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# Caricatures in the Newspaper *al-Maʿraḍ* ('The Exhibition'): Fighting for Social Justice in Lebanon, 1921–1936

## Abstract

This article examines caricatures printed in the Lebanese newspaper *al-Maʿraḍ* ('The Exhibition'), published by Michel Zaccour (1896–1937) in Beirut from 1921 to 1936. Situating these images within the socio-political dynamics of Lebanon under French mandate rule, it investigates how caricatures operated within the intermedial microcosm of a predominantly 'serious' newspaper that nonetheless relied heavily on visual humour. Drawing on approaches from Arab periodical studies and visual history, the article characterises caricatures in *al-Maʿraḍ* as 'mediating agents' and as 'sites of contestation' within the quest for independence and intra-elite debates on the future of Lebanon. It shows, first, that caricatures amplified the paper's critique of social injustice, economic exploitation, and political dysfunction, particularly in the late 1920s. Second, they reflected an elite perspective on Lebanese society and helped construct the editor's self-image as a heroic advocate of press freedom and Lebanese interests. Third, in conflicts with French mandate authorities–especially through censorship trials–caricatures functioned simultaneously as weapons and as bones of contention, provoking concrete reactions and shaping chains of action and counteraction.

**Keywords:** caricatures, periodical studies, Lebanese history, French mandate in the Levant, censorship, social injustice

## 1. Introduction

In March 1926, the Beirut-based newspaper *al-Maʿraḍ* ('The Exhibition', 1921–1936) published a caricature of an armoured knight on horseback piercing a sheet of paper with a lance. Titled *After the court ruling on al-Maʿraḍ*, the image showed editor Michel Zaccour (1896–1937) as the heroic knight, rallying with the caption: *'Al-Maʿraḍ: To the appeal!!! To the appeal!!!'* The pierced sheet of paper symbolised the court order to shut down the newspaper, a decision Zaccour was determined to contest as part of his broader struggle against censorship during repeated closures between 1925 and 1927 (Fig. 1).

The caricature reveals the editor's heroic self-image: he depicts himself as a lone knight in shining armour struggling for his paper's survival while also fighting for press freedom, independence, and social justice.[2] His paper thus was not solely a tool of reporting and analysing current events but was intended to generate political and societal change.

1 ORCID: 0009-0001-5920-2593.

2 See Ayalon 1995, 131, for the intricate entanglements of the fights for national and individual freedoms.



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*Figure 1. Michel Zaccour as a knight in shining armour attacking the court decision to temporarily close his newspaper,* al-Maʿraḍ *(*Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 5.457, 1926, 7). After the court ruling on* al-Maʿraḍ. Al- Maʿraḍ*: To the appeal!!! To the appeal!!!'*

Furthermore, the image exemplifies that caricatures were (and are) not only humorous commentary but sites of controversy and struggle. They exaggerate and essentialise to challenge existing social and cultural norms as well as political and societal hierarchies.[3] This potential for subversion made caricatures very popular in the Middle East, especially in the 1920s/30s in the context of anti-colonial struggles.[4]

As caricatures continue to enjoy great popularity in the region, this article can draw on a rich body of existing scholarly literature. Researchers have particularly focused on Ottoman, Turkish, and Egyptian caricatures emphasising their roles in anti-colonial struggles

3 On the specific qualities of caricatures see, for example, Achterberg 1998, 73; Coupe 1969, 85; Göçek 1998, 2; Okyar 2023.

4 Kollatz 2022a, 122.



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and nation-building.[5] Research on caricatures in the Levant (or the Gulf) is much rarer and is almost exclusively produced by journalists and artists from the region.[6] Furthermore, most existing scholarship focuses on explicitly humorous and/or satirical magazines[7] or on specific topics tackled by caricatures published across several papers.[8] Less attention has been paid to how caricatures function or act within a given superordinate medium such as a (serious, non-satirical) newspaper or journal, TV channel, or website. This article therefore focuses on *al-Maʿraḍ*, one of the first periodicals to popularise caricatures in Lebanon. *Al-Maʿraḍ* is an ideal source for investigating caricatures within a periodical or text–image interactions more broadly, as it was primarily intended as a serious newspaper but nonetheless included at least one, often more, caricatures per issue, as well as textual jokes, and generally presents itself as a paper that carefully combined diverse textual and visual elements.[9] In this mix of visual and textual, serious and humorous elements it resembles the Syrian satire magazine *Al-Muḍḥik al-mubkī* ('The Weeping Joker', 1925–1966), launched in 1925.

Based on the surviving issues of *al-Maʿraḍ*, this article investigates how caricatures as an integral part of the paper became agents within an anti-colonial struggle. In doing so, it particularly focuses on how caricatures and texts interacted and integrated into a communicative whole to enhance the paper's overall communicative impact, an approach inspired by both Arab periodical studies and newer approaches in visual history.

Arab periodical studies reconceptualise periodicals (newspapers, journals, other serialised print media) as more than vessels of discourses. They stress that periodicals are active agents or actors in themselves that are deeply embedded in networks and social practices. Through this embeddedness as well as their capacity to integrate diverse textual and pictorial elements into a communicative whole, periodicals influence intellectual, cultural, and political transformation.[10] In a similar way, proponents of visual history emphasise that images not only document history but influence its course.[11] Based on this insight, Roßler has developed a sociological model to describe images and works of art more generally as actors. He conceptualises works of art (such as caricatures) as part of 'chains or networks of action' that influence how people understand and consequently shape their realities: once produced by humans, a work of art (periodical, caricature) becomes a 'mediating agent,' which exists independently from its creator. It circulates, interacts with human readers/viewers, shapes their perceptions, and elicits reactions from them through its 'performative, theatrical, dramatic' qualities. In this interaction

5 Awad 2020; El Saied 2019; Göçek 1998; Kollatz 2022a; Kollatz 2022b; Okyar 2023; Wagner 2022.
6 Anonymous 2022a; Al-Ǧauhīrī and Bazzī 2023; Ḥaddād 2023; Ḥammūd 2024.
7 For example: Awad 2020.
8 For example: Okyar 2023.
9 Kaḥḥālah 1925.
10 Albers 2023; Bentlage and Köster 2025; Collier 2015; Ernst and Scheiding, 2022; Glaß 2004; Latham and Scholes 2006; Sheehi 2005; Winckler 2018.
11 Bredekamp 2021; Gerhard 2011.

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with humans, it gains an inherent capacity to effect change, which Roßler terms 'effective power' and 'actorness.'[12]

Applying Roßler's model to this case study, I define *al-Maʿraḍ* and its caricatures as mediating agents. Purposefully created by actors belonging to an emerging professional middle class as instruments in their anti-colonial struggle, they became sites of contestation in debates over Lebanon's future. As iconotexts within the intermedial microcosm of a periodical and through their specific 'performative quality'–that is, their exaggerating and essentialising style–caricatures gained 'effective power' and 'actorness,' becoming battle cries for action against colonial exploitation and social injustice.

The article traces these dynamics across five sections: After outlining the historical context and characterising the set of actors behind periodical and caricatures in the first two sections, it analyses how caricatures interacted with *al-Maʿraḍ*'s textual elements as a third step. In the fourth section it zooms in on a specific set of caricatures crucial to the paper's core agenda of promoting Lebanese independence and social justice to highlight how their emotive and appellative character turned into communicative impact. The final section then highlights caricatures as simultaneous bones of contention and weapons in a conflict between local newspaper editor and colonial power. As they elicited very concrete reactions from the colonial powers, caricatures in this section clearly emerge as key actors within circular chains of action and (re-)action deeply embedded in the colonial realities they were intended to change.

## 2. Periodicals and Caricatures amidst the Struggle for Lebanon's Future

*Al-Maʿraḍ* was published in Beirut between 1921 and 1936, during French mandate rule over Lebanon and Syria, a period marked by the struggle for independence, widespread poverty, and sharp socio-economic inequality. Periodicals reflected and intervened in these struggles.

