Introduction

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Studies on the 'Arabisation' of missionary work have often stressed either the growing intention within missionary societies of delegating responsibilities to the local clergy trained by them[1] or, conversely, the appropriation of the mission by Arab missionaries.[2] They have stressed the conflicts arising between foreign and local missionaries in the process.[3] The purpose of this special issue is to widen the circle. Our goal is to include other, non-missionary actors with a stake in the Arabisation process, including administrative and political authorities, from the *mukhtar* of the neighbourhood to the governor or high commissioner of the territory or local consular personnel.

The point here is not only to avoid the trap of schematism, but also to analyse a political trend at work within and around the missions. Binary constructions such as missionary-missionised relations leave out of the picture many social resources and relevant political actors. Much attention has been given by historians to some of these outsiders, particularly European protectors and diplomats. Local authorities, while often unconcerned by or hostile to missionary work, were often involved in the in-fighting within the missions regarding Arabisation, or between the missionary staff and the Eastern churches. But, they could also take a larger political view of missions, considering Christian

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1   See, among others: Kitani (2010); Robson (2011), pp. 129–144; Franzman, Glueckstadt and Kark (2011), pp. 101–126.

2   Butrus Abu-Manneh gives, through the case of Butrus al-Bustani, an example of trajectories that could go from instrumental adhesion to missionary projects to their dismissal in favour of ottomanism as a better vector of reform and national cultural regeneration: Abu-Manneh (1980), pp. 287–304.

3   See for instance, on matters of religious discipline, Jock (1936); on diplomatic matters, Hajjar (1988).

communities as part of wider Arab national communities in the making.[4] Navigating between these poles required some fine-tuning on the part of the missionaries. Yet it would be an error of perspective to focus only on organisational developments. The contributions gathered here also explore the contradictory ways in which missionaries and Christian communities around them reacted to the ideologies of Arabisation and their proponents, and were transformed by them.

Considering the various patterns of relations between missionaries and local authorities and the broader processes and projects of nation-building and nationalisation of local communities, our hypothesis is that Arabisation is dialectically associated with territorialisation. Territorialisation itself is a word fraught with internal contradictions, not least in an Arab context.[5] From the 1830s onwards, administrative delimitations and political borders in the Middle East became shifting – if sometimes abstract – spatial references through the course of Ottoman reforms, the breakup of the Ottoman Empire and the independence of Arab Middle Eastern states. Neither the Ottoman Empire nor its post-World War I successors met the expectations of nationalists as "Arab" states. Yet they provided a template that could be criticised as a corset for self-determination or used as a base for nation-building. In parallel grew increasingly nationalistic trends based on the notion of Arabness.[6] Language choice, much guided by response to local concerns, became more complicated and language came to be seen as a tool for unification and strengthening of the newly conceptualised 'nation'. Varying linguistic norms could easily be interpreted as undermining nationalist unity. Therefore, pragmatic language choices became increasingly imbued with political meaning.

Yet Arabisation did not follow a linear process of territorial anchorage, self-assertion and realisation, either in the political arena or within church and missionary institutions. It engulfed ethno-political and cultural meanings that were increasingly projected onto a map, especially after 1918. And yet it could

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4 Maggiolini (2015).
5 On the understandings of territorialisation in the post-Ottoman era, see Schayegh (2011).
6 On discussions on Arabness during the Mandates, see for example Sati al-Husry's often quoted phrase on Arabic as 'a unified and unifying language' and Antonius (1938), in which the Arabic language is described as one of the defining factors in the question whether somebody can be regarded as an Arab. *The Arab awakening* is, according to Sheehi, a 'manifesto of selfhood […] a text that *enunciates* the archetypal Arab self-view', Sheehi (2004), p. 9. Numerous early Arab nationalist authors defined the importance of the Arabic language in their definition of Arab nationalism; see among others Suleiman (2003), Suleiman (1994), and Suleiman (2006).

be distinguished from all issues of lay territorial government, due to the autonomy of missionaries in the field and the low level of centralisation of certain churches, especially Protestant dissenters.

