See for example, Ghassan Tuani, *Une Guerre pour les autres*, Paris: Lattes, 1985.

different from the bulk of the Empire. It is, indeed, in *Man Yahkum Lubnān* that the combination of feudalism, nationalism, and competitive élite groups receives its logical achievement. The argument in Harik's first Arabic book on Lebanon, at a time when his work on feudalism was yet unavailable to Arabic audiences, is that feudalism had outlived its promises, died honorably, and is not there anymore, which is what *all* feudal structures are supposed to do, to live their normal *longue durée* lifespans: first, to institute a normative culture of rights and obligations that would regulate class struggle, then upon the collapse of the imperial structure, to open the ground for a competitive class antagonism; competitive in the sense that the state would not be regulated by an oppressive bureaucratic and military complex, and where the peasantry is not anymore the main producing force. We can see why Harik moved, upon completing his research on Lebanon, to Egypt and other Mediterranean societies where "feudalism" emerges very late under the Ottomans—by the nineteenth century, a lateness that would solidify by the early twentieth century into a landowning class that would ultimately create, as is the case in Egypt, a reactionary political and class structure that would crystallize under the monarchy. When in 1952 the free officers revolution uprooted the landowning class, it did so by destroying it and its resources completely, a move that would neither permit industrialization on solid grounds, nor a competitive class structure, as statism (*étatisme*) had already absorbed the totality of production.³⁰ If in countries

³⁰ Harik, *Economic Policy Reform in Egypt*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997:

[5] The patron state is made up of a set of rules in which the provision of livelihood of citizens and the management of business enterprises fall in the public domain as a responsibility of the government. The government in a patron state is a provider and an entrepreneurial manager whose tools of trade are central planning and control mechanisms. The authoritarian character of the July Revolution soon extended from the political arena to the marketplace.

[196] In a national effort to redefine the philosophy behind the two institutions [governments and markets], leaders of the July Revolution by and large substituted government for the market. Centralized agencies acting within the context of a national plan took the place of private actors. Subordinating the market almost totally to central authority blocked those channels that make government responsive to the public. It also disturbed the complementary equation between

like Lebanon and Turkey, the class structure remained by and large open, in the sense that the middle class grew without close monitoring by the state, it was because the state and military bureaucracies did not cripple the social forces on the ground, which were stronger than in other parts of the Middle East, while the peasantry ceased to be the main producing force; in turn, landowners were not the major driving force behind a capitalistic economy based on the power of entrepreneurial urban centers, while slowly metamorphosing into an urban commercial class. In Egypt by contrast, the late class of feudalists, which solidified only under Muhammad Ali (under the Mamluks it was still a princely tax-farming élite), did not have much of a “nationalist” outlook until Egypt received its independence from the British (Muhammad Ali looked at his policies not within an Egyptian “nationalistic” outlook, but as an Ottoman viceroy who was challenging the central policies of the sultan, such a challenge manifested itself predominantly in the colonies of Sudan and Greater Syria, both of which became open to Egyptian “reforms,” decades earlier than the Ottoman Tanzimat, which in retrospect look much more modest than the ones launched by the Egyptians). Upon independence, the monarchy was the main vehicle that maintained the lock-in between state and landlords active, and when the free officers broke the tie, it was only at a price: thinking that by undoing the élites, the state would promote industrialization, urbanization and a more dynamic class stratification; but ultimately none of that happened, and such failure promoted an outsized peasantry that became a main characteristic of failed states and societies.

In a chapter entitled “peasants, princes, and reformers,” Harik coins the term “rural capitalism” to denote a process in the commercialization of production that was implanted since 1952. Its main features were (1) extreme inequality in landownership; (2) commercial production of cash crops by means of tenancy; and

market and government by determining wages, prices, and the production of commodities in accordance with a national design and using authoritarian means.

