

From Their Classes to the Masses

Youth Volunteerism and Rural Welfare in Interwar Lebanon and Syria

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The Village Welfare Service (VWS) was founded at the American University of Beirut in 1933 to spur educated young people to contribute to rural progress. This “message [*risāla*] of the educated youth to the *fallāḥ*”, as the organization’s motto had it, brought students to rural villages in Lebanon and Syria as volunteers. The Service’s “Village Welfare Song” celebrated the departing volunteers: “We are coming from our classes, / We are going to the masses [...] We bring them science with its truth, with its truth / We bring the power of our youth, of our youth.”¹ The “Farewell Village Song”, on the other hand, announced their return: “We ride our donkeys to cities that are far / Wherever useless students are [...] To the pupils who are loafing with no toil, no toil [...] We bear the light of re-al [sic] truth, rural truth.”² To the Service, educated youth was as much an object of reform as its subject. Together, the two songs envisioned educated youth as the protagonists in a mission to advance rural welfare and spread an ethic of rural service. Established as an “experiment in constructive citizenship” that would bring about a “national resurgence by way of the reformation of rural life,”³ the VWS would encourage the “educated youth of the country to live up to the highest ideals of life, and [train] them to apply those ideals in national constructive action.”⁴ In this way, the VWS placed educated young people’s expertise and attitudes at the heart of a project of rural revitalization.

The interwar Middle East witnessed a succession of new organizations like the VWS that identified young people as a transformative force. Scholars have placed this phenomenon in several historiographical contexts. Debates about Middle Eastern fascisms have animated one set of studies. This research suggests that some

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- 1 “Village Welfare Song”, Special Collections and Archives, Jafet Library, American University of Beirut (SCA), Students 30s, Box 11, File 1.
 - 2 “Farewell Village Song”, SCA, Village Welfare Service Yearbook 1939–1940.
 - 3 “Third Annual Report of Village Welfare Service of the American University of Beirut 1935”, SCA, Students 30s, Box 11, File 1.
 - 4 Draft Constitution of the Village Welfare Service, SCA, AA 4:3.

youth-identified nationalists, scout troops, and colored-shirt paramilitaries in the region appropriated practices from European counterparts but largely eschewed fascist ideology.⁵ Indeed, the symbolism of youth resonated across the ideological spectrum; in Syria, for example, Akram Hourani, later leader of the Arab Socialist Party, founded the Youth Party in Hama in 1938, while the Azhar-educated Mustafa Sibai established the Young Men of Muhammad in Damascus in 1941, inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood.⁶ Several studies account for this interwar affinity for youth as an expression of a burgeoning mass politics in which young, middle-class men rose to political prominence in urban spaces and reading publics.⁷ Youth-identified political parties mobilized these means, sometimes to oppose and sometimes to support the late Ottoman-era urban elites or 'notables' who dominated interwar nationalist politics. Other works focus on interwar discourses on youth, which associated adolescence with both nationalist vigor and deviant disruption.⁸ These latter works describe young people's performances of national identity through sartorial choices, athletic displays, and more and discuss the gender and class anxieties that prompted elite attempts to discipline youth subjectivities.

The case of the VWS offers a chance to synthesize the mass-political and performative-discursive approaches to youth in the interwar Middle East. The Service sought to develop a hybrid technical-cultural expertise on rural societies, drawn from transnational sources, and to train young volunteers to employ it. On the

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- 5 See, for example, Israel Gershoni/James Jankowski: *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009); Jennifer Dueck: "Uniforms and Salutes: Fascism and Youth Policies in Syria and Lebanon under French Rule", in: Samir Khalaf/Roseanne Khalaf (eds.): *Arab Youth: Social Mobilization in Times of Risk* (London: Saqi Books, 2011).
 - 6 Elizabeth Thompson: *Justice Interrupted: The Struggle for Constitutional Government in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 207–238; Sami Moubayed: *Steel & Silk: Men and Women Who Shaped Syria 1900–2000* (Seattle: Cune Press, 2006), 340.
 - 7 Charles Anderson: *From Petition to Confrontation: The Palestinian National Movement and the Rise of Mass Politics, 1929–1939* (PhD dissertation, New York University, 2013); Dylan Baun: *Winning Lebanon: Youth Politics, Populism and the Production of Sectarian Violence, 1920–1958* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). Earlier works in this vein include Elizabeth Thompson: *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Keith Watenpaugh: *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).
 - 8 Omnia El Shakry: "Youth as Peril and Promise: The Emergence of Adolescent Psychology in Postwar Egypt", in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 43:4 (2011), 591–610; Wilson Chacko Jacob: *Working out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870–1940* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Lucie Ryzova: *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Sara Pursley: *Familiar Futures: Time, Selfhood, and Sovereignty in Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

one hand, this project represented the articulation of transnational middle-class practices and institutions with local political dynamics. While the VWS emerged from American schools, later support from the Syrian government suggests it intersected with wider attempts to mediate between rural and urban constituencies. These efforts can be seen as a furtive bid to fold a network of rural welfare activities undertaken by private institutions into the expanding semi-privatized governmental services of Syria and Lebanon's "colonial welfare state[s]" under mandatory rule.⁹ On the other hand, the notion of an "educated youth" devoted to rural service implied that the VWS was seeking to both mobilize and reform youth subjectivities. Its summer camps facilitated the performance of youth volunteerism as a modernizing spark in rural communities, while also striving to carefully regulate how the volunteers interacted with villagers and one another. The VWS's appeal lay at the intersection of this management of educated young people's practices and attitudes and its capacity to articulate the figure of educated youth with other sociopolitical forces, suggesting that a full account of the political efficacy of youth in the interwar period must account for both its popular politics and its discursive elaboration.

The "educated youth" of the VWS was a vehicle for middle-class ambitions, a project to reform the peasantry and its volunteers alike that sparked regional political interest. As the first section below indicates, the Service's beginnings can be traced to coalescing transnational interest in rural issues among alumni, students, and professors at American missionary schools in interwar Lebanon. The second section details how the model of summer-camp volunteerism and the ordered social life of the camps formalized the conceptual pairing of the collective enthusiasm and expertise of educated youth with a culturally authentic rural renewal. Summer-camp operations contracted with the onset of World War II, but, as detailed in the third section, VWS leader Afif Tannous's post-war career in U.S. developmental aid points to the enduring resonance of the "message of the educated youth to the *fallāh*" in a developmentalism guided by social science.