After World War I, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the 1920 San Remo conference placed former Arab provinces under British and French mandates. Officially framed as transitional 'tutelage' towards independence, mandate rule in practice concentrated power in French institutions, while local authorities were largely confined to a consultative role.[13] The war had caused large-scale poverty in both today's Lebanon and Syria, which peaked during the Great Famine (1915–1918) with 30-50% of the population starving to death in some areas.[14]

Despite this dire socio-economic situation, investments in trade and finance and new educational opportunities helped to produce an emergent professional middle class of engineers, doctors, lawyers, and journalists that challenged established elites. This new upper class recognised the potential of journals and newspapers for influencing public

12 Roßler 2023, 237–41, 247.
13 Ṣalībī 2003, 19; Traboulsi 2007, 88.
14 Abi-Rached and Diwan 2022, 8; Harris 1997, 40.



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opinion.[15] Consequently, periodicals became important vehicles for the anti-colonial struggle but also for the gradual development of a Lebanese national sentiment and the articulation of competing political, social, and cultural visions of the country's future.[16] In doing so, they contributed to the gradual consolidation of Greater Lebanon–an externally delineated space–into a political and cultural unit increasingly invested with national meaning.[17]

Against this backdrop, the proliferation of periodicals in 1920s Lebanon is unsurprising.[18] The collapse of the Ottoman Empire (1922) enabled the return of formerly exiled intellectuals, and Beirut re-emerged as a vibrant centre of Arab journalism.[19] Despite continuing censorship and extremely insecure, often rapidly changing legal conditions, 'political passion' motivated a generation of often very young editors and journalists.[20] They considered their periodicals as a service to the people and as leading the struggle for independence. Periodicals frequently acted as mouthpieces for specific political agendas and accompanied the formation of contemporary political parties. They thus became 'an indispensable actor in political mobilisation […] and the restructuring of political life' in Lebanon as elsewhere in the region.[21]

Humour and satire–especially caricatures–were central to these processes of nation-building and mobilisation. Not only did they enable the circulation of political critique under the guise of entertainment, but they gave visible form to political and societal dynamics and created idiotypic representations of group identities. From the 19th century onwards, Ottoman/Turkish and Egyptian caricaturists, for example, often depicted the nation as a female figure that embodied the nation's virtues and/or its struggles against foreign powers.[22] Stylised representations of corrupt officials, of the 'new woman,' and of downtrodden peasants became similar staples in caricatures[23] reflecting debates in societies undergoing profound political, societal, and cultural transformations.

While Lebanese publishers, journalists, and artists seem to have discovered the power of humour later than their Ottoman/Turkish and Egyptian colleagues, they made strides to catch up during the first two decades of the twentieth century. The first Lebanese satir-

15 Abi-Rached and Diwan 2022, 4; Arsan and Schayegh 2015, 4; Traboulsi 2007, 92.

16 On newspapers as 'platforms for the discussion of issues of national identity and culture […]' see Ayalon 1995, 81. While he focuses on Egypt during the interwar period here, his observations are applicable to the entire region. On the power of print in creating national awareness also see Okyar 2023, 7.

17 On the complexities of the evolution of a Lebanese national consciousness see Salibi 2003.

18 Ayalon 1995, 91; Méouchy 2002, n.p.

19 Méouchy 2002, n.p.

20 Ayalon 1995, 88–90, 118–9.

21 Méouchy 2002, n.p.

22 Awad 2020, 180; Brummett 1995, 434; Brummett 1998, 13, 25, 29. This is not only true for the Middle East. Somers has shown that American editorial cartoons were crucial for the development of national symbolism, Somers 1998, 2–3.

23 Awad 2020, 171–2; Brummett 1998.

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ical magazines had already been published prior to World War I,[24] and 12 out of 104 periodicals that were launched in Beirut between 1918 and 1939 were humorous in nature, making them the third largest category after magazines on literature, history, and culture (22 titles) and magazines on religion (22 titles).[25] Caricatures first appeared before the Great War in *Habbat* ('Galloping', n.d.), a horse-racing magazine, but they only became a prominent art and media form in the 1920s. Four periodicals are usually credited with their breakthrough: *ad-Dabūr* ('The Wasp', 1923–today), *an-Nadīm* ('Nadeem', n.d.), *al-Aḥrār al-Muṣawwara* ('The Illustrated *al-Aḥrār*', 1926–1927), and *al-Maʿraḍ*.[26]

## 3. Michel Zaccour and *Al-Maʿraḍ*: a Top-Down Approach to Reforming Lebanon

Periodicals are more than their textual content: they emerge from social networks (publishers, journalists, photographers, artists, readers, printers, typesetters, agents and vendors, etc.),[27] are tied to specific institutions (postal offices, telegram services, publishing houses, literary salons, etc.),[28] and shape social practices (political and societal debate, individual and public reading, letter writing, gifting subscriptions, etc.). Yet the archival visibility of the many actors involved in the periodical's production and consumption is uneven. While Michel Zaccour's biography is well documented,[29] most other contributors remain obscure. This silence itself suggests *al-Maʿraḍ* as the product of a relatively small elite circle, advancing a top-down vision of social change and a highly personalised model of journalistic activism centred on its founder.

Zaccour was the paper's decisive driving force. Most clearly, *al-Maʿraḍ* ceased publication immediately after his death, and early imprints list him as founder without mentioning other key figures.[30] He authored many of the editorials and was among the most prolific contributors: the compiled issues of May 1935, for instance, include nine articles by Zaccour, nine by other named authors, and eight anonymous pieces.[31] This strong position of the founder-publisher-editor was typical of private publishing in the Middle East, especially in its early phases in the second half of the 19th century. As launching a printing business and/or a periodical was relatively easy and inexpensive, many papers were one-man enterprises. Consequently, these owner-publisher-editors profoundly shaped 'their' periodical's political agenda, societal messaging, content curation, and aesthetic design.[32]

24 *Ḥimārat baladnā* ('Our Country's Donkey', 1910), *Ḥimārat al-ǧabal* ('Donkey of the Mountain', 1913), and *Ǧirāb al-Kurdī* ('Haversack', 1914), see: Anonymous 2022a, n.p.; Ḥammūd 2004, 79.

25 Méouchy 2002, n.p.

26 Al-Ǧauhīrī and Bazzī 2023, n.p.; Ḥaddād 2023, n.p.; Ḥammūd 2004, 79–80, Anonymous 2022.

27 On the new professions created by the print industry see Ayalon 2008, 563.

28 On the technical changes accompanying the print revolution see Gelvin and Green 2013.

29 Mostly thanks to the biography written by Naǧǧār (Naǧǧār 2010).

30 Title pages of *al-Maʿraḍ* May 1921–November 1924.

31 This in addition to a conference report, five reprinted speeches held at a commemoration for al-Mutanabbī, several poems, miscellaneous news, photographs and illustrations with explanations, and advertisements. *Al-Maʿraḍ* 1057–1067 (1935).

32 Ayalon 1995, 195–206, 223–4; Ayalon 2008, 564.



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At the same time, *al-Maʿraḍ* reflects the gradual institutionalisation of journalism in the 1920s. Periodicals that were mid- to large-scale enterprises and thus able to hire paid staff became more common.[33] This development was often contingent on outside funding, *al-Maʿraḍ* for example was funded by Edmund Zaccour, the editor's brother, a wealthy émigré to Colombia,[34] which enabled Michel Zaccour to purchase his own printing press from Leipzig, Germany.[35] *Al-Maʿraḍ* seems to have employed a photographer,[36] and from late 1924 the paper's imprints mention Ḫān Antūn Bek as an administrator in charge of advertisements.[37] If additional staff (clerks, typesetters) existed, they remain invisible in the sources. When Zaccour entered parliament in 1929, Mīšāl Abū Šahlā joined as director;[38] although he occasionally contributed articles, he did not noticeably reshape the paper's curation.

*Al-Maʿraḍ* was produced by and for the emerging cosmopolitan (upper) middle class described above. Zaccour came from a relatively well-off Christian family from Chiyah and began studying law before joining the first generation of full-time professional journalists.[39] Contributors were likewise drawn from intellectual circles along the Syrian and Lebanese coast and from diaspora communities.[40] The advertising profile–luxury women's fashion and Rolls Royce cars–further indicates an affluent readership. In this sense, *al-Maʿraḍ* resembled many 1920s periodicals whose producers and readers belonged to relatively prosperous social strata combining Western models with local traditions.[41] Nonetheless, Zaccour framed the paper as advocating for all Lebanese people, an agenda which also shaped his political career.