(3) the preponderance of the national power of large landlords.³¹ Harik sees rural capitalism, in its three-pronged definition, as having emerged in the pseudonym locality of Shubra el-Gedida. Since the agrarian reforms in the 1950s, which limited the amount of land ownership for landlords, the term “large landlords” has come to signify those designated as such by the peasant population before the Revolution. In other words, the pre-1952 landowning families have retained such a cachet so as to be still influential in Nasserite Egypt, even though some of them may have become de facto absentee landowners, with their properties taken over by new landlords, created by Egypt’s new “revolutionary” civil and military bureaucracy. It remains to be seen, however, how concretely the mixing between old and new landlords took place, and how landlords, at least those perceived as such by their peasants, managed the new restrictions imposed by the state, in particular when limits were imposed on size, which was not the case in pre-revolutionary Egypt. Moreover, since landlords were generally grouped under the pejorative term of *iqtā’iyyin* (feudalists), it needs to be seen whether such an image has pervaded revolutionary Egypt, or whether landlords have come to be perceived under a new light.

There is no doubt that Harik portrays an overall positive picture of the process of the modernization of the peasantry in *The Political Mobilization of the Peasants*. But one cannot refrain from asking, at what cost? It is not as much the cost of modernization per se, as that of modernization forced from above. Between Lebanon and Egypt Harik has documented two divergent paths, one where feudalism matured under the Ottomans, where traditional élite groups broke down by the nineteenth century, with their properties distributed among the peasantry, leading the way to a transition from mountain to city, which gave way to modern Lebanon and its open parliamentary system. Such a modernization from below without revolution, and without statist intervention (the Lebanese state is

³¹ Iliya Harik, *The Political Mobilization of Peasants. A Study of an Egyptian Community*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1974, 33.

notoriously weak and sectarianized), deeply contrasts with Egypt, where class struggle had to be monitored from above through statist bureaucracies. Yet, in spite of major differences between such processes, Harik would not look at Egypt and its peasantry condescendingly, namely that a statist modernization from above with pseudo-revolutionary claims would lead to a depoliticized peasantry not much better off than what it used to be under political monarchism. His concern was indeed the patronage that bureaucratic and military *étatisme* exercises over civil society, to the point that the latter would gradually lose its political and economic initiative.

In the Egyptian system under political monarchism, as portrayed by Harik, the oligarchic power structure was irresponsive to the community.³² There were at the time big landlords who owned lots of lands, and who were either absentee landlords (in this instance, a Prince from the ruling family) who leased their properties (often to other landlords), hence had no real connection to the peasantry and the community, inhibiting a process of politicization at the grassroots level. On the other hand, stood other landlord families who did most of the work with the community. In the locality of Shubra a great deal of the political and economic authority in 1952 was hereditary, primarily the Samad family, specifically the two brothers Mustafa and Kamil. Mustafa became 'umdah in 1927 upon his father's death through an election by the village landlords, but Harik adds in a cautionary note that "since almost all of Shubra's landlords were absentees, it is doubtful that any such election took place" (ibid., 51-2). The authority of the Samads was challenged only once, in 1952, when the rival Kura landlords attempted to take over amid political turbulence. The tone is already set: most of the landlords by 1952 were absentees, and the couple of families that had any force on the ground, due to land possession, strongly displayed their rivalries. Another aspect of a 'umdah's domination is harsh treatment and even at times a recourse to violence. Even though Harik limits himself to two incidents only where violence was visibly used by Samad members (ibid.,

³² Harik, *Political Mobilization*, 261.

52), that's an issue that needs to be reconsidered, in particular in light of Timothy Mitchell's harsh critique of Harik that we'll consider later.

A major change came through in post-1952 revolutionary Egypt, with the downfall of the Samads. For one thing, the Nasser régime created conditions that gradually undermined the umdah's predominance, primarily in the agrarian reform that was launched as soon as the free officers took power. For another, the revolution initiated all kinds of socio-political institutions that were hitherto inexistent under the monarchy, such as cooperatives, councils, boards and rallies, all of which were intended as gateways to increase local participation in national politics, on one hand, while undermining traditional power, amid an enhanced state presence in the localities, on the other; hence the ascent of the Kuras at the expense of the Samads in revolutionary Egypt. There is no need here to go into the details of such a reversal of power fortunes. Suffice it to say that such a shakeup took place in the shadow of a heavily bureaucratic and militaristic state, which seized every opportunity to deepen its power within the localities under the umbrella of the single party system. Harik will therefore have to convince his readers how a one party system, which was not by definition democratic, helped in the political emancipation of a local community like Shubra.