Rural Service and Expertise in the Interwar American Mission

Founded by the American Protestant Syria Mission in 1866 and 1927, respectively, the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the American Junior College (AJC) in Beirut furnished the immediate context for the VWS. Financially supported by the philanthropy of northeastern American industrial capital, American missionary schools had long served to satisfy local social and governmental demand for technical training and professional licensure. AUB graduates became, for example, Ottoman military medical staff, officials in the British administration in Sudan, and Iraqi sec-

9 Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 6–7.

ondary-school teachers.¹⁰ This transnational accommodation between missionary education and local state-building projects, however, had produced few conversions. With little to show after nearly a century of proselytizing, AUB and AJC reconceptualized their educational objectives in the interwar period. These decades saw the two institutions, like their counterparts in Egypt, “[moving] toward an understanding of mission that utterly rejected polemic and emphasized social service.”¹¹ In this context, a notion of specifically rural service emerged in the early 1930s, bolstered by funding from American charitable foundations. For AUB alumni and AJC students, the prospect of improving rural life heralded a chance to realize social and professional ambitions. Professors and missionaries, meanwhile, sought to reform their contributions to local communities by developing a rural practice in their respective fields, drawing on financial support from foundations and the transnational circulation of ideas about rural modernity. At the intersection of American capital and local educational priorities, then, rural service and expertise acquired a discursive cachet and institutional foothold that proved foundational to the VWS.

Early murmurs of interest in rural service are evident in the early 1930s correspondence of a cohort of late 1920s AUB graduates, including future VWS director Afif Tannous and Aleppo camp director Zekin Shakhashiri. Most had found employment in the interlocking networks of British imperialism and American foundation activity. Afif Tannous, for example, worked for the British administration in Khartoum, before joining rural education and agricultural extension programs supported by the Near East Foundation (NEF) in Mandate Palestine.¹² Charles Malik, a future VWS committee member, worked for a Rockefeller Foundation project in Egypt.¹³ Evangelos Stephanou and Shukri Shammas, who had also worked for the British in Sudan, were both employees of the foreign-owned Iraqi Petroleum Company in Damascus and Homs, respectively.¹⁴ Exchanges between these friends

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- 10 Henry Gorman: “American Ottomans: Protestant Missionaries in an Islamic Empire’s Service, 1820–1919”, in: *Diplomatic History* 43:3 (2019), 544–568; Hilary Falb Kalisman: *Schooling the State: Educators in Iraq, Palestine and Transjordan: c. 1890–c. 1960* (PhD dissertation, University of California Berkeley, 2015); Heather Sharkey: *Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 75.
 - 11 Heather Sharkey: *American Evangelicals in Egypt: Missionary Encounters in an Age of Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 127–128. See also Ellen Fleischmann: “‘Under an American Roof’: The Beginnings of the American Junior College for Women in Beirut”, in: *The Arab Studies Journal* 17:1 (2009), 62–84, here 73; Betty Anderson: *The American University of Beirut: Arab Nationalism and Liberal Education* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011), 71–73.
 - 12 Afif Tannous: *Village Roots and Beyond: Memoirs of Afif I. Tannous: Written at Intervals between 1972 and 1985* (Beirut: Dar Nelson, 2004), 123–135.
 - 13 Shakhashiri to Malik, 21 August 1931, Charles Habib Malik Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (CHMP), Box 43, Folder 2.
 - 14 Evangelos to Malik, 19 May 1934, CHMP, Box 44, Folder 5; Tannous to Shammas, 6 May 1936, SCA, AA 4:3; Malik to Stephanou, 20 September 1931, CHMP, Box 44, Folder 4.

exuded dissatisfaction and found them lamenting their lack of meaningful contributions to the greater good. As Stephanou wrote to Malik in one early 1930s postcard, for example: “Here we are getting older and older and what have we done yet? We ought to unite and work united.”¹⁵ Malik, Tannous, and Stephanou directed their frustrations into plans that recalled shared experiences as AUB students, particularly the service-oriented “village deputations” of the ecumenical Brotherhood Society at AUB led by Professor Laurens Seelye.¹⁶ Malik suggested rural summer conferences to discuss philosophical and political topics.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Tannous and Stephanou circulated plans to form utopian rural communities that would function as models for villages in the region.¹⁸ Tannous, for example, imagined a communal farm led by Malik, Stephanou, Shakhashiri, and himself, which would “ultimately [...] become a dynamic center of rural reconstruction.” The farm was inspired by Harold Studley Gray, an American pacifist, conscientious objector, and missionary who later founded a cooperative farm in Michigan in response to the Great Depression, and with whom Tannous felt he shared a dedication to the “rural environment with its simplicity” and the “freedom of thought and action” that agricultural self-sufficiency would provide.¹⁹ The rural visions of these AUB graduates combined nostalgia for the idealism of their student years and a distaste for urban ‘civilization’. Their aspirations set the stage for a conception of the VWS summer camps as a transformative retreat into rural space.

At AUB, meanwhile, the emergence of social-scientific rural-studies programs in the late 1920s and early 1930s, fueled by donations from American foundations, provided the institutional context for the VWS. A 1927 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to develop social-science teaching and research led to the hiring of sociology professor Stuart Dodd, another executive committee member of the VWS. Equally important to the Service was the 1930 establishment of the Institute of Rural Life (IRL) at AUB, with financial support from the NEF. The IRL soon hired UC-Berkeley-trained agriculture specialist Halim Najjar as its director of

15 Evangelos to Malik, undated, CHMP, Box 44, Folder 4.

16 Malik describes one such “very sweet experience” of a “week [of service] on a Brotherhood Deputation to a distant ignorant village” in the summer after his graduation (Malik to Evangelos, 28 April 1928, CHMP, Box 44, Folder 2). See also the mention of “Mashtat Hasn Deputation” in the January 31st entry in Malik Appointment Book for 1928–29, CHMP, Box 258, Folder 11, and Malik’s retrospective praise for these deputations in a recommendation for Seelye in Malik to Dickerson, 19 December 1958, CHMP, Box 43, Folder 1.

17 Malik to Stephanou, Tannous, Shammās, Levi, Asadollah, Abazoglu, Hadidian, and Shakhashiri, 13 November 1930, CHMP, Box 44, Folder 3.