Like many contemporary editors and journalists, Michel Zaccour saw his publishing as patriotic activism. After an unsuccessful campaign in 1925, he entered parliament in 1929 as representative of Mount Lebanon and was re-elected in 1934 as part of the Constitutional Bloc established by his friend Béchara el-Khoury (prime minister in 1927–1928 and 1929; Lebanon's first president, 1943–1952). In March 1937 Zaccour was appointed minister of the interior, consular secretary of state, and minister of education, but his ministerial career ended with his premature death at 41.[42] In his publishing activities as well as his political career he promoted Lebanese independence stressing the mandate's transitory character, lobbied against sectarian divisions, and advocated for more social justice.[43] Additionally,

33 Ayalon 1995, 195–206, 226.
34 Naǧǧār 2010, 20–3, 29; Noun 2010, n.p.
35 Naǧǧār 2010, 56–7.
36 Suggested by the large number of photos published in the paper.
37 *Al-Maʿraḍ* 11, 332–63 (1924), title page.
38 *Al-Maʿraḍ* 27, 798–843 (1929), title page.
39 Naǧǧār 2010, 18–21.
40 They for example include Badawī al-Ǧabal, a well-known Syrian (ʿAlawī) poet, aš-Šāʿir al-Qarawī, an Arab Brazilian diaspora poet, and the Lebanese journalist and diplomate Ġassān Tuīnī.
41 Kollatz 2022b, 154–5.
42 Naǧǧār 2010, 55, 57–8, 72–3, 97; Noun 2010, n.p.; Traboulsi 2007, 95.
43 Noun 2010, n.p.; Naǧǧār 2010, 8–9, 38–41, 101–2.

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*al-Maʿraḍ* presented itself as a platform for freedom of opinion and speech and as a mediator of plural political perspectives within intra-elite struggles over Lebanon's future.[44]

Caricatures were an integral part of the paper's make-up and crucial to the dissemination of its political and social messages. Although Zaccour positioned *al-Maʿraḍ* as a 'serious' publication rather than a primarily satirical one, almost every issue included at least one caricature (often more) alongside textual jokes. While some caricatures were borrowed from English and French magazines or the Egyptian satire magazine *Kaškūl*,[45] most were original–an unusual feature that, together with the paper's careful content curation, implies that caricatures were likely commissioned specifically for *al-Maʿraḍ*. The commissioning process and editor–artist interactions are not documented, but scholarship on Ottoman and Egyptian caricatures suggests editorial control, with publication decisions tied to political messaging[46] and artists contributing to multiple papers as freelancers.[47] The scant information available on *al-Maʿraḍ*'s caricaturists suggest a similar picture.

While many caricatures were not signed–a usual procedure at the time, as the message was considered to be more important than the person behind it[48]–some contributing caricaturists can be identified. The diversity of their backgrounds[49] reflects Beirut's cosmopolitan character and presents caricatures in *al-Maʿraḍ* as bringing together European–especially French, Ottoman, Greek and Lebanese–traditions and voices. Early caricatures published during the 1920s had been either drawn by the French artist Doctor Farnago (no further information available)[50] or by ʿEzzat Khūrshīd (n.d.), a Lebanese man of Turkish origins commonly regarded as the first Lebanese caricaturist. As he first served as a police officer and then worked in the foreign ministry, he kept his artistic endeavours secret.[51] In 1927 an artist called Vasiliadis, who signed his caricatures in Greek letters, began contributing to Zaccour's paper.[52] In the early 1930s two Lebanese artists joined the paper: Raʾfat Buḥairī[53] and Muṣṭafā Farūkh.[54] While little is known about Buḥairī, the latter was a famous Lebanese artist, critic, and art teacher, whose works combined Ottoman and European influences with popular Lebanese traditions. He contributed caricatures to *al-Maʿraḍ, ad-Dabūr*, and *an-Nadīm*.[55] The paper also printed caricatures with an illegible

44 Zaccour 1921, 1.
45 For example*: Kaškūl*. 1923.
46 Awad 2020, 169–70.
47 Brummett 1998, 15.
48 Brummett 1995, 436.
49 A distinguishing feature from rival Lebanese satire magazine *ad-Dabbūr* that primarily employed Egyptian and Syrian artists (Anonymous 2022b).
50 The employment of foreign caricaturists was not unusual. Al-Kaškūl for example first hired the Spanish teacher Juan Sintes to draw caricatures for the magazine (Awad 2020, 167).
51 Al-Ǧauhīrī and Bazzī 2023, n.p.; Ḥammūd 2004, 79; Naǧǧār 2010, 31.
52 For example: *Al-Maʿraḍ* 1927, 7,575, 11, and *al-Maʿraḍ*, 1927, 7,617, 20.
53 For example: *al-Maʿraḍ*, 1931, 11,948, 21; 1934, Special Issue, 32.
54 His first contribution to *al-Maʿraḍ* appears in 1932, 11,975, 19.
55 Al-Ǧauhīrī and Bazzī 2023, n.p.; Ḥammūd 2004, 79; Anonymous 2022b; Lebanese Artists.



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Arabic signature[56] as well as two artists with the French-sounding names HP Garisien[57] and Daniel Lapause[58] for whom no further biographical data is available. The growing number of identifiable contributors suggests the increasing popularity of caricature as a genre, which is further illustrated by a reader of *al-Maʿraḍ* contributing as an amateur or citizen caricaturists. In 1934 Blanche ʿAmūn (1912–2011) contributed an entire page of humorous drawings depicting street life in Beirut.[59]

Given that most caricatures remain unsigned and selection practices are undocumented, no reliable statement can be made on how involved artists were in choosing the topics or in shaping political messaging. Nonetheless, some identifiable caricaturists seem to have had preferred topics. Both Khūršīd and the unidentified Arab artist, for example, focused on the mismanagement of political and public life in Lebanon. These likely reflected challenges they encountered in their professional and everyday lives, which suggests that at least some caricaturists influenced the paper's messaging.

## 4. Effective Power through Iconotextuality and Intermediality

Since interventions by scholars like W. J. T. Mitchell and Roland Barthes have challenged the historic divide between text and image, scholarship has increasingly shown that the two do not operate as rivals but produce cultural meaning in their interplay.[60] Instead of adding to this literature and contributing general observations on caricatures as iconotexts (media that combine image and text),[61] this section investigates caricatures as components of a superordinate medium, the periodical in which they appeared. In doing so, it demonstrates that caricatures at least partially gained their effective power through being part of a periodical while also enhancing the periodical's communicative impact.

Periodicals are inherently intermedial; they integrate diverse genres of text (editorials, essays, reports, news, short stories, poems) and pictorial media (photographs, illustrations, graphs, caricatures), and they often contain references pointing to other forms of media beyond their pages (books, music, and later radio, movies, etc.). This as Walter Armbrust notes, turned them into labyrinths of text and image that the reader had to traverse.[62] Curating a mix of media, genres, and topics into a communicative whole rendered the periodical a special form of media that has the capacity to instigate debate and potentially also societal transformation.

56 For example: *Al-Maʿraḍ* 1927, 7.575, 2.
57 For example: *Al-Maʿraḍ* 1929, 9,844, 6.
58 For example: *Al-Maʿraḍ* 1935, 13,1077, 4.
59 ʿAmūn 1934, 24. Blanche ʿAmūn and Nina Helou were the first women in Lebanon to graduate in law in 1931. Blanche ʿAmūn then became a famous painter and book author. Fadel 2021.
60 Barthes 1983, Mitchell 2004.
61 This, while recognising the value of this research and agreeing with Göçek's astute observation that the cartoon [or caricature] is a 'significant social medium because of the multiplicity of meanings and forms embedded within: it contains both a visuals and textual message on political events presented through cultural symbols' (Göçek 1998, 2).
62 Armbrust 2022, 88.

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Within this curated mix, the caricature's iconotextuality was evident not only in captions within the imagery (headlines, explanations, dialogues), but also in interactions with the periodical's other textual elements. Consequently, as Okyar argues, '[t]hese visual forms [caricatures] combined with the text would invest in the consolidation of symbols that helped construct an imaginary world of perceptions and ideas.'[63] Applying this to Roßler's observations on image agency confirms caricatures as nodes within networks of actors: authors and artists created texts and images, editors curated them into a coherent world of shared ideas and values. As soon as published, caricatures became visual embodiments of these ideas and values. They became mediating agents conveying shared meanings to the readers/viewers in interaction with these readers but also in interaction with the periodical's other elements–pictorial and textual.

Cataloguing[64] the caricatures in the available issues of *al-Maʿraḍ* with particular attention on caricature–text interplay, suggests that Zaccour (potentially in cooperation with other editorial staff, contributing authors and artists) consciously mobilised the mediating potential created by this interplay. Caricatures in *al-Maʿraḍ*, especially when tackling social injustice, the oppressive nature of the mandate system, or defects in the Lebanese political system, frequently entered direct dialogue with adjacent articles, amplifying arguments and steering readers towards specific perspectives. Texts and caricatures mutually reinforced their communicative impact turning the periodical as a whole into a site of resistance with caricatures acting as visual vanguards of this resistance.

