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Linguistic Diversity and Ideologies among the Catholic Minority in Mandate Palestine. Fear of Confusion or a Powerful Tool?

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ABSTRACT

Palestinian Catholics have always played a major role in the Palestinian political, cultural and educational systems, with an influence disproportionate to their numbers. Instrumentalized by France during and even after her Protectorate of the Christians (1924), more visible for the Europeans during the growth of European institutions in the Holy Land and the beginning of an international Christian network, Catholic Palestinians (mainly Latin and Melkite) favoured multilingualism, but at the same time felt trapped between different trends that influenced linguistic ideologies and practices. They faced the centralizing Catholic interests of Rome (who first favoured French and Italian, but soon after the Mandate mostly Arabic); the national interests of Catholic European powers present in the Holy Land favouring their own languages (French, German through the German Catholics and the Austrians, and English through the British Catholics); and the Arabization promoted by the Melkite community. The present article aims to analyse the linguistic choices of the Catholic community, via its educational system, by observing the process through which a complex local reality has been simplified by colonial powers, to tackle identity and conflict through language.

Introduction

The use of French in the Catholic communities of the Middle East in which it was not the mother tongue was a pan-Levant phenomenon at the beginning of the twentieth century; it was the language of a good education, the vehicle for conversation in refined social circles.¹ Not only were the Catholic elites 'identified'² with it, but also the poor Catholic populations, who were at the centre of the educative and sanitary actions of different Catholic missions, which were particularly developed in the Holy Land.³ Palestine indeed concentrated many

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¹Cf. F. Abecassis, 'L'enseignement étranger en Egypte et les élites locales. Francophonie et identités nationales' (PhD thesis, University of Aix-Marseille, 2000); C. Aslanov, *Le français au Levant, jadis et naguère. A la recherche d'une langue perdue* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006); J.E. Joseph, *Language and Identity: National, Ethnic, Religious* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); J. Riffier, *Les œuvres françaises en Syrie: 1860–1923* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000).

²Linguistic identification is understood as a process, even if the speakers were not fluent.

³K. Sanchez, 'Le triptyque Langue/ Education/ Religion en Palestine ottomane et mandataire', *Sociolinguistica* 25 (2011), pp. 66–80.

European missions and multilingualism⁴ was discussed early on by these Europeans as well as by the local lay and clerical elites.

Palestine was often characterized as a divided place in British and French travellers' accounts during the nineteenth century, religious and ethnic groups speaking different languages. The travellers and the European governments present in Palestine perceived this diversity and the plurilingualism resulting from it either as a threat of confusion (the image of Babel was regularly referred to)⁵ or as a powerful tool for the Christian minorities.

Soon after the beginning of the Mandate, Catholic educational institutions in Palestine, mainly French, discussed the positive and negative aspects of multilingualism. Language use and language acquisition marked moments of contact with other communities, both locally and overseas, the transnational Catholic community and, to a certain extent, the Palestinian Catholic diaspora. In this multilingual and multicultural landscape of Mandate Palestine, language learning played a role in 'foreignizing' the native Catholics and carrying their case outside the borders of Mandate Palestine at the same time as contributing to the political mobilization of this community. A multilingual education represented both a powerful tool but also a weakness to different actors of the Catholic communities between 1920 and 1948. During this period which saw the beginnings of opposition to the British and French empires, the terms of the debate over the functions of Arabic, English and French tended to be formulated in terms of an international language, a language of civilization and the language of God.

In this article, I intend to analyse the shifting linguistic attitudes of the Catholic communities of Palestine during the interwar period towards the European presence in Palestine and towards the growing communalism. I will show how Catholics 'imagined the Nation' Palestine using languages as a tool to position themselves as regards the European declared protection of the Christian communities and to express their communalism but also their nationalism.

I will focus on the educational area (schools, contacts with religious and administrative entities), as the philanthropic/missionary groups who maintained the schools had linguistic agendas. Catholics, not only from a communal but also from an individual point of view, expressed their linguistic concerns. Different positions appeared within the community; European officials documented this variety, this multilingualism, while at the same time they treated the Catholics of the Holy Land as a monolithic group.

For this multilingual community, what role was played by languages in its gradually increasing feeling of distinctiveness? How did the Catholics accommodate to the bureaucratic Mandate reality that favoured English? How did they react to linguistic pressure? How was a particular language used or repressed in the building processes of individual or collective identities? How did the local Catholic actors perceive and use language as a tool for the defence of their interests?

From a historiographical point of view, the 'linguistic turn', discussed by historians since the 1970s, has focused mainly on literary studies. The mid-2000s saw only exchanges between historians and historical sociolinguists,⁶ but the social history of language has been studied less, and the Levant is still under-represented. Historical studies dealing with Christians in

⁴I will refer to 'multilingual' as a collective attitude to language, and 'plurilingual' as a more individual one, though both terms can be found in the archives.

⁵For example MECA (Middle East Centre Archives, St Anthony's College, Oxford); J. de V. Loder, in A.J. Sherman *Mandate Days: British Lives in Palestine, 1918–1948* (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 38.

⁶Historical Sociolinguistics Network (HiSoN), created in 2005. J.M. Hernandez-Campoy and J.C. Conde-Silvestre (eds.), *The Handbook of Historical Sociolinguistics* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012).