18 Evangelos to Malik, 15 August 1931, CHMP, Box 44, Folder 4.

19 Malik, Tannous, Stephanou, Shakhashiri to “Character Bad”, 30 December 1934, CHMP, Box 48, Folder 2. See also Patricia Appelbaum: *Kingdom to Commune: Protestant Pacifist Culture Between World War I and the Vietnam Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 10–24.

agricultural work and Tannous as its director of social work; they were the likely architects of the VWS agricultural and recreational programs, respectively. The involvement of both foundations reflected a shift in American humanitarian efforts from emergency charitable giving during World War I towards proto-developmental projects in the interwar period. The sum effect of this influx of support was that AUB was able to position itself as a center of research and social service from which this new approach to philanthropy could be executed in the region.²⁰ Combining AUB's emphases on service and social science, Dodd would soon be "taking groups of students to the villages during the vacations to make surveys and to conduct controlled experiments" in a prelude to the VWS's summer activities.²¹

A contemporary AUB civics textbook reveals how a service ethic and the transnational circulation of rural expertise aligned for undergraduates. Dodd wrote the first edition of *Social Relations in the Near East* to accompany first-year civics courses in 1931. Malik, Tannous, and Najjar each contributed chapters urging students to take responsibility for the improvement of rural life.²² Scientific improvements to peasants' hygienic and agricultural practices would guide such efforts. A list of "literature for village work" prepared separately by Dodd points to the social-scientific and practical bodies of specifically rural knowledge that influenced *Social Relations*. It included works on Danish cooperatives, "rural reconstruction" in the British Raj, American 4H Clubs, and rural education in the U.S., Iraq, and China from American teaching colleges.²³ Equally, however, the rural chapters in *Social Relations* suggested that this scientific modernity would have to accommodate itself to rural life, arguing that, in order to be accepted by peasants, village welfare projects had to reflect cultural as well as technical knowledge. Malik argued, for example, that concepts of hygiene were best conveyed to villagers in rural terms, with germs as invisible *jinn* spirits and antiseptic as a protective *kohl*, a cosmetic thought by villagers to be curative.²⁴ This paternalism reflected a preference at the core of Dodd's assemblage of

20 Keith Watenpugh: *Bread from Stones: The Middle East and the Making of Modern Humanitarianism* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 189–191; Cyrus Schayegh: "The Interwar Germination of Development and Modernization Theory and Practice: Politics, Institution Building, and Knowledge Production between the Rockefeller Foundation and the American University of Beirut", in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 41:4 (2015), 649–684; Stuart Dodd: "The village welfare service in Lebanon, Syria and Palestine", in: *Journal of the Royal Central Asian Society* 32:1 (1945), 87–90.

21 Dodd, "The village welfare service", 87.

22 Charles Malik: "Village Welfare", in: Stuart Dodd (ed.): *Social Relations in the Near East: A Civics Textbook of Readings and Projects for College Freshmen* (Beirut: American Press, 1931); Halim Najjar: "Agriculture", and Afif Tannous: "Village Problems", in: Stuart Dodd (ed.): *Social Relations in the Near East: A Textbook in Citizenship prepared for the Freshmen at the American University of Beirut* (Beirut: American Press, 1940).

23 "Literature for Village Work", SCA, VWS Yearbook 1939–40.

24 Ibid., 582–583.

rural expertise, and later in the VWS, as discussed below, for so-called rural methods that would preserve what was perceived as the authenticity of rural life against modernizing transformations.

The more immediate inspiration for the VWS's volunteer summer camps were projects organized by the American Junior College, the Mission's recently established college for women. The AJC held the first self-described volunteer rural service camp in the summer of 1932 in Bint Jbeil, which was later credited with inspiring the VWS. This summer camp appears to have emerged in large part from the initiative of AJC students. As early as the summer vacation of 1929, according to an AJC annual report, an AJC student "organized the idle in her village and started oriental rug-making on a small scale", while another "organized a health school" for the children in her village in what may have been templates for the first camp.²⁵ Participation in such projects reflected AJC students' appropriation of the College's and Mission's pedagogy of service. Accused in an anonymous 1936 report of reinforcing a tendency to "concentrate [...] money and personnel in Beirut" in missionary educational institutions, administrators at the AJC may have been eager to "justify [the college's existence] by producing real home missionaries" with an orientation towards village welfare.²⁶ For the young women of the AJC, meanwhile, the summer camps presented an opportunity to put the skills in hygiene and childcare they had learned from their courses into practice for both altruistic and professional purposes. As one alumnus of the College who was "doing constructive village work" reported in 1934: "I am here a doctor and nurse! I keep eyedrops, iodine, quinine, ointments, and first aid necessities, and I am treating the village on the whole."²⁷ Both institutional and individual interests in rural development thus validated rural volunteering.

These factors provide the backdrop to the 1933 conference on "rural conditions", attended by both students and faculty of AUB and AJC, which led to the formation of the VWS.²⁸ Retrospective accounts by Dodd, Tannous, and in VWS annual reports are vague on the Service's foundation, saying little more than that students and faculty at the two schools with an interest in rural welfare gathered at the conference and decided to form the organization. A 1932 set of "tentative proposals for village work of volunteer students in the summer" compiled by Dodd after a meeting at AUB seems to have been an effort to coordinate AUB, AJC, IRL, and Mission

25 Annual Report 28–29, in: Junior College Reports, 1926–1964, Presbyterian Historical Society (PHS) 115-3-4.

26 "Criticisms of Junior College for Women", date likely 1936, in: Junior College minutes, 1934–1943, PHS 115-3-6.

27 Annual Report 33–34, in: Junior College Reports, 1926–1964, PHS 115-3-4. See also Fleischmann, "Under an American Roof", 74.

28 "Third Annual Report [...]", SCA, Students 30s, Box 11, Folder 1.

rural activities.²⁹ The Service's eventual coalescence from this conjuncture of forces within American educational institutions in interwar Lebanon confirms the appeal of rural welfare projects within a broader shift towards a more ecumenical, service-oriented missionary presence in the Middle East. Student and alumni aspirations and transnational institutional transformations thus combined to give the notion of "village welfare" its discursive and material underpinning. Attempts to improve village life along these lines demanded not only rural expertise but also the cultivation of a rural service ethic among educated youth. As the next section describes, the work of translating modernity into a rural context as a volunteer was equally about shaping the educated young subject. As Najjar would later argue in an undated VWS report,

the energies of the educated youth must find a channel for self expression. [...] This aimless expression of the spirit of youth should be well harnessed [sic] and utilized to the best advantage. It should be directed towards a worthwhile ideal in life. What is more worthy of the efforts of the educated youth of this country than the masses of the population who have been for ages maltreated, neglected and usurped – masses of people on the farms who have been suppressed and exploited?³⁰

Youth too, in other words, would be reformed by rural welfare work. More specifically, spending the summer in rural service would "habituate city youth to [a] democratic and athletic life in which order and work reign."³¹ As it grew in the 1930s, the VWS would attempt to create this order through its summer camps and extend it beyond American missionary networks.

Ordering Rural Leisure in the VWS Summer Camps

In an editorial in Beirut's *Le Jour* in 1935, banker and statesman Michel Chiha praised the merits of the summer vacation. According to Chiha, the summer vacation gave "future doctors, lawyers, and engineers" a much-needed "direct and salutary contact with the old Lebanese soil."³² "Without [vacations]," argued Chiha, "the majority of

29 Stuart Dodd: "Tentative Proposals for Village Work of Volunteer Students in the Summer", undated, PHS 115–16–18.

30 Halim Najjar: "The Village Welfare Service", undated, SCA, Students 30s, Box 11, Folder 1.

31 "Risālat al-shabāb al-muthaqaf ilā al-fallāḥ [Fifth Annual Report]", SCA, VWS Yearbook 1937–38.