Do different regimes define different official understandings of Arabisation? In any case, the Late Ottoman period (19th century) can be characterised by the influence of these missions on the organisation and Arabisation of the local churches, as well as their role in training clerical and intellectual elites (N. Neveu, P. Maggiolini). How do these developments play out in the context of Ottoman reforms and intensified administrative presence – with an increased likelihood of micro-conflicts and, in the last few years, a hiatus between Arabisation and the emerging Turkish nationalist agenda of the central government – with or without proactive enforcement in the provinces?

To missionaries and Arab Christians alike, Arabisation could be understood as narrowly ecclesiological or in a more broadly cultural sense.[7] Some Christian communities were in a more complex linguistic situation than that of their Muslim compatriots. The existence of liturgical languages (always in a classical form that was not used for everyday communication – including classical Greek, Armenian, Syriac, Coptic) gave the teaching of the latter a special ecclesiological importance that could somehow spill over into the realm of political claims, while Arabic, or other majority languages such as Turkish, always played a role for official purposes or inter-communal communication.[8]

This ecclesiological dimension did not imply a confinement of the debates on Arabisation to internal church matters. Interdenominational competition was rife and, as Konstantinos Papasthatis shows in his article, rival missionary bodies were liable to play off commitments to Arabness against one another, with the Orthodox church in a weaker, passive position. This was especially true in the Ottoman era, when political power was seen as exterior to these rivalries. In the post-1918 period, colonial powers and their traditional protection of specific denominations created an imbalance between missions. By and large, it worked in favour of Catholic missions in Syria and Lebanon and

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7   Missionaries positioned themselves towards the role of language in creating and defining ethnic, national, and religious identities. For discussions on the role of language in creating and defining ethnic, national, and religious identities, see Joseph (2004); Myhill (2006); Omoniyi and Fishman (2006); Suleiman (2013); Hary and Wein (2013).

8   For the Syriac community in Iraq, see Murre-van den Berg (2015). Tijmen Baarda (2019) shows the complex modalities of having Arabic as the language for official use, colloquial Arabic or Neo-Aramaic as the language for private communication, and Classical Syriac as the ecclesial language. Neo-Aramaic and Classical Syriac were sometimes used as written languages in non-ecclesial situations as well.

Protestant ones in Iraq, Palestine, Transjordan and Egypt, and helped maintain their distinctly Western outlooks. But it did also backfire and nurture the demand for Arabisation on the part of native churches eager to disentangle themselves from association with the colonial power. The mandate structure as well as the political organisation of colonial Egypt created extra tensions, as colonial powers grew increasingly attentive to native local administrators who displayed a propensity to play the nationalist card in order to ensure their prerogatives vis-à-vis central colonial authorities. One way for them to do this was to denounce and curtail missions. Thus, the ecclesiological and cultural connotations of Arabisation often worked like Russian dolls. One level of conflict with church authorities or with rival missions hid local claims, but could also be seen as an effort to placate nationalist local powers.

Conversely, missionary work was never indifferent to local authorities whose power was based on a territorial definition. Many actors, outside missionary churches, or indeed more generally outside the boundaries of Christian communities, had a stake in the Arabisation of the churches established or developed by Western missionary institutions. In the colonial era, if Arab nationalists were to propagate their sense of nationality through society, they could hardly afford to bypass these churches, lest colonial powers accuse them of religious particularism. Locally, the nationalisation (i.e. resources and localised response in terms of community needs) of missionary institutions was a matter of state-building from below as much as of nation-building, as they were significant service providers to the community, beyond communal boundaries. Indeed, the process went beyond the colonial era, as post-Independence nationalist regimes proceeded to nationalise missionary institutions in the legal sense well into the 1960s.