Palestine are for the most part interested in the holy places, diplomacy, politics and religion but the history of the education and language teaching of the indigenous Christian communities has yet to be explored. The work of B. Spolsky and R. Cooper⁷ does not tackle the Christian communities' use and learning of languages during the Mandate period in relation to their Muslim and Jewish compatriots, nor does the recent work on Christian communities and communalism of Haiduc Dale (2010). Despite the close link between the preservation and further dissemination of the French language and the promotion of the Catholic religion in Palestine under British rule, this aspect is not well known,⁸ the focus until now having been on Egypt, Syria and the Lebanon.⁹ The impact of colonial linguistic policies on Palestine has been underrated in the different historiographies despite the conspicuous European legacy in Palestine and despite the linguistic motivation of missionary education, cited since the 1950s. The Muslim and Jewish educational systems from the same period have been analysed recently. Suzanne Schneider¹⁰ studied the transformation of Jewish and Islamic religious education in Palestine during the period of the British Mandate and analysed the British point of view on monolingualism, while Liora Halperin¹¹ enlightened the complex situation of Hebrew as the indigenous language capable of neutralizing the foreign mother tongues of the Jewish population.

Despite the scarcity of the sources, a 'social history of languages' of the Catholics of the Holy Land can be studied. The linguistic diversity and ideologies among Catholics can be envisaged via the linguistic 'offer' (school and government archives) but also via the 'linguistic demand' (positions expressed by parents, political and religious actors), though the reception has very often been overlooked in studies concerning education. The complex social conditions and political tensions imply a non-linear spread of the use of European languages in Palestinian society during the interwar period. I consider that language learning and use depend on several variables: the prestige attached to a specific language and its usefulness in society, bearing in mind that language teaching and language prestige will have evolved differently in different social groups.

Language ideologies were perceptible in Palestine in the power relations between speakers, different social groups and governmental actors, involving language issues. I am referring to R. Bassiouney on language ideology as 'the beliefs about language and language use that prevail within a specific community or that influence language practice',¹² as well as to K. Woolard's opinion that language ideologies are not primarily about language; rather 'they

⁷B. Spolsky and R.L. Cooper, *The Languages of Jerusalem* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

⁸This absence could be explained by the fact that the diverse French influences in Egypt have been prevalent in the historiography of the French presence in the Levant, as well as the traditional links between the Maronites of the Lebanon and the French language. The Palestinian case, which occupies a separate place in the Levantine Francophone communities, has been forgotten.

⁹Few memoirs of the schools' alumni and magazines were published to voice the indigenous perspective on missionary educational activities, in contrast to the ones available in the Lebanese and Egyptian cases. Some of the archival material was preserved and classified during a project ('*Archiver au Moyen-Orient, faiseurs d'histoire, faiseurs d'archives*', 2006–2008) undertaken with the French Consulate, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs Archives Department and the French National Research Agency CNRS (*Centre national de la recherche scientifique*), in order to preserve and classify the archives of the schools still remaining. The loss of certain archives can be partially explained by the political events that affected the schools, such as the 1947–1948 and 1967 wars.

¹⁰S. Schneider, 'Monolingualism and Education in Mandate Palestine', *Jerusalem Quarterly* 52 (2013), pp. 68–74.

¹¹L. Halperin, *Babel in Zion: Jews, Nationalism, and Language Diversity in Palestine, 1920–1948* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

¹²R. Bassiouney, *Arabic Sociolinguistics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 99.

are in the service of other, more basic, ideological systems [...] which they cloak in linguistic terms.¹³ During the interwar period, several actors made a clear link between language and nationalism.

Language policy was never formulated as such at the time by the Mandate authorities; it was not a coherent, articulated idea, while on the contrary, in French cultural policy, strong linguistic elements were present. But language policy existed rather as an ideological assumption, expressed in different educational, cultural, administrative and political policies. In the present article, I will focus on the educational aspects only, but I will give the more general context, and envisage the colliding and oppositional perspectives around language policies. English and French were more than simply European administrative languages, perpetuated via the educational system.

I shall first present the Catholic communities, the European powers in the Holy Land, and their linguistic and educative agendas during the interwar period. In the second part, I shall focus on how Catholics stressed the importance of offering/receiving a multilingual education. Finally, I shall analyse how, at the same time, multilingual education was pointed out as a danger for Catholics as it foreignized them.

1. Catholics of the Holy Land: The Challenges of a Diverse and Multilingual Community

The linguistic plurality of Jerusalem, like that of Rome, was obvious to many European travellers, pilgrims and tourists, hosted in different Catholic French, Italian and German hospices, where they also found a monolingual environment. Arabic remained the everyday language of contact, while the elites, since the mid-nineteenth century, had adopted the semi-official languages of the Catholic hierarchy, Italian and French. The Catholic community had an active (for the elites) or more passive (for the poor Catholics) knowledge of several languages, along with formal language teaching.

From the 1880s until the late 1920s, the necessity of fluency in French was not really discussed by the Catholic communities, offering them a spiritual connection to France, rather than real economic opportunities. However, Arabic was the mother tongue of this diverse community. Nevertheless, some Orthodox Christians accused them of being 'Westernized', and, as in the Jerusalem 'language war',¹⁴ the Latin Catholic community was perceived as that most acquainted with foreign powers. George Antonius, in his book *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement*,¹⁵ underlined the Arab character of the Palestinian population¹⁶ including the Catholic groups, and the role of Arabic in what he called 'Arabisation'. Khalil Sakakini, a famous Palestinian educator, also stressed the importance of language when dealing with the inclusion/exclusion processes of the Palestine nation phenomenon: 'if I enjoy any position in this land, if the people love me and respect me... it is because I am wealthy in Arabic.'¹⁷

¹³K. Woolard and B Schieffelin, 'Language Ideology', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 23 (1994), and Y. Suleiman (ed.), *Arabic Sociolinguistics: Issues and Perspectives* (Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 1994), pp. 55–82, p. 57.

¹⁴Sanchez (2009), chapter 3. Politiques, éducation et identités linguistiques, le collège des Frères des écoles chrétiennes de Jérusalem (1922-1939), LOT, Utrecht, 2009 (PhD).