32 Michel Chiha: "La jeunesse libanaise et les vacances: La reprise de contact avec la terre et l'action individuelle", *Le Jour*, 9 August 1935. Thank you to Janina Santer for alerting me to this piece.

our students would be, from a spiritual and national point of view, rootless [*déracinés*].” Chiha’s editorial captures some of the currents that shaped the VWS and its camps. Volunteering for the VWS would provide a summer’s “direct and salutary contact” with rural life. Forgoing visits to home cities and villages, or more desirable vacations in the breezy resort towns of Mount Lebanon, VWS student volunteers made their way to Lebanon’s peripheral Biqā’ and ‘Akkār areas and the countryside of Damascus and Aleppo. The camps they joined there were a staging ground for visits to villages and an ordered space to facilitate the development of the character of the youth. Both camp organizers and volunteers, however, recognized that summer was still a vacation from school. The VWS camps thus attempted to cultivate certain leisure practices among the “educated youth” that comprised its volunteers. In the organization of the camps and in interactions with villagers and rural youth, the Service encouraged volunteers to orient their leisure time and their competences towards the realization of an improved yet authentic rural life to be shared by middle-class youth and peasants alike.

Arrangements for the camps began on AUB’s campus each spring, as Tannous and others reached out to secondary-school and university students, as well as recent alumni and families with AUB connections, to find both new and returning volunteers for two-week sessions in July and August. A VWS executive committee, composed of employees of the Institute of Rural Life and AUB faculty members, selected camp directors and made arrangements for the location of each camp. On the whole, the governance of the Service seems to have been relatively ad hoc. Tannous, Najjar, Dodd, and longtime chemistry professor Harold Close played important roles early on. By the end of the 1930s, a wider range of Lebanese professors and instructors at AUB and other Mission schools had become involved, including Tannous’s contemporaries such as historian Constantine Zurayk (B.A. 1928), philosopher Charles Malik (1927), and commerce instructor Shawki Dandashi (1927), as well as younger figures such as elementary school teacher Shafik Jeha (1933) and ethics instructor Munir Saadeh (1930). For camp directors, the executive committee seems to have had a particular preference for doctors like Shakhshiri and medical students such as Rassem Zauk (M.D. 1939) and Khalid al-Muti’ (B.A. in Medicine, 1938). As for the location of camps, the Mission’s networks of contacts and converts in rural areas likely facilitated the siting of future VWS summer camps in villages in the Biqā’ Valley and ‘Akkār, as well as separate AJC summer work in villages in the Masyaf district near Hama.³³

33 Shannon to Greenslade, 25 July 1935, in: Junior College minutes, 1934–1943, PHS 115-3-6; “Report on Rural Work, 1937”, in: Rural Mission Work, 1935–1956, PHS 115–16–19; Shannon to Nicol with enclosed report by Stuart Dodd on “Tentative VWS Plans for 1934”, in: Junior College minutes, 1934–1943, PHS 115-3-6.

Reports, inventories, and schedules hint at the ordered leisure sought by summer camp directors. An Aleppo branch camp featured a group of tents, including a director's residence, a kitchen tent, and a meeting tent, arranged in a semi-circle around a flagpole. A nearby stream provided water, which a volunteer retrieved daily with the help of "the camp's donkey", but a car also gave the camp access to ice and other supplies.³⁴ Inventories of camp equipment from the Biqā' and 'Akkār list beds and cots, tin or brass tubs for cleaning and transporting water, cutlery, lamps, and more. The inventories also include recreational items, such as a volleyball net, megaphone, Victrola record player, and playing cards.³⁵ Daily schedules organized both work and leisure: Service projects in the morning, discussion over lunch, a few free hours before "organized athletic games for boys from the villages" and educational events such as night school for villagers or lectures in the evenings after dinner.³⁶ Discipline was to be strict, with fines for tardiness and one report suggesting that "the laws [of the camps] must be military or at least semi-military [...] each volunteer should understand that he has volunteered of his own will and that he must sacrifice for the sake of the high ideal."³⁷ Camp by-laws hinted at the daily efforts that went into maintaining this order, forbidding students from wearing pajamas at meals and insisting that students keep their beds tidy and the camp clean. "This place is a[n official] site [*maq'ad*] and not a bedroom", the by-laws reminded the volunteers.³⁸ Overall, however, an accommodation between service work and summer diversion seems to have characterized the volunteers' experience, belying the severity of the camp motto, "work and order [*al-'amal wa-al-nizām*]"³⁹

The camps also claimed to offer a regulated sociability that would nurture the Service's "national constructive action". Advocates emphasized the coeducational, non-sectarian, and apolitical character of the camps, in which a "strong consciousness of the necessity of this kind of work for the uplift of the villagers" led to "cooperation in spite of individual, racial, mental[,] age and sex differences."⁴⁰ In a letter thanking the Syrian Relief Association in Boston for its donation to the VWS, AUB president Bayard Dodge proudly reported that a summer camp in Damascus witnessed "the first time [in the region] that Christians and Moslems have worked to-

34 "Taqrīr 'ām 'an a'māl mashrū' in'āsh al-qurā fara' Ḥalab", undated, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1938–39.

35 "INVENTORY OF EQUIPMENT: VWS Camp, Akkar", undated; "An Inventory of VWS Equipment stored at [T]alabaya for 1937", undated, SCA, Students 30s, Box 11, Folder 1.

36 "A Day s [sic] Program at the Camp", undated; "Daily Programme", undated, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1937–38.

37 "VWS Akkar Jibrayil [Report]", undated, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1937–38.

38 "Qawanīn al-mukhayyam", undated, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1937–38.

39 "Risālat al-shabāb al-Muthaqaf ilā al-fallāḥ [Fifth Annual Report]", SCA, VWS Yearbook 1937–38.

40 "Suggested Plans", undated, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1938–39.

gether, and men and women together have taken part in public service.”⁴¹ Tannous would later describe the summer camps in similar terms, adding that the camps had a patriotic “spirit of Arab nationalism in its broad and liberal sense” with the strict prohibition of any formal political activity or party “propaganda”.⁴² Gendered anxieties about cohabitation in the camps, meanwhile, were addressed by the presence of a married couple as chaperones to create a “homelike” or “family atmosphere”.⁴³ This aspect of the camp environment nonetheless seems to have appealed to students. As one annual report put it, “the volunteers included young women as well as young men, and consequently the social life at the camp became a distinctive feature of the experiment.”⁴⁴ Notably, a number of the female volunteers in the summer of 1937, such as Alice Kandaleft and Rose Ghreib, would become leading figures in the Lebanese and Syrian women’s movements.⁴⁵ The participation of these and other female students reflected efforts to cultivate respectable coeducational sociability in the camps.