Not only could missions become nationalised, but nationalisation ran through the Christian communities under the supervision, if not with the enthusiastic support, of European and increasingly 'Arab' missionary clergies, engulfing the latter in the process. 'Native' or 'Arab' missionaries referred, more often than not, to missionaries with ties abroad, whose 'cultural intimacy'[9] with the missionary field did not erase their image of outlanders. At the same time, the work of a culturally intimate clergy could alternately mollify or further antagonise local authorities vis-à-vis the mission. Indeed, the Arab missionaries' cultural intimacy could mean sharing an understanding of social circumstances and the reliance of missionaries on embedded networks, nationality and citizenship, or semantic and cultural finesse in the service of the mission.

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9 On this notion, see Herzfeld (2014).

Therefore, the loose but deep connection between Arabisation and territorialisation transformed Christian missions in ways that reflected their respective polysemies. Roughly, two orders of meanings emerged here, one of a linguistic nature, the other of staff-related, ethno-local character. On the surface, the linguistic dimension of Arabisation was a pedagogical concern as well as a matter of recruitment. Missionary schools should teach Arabic and, ideally, in Arabic, as shown by Annalaura Turiano in her article. Beyond that formal requirement laid the expectation that school programs should serve the state's purpose and help fill certain functions which public education could not provide. The ability to speak Arabic was not just a necessity for missionary work; it also tended to ease relations with local powers and provided a sense of agency on the spiritual side to local Christian communities. Yet, as Paolo Maggiolini shows, in turn it could become an issue for missionaries vis-à-vis their own hierarchy, linguistic skills being understood by the latter as the type of knowledge-power that could upset the chain of command.

Both the pedagogical and the recruitment dimensions ran deeper than this. Standardisation of the language through a normative pedagogy such as that of the missionaries served native agendas of local empowerment, especially among new literate elites. As shown by Stephen Sheehi, the reform of the Arabic language launched by the intellectuals of the Arab *Nahda* (awakening) in the 19th century was holistic.[10] The prescriptive aspects of the reform were part and parcel of the promotion of *adab* as both a standard of literary culture and a respectability that started with speech. The many debates regarding the definition of *adab* as a culturally-specific concept cannot entirely be separated from the influence of the missionary education received by a number of those intellectuals. To what extent did the models of respectability promoted by missionaries dovetail or clash with the ethos promoted in public education by Ottoman and later self-styled Arab governing bodies?

"Arabising" missionary education carried in itself the possibility of autonomy through nationalism by providing methods and conceptual equivalence, but also by showing the slippage of those equivalences. *Adab* (polite etiquette) was one of the new indigenous concepts that Western missionaries confronted with Arabization, alongside ʿurūbah (Arabness) and others. Movements of administrative reform, social reform and national liberation were not channels for the transfer of concepts from the West, but also movements of conceptual emancipation, to substitute indigenous understandings of liberation

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10   For a recent discussion of the Nahḍa as a cultural phenomenon, see Hanssen and Weiss (2016).

such as *swaraj* (self-rule/ home-rule), *độc-lập* (independent, self-sufficient), etc. to emancipation itself.[11] Independence (*Istiqlāl*) and sovereignty (*Siyādah*) would not be complete either if they were not understood by Arabic countries and churches in their own terms – i.e. in Arabic words and semantics. In an ecclesial context, this would be achieved by insisting upon lex fori (*Qanūn al-maḥkamah*) and the respect of "national" rights within existing conceptual framework of church laws, or perhaps more effectively through demands for formalized canon law carried the same intent. In either case, missionaries could be seen as the main culprits (e.g. for harbouring dark plans of latinization) or as the providers of a necessary conceptual interface. Indigenous political concepts could overlap with the ecclesiological conceptual field, and reciprocally, as Paolo Maggiolini hints, theological concepts as well as practices of the Eastern churches that could be mobilised by Christian communities to make a political statement vis-à-vis church hierarchies and local political institutions.