¹⁵George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening: The Story of the Arab National Movement* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1938).

¹⁶George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, p. 17, basing himself on Louis Massignon (Revue du Monde Musulman, 1924), p. 57.

¹⁷ISA (Israel State Archives), P 356/7, 12/12/1932.

Latins and Melkites (Greek Catholics) were the two main groups of Catholics in the Holy Land,¹⁸ with a notable difference between the rural (Melkites) and the urban Catholic population (Melkites and Latins).¹⁹ Quite a few Catholics were counted among the elites. The Melkites lived mainly in Galilee, having their seminary in Jerusalem, at the St Anne Convent, with a liturgy mostly in Arabic (and a few words in Greek). The Latin Patriarchate, though not having a clear linguistic agenda, also expressed the importance of language for Catholics, when he denounced English as ‘the language of Protestantism’²⁰ as early as 1920.

Soon after the beginning of the Mandate, Arabic appeared as the language of the majority defending itself against the minority national language, Hebrew (Halperin), granted ‘official rights’ by the Mandate authorities. British administrators claimed that the educational separation of communities along linguistic lines was a pedagogic necessity, a declaration that was well received by Palestinian and Zionist nationalist camps.

For Great Britain, Palestine constituted the link between Egypt, Iraq and India and the Holy Land. For France, who considered herself as the ‘*filles aînée de l’Eglise*’ (‘the eldest daughter of the Church’) and the protector of the Christian minorities in the Middle East since the sixteenth century, Palestine was perceived as an essential area, the ‘most French Land of the Levant’,²¹ close to its French sphere of influence over Syria and the Lebanon. The Sykes–Picot agreements (1916) redrew the geopolitical map of the Middle East and considered Palestine as an international zone, but the Treaty of Sèvres (1920) placed Palestine under the responsibility of the British government, bringing a *de facto* end to the French protectorate for Catholics, which ended *de jure* in 1924.²² The European consulates influenced the linguistic equation of the city via the missionary schools they supported.

From the 1860s onwards, taking the reforms of the Ottoman Empire as an opportunity to spread French education all around Palestine, the French Catholic schools proposed a curriculum, both classical and professional, valued by the Ottoman authorities.²³ The last quarter of the nineteenth century saw a rapid growth of the French congregations teaching in French, which was then recognized by the Ottoman Empire as a semi-official language. French Catholic establishments opened rapidly across Palestinian territory.²⁴ French was taught as an international, administrative language and also the most suitable to transmit a proper sense of catholicity to the pupils.²⁵

¹⁸They constituted 20% of the population of Palestine. AMAE (Archives du Ministère des affaires Etrangères), *Turquie, Syrie-Palestine*, vol. 877, ‘Notes sur les populations de Palestine’, L. Massignon à A. Briand, 7 May 1917, 5227 Catholics in Jerusalem; 40,000 Greek Orthodox; 35,000 Catholics; 5,000 Protestants; 80,000 Jews; and 82,000 Muslims in Palestine; the Latin Catholic presence, A. O’Mahony, ‘The Latins of the East: The Vatican, Jerusalem and the Palestinian Christians’, in Anthony O’Mahony (ed.), *The Christian Communities of Jerusalem and the Holy Land: Studies in History, Religion and Politics* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008), pp. 90–114.

¹⁹COCA (Congregation for Oriental Churches archives, Congregatio Pro Ecclesiis Orientalibus) and LPA (Latin Patriarchate Archives, Jerusalem).

²⁰COCA and LPA, L. Barlassina’s archives, 1920.

²¹M. Barrès, *Enquête aux Pays du Levant* (Paris: Plon, 1923).

²²C. Nicault, *Jérusalem 1850–1948, des Ottomans aux Anglais, entre coexistence spirituelle et déchirure politique* (Paris: Autrement, 1999).

²³The reforms of the Tanzimat (*regulation period*) encouraged the Westernization of the Ottoman administration, and favoured the teaching of European languages; French became the official language of the Ottoman administration. As a consequence, members of the Catholic communities progressively acquired important positions due to their multilingual education provided by French Catholic missionaries. The 1901 Mytilène and the 1913 Constantinople agreements (preservation of the Christian communities’ rights) supported the Catholic schools which were established without an official permit; ACB (Archives of the Bethlehem College of the Christian Brothers, Bethlehem), ACJ (Archives of the Jerusalem College of the Christian Brothers), ASSJ (Archives of the Sisters of Saint Joseph, Jerusalem), ANDS (Archives of the Sisters of Zion, Jerusalem and Rome).

²⁴One school every two to three years until 1904; K. Sanchez, ‘Le triptyque Langue’.

²⁵ACJ, Annual reports, 1926–1937.

French Catholic schools had a monopoly when it came to representing France because no other linguistic and cultural institution (*Centre culturel, Mission Laïque, Alliance Française*) had succeeded in establishing itself in Palestine. French schools gradually opened their doors to enrol children from the Muslim and to a lesser extent Jewish elite. They promoted the idea of a 'modern education', favouring multilingualism as a tool of self-affirmation of the Catholic community in Palestine and a means of promoting it in the international Catholic arena. These institutions (primary, secondary and vocational education) continued to be used as a platform for French cultural influence and the sponsor of Catholic protection, while also providing an alternative to British linguistic and educational initiatives.

From the early years of the Mandate, the British administrators wanted to separate the educational system along linguistic lines: an Arab and Jewish/Hebrew language system,²⁶ which left the Christian communities apart. But shortly after the beginning of the Mandate, the authorities faced important expenses for defence and security matters, due to the political situation, and the Mandate authorities did not invest as much in education as planned.