Harik was aware of the limitations that mobilization had engendered in the 1960s, for instance, in a passage like this one where he points to the instability of leadership: "Indeed, the continuously changing policies of the regime have contributed to local leadership proliferation and instability, and have precluded the possibility of a new autocracy replacing the Samads. Successive changes in leadership positions in Shubra show that politics has become a precarious career. All prominent leaders in Shubra were successively weakened by a combination of national and local developments." (ibid., 99) What this implies is that proliferation, hence the demise of autocracy, de facto implies under a one party system, instability and destabilization, because there does not seem to have been a deepening of the process of participation, leaving it to a mobilization controlled by the state. I would

have wished a more sociological and anthropological look at what Harik terms as “mobilization”: How did the peasants concretely participate? What were the tools of participation? What were the propaganda tools? How did political representations take shape? How were they “absorbed” by the population at large?³³ Harik leaves such concrete processes outside the scope of his research. When he states in his conclusion that “Not until vast, radical reform measures had been introduced by the Revolution did the ordinary villagers become part of the modernization process” (ibid., 261), the problem with such assertions and observations is that the sociological and anthropological processes whereby the so-called “modernization process” has been observed in some of its aspects, have not been satisfactorily elaborated, to see what went wrong with mobilization, modernization, and the coming of the peasantry into the political process.

V.

In Harik’s study of a village in the Nile Delta summarizing the conduct of Mustafa Samad and his brother, who until the end of the 1950s were the village’s dominant family (pre-1952 “feudalism”), the 1960s represent the era of the massive political mobilization of the peasantry, and the de facto impossibility of any family to replace the Samads as ‘umdah of the village; indeed, the entire ‘umdah system seems to have collapsed in villages across revolutionary Egypt. Thus, when in the 1960s, at the moment Harik was completing his research, the Kuras, another one of those big landowner families, had displaced the Samads from their power base, they merely represent an economic force, and a political power base tied to the central state, thus lacking the moral prestige of the Samads. However, such a weakening of traditional patrimonial authority does not seem directly related to the first agrarian reform law of 1952 (those owning more than three hundred acres), but more to the integration of the local peasantry into national politics and their mobilization for

³³ Such questions were raised for Baathist Syria in Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

that purpose. Even though Harik goes detail after detail to document such mobilization process, his study fails to concretely come into grips with the tools of mobilization: How did the propaganda machine of the state concretely work? How were the peasants integrated? What were the methods of representation (imagery, mass media, institutions)? Harik's study is content of formal analysis of class in relation to the state, but the main handicap in such an approach remains the lack of concrete documentation of power relations on the ground: What tools should the researcher have at his disposal to get to the bottom of power relations? How to document such power relations? Namely, the *modus operandi* and *modus vivendi* of power relations.

Timothy Mitchell's criticism of Harik centers on such concrete power relations and their modes of representation in official reports (e.g. the Higher Committee for the Liquidation of Feudalism), documents and memos, court hearings, newspapers and the media, and the like, not to mention the possibility of direct observation by the research. Mitchell is also concerned in the way power relations are present or absent in contemporary research, more specifically, the way American researchers portray Egypt, hence his encounter with Harik. Mitchell tackles a single aspect of power relations in rural communities, namely, political violence, which official reports shows that it was quite pervasive, but seldom taken into account: "The failure to examine the question of political violence against the poor in American academic writing on rural Egypt was not merely one of oversight or neglect. Rather,...the literature generally constructed its object of study in such a way that any evidence of such violence, given its elusive nature, was inevitably discounted, or translated into something else."³⁴ Typically, Mitchell argues, the peasant personality is portrayed in psychological traits as an unstable mixture of violence and submissiveness, which the American visitor experiences as the peasant's "excessive" politeness and generosity. State bureaucrats, therefore, construct their mobilization schemes on the peasant's inbred desire for authority, who expects the superior to be