The work of situating youth sensibilities in rural space continued in the volunteers’ welfare projects with villagers. VWS volunteers made daily rounds to surrounding villages, offering everything from literacy instruction to new agricultural techniques and American livestock breeds including Jersey cattle and Leghorn chickens.⁴⁶ These activities solicited both technical and cultural expertise on the part of VWS volunteers. Consider, for example, a handwritten scripted “dialogue between a volunteer and a *fallāh*”, perhaps performed by students at a “Rural Day” VWS fundraiser at AUB, used as a volunteer training tool, or written by a student in a civics course, in which a volunteer and a villager discuss local water sources. The volunteer explains why spring water is healthier than the river water they are first offered:

I didn’t mean to say that spring water is honey and the valley water is yogurt [*laban*, i.e. categorically different] [...] I only meant to say that spring water is far better than the valley water because it is cleaner. It is as if you went to the market and bought two shirts, one is worn and one new [...] One is dirty because someone else used it, while the second is new and clean because it has not been used: just so

41 Dodge to Syrian Relief Association, 2 August 1938, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1938–39.

42 Afif Tannous: “Rural Problems and Village Welfare in the Middle East”, in: *Rural Sociology* 8 (1943), 269–280, here 278.

43 Dorman to Najjar, 9 June 1938, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1938–39; Form Letter, undated, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1937–38.

44 “Third Annual Report [...]”, SCA, Students 30s, Box 11, Folder 1.

45 “Non-AUB Volunteers of VWS Summer of 1937”, undated, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1937–38. Thank you to Nova Robinson for drawing my attention to this fact.

46 Tannous, “Rural Problems and Village Welfare in the Middle East”, 277.

with the water. Spring water is new and clear and valley water is dirty and not clean.⁴⁷

As the dialogue continues, the volunteer is often tested by the *fallāh*'s skepticism before the latter's ultimate acquiescence. The dialogue depicts an encounter between a resourceful and resolute young volunteer and the stubborn ignorance of a villager; the volunteer's resort to analogy and their determination reflects the VWS's efforts to cultivate cultural aptitudes and positive character traits among educated youth. A VWS report affirmed that the best volunteers exhibited "perseverance" and were able to "[bear] the attacks and grumblings of the villagers patiently and with good spirit."⁴⁸ Similarly, when villagers in 'Akkār rejected a VWS proposal to build a new water pump, the volunteers initiated a "strong campaign" to convince the villagers of the pump's hygienic value. The "campaign" leveraged access to medical expertise by having a local doctor certify the uncleanness of the water and the camp doctor give out free treatment, taking advantage of the fact that "doctors held a high position in the hearts of the village people." Male volunteers, meanwhile, appealed to village men through norms of hospitality, arguing that it was a "dishonor [*ʿayb*] for the village people to abandon [...] its guests who wanted only the best for them" and that it behooved a "distinguished [*wajīh*] man like himself to support the Service." In each of these cases, student volunteers were charged with marshalling local culture to overcome resistance and thus exercise both their technical and cultural proficiencies.⁴⁹

In addition to hygienic interventions, the VWS also encouraged athletic activities such as team sports and scouting as a basis for their envisioned improvements in rural society. Such work was premised on similar grounds to the summer camps themselves. Just as the volunteers were to practice new forms of leisure, sociability, and expertise, the village children and youth would adopt recreational habits that would instill cooperative sensibilities. The VWS prioritized the introduction of "organized athletic games for boys from the villages", and particularly team sports.⁵⁰ Instructing the local boys in such activities, one report suggested, helped to train villagers to "grow within [themselves] the spirit of cooperation and order and make them stronger in their bodies in the spirit of complete manliness [*rujūla*]."⁵¹ Team sports also had the merit of replacing what the VWS saw as the chaotic play of local youth. One report described teaching baseball in Biqā' Valley villages, arguing

47 "Muḥāwara bayn mutaṭawa' wa fallāh", undated, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1939–40.

48 "Suggested Plans", undated, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1938–39.

49 "al-Taqrīr al-sanawī al-rābi' li-mashrū' in'āsh al-qurā fi al-jāmi'a al-amrikiyya fi Bayrūt", SCA, Students 30s, Box 11, Folder 1.

50 Abdul-Wahhab Rifa'i: "Report [on] Sport activities in Jibrayil VWS Camp 1937", undated, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1937–38.

51 "al-'Amal al-thaqāfi [report]", undated, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1938–39.

that “[baseball] served our purpose which was to replace the untidy and rather mischievous games that occupied their *leise* [sic] time.”⁵² The curriculum of a “Rural Problems” course at AUB also noted the existence of “deficiencies [sic] in rural play” and suggested “improvements” including the introduction of football, basketball, volleyball, and track and field. The curriculum, however, also suggested “choosing an old native sport, classifying it [and] modifying it” with the goal of making it “obey the rules of sports” and conform to a “spirit of sportsmanship.”⁵³ Here too, the VWS encouraged its volunteers to appropriate and reform local cultural phenomena. In a similar vein, VWS scouting troops sought to eliminate rivalries among village boys. According to Khalid al-Muti’, VWS scout leader in the Biqā’, the aims of scouting were “to create [a] sense of order in [local boys]” and, with the “thoughtful arrangement of the groups”, to “cut away the sense of hatred among the boys coming from different villages.”⁵⁴ Both al-Muti’ and his counterpart in ‘Akkār, Muhammad Rifaat Dalati, proudly reported the success of scout gatherings in soothing tensions between boys from neighboring villages.⁵⁵ Team sports and scouting were thus to serve as paradigms for what the VWS understood to be new attitudes and relationships.

VWS athletic programs reflected the centrality of young people’s recreational habits to the Service’s vision of a rural modernity. The example of the construction of a swimming pool in the ‘Akkār village of Jibrail, as described in a VWS annual report, is instructive. After cleaning the spring in the village, “a further suggestion was made to build a swimming pool near to the spring, thus adding a very attractive feature to the life of both the volunteers and the young men and children of the surrounding villages. When the idea was proposed the young men of the village were enthusiastic.” The completed swimming pool, although it “appear[ed] to be somewhat of a luxury for a village,” served a greater purpose than mere recreation to the VWS leadership. Not only did the pool “suggest the advantage of hygienic habits,” but it created the conditions for an indispensable attitudinal shift:

The great need of the villagers in this district is a spiritual one [...] There is a lack of the energy and ambition which is so necessary if they are to improve their economic status. Furthermore, their lives are culturally starved and must be dull and monotonous. What a challenging situation! How can we stimulate them as a group to want a richer and more abundant life? We feel that we must appeal to the

52 “Report on the V.S.W. [sic] Work During Summer 1944”, undated, SCA, Students 30s, Box 11, Folder 1.

53 “Outline of the Rural Problems Course”, undated, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1939–40.