The formal British Mandate for Palestine was ratified by the League of Nations on 24 July 1922. The place of English was not entirely different from what was happening in the other parts of the British Empire. It tended to diminish French cultural and linguistic influence, as it had done in Egypt since the 1880s.²⁷ Articles 15 and 16 enjoined the Mandate to ensure the rights of the religious communities to maintain schools for the education of their own members. Article 15 guaranteed 'the right of each community to maintain its own schools for the education of its own members in its own language, while conforming to such educational requirements of a general nature as the administration may impose.'²⁸ Article 22 of the Mandate recognized English, Arabic and Hebrew as the official languages. One year after the Mandate was granted to Britain in Palestine in 1923, French, which had previously had the status of a semi-official language, was no longer recognized as the language of examinations for all primary, secondary and professional schools in Palestine.²⁹ The Education Department (created in 1922 by the Government of Palestine to develop primary education, and secondary urban and rural teacher-training), although favourable to the religious communities' institutions, separated language from religion in its first piece of legislation, leaving each community responsible for the teaching of its own religion. In 1933, the Education Ordinance gave statutory recognition to this *de facto* bifurcation of public education into two realms. However, the British Government did not recognize the Catholic schools as part of the Arab school system, as public entities.

From the official start of the British Mandate in Palestine, the British foresaw their role as the 'sacred task of civilization',³⁰ which implied a change in language planning, officially dividing the population into two linguistic groups, an Arabic-speaking group and a Hebrew-speaking group. Modernization³¹ was intentionally promoted by the Mandate administration, a process that involved the birth of an educated and multilingual middle class.

²⁶A.L. Tibawi, *Arab Education in Mandatory Palestine: A Story of Three Decades of British Administration* (London: Luzac, 1956) and A.L. Tibawi, *Arab Education in Mandatory Palestine: A Story of Three Decades of British Administration* (London: Luzac, 1956) and S. Schneider, 'Monolingualism and Education in Mandate Palestine', *Jerusalem Quarterly* 52 (2013), pp. 68–74.

²⁷F. Abecassis, 'L'enseignement étranger en Egypte'.

²⁸PRO (Public Record Office), BB (Blue Books), class B Mandate—contrary to class A Mandate, the B was not destined for independence.

²⁹AMAE, E 312–32, 26/04/1924.

³⁰A.S. Sherman, *Mandate Days: British Lives in Palestine*; E. Bar-Yosef, *The Holy Land in English Culture, 1799–1917. Palestine and the Question of Orientalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

³¹Modernization is understood here 'as a process, an incorporation of technological and bureaucratic innovations, the consequence of an ideological engagement with modernity on the part of the reformers [...] they incorporated into their daily lives and politics a collection of manners, mores, and tastes, and a corpus of ideas about the individual, gender, rationality, and authority actively derived from what they believed to be the cultural, social, and ideological praxis of the contemporary metropolitan Western middle classes', K.D. Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), Introduction.

In the private and the governmental schools and the entirety of the Mandate's administrative, executive and judicial spaces, the personnel faced an institutionalization of English. From the British and the schools' archives, the British educational and linguistic agenda appears as the propagation of an alternative language-culture model, the language ideology of the Mandate being, as for any colonial power, to reinforce the power structure, mainly via governmental administration, education and mass communication. More importantly, the Mandate administration seems to have thought that 'modernization' was inherent in English and synonymous with economic modernity.³² A clear language policy did not exist officially as such, but a plan for languages was perceptible in the British official discourses about the Jewish, Muslim and Christian communities.³³

This language power control was noticeable in three main domains in Palestine: governmental administration, education, and communications. Herbert Samuel, the first High Commissioner, stressed the importance of linguistic facilities among the administrative local officers. The Department of Education³⁴ emphasized that English literature was a preparation to an entry into public life, not a literary exploration (the British did not want to repeat the 'Indian model' mistakes).

However, the Mandate, being relatively vague, resulted in the reinforcement of private schools teaching several languages, maintained by political, philanthropic or missionary groups. These private schools addressed the educational wishes of the elites, their traditional clientele, but also the new middle class, dissatisfied with what was viewed as a too little number of Governmental schools.

As far as private schools were concerned, French Catholic schools were the most numerous; they represented between 75 and 85% of enrolment in Catholic schools during the British Mandate period and more than 60% of enrolment in private schools. The French Catholic schools enrolled the majority of the Christians from Jerusalem until the mid-1920s and they played an essential diplomatic role in the dissemination both of the French language and of Catholicism.

They competed fiercely with other missionary institutions.³⁵ The French educational model operated differently from the German and English systems, which held that the pupil's mother tongue had to be mastered before any other language teaching could take place. They were guilty of fearmongering over a 'confused linguistic identity', resulting from teaching several foreign languages, considered as a sign of the 'degeneration' of Palestinian society.³⁶

2. Multilingualism: A Powerful Tool

In his study of the construction of a Palestinian identity, Khalidi showed that in Palestine a (single) language did not always correspond to a (single) religious community, and he

³²MECA (Middle East Centre archives, Oxford), Humphrey Bowman archives (Director of Education, Mandate Palestine, 1920–1936), Private diary.

³³K. Sanchez, 'Le triptyque Langue'; idem, 'Preserving the Catholics of the Holy Land or Integrating them in the Palestine Nation? Catholic Communities, Language, Identity and Public Space in Jerusalem, 1920–1950', in H. Murre-van den Berg (ed.), *Common Ground? Changing Interpretations of Public Space in the Middle East among Jews, Christians and Muslims in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

³⁴H. Samuel, *Memoirs* (London: Cresset Press, 1945), pp. 150–5; and MECA, Humphrey Bowman's diary.

³⁵German and Russian institutions had two schools in Jerusalem during the Ottoman period, and these were partially closed after the First World War (WWI). Italians did not run their own schools in the Bethlehem and Jerusalem areas, but their influence was predominant in the Franciscan schools for the poor Catholic population.