Yet, whether the Arabic language was taught at all was a crucial issue here. It should not be assumed that missionaries participated uniformly in a process of cultural homogenisation under the banner of the Arabic language. Missionaries could go against the grain of Arabisation by choosing to promote other vernaculars, such as Sureth, that could strengthen the sense of specificity of Christian communities in complex communitarian and linguistic settings. Such policies were not tools of social engineering and were not sufficient to foster communitarian forms of nationalism, but in changing political landscapes, they might play a major role in the appropriation and remediation of national identities. How Arabic was taught was also crucial: Heather Sharkey has shown how teaching Arabic in Latin characters was a factor of social isolation, not social emancipation, for students in Northern Sudan.[12]

Given precedents such as this, a tendency to adapt the Arabic in use, through the vernacularisation of missionary work, is not unexpected. But it did not develop wholly at the expense of standard Arabic. From the 19th century onwards, missionaries were confronted with militant claims to Arabness, yet those claims of Arab identity were far from monolithic. Linguistic purism and originalism were nurtured by missionary education among other factors, which was influenced by European missionaries' scholarly command of Arabic. It is usually assumed that missionary education promoted linguistic norms and a

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11   Regarding missionaries and indigenous concepts of emancipation, see Webster (1984); Pass (2014); Sarkar (2005), in particular pp. 8–10 and 15; Bùi Thiện Thảo (2018).

12   Sharkey (2002).

prescriptive grammar. Much debate among Arab intellectuals – who had often been trained by missionaries – was devoted to locating that norm in the second half of the 19th Century. Yet gradually, over the twentieth century, the debates turned into a political discussion of the validity of the norm vs. claims to the rights of vernacular Arabic. Left-leaning nationalists saw the democratic diffusion of standard Arabic as a tool for the promotion of the *qawmiyyah* (oneness of Arab language, culture and polity). Regionalist movements and more conservative governments insisted on their specific *aṣalah* (specificity of origin, distinction, nobility) and the defence of their dialect, which could be weaponised against Arab migrants.[13] Amid such debates, missionaries had to decide not only which Arabic they would speak, but to whom, on a daily basis. They could be called to teach standard Arabic in the classroom, or to use it with the mayor or in public speech, and at the same time to speak colloquial Arabic in the field. The politics of standard and colloquial Arabic reverberated in missiology.

The competition between the understandings of Arabness based on *qawmiyyah* and on *aṣalah* was also a matter of recruitment policy for the missions. With the growing trend to recruit missionaries locally, it became increasingly clear that "native" missionaries could be seen as strangers in the fieldwork to which they would be assigned, rather than as sharing a common Arabness. How they spoke reflected who they were, and where they belonged; and so, whether they belonged in the place where their missionary calling had brought them. This became a crucial matter after the independence of Middle Eastern states, as various Arab states would now be rivals in the common Arab political arena. Such competitions did not leave local churches untouched, and missionaries would be called upon to show loyalty to the state, but also the diocese, where they worked; and this they would have to do vehemently, given the overwhelming perceptions that Christian missions and colonial powers had walked hand in hand.

Within the mission, the internalisation of these rival concepts of Arabness is not a forgone conclusion. How did missionary organisations understand the Arabness of their staff? Edouard Coquet shows that Catholic missions in the interwar years tended to politicise the Christian and Catholic character of their native missionaries before their Arab character, which could be seen as a source of possible problems. Yet we should be wary of generalising this conclusion. It is necessary to pay attention to the events which showed shifts in missionary approaches – the 1928 Jerusalem World Missionary conference, for instance –

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13   Kazerouni (2017).

and to the different temporalities of policy changes between the missions. Post-independence, most missionary societies had to revise their positions on the issue or leave, as Samir Boulos shows the missions most closely associated to British colonial power in Egypt did after the 1956 Suez crisis.[14]

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14   Boulos (2016).

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