54 Khalid al-Muti’: “Recreation in the Rural Camps”, undated, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1938–39.

55 Khalid al-Muti’: “Report about scouting – Miksi, Beka’a”, 25 July 1939, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1939–30; Muḥammad Rifa’at Dalāti and [illegible]: “al-Ḥaraka al-kashfiyya fī qadā ‘Akkār”, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1937–38.

young men and get them interested first. Athletics is one way to appeal to young men – hence our athletic field and the swimming pool. This will bring them to the camp and the spring daily, and the rest of the village will come along to watch. What could be more natural than that the spring should be the center of interest for the whole village and a meeting place for the near-by villages?⁵⁶

This portrayal of the swimming pool's impact epitomized VWS efforts to inspire a desire for progress in young villagers who were otherwise perceived as anarchic, passive, or both. From the camp leaders' perspective, Jibrail's new spring, swimming pool, and athletic fields together would encourage a healthful and active rural life. This "spiritual" transformation in rural young people paralleled the rural service ethic of the student volunteers, which was also considered a remedy for misdirected "energies".

By the late 1930s, expansion beyond Lebanon and beyond missionary networks, particularly the establishment of VWS branches in Aleppo and Damascus, suggested ambitions of a large-scale regional adoption of the VWS model of rural revival.⁵⁷ The practice of the summer camps and the discursive pairing of youth and peasantry appears to have appealed broadly, as indicated by a request for materials from AUB's Institute of Rural Life sent by a bookstore owner in Tartus, who had started an "organization of active young men to travel about the farms and villages investigating the situation of the *fallāḥ* and serving him."⁵⁸ Beyond new volunteers and camps, the most consequential evidence of increased attention to the VWS was financial assistance from the Syrian government, which contributed 1000 pounds in 1938 to the Aleppo and Damascus camps, 3000 in 1939, and "two thousand dollars" to support the publication of a VWS literacy primer for elder villagers.⁵⁹ Syrian political interest in the VWS is evident in a pamphlet by Tannous, which included a photograph of National Bloc notables Jamil Mardam Bey, Abd al-Rahman al-Kayyali, and Shukri al-Quwatli with Alice Kandaleft and a group of village children during a "full day" visit to a VWS camp. Equally striking is Tannous's description of "around ten of the best Muslim girls of Damascus from the al-Bakri, al-Tarzi, Mardam, al-Jaza'iri, 'Ayyad, and al-Rayyis families" who "unveiled [...] and went out to work in those villages among the women and children" with the VWS, recalling the VWS's emphasis on its coeducational volunteers.⁶⁰ Backing for the VWS paralleled Syrian elites'

56 "Third Annual Report [...]", SCA, Students 30s, Box 11, Folder 1.

57 Halim Najjar: "The Village Welfare Service", undated, Students 30s, Box 11, Folder 1.

58 Juha [?] to Institute of Rural Life, 25 January 1939, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1938–39.

59 "Taqrīr 'ām 'an a'māl mashrū' in 'āsh al-qurā fara' Ḥalab", undated; Dodge to Barakat, 2 August 1938, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1938–39; Halim Najjar: "Institute of Rural Life [...] Annual Narrative Report", 30 June 1939, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1939–1940; Afif Tannous: *Mashrū' in 'āsh al-qurā fī al-aqtār al-'arabiyya* (New York[?]: al-Jāmi'a al-'arabiyya [?], undated), 41.

60 Tannous, *Mashrū' in 'āsh al-qurā*, 43–44, 54–55.

broader efforts to cultivate ties to middle-class figures and institutions, in this case via the rural expertise of educated, young, middle-class men and women.⁶¹ National Bloc figures may also have agreed with the AUB professor and Arab nationalist intellectual Constantine Zurayk, who contrasted VWS youth volunteerism with humanitarian charity in a chapter of *al-Wa'ī al-qawmī* ("On National Awakening", 1939) and depicted it as "unifying national work in which every individual desire dissolves and every partisan tendency vanishes."⁶² In this vein, the VWS may have appeared to interwar notables as a means to reframe their contested paternalistic rule and direct the political activity of educated youth towards non-partisan expression in rural service.⁶³

The movement's growth, however, triggered hesitation at AUB. At a 1938 VWS conference, for example, prominent figures within the VWS debated the extent to which their project should or should not be described as "national work" [*al-'amal al-qawmī*]. Some, including Zurayk, contended that the VWS program necessarily had to instill an Arab national conscious in the peasantry as part of the work of rural revival. To others, however, it was imperative that a project sponsored by the university remain apolitical.⁶⁴ The conference also heralded a more professionalized service model that limited reliance on the voluntary and amateur participation of students. After the conference, AUB commerce instructor Albert Badre underlined the necessity of such changes in a report criticizing the camps, which he found to be too full of lowerclassmen to achieve much of substance. His recommendations, which were adopted shortly afterwards by the AUB's VWS executive committee, proposed a year-round concentration of expert intervention in a "Rural Center".⁶⁵ Halim Najjar elaborated that, after the conference, "the camps [were] to be used as training centers" while "actual rural reform [was] to be conducted during the whole year."⁶⁶ Besides entrusting village welfare to specialists instead of student volunteers, these changes would also address concerns expressed by camp directors in the Biqā' and 'Akkār in previous years that student "outings" and other activities had "given the camp the reputation of a summer resort."⁶⁷ Starting in 1940, the VWS also appears

61 Keith Watenpugh: "Middle-Class Modernity and the Persistence of the Politics of Notables in Inter-War Syria", in: *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 35:2 (2003), 257–286.

62 Constantine Zurayk: *al-Wa'ī al-qawmī* (Beirut: Manshūrāt Dār al-Makshūf, 1939), 105.

63 On the contested paternalism of the interwar period, see Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*.

64 "Mu'tamar mashrū' in 'āsh al-qurā fī Jdita", September 1938, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1938–39.

65 Albert Badre: "Report to VWS Executive Committee", 18 February 1939, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1938–39 and AA 4:3.

66 Halim Najjar: "Institute of Rural Life [...] Annual Narrative Report", 30 June 1939, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1939–1940.

67 "Directors [sic] notes from Shtaura camp", undated; "VWS Akkar Jibrayil [Report]", undated, SCA, VWS Yearbook 1937–38.

to have encouraged individual students to pursue summer projects in their home villages as a substitute for the collective experience of the camps.⁶⁸ While the Service's summer-camp model for rural welfare had garnered regional attention, ambivalence towards nationalist politics, calls for greater expertise, and skepticism about the emphasis on leisure jointly precipitated a contraction in its scope.