³⁶ACJ, Report of the German Archeological Institute, *Schools for Arabs*, Jerusalem.

highlighted their overlapping identities. The linguistic landscape of Jerusalem was indeed characterized, at the end of the Ottoman period, by a coexistence of Turkish (the official language of the empire, which was spoken by relatively few outside what is now Turkey), Arabic (the language of the majority and the language of instruction in Ottoman schools), Yiddish, Hebrew, Greek, Armenian (languages of ethnic minorities), and languages of the colonial powers such as French, English and German (dominant languages in terms of social prestige, but minority languages in terms of the number of speakers).³⁷

The Catholic community characterized itself by its multilingualism, which highlights its shifting motivations, its communal self-understanding, and the complexity and elasticity of its linguistic identities. The community indeed used French and Italian as languages of instruction, while Arabic remained the main language of daily communication until the end of the 1920s. Multilingualism was defined by Catholic elites as being part of their identity, while at the same time they acknowledged Arabic as their mother tongue. They adapted the curriculum for languages in several schools, in order to preserve the plurilingualism of their children.

The teaching of different languages appeared as essential to many parents; if Russian, German and Italian were appreciated by parents until the First World War, French and English were clearly favoured among the Christian communities during the interwar period. The demand for French education among the Arab Palestinian population continued to draw pupils to the missionary schools, as the Government schools could not offer Palestinian society the opportunities it needed. The teaching of French was reinforced by frequent contact with pilgrims hosted in the schools' buildings.

In the context of the internationalization of Western norms of education in the colonies,³⁸ the teaching of European languages was an answer to the local desires of different parts of the population for the 'international' claim in education, as a means of economic and social advancement. In Palestine, several factors explained this desire: the birth of an urban middle class whose demand for education was important, the reproduction of an elite through European educational systems, the teaching of foreign languages as a valuable moral education by many Christian families.³⁹ However, no higher or specific professional education was offered to Arab pupils. The creation of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1925 did not attract many Arab students. Few scholarships were offered to study in England while French Catholic schools sent several pupils to the Lebanon (USJ) and Egypt (UFC) USJ Université Saint Joseph and CSF Collège de la Sainte Famille (better known as the UFC).⁴⁰ The language of economic power certainly played a role, English appearing to many Palestinians as the portal for international, diplomatic, scientific and commercial relations, a powerful tool, bringing the Palestinian, then later the Catholic cause, outside Palestine; it also drew economic help.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a knowledge of languages was a way of accessing 'modernity';⁴¹ a positive tool to obtain a powerful position in Palestinian society. The Mandate authorities presented English as a key mode for educational and social advancement.

³⁷K. Sanchez, 'Preserving the Catholics.'

³⁸N. McLelland and R. Smith, 'Building the History of Language Learning and Teaching', *Language and History* (2015) (in print) volume 57, issue 1, p 1-9.

³⁹ACJ, ASSJ, ANDS (diaries).

⁴⁰AMG (Archives of the Generalate of the Christian Brothers, Rome), BBDE (Blue Books, Government of Palestine, Department of Education).

⁴¹Watenpugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East*.

France continued to support multilingualism as being a 'powerful tool' for the Levantine population, while keeping French as the most important language of their curricula. French was presented as a language of coexistence⁴² by several French and indigenous Latin Catholic elites who supported the promotion of an official 'coexistence between communities' in the French boys' and girls' schools.⁴³ The French missionary schools attempted to find a middle ground between the French authorities' and the Catholic authorities' educational and linguistic objectives, to promote a *modus vivendi* within the schools. The analysis of their pedagogical materials shows a progressively important place being given to local heritage and the figure of the Palestinian Christians,⁴⁴ while considering the Catholics as a multilingual community. Some Catholic schools' magazines emphasized identity being based on religion, the Arabic language and local history, arguing that students were able to study French culture or Western culture and languages without losing their identity.⁴⁵

The Catholic school directors questioned the desirability of French and English in their curriculum. Arabic instruction began in the 4th grade, and came to occupy the same number of hours (8 to 12 hours weekly) as French (though some students did not achieve full competence in their native Arabic), followed by English (between 6 and 8 hours a week during the 1930s). In these French Catholic schools, the English language was not used as the primary language in education, in contrast to Terra Sancta College (founded in 1926 under the auspices of the Franciscan Custodia di Terra Santa, the second 'secondary' school), and the last grade of the Collège des Frères, which competed with the Arab College, a unique governmental secondary school.

To the 'more and better English' promoted by the Mandate government, the French schools' answer was 'less and better French'. This meant that French schools had to manage heterogeneous groups of pupils in language teaching; we see evidence of this in the inspectors' reports. British and Irish Christian Brothers (Jean Baptiste de la Salle) were sent to Jerusalem to teach English. English and Arabic, crucial for earning a diploma under the British Mandate, became for the French schools a way of preserving French education and of ensuring that their students found a suitable place in the Palestinian job market. From the beginning of the 1920s onwards the high commissioner stressed the importance of developing linguistic facility among employees. Therefore, though the discussions in the French Catholic schools were not about the potential 'anglicization' of their curriculum, they proposed a progressive increase in hours of English instruction. This is also an assertion of what Watenpaugh has described as a modern middle class, contesting their exclusion from political processes via their language ability, and wishing to take a pre-eminent role not only for themselves, for their community, for Catholics, but also for Palestinian society as a whole.

The birth of an urban middle class contributed to the demand for education and emancipation. Until the mid-1930s, a good education was still based on language education, and foreign languages were still a benchmark, a key factor in obtaining a good social position in

⁴²A few archives among the Central Awqaf archives of Abu Dis mention the warning to parents from the Muslim religious authorities and some Jerusalem leaders to beware of the missionary schools. Few cases of intimidation were reported by the directors of the schools, Central Awqaf archives (Abu Dis), 13/25/2, 31/1/75.