³⁴ Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, 161.

strict and firm. In pre-1952 Egypt, the much venerated class of “feudalists” abused of its authority vis-à-vis a depoliticized peasantry that lacked representation and protection at a national level. In revolutionary Nasserite Egypt, with the impossibility to find a replacement for the defunct “feudal” class, the state took over the abusive role towards the peasantry. The political mobilization was therefore not overtly intended of “freeing” the peasantry from abuse, but to monopolize power relations at a national level, at a time when the power local base of the feudalists had collapsed, only to be replaced by a new landowning class that lacked the moral cachet of the previous one (the limits imposed on property size by various agrarian reforms were quickly circumvented in various ways, as would be expected).

With such a perspective, the reasons for the failure of policies of rural modernization seem clear. Not only will the flaws in peasant personality cause him to reject capitalist development, “but to reject the very authority of landowners, agricultural experts, and the state.” (ibid., 163) Moreover, such foreign studies, Mitchell warns us, “are in most cases simply an accumulation of earlier Orientalist lore, ...[which] generalizes to an absurd degree, and tells us far more about the political frustrations and desires of those involved in organizing the transformation of Egyptian landholding and agriculture over the preceding century than about the particular experiences of Egyptian villagers.” (ibid., 164) For Mitchell, however, the crux of the matter comes down to the “invisibility” of the culture of fear: “What appear to the outsider as patterns of docility and dissimulation, of distrust and disrespect for authority, of conservatism and suspicion, can be read as the characteristic symptoms of a *culture of fear*. Forms of coercion that leave no explicit trace of themselves may nevertheless reveal themselves to strangers through negative signs: silence, avoidance, extreme formality, and outward submissiveness.” (164) The reversal is here subtle between an analysis that focuses on “personality and culture,” and the “character of the peasant,” and one that looks at fragmentary invisible signs of a “culture of fear.” In the latter, it’s an entire “culture” that is pervaded by fear, where, for instance, landowners would abuse of their authority towards their peasants not only in the way they appropriate their lands and impose

harsh tenancy contracts, but in their (or through their agents') physical presence; in short, all kinds of power relations, which due to their invisible, fragmentary, and non-documented nature, are typically left out of research.

When critiquing the tendency of psychologism in some contemporary American political studies on Egypt, Mitchell was thinking more of James Mayfield's *Rural Politics in Nasser's Egypt* (1971) than Harik's *Political Mobilization of Peasants*, which overtly attempted to concentrate "on behavior rather than personal characteristics" in order to uncover the local power network that implements development plans and shapes their success.

In spite of Harik's meticulous account of the transformations on the ground between 1967 and 1968, and his avoidance of psychological categories or cultural pathology à la Mayfield, Mitchell detects something pathological in the approaches on political development that were common to the 1960s and 1970s, and probably still serve as a ground for some of today's research. Mitchell's take on Harik is mainly regarding "the phenomenon of change," which assumes a narrative that perceives change in terms of a Weberian scheme of rationalization, and where the forces of change would operate from a presumed center controlled by the centralized state. Change would thus be portrayed in terms of its successes and failures, on one hand, relative to the agendas set forth by the central bureaucracy which supposedly was the engine behind the process, and on the other, on how local rural communities reacted to it, or how well the bureaucratic agendas were absorbed on the ground. In short, we're into the classical dilemma of an active center that promotes change versus a passive rural periphery that only receives it by reacting to it. Set within such a dilemma, "change" would look an abstract process, not much connected to the concrete power relations on the ground, as it is mostly drawn by larger bureaucratic forces from the center of the nation-state. Moreover, Harik's book, argues Mitchell, even though very rich on crucial details, lacks fundamental aspects of rural life, such as the work on the field, which involves the observation of rituals,

day-to-day transactions between individuals and groups, and the micro power relations that regulate customary practices.