Tracing the trajectory of caricatures within *al-Maʿraḍ* shows that early humorous illustrations of everyday life were increasingly replaced by biting political caricatures. The first direct attacks on mandate rule and inner-Lebanese political affairs appeared in 1923 alongside several caricatures on international politics, particularly conflicts between

63 Okyar 2023, 27.

64 This quantitative analysis draws on two bound volumes that were posthumously compiled and published by two friends of the periodical's editor and are preserved in the library of the Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin. They reduced the original volume of the 1,106 issues, which must have comprised 5,000-6,500 pages, to roughly 1,000 pages. Consequently, the following analysis is based not on a complete set of the paper's issues but on material pre-selected by two editors who intended to honour their friend's legacy. In the introduction to the bound volumes they, however, stress their determination to not interfere with the content of articles or images and to stay as true to the original as possible. A comparison with unbound original issues of the paper archived in the library of the Orient-Institute Beirut and with 48 issues scanned and published by the platform Sharekh Archive revealed that the bound volumes indeed are very close to the make-up and text-to-caricature ratio of the originals. While total numbers thus differ from the original, the overall curation of the paper and the topics tackled still reflect the original. I first conducted a cursory review of all caricatures contained in the two bound volumes. Second, I identified recurring topics and visual tropes, based on which I developed a thematic coding framework. Third, I assigned each caricature to one or more of these topics, noting the frequency and evolution of key themes over time. Finally, I examined each caricature's placement in relation to surrounding textual elements to determine whether adjoining articles addressed the same topic and how the caricatures interacted with or amplified the written content.



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France and Britain as well as the Greco-Turkish War (1919–1922).[65] These critical caricatures peaked in number in 1926–1929 and repeatedly addressed topics such as the unjust mandate system, inept and corrupt local politicians, economic corruption, the hazards of modern infrastructure, the exploitation of the Lebanese people, and the struggle for press freedom (Fig. 2). This shift was catalysed by French atrocities during the suppression of the Syrian Revolt in 1925, which intensified anti-French sentiment, and by mounting socio-economic pressures[66] aggravated by the concession of monopolies on certain commercial sectors to foreign companies.[67] Reacting to these developments, caricatures in *al-Maʿraḍ* abandoned light humour in favour of sharp, sometimes horrifying denunciations of corruption, injustice, exploitation, and poverty.[68]

These harsh, sometimes disturbing caricatures were the most tightly connected to the paper's textual elements. In the surviving issues, more than half of the caricatures addressing injustice and the political inadequacy explicitly refer to matters discussed in articles on the same or an adjoining page (Fig. 2b). This tight image–text connection is considerably less pronounced in entertaining caricatures that address lighter, everyday topics indicating that criticism of injustice, exploitation, and corruption were central to the periodical's agenda (Fig. 2b).

Such caricature-text interactions typically took two forms: caricatures reinforced specific points made in an article or subtly biased readers toward a particular perspective. Very direct connections between an article and a caricature appear for instance in the paper's commentary on violent gang warfare in the Shouf district in 1923. Two short articles–*Al-Ḥukm al-ʿurfī fī-l-šūf* ('Customary Law in the Shouf District') and *Wa-Irḥamatāhu ʿala al-maṣāyif* ('God's grace on the Summer Resorts')–appear alongside a caricature and all three elements are tied together by a frame. The second article, adopting a very cynical view on the matter, comments: 'Graves have become safer and better housing than the summer resorts in the Shouf, Lebanon.' Beside it, a caricature presents a 'panorama' of the Shouf in which two skeletons sit atop a gravestone, visually literalising the text's grim irony (Fig. 3).[69]

A more indirect strategy intended to bias the reader towards one side of the argument becomes visible in the paper's commentaries on modern transport, more specifically the dangers of cars. In 1924, *al-Maʿraḍ* published a largely neutral article on cars, discussing the pros and cons of modern transport. The article nearly takes up an entire page and only leaves room for two caricatures. The first, *Būlīs al-mufāriq* ('Police of the Junction'), shows a horrific car accident caused by a distracted police officer. The second, *Wa-š-šaʿb*

65 For a detailed discussion of the Greco-Turkish War in Ottoman caricatures see Wagner 2022.

66 The common budget was introduced in 1921 for both Syria and Lebanon and a renamed budget for the services of common interest followed in 1928. It was primarily financed by custom tariffs and income generated by the tobacco monopoly. It was exclusively administered by the mandate authorities and was primarily used to cover the mandate's expenditures. Consequently, it constituted a great burden on the local economy. Al-Saleh 2002; Abi-Rached and Diwan 2022, 6.

67 Al-Saleh 2002; Edde 2021, 247; Traboulsi 2007, 89, 92.

68 Similar findings but pertaining to Egyptian satire magazines in Awad 2020, 171.

69 Anonymous 1923, 3.

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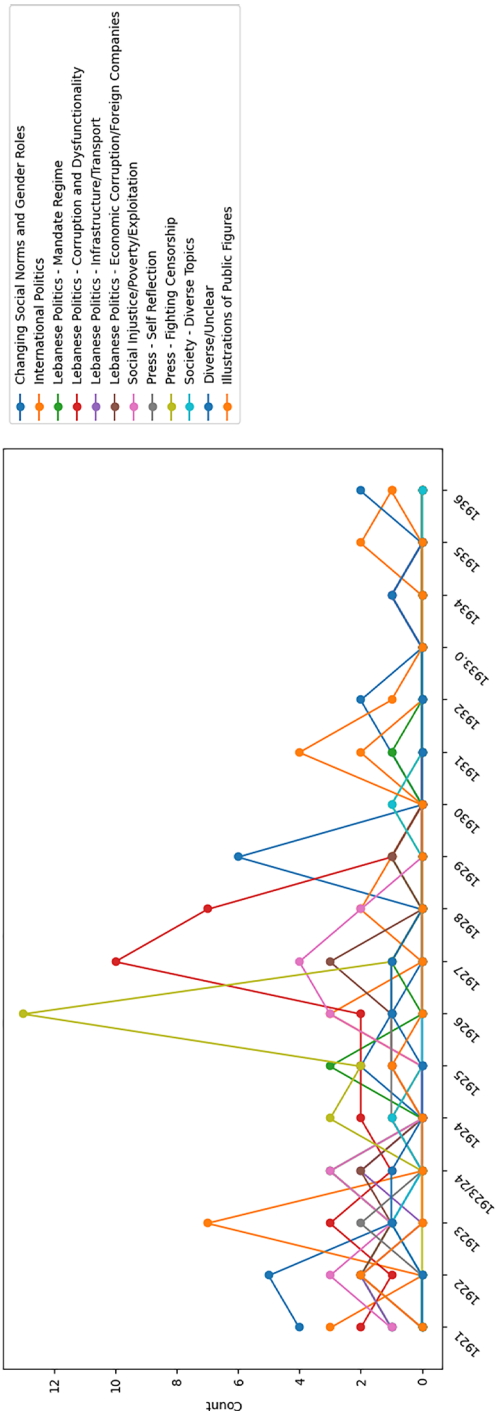


2a

*Figures 2a and 2b. Quantitative analysis of caricatures in* al-Maʿraḍ.