⁴³AMG, NH101, 'Admission des dissidents dans nos écoles', Frère Onésime, Visiteur, 1910. The author of the letter evoked 'fewer prejudices [...] pupils grateful to their masters and their religion [...] segregation and separation cannot offer reconciliation'. The girls' schools, providing education to future mothers, played a role in establishing and maintaining 'Christian homes', while they continued to enrol a large number of Muslim pupils.

⁴⁴ACJ, French language textbooks.

⁴⁵ACTS, Magazine of the Terra Sancta (Franciscan) College, 1924–1929.

Palestinian society. French was essential in education until the mid-1920s because, according to the missionaries, the French government and the Palestinian elite, it mirrored the 'universal values of rationalism and the clarity of expression'.⁴⁶

The metalinguistic landscape in Palestine is characterized for the interwar period by contradictions and tensions. Several Catholics embraced from their beginning the Muslim Christian Associations (MCA) which promoted the idea that Muslims and Christians were part of a single movement⁴⁷ of growing nationalism. Mastering several languages allowed the Catholics to bring their causes to the Vatican, to mobilize the Catholic diaspora, but often on an individual basis, as explained by the latest study by N. Haiduc Dale and the local archives.

3. The Fear of Confusion

The Mandate Government was moved by practical considerations: for the government, reading in English was not a cultural exploration but a preparation for entry into working life. The Bowman archives reveal that for the Director of the Department of Education (1920–1936), any other language/culture beyond the local vernacular was perceived as a potential political threat. Humphrey Bowman promoted a doctrine of education along a 'native language line' and wanted to avoid literary education. The English language linked to the education policy was perceived as a failure,⁴⁸ the context of English colonial education policy being largely based on the British experience in India. In this respect, Bowman discouraged the development of private and missionary school alternatives.

The German Catholic educational system also insisted on Arabic as the mother tongue, and the fear of 'confusion' that might result from neglecting the teaching of Arabic. After the foundation of the German Empire, German Catholic institutions were active from an educational point of view,⁴⁹ to support existing Catholic institutions, via the Latin Patriarchate, while German Protestantism was encouraged. The German Catholic schools did not differ from their Protestant counterparts: though defeated after the First World War, Germany continued to promote an educational programme in Arabic and English, as German was forbidden.⁵⁰ The re-opening of the Schmidt girls' school was granted only in 1921 on the condition that no longer German but English should be taught in the school besides Arabic. The German school for girls in Jerusalem aimed at 'educating [the] pupils to become good and useful members of Arabic society and not inferior Europeans'. It adjusted to the Palestinian syllabus and remained the only school for higher education of that kind under Catholic administration. Students qualified as teachers and the Government of Palestine acknowledged their qualifications. Most of the girls obtained important positions as headmistresses of schools or assistants in various ministries.⁵¹

⁴⁶Reem Bassiouney, *Arabic Sociolinguistics*, p. 212.

⁴⁷N. Haiduc Dale, 'Arab Christians in Palestine Communalism and Nationalism, 1917-1948' (PhD thesis, New York University, 2009), chapter 1 2010.

⁴⁸In 1931 for example, only one in a thousand boys completed secondary education.

⁴⁹1855 Society of the Holy Sepulchre (founded in Cologne); 1885 The German Palästina Verein founded and established in Jaffa Gate (Haim Goren); German Hospice for Pilgrims and a school (German Sisters of St Charles); Palestine Society for the Catholics of Germany; 1895 The German Palästina Verein was merged with the Verein vom Heiligen Grabe to the Deutsche Verein vom Heiligen, landowner and supporter of the school in 1895.

⁵⁰H. Goren, *'Echt katholisch und gut deutsch' - Die deutschen Katholiken und Palästina, 1838-1910* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2009); R. Loeffler, *Protestanten in Palästina. Religionspolitik, Sozialer Protestantismus und Mission in den deutschen evangelischen und anglikanischen Institutionen des Heiligen Landes 1917-1939* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer Verlag, 2008).

⁵¹Schmidt school, Jerusalem, private archives. At the beginning of the 1920s, more than 300 pupils were welcomed, mainly Arab Palestinian. The German linguistic and cultural agenda via its school and its dispensary in Jerusalem will be studied in a future article.

The Holy See took an official position against the teaching of 'national languages' to Catholics at the beginning of the Mandate for Palestine. The relations of the French schools with the various ecclesiastical institutions to which they had to pay allegiance (the Vatican, the Latin and Melkite Patriarchates) were subject to the duty of non-interference with temporal powers.⁵² From the early 1920s the Holy See insisted on the neutrality of the missionaries, who should not be 'agents of colonial powers', emphasizing the incompatibility between the two roles of language and faith missionaries. The Vatican underlined the danger of secular nationalism of the missionaries and insisted on limiting the teaching of 'national languages' in its recommendations to the Catholic schools. In the French schools, the promotion of the catechism (both textbooks and religious education) in Arabic was part of a bigger project directed by the French ecclesiastic Abbé Guervin and approved by popes Benedict XV and Pius XI to attempt to preserve the Catholics (via schools, cultural associations and international organizations).⁵³

At the same time, there was no escaping the linguistic and cultural influence of Italian, the national language of several representatives of the Catholic hierarchy. The project of a Catholic university of the Holy Land at the end of the 1920s was supported by cardinal de Ferrari, and intended for students of 'Arab nationality and language [...] independently from their religion and rites'; only Arab students should be enrolled. It was intended to react to the development of the YMCA and to offer professional opportunities. The curriculum was planned in Arabic and English (with optional French and Italian courses) but the whole initiative, coming from Italy, was clearly perceived as an influence of Italian language and culture by the French Foreign Affairs minister and German missionaries in Jerusalem.⁵⁴