Rural Modernity from the VWS to International Developmentalism

The VWS project rested conceptually on a mutuality between educated youth and rural society. The invigorating presence of young people was intended to translate modern advances into a rural vernacular and inspire a "spiritual" motivation for progress. Equally, the educated youth would benefit from the authenticating effects of rural service and the managed environment of the camps. For both youth and villagers, then, the summer camp model promised a delicate initiation into modernity. This underlying imperative of a "selective acculturation" was an enduring tenet in the thought of Afif Tannous (1905–1998).⁶⁹ Tannous's education and work at AUB and his access to American missionary networks allowed him to establish himself as an expert in rural affairs, beginning with NEF-sponsored rural education work in Palestine, continuing with roles in the VWS and IRL, and culminating in his 1940 Ph.D. in "rural sociology" at Cornell University. Even after starting what would become a decades-long career at the Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations in the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Tannous remained a dedicated advocate of the Service, portraying it as a model for developmental intervention in several publications. As his attention turned to larger regional development projects in the Arab world, his work continued to insist on the need to mediate development through local culture, transplanting the concerns that animated the notion of youth-led rural development to the burgeoning practice of administering developmental aid. Tannous's post-war advocacy for a culturally sensitive social science to guide development thus built on his experiences with the VWS, which had similarly sought to make its volunteers conduits for rural transformation.

Foundational to Tannous's thought was his claim to unique epistemological access to village culture. His 1940 dissertation at Cornell University, where he was supported in part by a scholarship facilitated by Neale Alter, a rural missionary in Syria and Lebanon in the 1930s, combined an intimate familiarity with his own home vil-

68 Zakhour to Najjar, 14 June 1940; Dodd to Zakhour, 19 June 1940; "List of Volunteers", SCA, VWS Yearbook 1939–40.

69 Afif Tannous: "The Arab Village Community of the Middle East", in: *Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution* (1942), 523–543, here 543.

lage, Bishmizzin in northern Lebanon, with social-scientific methods.⁷⁰ The introduction presented a conception of the Middle Eastern village as a discrete unit of social life, a notion that Tannous had been developing since at least a 1935 article during his time with the VWS.⁷¹ To Tannous, the village constituted a material and spiritual unity, producing both the biological and symbolic means by which its residents lived and expressed all meaning. Tannous legitimated his claims by referencing his “intimate contact with [Bishmizzin’s] life during the past twenty-five years” and his familiarity with “the subtleties and complexities of its cultural and social organization.”⁷² Simultaneously, Tannous believed that he had “been away enough from the village and comparatively free from entanglements in its affairs, so that he was able to examine it with a reasonable degree of objectivity.”⁷³ He situated his doctoral research in this balance between intimacy and detachment with a methodological argument about the limits of quantitative knowledge in sociological inquiry. The “rigorously quantitative method of science” was of limited use “in the realm of social phenomena,” according to Tannous.⁷⁴ Inspired by the University of Chicago philosopher and sociologist George Herbert Mead, Tannous conceived of society as a “human organism” seeking “relative equilibrium” on the basis of “past experience” in response to various environmental stimuli.⁷⁵ In this understanding, the social body sought to restore its coherence in response to disruption. This process required qualitative investigation, especially in the case of “such a village community as the one under study where life is integrated to [such] a high degree [...] that no sharp lines can be drawn between the various aspects of its life.”⁷⁶ His “participating neutrality” put him in a position to employ sociological categories while grasping the constitutive unity behind them.⁷⁷

Tannous’s conception of the village as an “integrated” social unit set the stage for an emphasis on the fragility of village life in modernity. A series of 1940s articles in sociology journals based on his dissertation research found Tannous developing an understanding of change as an external threat to the internal coherence of village communities. His articles identified the silk industry, emigration, and missionary education as historical intrusions that had jeopardized Bishmizzin’s ability to structure meaning for its inhabitants. Tannous described the silk industry as an

70 Tannous, *Village Roots and Beyond*, 159.

71 Afif Tannous: “The Village Teacher and Rural Reconstruction in Palestine”, in: *Open Court* (October 1935), 236–244, here 237.

72 Afif Tannous: *Trends of Social and Cultural Change in Bishmizzeen, an Arab Village of North Lebanon* (PhD dissertation, Cornell University, 1940), 5.

73 Ibid.

74 Ibid., 15.

75 Ibid., 6–7.

76 Ibid., 18.

77 Ibid., 39.

interruption to Bishmizzīn's classless society: "With the advent of the silk factory, [the village's] harmony began to show some signs of disruption and social stratification became evident."⁷⁸ Missionary education was equally unsettling. "It widened the horizon of village life," argued Tannous, "but the horizon was widened to an extent that was conducive to the destruction of the community integrity."⁷⁹ Individual aspirations empowered by cash from silk production or kindled by new educational opportunities threatened to weaken the bonds of communal membership. Emigration encapsulated these deleterious consequences of modernity for the close-knit character of village life. "Before the American World (the world of free individualism) was discovered by Bishmizzeen," suggested Tannous, "social control [had] never assumed an extreme character, and individual frustration [had] never been an acute problem." With the option of emigration, "an outlet, an escape was provided" which threatened to dissolve communal integrity.⁸⁰ Individual frustrations previously muted by the village's monopoly on meaning now found new avenues to sow division. To Tannous, then, the stability of rural society depended on maintaining distance from the individualistic tendencies of modernity. These convictions reflected Tannous's promotion in the 1930s of "a type of education suited to the actual conditions of the rural community," as he wrote in *Social Relations*. He believed a tailored pedagogy would not disturb rural integrity, an approach the VWS had attempted to put into practice through its methods for teaching hygiene and recreation.⁸¹

The prospect of rural cultural dislocation shaped Tannous's views on developmental interventions in the rural Middle East and led him to stress collaboration with certain rural elites. Tannous felt that in villages "local leadership and government [...] reflect[ed] the authority and interests of the community. Leaders develop gradually and spontaneously."⁸² Elsewhere, he added that village "leadership is not a birth privilege; it is rather achieved by those who measure up to standards."⁸³ The notion of village leadership emerging "gradually and spontaneously" suggests that Tannous saw it as meritocratic and representative. Tannous's understanding of traditional leadership fueled his belief that aid should be administered with the cooperation of such elites, convinced that only local leaders had the necessary legitimacy to sway rural communities to participate in development projects. His experiences

78 Afif Tannous: "Social Change in an Arab Village", in: *American Sociological Review* 6:5 (1941), 650–662, here 656.

79 Afif Tannous: "Missionary Education in Lebanon: A Study in Acculturation", in: *Social Forces* 21 (1942), 338–343, here 342.

80 Afif Tannous: "Emigration, a Force of Social Change in an Arab Village", in: *Rural Sociology* 7 (1942), 62–74, here 65–66.