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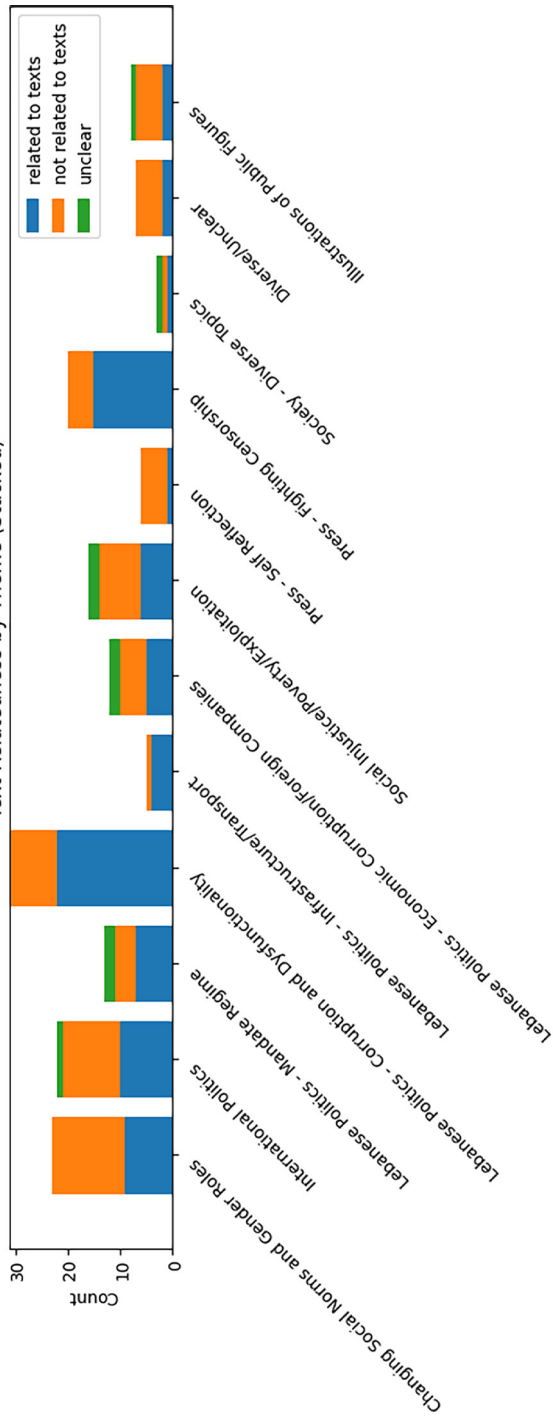


2b

*Figures 2a and 2b. Quantitative analysis of caricatures in* al-Maʿraḍ.

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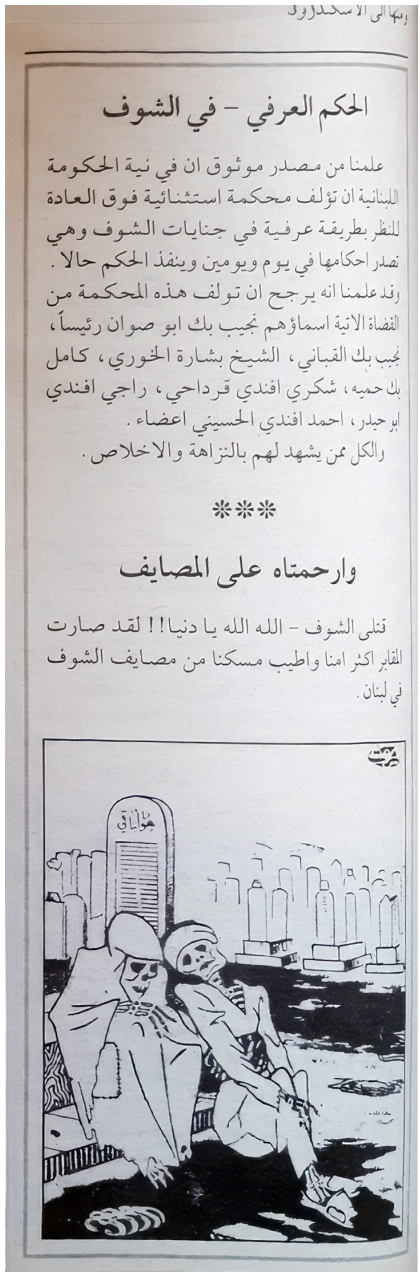
*Figure 3. A horrifying caricature on violent conflicts in the Shouf district right underneath two short articles on the conflict (*Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 3,204, 1923, 3).*



## الحكم العرفي – في الشوف

علمنا من مصدر موثوق ان في نية الحكومة اللبنانية ان تؤلف محكمة استثنائية فوق العادة للنظر بطريقة عرفية في جنايات الشوف وهي تصدر احكامها في يوم ويومين وينفذ الحكم حالا. وقد علمنا انه يرجح ان تولف هذه المحكمة من القضاة الاتية اسماؤهم نجيب بك ابو صوان رئيساً، نجيب بك القباني، الشيخ بشارة الخوري، كامل بك حمية، شكري افندي قرداحي، راجي افندي ابو حيدر، احمد افندي الحسيني اعضاء.

والكل ممن يشهد لهم بالنزاهة والاخلاص.

***

## وارحمتاه على المصايف

تتلى الشوف – الله الله يا دنيا!! لقد صارت المقابر اكثر امنا واطيب مسكنا من مصايف الشوف في لبنان.



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*sākit* ('And the People are Silent'), shows passengers thrown about inside a tram after sudden braking. Both caricatures are evidently intended to bias the reader by depicting modern transport as sites of injury and institutional negligence (Fig. 4).[70]

Texts and caricatures in *al-Maʿraḍ* clearly should not primarily be seen as independent and isolated objects but as interacting, coordinated elements within the paper's communication strategy. Caricatures boosted certain perspectives and opinions, guided the readers' eyes, and became visual representations of its political and societal messaging. A comparable technique appears in the Egyptian satirical magazine *al-ʿĀlam* (Cairo, 1926/27), founded by ʿAli Fahmi Kamil (1870–1926). On one page, an illustration of a veiled woman with a dramatically raised arm carries the caption 'I am one of the victims of freedom– Look at page 10,' directing readers to an article detailing how a woman wounded in the 1919 protests confronted politicians about her suffering.[71]

As iconotexts within the intermedial microcosm of the periodical, caricatures interacted with adjoining textual elements to nudge readers/viewers towards the editor's criticism of social and political realities in Lebanon. In some instances, these nudges became veritable battle cries.

## 5. Caricatures as Sites of Contestation and Battle Cries

Images transport worldviews. This is particularly true for caricatures, which exaggerate and essentialise and thereby ultimately challenge societal and political norms. By mapping social dynamics and hierarchies, they create representations of 'particular groups and individuals [that] retain the power to leave their mark on the collective memory,' feeding back into political decision-making and the perpetuation or alternatively contestation of these very hierarchies.[72] Ottoman, Turkish, and Arab caricatures of the late 19th and early 20th century were therefore preoccupied with foreign hegemony and rapid social transformations that were often perceived as chaotic and threatening.[73] In this preoccupation, they created representations of societal groups which reflected debates within newly emerging nation-states striving for independence and a shared national consciousness while also communicating a top-down elite view of society. Based on the Egyptian satire magazines *al-Kaškūl* and *al-Usbūʿīya as-Sīyāsīya* Sara Awad concludes that '[...] the representations in the images gave visibility to and positioned different actors in society: the powerful corrupt government elite, the interfering foreign powers and the passive actors of the citizen and the nation as an entity.'[74] Such representations identified the enemies of the nation: foreign powers and corrupt officials. As Gerhard notes, distinctive enemy imagery usually implied a call to action.[75] *Al-Maʿraḍ* transformed this call to action into a battle cry against injustice, exploitation, and poverty.

70 Anonymous 1924, 13.
71 Anonymous 1926a, 1926b.
72 Bredekamp 2021, 1–2.
73 Brummett 1995, 434.
74 Awad 2020, 185.
75 Gerhard 2011, 9.

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*Figure 4. Two caricatures showing accidents involving means of modern transport next to an article on cars (*Al-Ma'raḍ*, no. 3,270, 13).*
*Upper left corner: 'Police of the Junction: We saw a policeman looking at a beautiful woman and forgetting his whistle. Two cars crashed, smashing the passengers while the policeman remained entranced.'*
*Lower right corner: 'And the people are silent – Every time the tramway passes an earthquake happens and the passers-by see this distressing scene inside the wagon–and despite that the people are silent–and the government is as well?!'*

١٣ المعرض العدد السابع كانون الثاني نيسان ١٩٢٤

السيارات

من اول عهد الاحتلال ظهرت في بلادنا حركة حياة جديدة لم نعهدها من قبل هي الصناعة الميكانيكية وكل ما فرع منها من سيارات جر وتوربيل وتحريك ومحركات الى اخر ما هنالك من الزوائد والملحقات.

ولا ريب ان هذه النهضة الجديدة اصابت الوطن من احد الوجوه فوائد جمة لا توطن ان يحلم بها ويقدم نتائج هذه الحركة زيجبرون منها من تسهيل ونقص من خسرها. وفوق ذلك فانها تظهر على قدر شديد يظهر على هذه النهضة في اوربا وغيرها لا سيما ما كان له علاقة بصلحة بلادنا.