Catholic authorities (both local and in Rome)⁵⁵ required the French schools to implement their curricula and rapidly to develop the teaching of Arabic at the end of the 1920s, in order to counter Protestant educational initiatives (in which Arabic played an important role) more easily.⁵⁶ The teaching of the Arabic language, that of the country, should preferably be developed, also the teaching of English, to oppose the Protestant language more easily; declared clearly the Patriarch of the Catholic Latin community as early as 1920.⁵⁷

Further development of teaching *in* and *of* Arabic took place in the Catholic schools. Parallel to this offer in Arabic, some parents started to demand more social activities for children in Arabic, and underlined the moral value of Arabic. The indigenization of the religious educators in the French schools⁵⁸ promoted a more favourable attitude towards the Arabic language as well, which is manifest in a significant increase of diplomas in Arabic (1931–1938). For girls' education, the creation of the order of the Rosary Sisters (indigenous

⁵²Palestinian Catholics were less suspected of being francised than the Lebanese Maronite communities.

⁵³VSSA (Vatican Segretaria di Stato Archives), 33, PO 49, Palestina, 1923–1936, Opera della Preservazione della Fede in Palestina e scuole cattoliche and SCO, 481, Opera della preservazione della Fede in Palestina.

⁵⁴Archives of the Custodia di Terra Santa, C. Opera Ferrarri file.

⁵⁵LPA, jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle East was restored on 23 July 1847 (between the period of 1291, after the last Crusaders left the Holy Land, and 1847, the Franciscans were the curators of the Christian holy places and the legal representatives of the Latin Catholic authorities).

⁵⁶COCA, 466 i Protestanti in Palestina; 504 scuole media di lingua inglese in Palestina (to thwart the British influence); 463 L'ospizio de Tantur, desire to fight against the influence of the YMCA and attract Catholic youth, but also Christian and Muslim youth. LPA, *Circulaire du Patriarche Barlassina*, 02/10/1920; LPA, General correspondence, 1918–1924; correspondence after the Education Ordinance and the erection of the YMCA, 1933.

⁵⁷LPA, *Circulaire du Patriarche Barlassina*, 2 octobre 1920, Jerusalem. The Latin Patriarchate also invited the French institutions to improve their teaching of religion in the Arabic language, and invited the missionaries to provide catechism classes only in Arabic. AMG, GB351, 1932; AMAE, Nantes, n°362, 13/12/1941. AMG, *Maximum Illud*, 30 November 1919, *Acta Apostolicae, sedis XI*, 440. Nationalism is assimilated to heresy, December 1922, Pie XI, *Ubi Arcano Die Consilio*.

⁵⁸ACJ, before 1904: 90% of French Brothers; after 1936: between 30% and 60%.

Catholic nuns, teaching in Arabic) reveals the importance of an education given in Arabic and of the virtues of Arabic for the local Catholics. It shows that Arabic was not considered as the language of men, but rather, a national language, and the language of the local Catholicism that would preserve the Palestinian girls (all together) from the moral dangers associated with English.⁵⁹

But while supporting the Catholic community of Palestine and the underlying necessity of addressing it in Arabic in order to address the community in its mother tongue and to reinforce a common ground with their Muslim fellow-countrymen, the Holy See emphasized the international Catholic sphere and space, thus, in its declarations, detaching the Catholics from the Muslim Palestinians.⁶⁰

On the one hand, Arabic was clearly advocated from the beginning of the 1920s both as being the language of the local Catholic, and out of an underlying respect for Oriental Catholicism. On the other hand, the Holy See maintained Latin as a transnational tool, a language free from national origin, able to serve the transnational Catholic community and thus asked the community to remain aloof from nationalist organizations.

At the same time, while officially the Latin Patriarch L. Barlassina was spreading the idea of being pro-Arab, he encouraged the Latin laity to focus on their Latin-ness and to remain aloof from the wider Arab community. Barlassina was to some extent more pro-Latin than pro-Arab, as he supported Arab rights only when it was important for the Latins.⁶¹ Some Latins took important positions in order to represent the Palestinians' interest but on a more individual level, and kept stressing the importance of multilingualism to make their case known outside the Holy Land.

The Catholic schools' alumni archives reveal to what extent Catholics questioned the categories imposed on them by the Mandate authorities, and kept claiming their Arabness along with their multilingualism. A difference has to be made between Latin and Melkite, as the latter clearly had a pretension of embracing Arabness more fully than the Latins. The Melkite bishop G. Hajjar was emblematic of this claim to Arabness.⁶² He was active in the early years in uniting Christians and Muslims against British policy and became a symbol for Christians of other denominations since he was the highest-ranked Arab clergyman in all of Palestine.⁶³ This was partially an answer to the Arabization trend of the Orthodox communities.⁶⁴ The Melkite leaders took a clearer position than the Latin Patriarchate towards Arab nationalism, as the correspondence between the Melkite Church and the Holy See concerning the 'Palestine Fatherland' makes clear. The Melkites clearly affirmed that they

⁵⁹LPA, Rosary Sisters schools files.

⁶⁰COCA, 426, Progetti di venire in aiuto dei cattolici in Palestina.

⁶¹Barlassina refused for example the Mandate government overseeing of Latin schools, complained about Zionist morals in the Holy City, and refused to attend the king's birthday celebrations because the service was in a non-Catholic church. LPA, Barlassina archives, 1920–1940 and ISA M7/1 and M7/2 for extensive documentation of Barlassina's conflicts with the British and the Vatican.

⁶²Hajjar or Haggear. Antonius underlined the Melkite contribution to the Arab revival in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. William L. Cleveland, 'The Arab Nationalism of George Antonius Reconsidered', in James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni (eds.), *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 65–86.