Once the researcher establishes his observations from the vintage point of view of such practices, “change” promoted by the centralized state would begin to look in a different light. That is, instead of being perceived as total operations of change with rationalized modernization plans, they would look as “temporary interventions, which occur in reaction to crises in the local construction of power and are themselves a site of struggle and reversal.” (ibid., 168) Mitchell is perhaps thinking here of Foucauldian documentations of power, ones that are capillary and operate at the very root of social practice; or he could be thinking along the line of micro historians like Giovanni Levi and Carlo Ginsburg whose documentation of local powers is achieved through a particular reading of documents, one that is not limited to broad structures, but to invisible relations and power struggles; or he could be thinking of Clifford Geertz’s thick description; or the ethnomethodology of Harold Garfinkel and his cohorts. Whatever our approach to micro power relations may have been, the crux of the matter is that “Power is not simply a centralized force seeking local allies as it extends out from the political center but is constructed locally, whatever the wider connections involved. The so-called mobilizing initiatives from the center occurred in response to struggles for specific changes at the local level. The center did not initiate change, but tried to channel local forces into activities that would extend rather than further threaten the weakening influence of the regime.” (ibid., 169) If Mitchell is attempting to reverse Harik’s approach, and similar ones along narratives of modernization, how should we then proceed? The above citation suggests that power cannot be localized within a state or institutions, or even in the hands of persons or groups; it rather suggests, along well known Foucauldian lines of reasoning, that power is not only decentralized, but more importantly, it should be detected in even the most invisible practices, in knowledge patterns and discourses. In this instance, we need to document power locally, which means getting all kinds of concrete information on individuals and groups, their kinship relations, their labor and work rituals in the fields, how

landowners concretely establish their local power, how they interact with their peasant base. With that in mind, modernization programmes that may come from the central state bureaucracy would not be seen single-handedly as promoting change from the top. Once local communities are documented from the vantage standpoint of their decentralized power relations, whatever comes as “state action” would be in conjunction with the power relations within those local rural communities. State power would not look anymore singlehandedly as be instituted within a program of change from the top, but as a set of more confusing practices which are attempting to use, abuse of, or simply encroach upon the network of power relations in those rural communities. All this would need not only a shift in methodology and conceptualization, but more importantly, a new way of documenting the practices that Harik has focused upon, and also all kinds of practices he had left behind either intentionally or unintentionally, for instance, how power relations are structured on a culture of violence that is very hard to document, and which for the most part remains invisible in official reports and research alike.

A case in point is the whole culture of “feudalism,” which in Egypt of the 1960s, 1970s, and later implied a pejorative term connoting big landowners who were abusive and who had inherited their status from Ottoman and colonial times; hence the implication that such a class needs to be replaced by a more open and competitive class of landowners—more capitalists than feudalists. The state, picking up on such public perception of the feudalists in post-1952 Egypt, poses itself as the party that would contribute to a reversal in the process, one that would open up Egypt to a new class of landowners, better integrated within a nationalist framework, more productive, and competing within Egypt’s so-called “socialist” economy. For that purpose, and within the framework of the Arab Socialist Union’s one-party system, Nasser sets up the Higher Committee for the Liquidation of Feudalism, which as its name already implies, assumes that there is such a thing as “feudalism” that effectively exists, that it could be “liquidated,” and that a national party committee could do such a work of liquidation of an entire class fragmented