فالذين يريدون اقتناء محركات لمنازلهم او لمعاملهم والذين يريدون اقتناء محركات خفيفة لهم يقدرون مثلا الآن ان يطالعوا من جديد الى حين في هذه الصفحة التي يخصصونها العارض لهذه الغاية تعليمات جلية مفيدة وبغاية الاهمية.

(ك) ان ان يرجع في هذه المعلومات المطلوبة الى معملات شارل القريم وشركاه وهي شهر معملات في بلادنا (صيتها ما يملأ من السمعة الطيبة وعرفت به من الحرة للواسطة.

وقد رزقنا بوجود هذه المعملات وغايتنا تعليم عن قرن الفتى فقد رجيتنا حبيب في هذا لم فرع فاحكة ت لحراء لم في ما يلي:

المعرض – هل تم ان دخول هذه الصناعة الجليلة الى بلادنا وصيرورتها تقضي بالبلايين الى هزة اعراب والاعلاس لانها تكلفهم اموالا لا قبل لها على احتمالها واستنفاذ قروشا بسرعة.

الجرح – من الواجب الجانب ان لبنان وسوريا يصدران من الخارج لا قل من ٥٠٠ اوتومبيل كل سنة بلغ قيمته ما ملايين فرنك ويمكن ان نضم الى هذا المبلغ الكبير مثله بقيمة ثمن البنزين يزيت وبقية معدات الاوتومبيلات فتصبح القيمة ٢٠ مليون فرنك.

ويمكن تقدير ان نخصم من هذا المبلغ الربح الذي يجنيه في البلاد اذا صنعت


بوليس المفارق

بوليس المفارق يشاهد حسناء تمشي بسيارتها. فتصطدم سيارة باخرى فتحطم الركاب . . . وبقي البوليس غرقان

الشكك.

اما وانت تستنتج ردحا من الخسرج لمثلها تكلفنا اصناعي ما تكلف السيارات . واخف للجدوى الوحيد الموجود في البلاد فدل على اننا لا نحتاج الى استغناء عن السيارات . وغاية قاله ليس ما هو ما تأسيس شركات كبرى تتولى تعليم اهالينا صناعة السيارات نحن مضطرون ان نتخذها بدلا عن بعض اصحاب الاموال العجزاء الحيين الذين ليس لهم ثقة لمعاملاتهم وهم مجهولون . ولا شبه العدد الكبير من ابناء البلاد الذين يشتغلون عضلاتهم بسهلة الاوتومبيلات ربحه لهم لبعثة قدرة ان تعلمهم من لهاجرة.

– نريد ان نسألكم عن الا خاصة يشغل بكم وأما يرتبط لهم كيف لكم قدرة ان تنافسوا المجلكم المطلع وعلم نرتاح لهم من الضعف و الكثير من الثمن اعظم المحلات ارتوجم وبيلات الى اقفال محلاتهم . من انتم لقد اوجدتم قدرة في لحلاكم في كل مكان لقاء وصورا هذه هذه المحلات العظيمة في بروت .

– ان الاستقامة والعمل والاجتهاد هي اساس النجاح ومتى قدر الانسان ان يكسب ثقة الناس في عمله خصوصا في مسألة معدات الاوتومبيلات فانه يقدر ان يضمن نفسه لنجاح رمقدم الثقة تكون بثلاثة ثم رهن . الاتقان في سعار الربح والاناقة في الصفات الباقية والامانة في الاصلاح هذا ما نعدت .

– كم عدد من السيارات في بلاد سوريا؟

– باعت معاملات في مدة الاخيرة ٤ سنوات ما يقارب ١٢٠٠ سيارة وبعدا لعدد الذي يضم هذه البيان وسوريا في مدة السنين من سيارات فقرية وهذه نتيجة معمل فقرية كل نصف ساعة لان معامل فورد تشتغل كل يوم ٢٤ ساعة وتوتوم بوتيل وكل هذه الالوف من السيارات تطلب كلها الآن الحالة اصبح بحاجة الى سيارات لفورد تحتوي لهم بالطبع على خير في اعجوبة اسمه "ابو الفقراء" لاسيما وان هذه السيارات لا تحتاج الى اصلاحات او تدقيق معدات الا في النادر.

والشعب ماكث


كلمة مشى الحال او هو ما يصطلح فيه وكان فيري لسائرون هذا المشهد للعبرة دافع اضافوا . . . يعم ذلك الشعب . . . وما فكوفة يتحرك ؟!



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One of the most striking examples of these 'battle cry' caricatures bore the title 'Do you see the mandate state?' and was published in early 1924. Against the backdrop of an apocalyptic-seeming landscape interspersed with gravestones, it shows an emaciated couple obviously close to starvation and clad in rags talking to an anthropomorphised death. The caricature identifies death as 'the tobacco monopoly company' who is sitting on a box bearing the label 'the national wealth' (Fig. 5). As several other caricatures in *al-Maʿraḍ,* it addresses the monopolies on certain goods bestowed by the mandate government on Western companies, especially tobacco, which significantly restricted local economic development.[76] The horrifying imagery denounces this practice and is intended to galvanise readers/viewers into action.

Similarly, the caricature 'Additional Credits' (1928) shows a chained skeleton representing the Lebanese people from whom three figures unsuccessfully try to extract even more blood. One restrains the skeleton, while another identified as Dammūs[77] futilely gathers blood in a hat and laments 'No blood remains within him... haram… oh he… haram.' A third figure in traditional Lebanese clothes helps pump the skeleton's blood through the tube (Fig. 6). The caricature thus implicates local elites in the exploitation by the mandate power and dramatizes the severe extraction of resources from the population.

These two caricatures feature the symbolic figures recurring throughout *al-Maʿraḍ*:[78] exploitative 'big money' and the downtrodden Lebanese people. 'Big money,' that is, (foreign) companies or the exploitative mandate regime and its instruments, such as the oversized security apparatus or an inflated state budget, were typically depicted as extremely obese, engorged by the resources they had taken from the Lebanese people.[79] By contrast, the Lebanese were represented as a destitute male figure (or a couple), emaciated, ragged, and near starvation. Their downward gazes and slumped postures underlined helplessness vis-à-vis corruption and structural exploitation.[80]

This way of depicting the Lebanese people reflected not only widespread poverty but also the specific contours of Lebanese decolonisation and nation building. In contrast to Egypt and Turkey, Lebanon was constituted by foreign intervention; 'Lebanese' as a broad identification only became common in the 1940s.[81] Unifying national symbols or figures as the female personifications in Egyptian or Turkish caricature were not yet part of *al-Maʿraḍ's* repertoire. Moreover, as sectarian tension was a constant danger, *al-Maʿraḍ*'s caricatures steered away from questions of (ethnic and sectarian) identity and sought to

76 Al-Saleh 2002.

77 Šibl Dammūs was a Lebanese poet and participated in drafting the Lebanese constitution. Reindl 2025, n.p.

78 Additional recurring figures in *al-Maʿraḍ* include the teahouse discussant of current developments, the inept politician (usually depicted as a half-bald rather small man) and the 'modern woman,' that is a woman who defies traditional gender norms, has a job, goes into politics, and wears Western clothes.

79 Similarly, in *al-Kaškūl* and *as-Siyāsa al-Usbuʿīyya*, greedy government officials were depicted as extremely overweight (Awad 2020, 171).

80 On the importance of analysing the posture of figures in caricatures see Achterberg 1998, 123.

81 Ṣalībī 2003, 71.

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*Figure 5. A destitute and emaciated couple representing the Lebanese people in front of an anthropomorphised death representing foreign companies who held the monopoly on tobacco* (Al-Ma'raḍ, *no. 3,270, 1923–1924, 2).*
*'Do you see the mandate state? – When a burdensome presence settles on the land of a people, the inhabitants have no choice but to leave.' (Arabic proverb)*

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*Figure 6. A horrifying caricature depicting the exploitation and plight of the Lebanese people (*Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 7,554, 1928, 5).*
*'Additional Funds*
*No blood remains within him... haram… oh he… haram.'*

foster a sense of belonging by depicting Lebanese unity through shared suffering and shared enemies: big money, foreign powers, and corrupt or inept political elites.

Furthermore, without negating genuine commitment to furthering social justice, these caricatures clearly represented a 'top-down vision of society.'[82] They constituted sites of contestation between local elites and colonial powers and were intended to mobilise local

82 The use of the term is inspired by Awad 2020, 186.

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elites into action on behalf of the people. While the masses/the poor are featured in many of the paper's caricatures, they are drawn as types rather than individuals, embodying deprivation and victimhood. Similarly, in Egyptian caricatures, the masses or farmers were depicted as helpless, bent forward, and poorly clothed. The caricaturists showed them as passive, as expecting others to take care of them, as having no agency of their own.[83] While this negative edge is not discernible in *al-Maʿraḍ*, it clearly frames the people as in need of saving and directs its battle cry primarily at educated elites, who are more often represented as recognisable individuals and as agents of action.