⁶³When the nationalist leadership sent a delegation to the Vatican in 1922, Bishop Hajjar and Fuad Sa'd (two Melkites) were sent rather than representatives of the Latin Church. The relative importance of Melkite over Latin is notable, showing that the Arab leadership privileged Christians who embraced their Arabness most fully, even if their denomination was smaller or internationally less important. VSSA, 108 PO 103, 22 December 1929, Apostolic Delegate to the Secretariat of State, Vatican, reaction of Bishop Haggear; and VSSA, 131 PO 115, Palestina 1932–1936, Centro Internazionale per la protezione degli interessi cattolici Minaccia sionista (directors of Catholic schools in the committee).

⁶⁴L. Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine* (Austin: Texas University Press, 2011).

constituted an integral part of the national movement and firmly criticized the 'neutrality' of the European consuls and missionaries.⁶⁵

Different archives of the Latin community mention a clear desire of several members of this community for the Arabic language to be the language for priests and deacons, and appointments of native archbishops, language playing an essential role in the 'processes of inclusion/exclusion' from the group.⁶⁶

The Catholic narrative over nationalism hesitated between focusing on its Arabic mother tongue and the necessity of keeping its multilingualism. Within this multilingual community, Catholic schools were trying to mobilize the Catholic community in Great Britain against the efforts of the Mandate authorities, primary and secondary languages being mastered differently according to the social status and the types of internal and external contacts of these subgroups with their French, German and English partners.

Conclusion

Recent studies on the Catholics of Palestine tend to ignore the great diversity of their attitudes towards language choices during the interwar period. A careful look at the linguistic and cultural challenges shows the different views of this group concerning the power of language. The multilayered conflicts and overlapping identification processes in which different languages played different roles invite us to a more nuanced narrative to explain the range of discussions among Catholics about linguistic choices and, to a larger extent, their attitude towards nationalism, Arabness and Catholicism. In the community's various archives, the boundaries between the categories of religion and nationality were contested: Catholics were struggling, sometimes implicitly, sometimes explicitly, with what it meant to be an Arab Catholic from a linguistic point of view.

Catholic Francophony was a complex phenomenon. It did not necessarily mean an infatuation with a foreign culture, nor a sign of either an identity crisis or a doubt about Catholic allegiance to the Palestinian nation. It also meant some material considerations (good education, easier access to sanitary services provided by the missionaries, for example). This invites us to a nuanced account of multilingualism, as in this Catholic community each of the foreign languages had a different function, some of them shifting over time. Both Latins and Melkites continued to promote multilingualism, their command of different languages enabling them to make a contribution to international debates over Palestine, though the Melkites wanted to emancipate themselves from the French *tutelle*, receiving a form of international protection.

During the time of the British Mandate in Palestine, language was an instrument for the political and religious institutions, and a reflection of the dialectic relationship between the

⁶⁵At the beginning of the 1930s they moved towards a common ground with Muslims as 'imposed' by the political circumstances in their correspondence with the Holy See. They claim to be protected as a 'minority'. COCA, Melikiti, 2030, Haggear, Ponzana personale, Letter of Haggear to Sincero (cardinal, Propaganda Fide, 13 December 1929—in French in the original letter). 'They are, in fact, a small minority scattered among a large majority of boiling fanaticism. I stand in good relation with Muslims to protect my people.'

⁶⁶R. Bassiouney, *Language and Identity in Modern Egypt* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 41; COCA, Latini, Propaganda Fide, 417, Sawt el Chab n° 144, 19 February 1925 (in Arabic) ASCAES, SS (Archivio della Sacra Congregazione degli Affari Ecclesiastici straordinari Segretario di Stato), Latini e missionari locali chiedono un Patriarca arabo; COCA, 417, Movimento di xenofobismo contro il clero straniero; n° 2080, 1927, article Shoura, Caire; n° 153, 27 October 1927, E fino a quando; n° 150, 6 October 1927, Cose latine; 100 COCA, Latini, Propaganda Fide, 417, Sawt el Chab, 2 August 1923, Il risorgimento religioso del popolo arabo cattolico in Palestina.

'dominant' and the 'dominated' linguistic actor.⁶⁷ Confronted with the emergence of local nationalism and its linguistic nationalistic repercussions, European language policies aimed at maintaining their sphere of influence. These European schools constitute an interesting platform for analysing the complexity of the relationships between language, religion, education and identity-building processes.

On the one hand, Catholic schools underlined the cultural and linguistic policies of the two rival mandatory powers in the region (through the exclusion, inversion and distribution of new language functions). On the other hand, they reflected the complex reality of the missionaries' presence in the Holy Land and the use of French in this society, very different from that in French Syria and the Lebanon.

Despite the impact of the international Catholic agenda, the Catholic communities of Palestine did play a role in the local scene, at the same time emphasizing their multilingual facilities and praising Arabic at all levels as the language of Palestinians, and their common ground with the Muslims.

The dynamics between personal and institutional interactions, between official rhetoric and actual practices, need to be studied further: the persistence of multilingual values in the Christian communities of Palestine shows that many indigenous Christians from Palestine were in need of language/identity negotiation via the language teaching/learning arena.

The linguistic choices faced by the Catholic communities appear diverse and, from time to time, contradictory, but less so if we consider the very complex networks of these Catholic groups in Palestine, and the different actors. The Catholics of Palestine definitely 'imagined' themselves as part of the Palestinian nation and discussed the use of Arabic as a means and as an essential element of their Palestinian identity, but not to the exclusion of other languages.

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⁶⁷Bourdieu, Pierre, *Ce que parler veut dire. L'économie des échanges linguistiques* (Paris: Fayard, 1982), p. 45.

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