along regional lines. By the 1960s the old landlords, whose ties on the ground were the outcome of personal networking and prestige, in addition to massive landowning and labor capabilities, with limited state support, lost power to another type of landowners, those who benefited from the land reforms in the 1950s, accumulated land and resources, and more importantly, were well connected to the government apparatuses (some landowners served as members in the parliament or in the senate). Those new landowners survived well in spite of—or thanks to—the political mobilization of the peasantry. What was therefore unique about revolutionary Egypt of the 1950s and 1960s was this combination of new landowners, who benefited from the end of the monarchy and régime change, and a state that was adamant at having the peasantry “on its side,” through mass mobilization. But was the balance between landowners and peasants that delicate? Not so much, once we realize that both relied on state apparatuses to survive: while the land reforms improved the status of many landowners and peasants, the peasants went in turn through a political metamorphosis, as they were no longer there for labor only, but as supporters of the revolution. The massive failure of the 1967 war, however, made all actors suspicious, if not looking for their own way of salvation. In hindsight, looking at Egypt through three decades of a corrupt Mubarak régime, what has survived are the *nouveaux riches* who found their place within the new post-1967, post-1973, and post-Camp David configuration of state power.

For the sake of simplicity, let us assume that the method of Harik versus that of Mitchell, is one of a broad narrative of social change versus the documentation of power relations. Mitchell would undoubtedly chastise Harik for opting for a narrative of change, which carries the burdens of gone ideologies, over a more sociological and historical approach to power relations. That would have implied going over formal class relations (which class or status group predominated, and under which circumstances), towards a depiction of the power relationships on the ground. Had we known how power relations in the 1950s and 1960s were managed, their modus operandi and modus vivendi, the 1970s and later would not have looked in hindsight simply as more or less state interference, rather the state

actions would be conceived more as piecemeal than global. In other words, they would have set themselves within other power relations on the ground, rather than appearing as manipulating rural relations from the distance of a bureaucratic center. Herein lies the big difference, from our perspective, between a global narrative of change that at its core would prove heavily ideological, and the documentation of power relations in which the state would look as one force among others. The 1967 debacle would not necessarily look anymore as reversal of policies within such perspective. Local powers are now suspicious of the state and its policies of mobilization that coopted local actors, but at the same time, and this is what led Egypt to the deadlock it finds itself into, many local actors benefited from state corruption and the isolation of state apparatuses vis-à-vis a civil society that constructed its own networks, independently of those of the state. Rather than the relations between classes, and who owned what, and how the state manipulated such relations, Mitchell would have liked a more developed picture of peasants in their concrete daily labor, how they struggled for ownership, how they were coopted by the state.

We can now bring Lebanon and Egypt together in order to depict problems in Harik's methodology that at its core centers on modernization. In the case of Lebanon, Harik looks at the modernization process "from below" so positively, with roots in 19th-century feudalism, to the point that he feels unable to detect the "internal" problems that Lebanon was facing in the early 1970s on the eve of the 15-year civil war. Indeed, the roots of the civil war are perceived as "regional" in their essence. For Egypt by contrast, modernization was triggered "from above," through a hard core statism, to the point that Egyptian civil society has stifled under an overpowering military and civil bureaucracy. In both instances, whether modernization is judged successful or not, Harik proceeds with a mixture of institutional and statistical data. For instance, in the case of contemporary Lebanon, both in his assessment of the 1972 elections, and a decade later, in his evaluation of the early decade of the bloody civil war, Harik deploys statistical tools that would have pointed out that Lebanese society was moving in the right direction: data on

education, the growth of the middle class, the labor force, the diversification in the parliament, and the narrowing of the economic gap among classes and confessional groups. In his early work on Egypt, conducted in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Harik seems at ease in on-site fieldwork in rural Egypt. Vivid descriptions of personalities, groups, and relations take precedence over any statistical or institutional data. But by the time he's into his second book on Egypt under Mubarak, Harik is once more withdrawn into official statistics to underscore his notion of patron states that dominate and stifle economy and society. Whatever the context, he is driven by a broad narrative of modernization and change, which besides its overt optimism or pessimism, might not represent the best tool to detect concrete power relations. Is it satisfactory to portray Lebanon as a society whose liberal growth has created equilibrium, and whose devastating civil war was an outcome of regional tensions? Or to document rural Egypt as a society of failed mass mobilizations? The problem here is not the "thesis" that in each instance is supposed to come to terms with the massive data, but what is left outside the scope of the modernization narratives, namely, the power relations that make a society possible, and how to portray them in the languages of the social sciences.