A key saviour figure emerges in the heroic journalist or editor, depicted as active, forward-looking, and angled upward–an explicit counter-image to the bowed and starving Lebanese. This is most visible in a caricature from late 1926 that shows the editors of three major Beirut newspapers–*al-Maʿraḍ*, *al-Aḫrār*, and *l'Orient du Jour*–climbing a stepladder towards God while two government officials unsuccessfully try to hinder their ascent (Fig. 7). Editors appear as the mouthpieces and advocates of the people, as determined fighters against censorship, injustice, and social problems. They even bring their complaints directly to God, a motif that also appeared in an earlier caricature printed in 1924 entitled 'There is nothing left except the door of the Merciful.' It shows a journalist interviewing God about a new law (Fig. 8). Such imagery reflects the self-understanding of newspaper makers as a nationalist vanguard employing their papers as drivers of change towards a better future.

Beyond reflecting this self-view, caricatures in *al-Maʿraḍ* were also a material documentation and extension of the editor's political views and activism. Most caricatures decrying social injustice and political dysfunctionality in Lebanon appeared in 1926–1929 (Fig. 2), years that were not only characterised by severe political and economic conditions but also coincided with two decisive markers in the editor's political career, his first, unsuccessful campaign in 1925 and his election to parliament in 1929. Denouncing social injustice in Lebanon, creating the figures of oversized big money, the emaciated Lebanese people, and the heroic editor/journalist, as well as ridiculing the dysfunctionality of the Lebanese political system thus also served to present Michel Zaccour as an advocate of the people and a fighter for Lebanese interests.

## 6. Prompting Reaction, Provoking the Reader: Caricatures as Weapons

'[T]he fact-creating, performative image act is as effective today as the use of weapons themselves.'[84] This framework captures the spirit of a cluster of caricatures published in *al-Maʿraḍ* in the late 1920s which fought against press censorship. They provoked reactions (censorship) from the French authorities, who were readers even if unwanted ones. Those reactions in turn prompted counteractions by the editor and collaborating artists, often in the form of further caricatures, making Roßler's 'chain of actors' circular. The mandate authorities' response furthermore suggests that they feared caricatures' capacity to mobilise Lebanese readers–apparently more than they feared *al-Maʿraḍ*'s texts alone.

83 Awad 2020, 176, 186.
84 Gerhard 2011, 10.



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*Figure 7. Editors/journalists bringing their complaints before God (*Al-Ma'raḍ*, no. 6,523, 1926, 1).*
*'Leave us, at least we convey our complaints about the current situation to God, we have no one else left who listens. Turn back promptly and publish another decree that forbids the sons of Lebanon from communicating with the merciful Lord. The three climbing figures are identified as the editors of* al-Ma'raḍ, al-Aḥrār*', and* l'Orient du Jour *by the posters they are carrying. The poster attached to the table the trident-wielding government officials are standing on, reads: 'Oh custodian!"*

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*Figure 8. Editors/journalists bringing their complaints before God (*Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 4,299, 1924, 3).*
*'There is nothing left but the door of the Merciful. The journalist: He has just arrived in heaven to meet God and to ask him for the new licences for his paper 'do you say, oh Lord, about this new law that was unjustly passed by the Lebanese parliament?'*
*God: Do not fear, my children, the journalists, I will soon retaliate for you against these members of parliament when they are dangling between my hands, but do not forget to write something nice about what you saw here in heaven... and about me.'*

The years 1925 and 1926 were marked by a conflict between Michel Zaccour and Léon de Cayla, the then French governor of Lebanon. Zaccour published several articles criticising de Cayla's tightening of press censorship, neglect of border security, and conduct towards the Lebanese population and eventually called for his resignation. The campaign escalated through caricatures,[85] which resulted in a threefold conflict: a personal feud between the governor and the editor, embedded in a broader struggle over press freedom, itself part of the wider contest between mandate power and local society.[86] While Zaccour's articles earned him reprimands, the caricatures resulted in court procedures, fines, and temporary closures of *al-Maʿraḍ*.

85 Naǧǧār 2010, 43–7.
86 On the inextricable link between the battles for press freedom and for national independence see Ayalon 1995, 131.



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*Figure 9. De Cayla in bishop's robes, the caricature that triggered the conflict between de Cayla and Michel Zaccour (*Al-Maʿraḍ*, no. 5,425, 1925, 8).*
*'From governorship to bishopric*
*Monsieur Cayla and the director of his official newspaper 'Y.G.' after the Lebanese Constitution has been passed.'*

The first round of conflict was triggered by a caricature showing de Cayla dressed in bishop's robes while the editor of the newspaper 'Y. G.' (n.d.),[87] which is dubbed de Cayla's official newspaper by the caricature, kneels in front of him swinging incense (Fig. 9). The

87 Unfortunately, no further information could be retrieved concerning this paper.

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image primarily targeted pro-mandate newspapers rather than de Cayla himself, yet the governor treated it as an affront, seeking to shut the paper down and impose an exorbitant fine. The case went to court and in a David-versus-Goliath moment Michel Zaccour won. His supporters demonstrated in front of the court, and he managed to rally 50 Lebanese lawyers who attended the trial in support of his case. Consequently, *al-Maʿraḍ* continued to operate, the editor did not have to pay a fine, and de Cayla had to bear the legal expenses.[88] Zaccour's victory became headline news in several Arab and European periodicals, but in the long run it did not endear him to the governor and the French mandate authorities.

The second round was soon ushered in by *al-Maʿraḍ* reprinting a caricature from the French newspaper *Mont Blanc* which showed Gaston Domergue (President of France, 1924–1931), Aristide Briand (French Prime Minister, 1910–1929), and Édouard Herriot (Chamber of Deputies of France, 1925–1926) in bishop robes. Its caption ended with the challenge: 'And what is Monsieur Cayla's opinion of this picture?' (Fig. 10). The reprint exposed a colonial double standard: ridicule of statesmen was tolerated in France yet denied to Lebanese papers under the mandate.[89] De Cayla retaliated by removing one judge from the first trial and demoting another, a gesture that underlined the limits of local institutional autonomy. He then sued again, demanding 1,000 francs in damages. This time he won: the court sentenced Zaccour to one month in prison and a fine of 50 lira. After protests and an appeal presided over by Béchara el-Khoury, the final ruling reduced the penalty to a fine of 75 lira, without imprisonment.[90]

Especially in the months between the second and third ruling Michel Zaccour used caricatures to lobby his case. Caricatures criticised censorship and the editor's opponents and glorified the editor as the defender of press freedom. In early 1925, for instance, *al-Maʿraḍ* printed a caricature showing a defeated-looking representative of the press (not the editor) in a pillory labelled 'Press Law.' Paper and ink sit uselessly above his immobilised hands. In its admission of helplessness and victimhood the caricature constitutes an exception to the general publication strategy of *al-Maʿraḍ*, which glorified the press and Michel Zaccour as fighters for the people's interests.

This glorification is epitomised in the caricature discussed at the beginning of this article, which shows the editor as a knight in shining armour fighting for the survival of his paper (Fig. 1). Other caricatures are less dramatic but similarly heroic. One shows Zaccour striding forward while floating among censor's scissors, surrounded yet untouched (Fig. 12). Another presents him in a courtroom: under the headline 'Enthusiastic Defence and an Imagined Reward' he bangs his fist on the table, sparks flying, while rows of chairs behind him stand empty after lawyers have withdrawn (Fig. 13). Even as his support disappears, the editor remains the lone steadfast hero in the face of adversity.

88 Naǧǧār 2010, 47–9.

89 The caricature thus exposed the practice of what Homi Bhabha called mimicry, the colonial stance towards colonised people that viewed them as 'almost the same, *but not quite*' (italics in original, Bhabha 1984, 126).

90 Naǧǧār 2010, 49–52.



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*Figure 10. A caricature reprinted from a French newspaper showing prominent French politicians in bishop robes.* (Al-Maʿraḍ, *no. 5,457, 1926, 14).*
*'Three bishops, not one*
*On the occasion of Monsieur Cayla suing us for publishing a humorous illustration showing him in bishop's robes, we take this picture from the last issue of* Mont Blanc *that shows Domergue, President of France, Briand, the French Prime Minister, and Herriot, President of the Chamber of Deputies of France in bishop's robes. And what is Monsieur Cayla's opinion of this picture?'*

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*Figure 11. A journalist in a pillory representing the limitations imposed on editors, publishers and journalists by the new press law* (Al-Maʿraḍ, *no. 5,396, 1925, 1).*

This caricature campaign did not immediately generate a favourable legal outcome, but it earned Zaccour the reputation of an ardent defender of Lebanese interests and press freedom. Even though tensions eased in 1926 when de Jouvenel replaced Sarrail as High Commissioner and de Cayla resigned, the paper’s critical articles and biting caricatures remained contentious. In September 1926 and March 1927 *al-Maʿraḍ* was suspended again.[91] True to form, Michel Zaccour reacted to these shutdowns by publishing the caricature *Al-Maʿraḍ Suspendu* (‘*Al-Maʿraḍ* Hanged’) showing him hanging from the gallows (Fig. 14). The notoriety generated by these conflicts may even have contributed to his election as the parliamentary representative of Mount Lebanon in 1929, which marked the beginning of a steep political career cut short only by his premature death. Interestingly, after 1929 the number of caricatures published in *al-Maʿraḍ*, especially of those

91 Naǧǧār 2010, 52–4.



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*Figure 12.* Al-Maʿraḍ, *no. 5,457, 1926, 14.*
ʻAl-Maʿraḍ *To the censor: At least, open up a path for us so we can walk in peace.'*

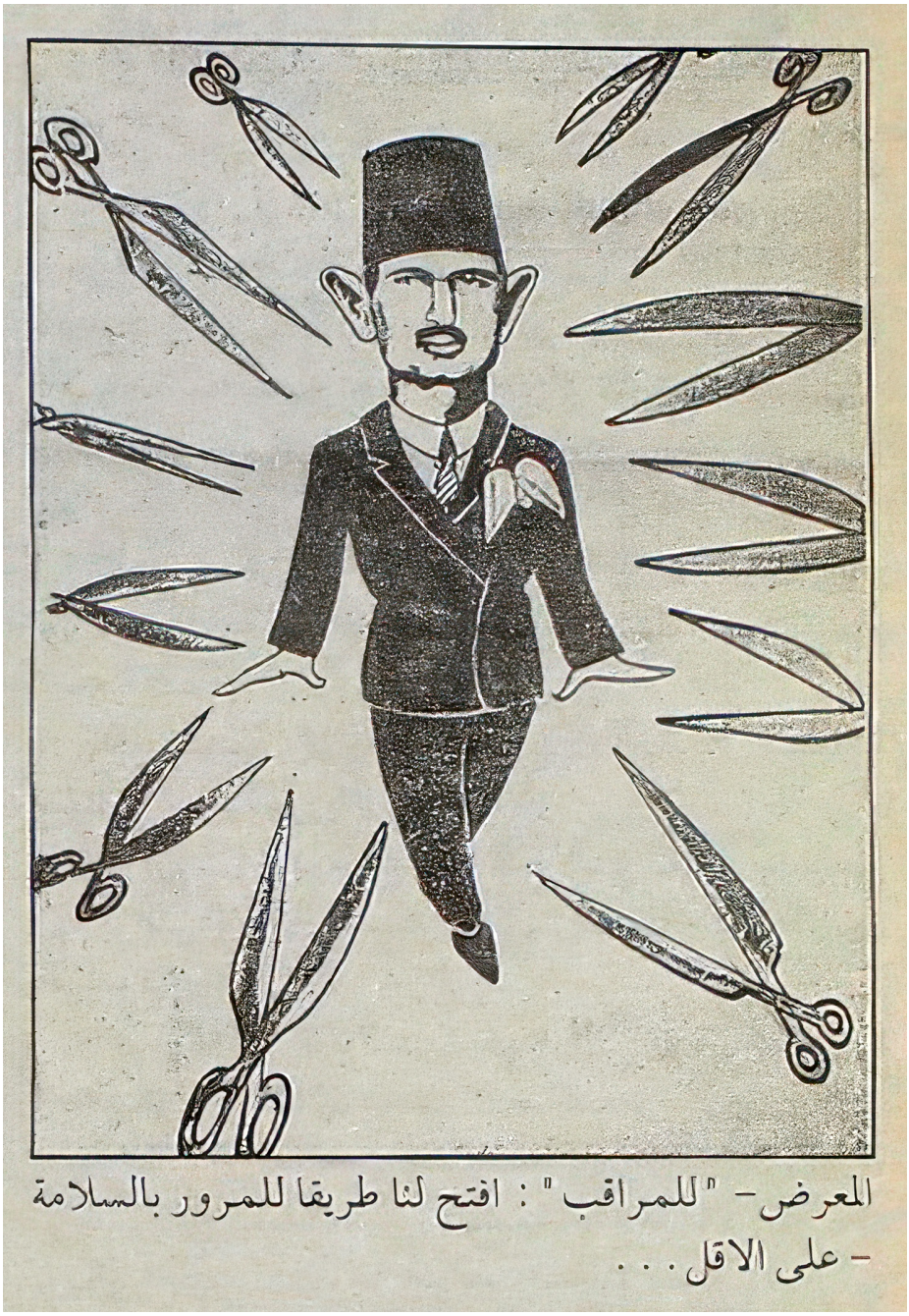


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*Figure 13.* Al-Maʿraḍ, *no. 5,457, 1926, 13.*
*'Enthusiastic Defence and an Imagined Reward – A scene from the trial of al-Maʿraḍ's editor after he and the lawyers had withdrawn from the hearing and their [the lawyers'] seats remained empty.'*

criticising the political system, dropped sharply, giving way again to more entertaining caricatures on lighter topics (Fig. 2).

In his conflict with the French and in his attempt to launch a political career Michel Zaccour employed caricatures in a familiar mode, that of the subaltern targeting the political powerful.[92] Caricatures were both the bone of contention and the weapon in his fights

92 Freedman 2012, 87.



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*Figure 14. After* al-Maʿraḍ *had been suspended twice: in 1926 and 1927. Drawing of Michel Zaccour representing his paper 'suspended' from the gallows* (Al-Maʿraḍ, *no. 6,549, 1927, 1).* Al-Maʿraḍ *Hanged – 'Azmī: Forgive me, this is all I can do for you, my friend.'*

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with the mandate regime. As mediating agents, they became the visual-material extension of the editor's will to act, challenged the limitations imposed on him, and glorified him as well as other representatives of the press as vanguards of the struggle for freedom. If *al-Maʿraḍ* were a motor, caricatures would be its pistons, transforming critique into momentum by condensing political asymmetries and social injustice into provocative, reaction-generating images.

## 7. Conclusion

Caricatures held a significant space and function within *al-Maʿraḍ* as and gained special force through their interplay with textual elements, that is adjoining articles, and through their embeddedness in the paper's overall political agenda and communicative strategy. Depending on the topic, caricatures entertained, highlighted specific aspects, or amplified messages and narratives. They illustrated, ridiculed, denounced, and occasionally horrified. In doing so, they enhanced the paper's criticism of the dysfunctionality of the Lebanese political system as well as social injustice and the exploitation of the Lebanese people by foreign companies and the mandate regime. Additionally, both the drastic imagery and the condensed emphatic messages gave *al-Maʿraḍ* an appellative character, which furthered and amplified the paper's socio-political agendas and heightened its potential to challenge authorities and galvanise readers into action. This way caricatures became sites of contest and struggle challenging existing hierarchies and power asymmetries.

In specific conflict scenarios such as the feud between Michel Zaccour and Léon de Cayla, caricatures became weapons. They were used to strengthen the editor's position by glorifying him, by attacking his opponents, and by tying the specific conflict to bigger issues, namely freedom of the press and the injustice of the mandate regime. Beyond furthering the editor's interests in this specific feud, caricatures also helped link different topics and messages transported by the paper, making its message(s) more coherent. In this way, they provided the paper with a more communicative character; caricatures reacted to current developments, commented and challenged the paper's adversaries as well as its readers to react and act. These findings confirm that caricatures in *al-Maʿraḍ* functioned not merely as humorous commentary but were active visual agents that shaped how readers understood, contested, and acted upon political realities. In the context of *al-Maʿraḍ* caricatures undeniably had effective power highlighting the medium's significance not just as a source for the reconstruction but as actors and drivers of historical developments.

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