81 Tannous, "The Village Teacher and Rural Reconstruction in Palestine", 237.

82 Tannous, "The Arab Village Community of the Middle East", 542.

83 Afif Tannous: "Extension Work among the Arab Fellahin", in: *Applied Anthropology* 3:3 (1944), 1–12, here 3.

with the VWS campaign to persuade the villagers in 'Akkār and his exposure to "the philosophy of [U.S. agricultural] 'extension' with its emphasis upon the [...] voluntary participation of the people in the process of rural development" at Cornell underlay this determination. In a 1954 article on community development, Tannous contended that the "stimulation" of an "adequate" leadership in developing communities would be easy where "tribal groups have not yet succumbed to disorganizing factors." "Outstanding individuals", Tannous noted of such cases, "grow into positions of leadership almost imperceptibly, through a long-time process of seasoning and selection. Such leaders truly represent the collective will and the traditional pattern of life of the group, and are trusted and followed when they pioneer in new endeavors."⁸⁴ Tannous also endorsed collaboration with landowning elites, believing that "enlightened elements [could be found] not only among the intellectuals and professional groups, but also among the tribal chiefs and large landowners" of the Middle East.⁸⁵ Such optimism may have derived from Tannous's experiences with the VWS, as indicated by his praise for a camp outside Damascus, where the local "feudal lord amazed [the volunteers] one day by appearing with his wife at the camp and requesting them to show him how to improve conditions in his villages."⁸⁶

Tannous's open disposition towards such figures contrasted with his opposition to post-war urban nationalist elites. He argued in 1955 that the "critical issue" after independence was "how to change from the old form of leadership into the new, which emanates from the people and is fully identified with their needs and aspirations."⁸⁷ Yet, in many ways, Tannous's temporal schema reversed "old" and "new", for it was in fact the (supposedly "modern") nationalist leadership that represented the historical distance between elite and populace, whereas Tannous's image of the ideal "new" leadership resembled his description of traditional rural leaders who "emanate[d] from the people". Contemporary nationalist politicians, on the other hand, had abandoned communal sociality. To Tannous, social atomization and this estrangement of leadership were linked: "Previous to the advent of the national-political movement, leadership in the village was simple, direct and its significance limited. Leadership statuses were, for the most part, assigned by the village culture structure, rather than achieved by individual effort." However, when "the old leadership pattern of the village was disrupted [...] leadership became mostly an achieved

84 Afif Tannous: "Assumptions and Implications of 'Community Development' in Underdeveloped Countries", in: *Human Organization* 13:3 (1954), 2–4, here 4.

85 Afif Tannous: "Land Reform: Key to the Development and Stability of the Arab World", in: *Middle East Journal* 5 (1951), 1–20, here 17.

86 Tannous, "Rural Problems and Village Welfare in the Middle East", 280.

87 Afif Tannous: "Dilemma of the Elite in Arab Society", in: *Human Organization* 14:3 (1955), 11–15, here 12.

status rather than an assigned one,” based on connections to central government.⁸⁸ Behind this notion of a shift from “assigned” to “achieved” leadership lay Tannous’s wariness of individual ambition and his contention that only “the village culture structure” could designate leaders who authentically represented village interests. Alienated “national-political” leadership thus fit into Tannous’s tableau of village integrity disrupted by urban modernity. In Tannous’s view, nationalist ideology also defied the temporality of traditional leadership, which could only gradually emerge from collective life. “The prevailing spirit of nationalism,” argued Tannous, “[was] impatient with [the] slow process [required for community development]; it is often eager to get things done and to attain nationally tangible results in the shortest time possible, regardless of the method adopted.”⁸⁹ Nationalism, in other words, would rush development to its detriment, becoming an agent of disruptive modernity rather than the “selective acculturation” to which Tannous, as both a VWS leader and a developmental expert, aspired. No wonder, then, that Tannous mused about “the selection of leaders assigned to village development work be[ing] restricted to those with village background and connections.”⁹⁰ Development projects led by the agendas of ambitious nationalist elites, he feared, threatened to displace traditional leadership and cultural structures.

In a 1951 article entitled “Positive Role of the Social Scientist in the Point Four Program”, Tannous combined his beliefs about cultural integrity, developmental expertise, and communal leadership. The article envisioned a crucial role for social science in facilitating the delivery of post-war aid to the developing world. Social scientists, Tannous contended, could mediate the transformations enabled by developmental aid. They would evaluate and alter projects conceived by technical experts so as to protect the integrity of communal life in recipient societies. “There is essential need,” Tannous asserted, “for the social scientist to be actively implicated in the program from the beginning. Otherwise, any project of technical aid will run a grave risk of being disrupted, and possibly wrecked, by the ignored forces of local culture.”⁹¹ These ranged from what Tannous called Muslims’ “irritable and short-tempered [...] Ramadan Personality” while fasting, to tribal responses to agricultural settlement, of which he asked rhetorically:⁹²

88 Tannous, *Trends of Social and Cultural Change in Bishmizzeen, an Arab Village of North Lebanon*, 248–249.

89 Afif Tannous: “Technical Exchange and Cultural Values: Case of the Middle East”, in: *Rural Sociology* (1955), 76–79, here 77.

90 Tannous, “Assumptions and Implications of ‘Community Development’ in Underdeveloped Countries”, 4.

91 Afif Tannous: “Positive Role of the Social Scientist in the Point Four Program”, in: *The Scientific Monthly* 72:1 (1951), 42–49, here 43.

92 *Ibid.*, 48–49. Tannous’s musings on “Ramadan Personality” are echoed in Tannous, “Technical Exchange and Cultural Values”.

How far and how rapidly could the tribal community be transformed into an agricultural community, and by what techniques and methods? What are the chances that such transformation will result in deterioration of health and morale, and in general disorganization? [...] Will such a program ultimately result in transforming the tribal chief, a democratic leader in the nomadic setting, into a feudal lord, and his tribesmen into landless sharecroppers?⁹³

As Tannous's concern for the loss of the "democratic leader in the nomadic setting" makes clear, developmental intervention had to tread lightly. Much as VWS volunteers sought to carefully introduce modern hygiene and recreation into village life, Tannous argued that the social scientist would "select and give expression to those fundamental values that make up the core of the American culture, and of the democratic way of life as a whole [and] interpret them in terms of the other culture participating in the aid program."⁹⁴ Tannous asserted that the social scientist would have to carry out a monumental and culturally informed act of translation. Social scientists were thus to be indispensable to post-war American developmental aspirations, agents of a colossal effort to introduce modernity in terms that would not unsettle local cultural stability that, for Tannous, had begun in VWS summer camps.

Conclusion

In summer excursions from AUB "classes" to "the masses", the VWS charted a trajectory that linked the behavior and attitudes of educated youth to the wider success of rural modernization. The VWS had emerged through the efforts of a combination of disaffected AUB alumni, budding AJC professionals, American foundations, social scientists, and, of course, the summer-camp volunteers themselves. The introduction of rural welfare as an object of expertise and focus of a youth-service ethic gave this ensemble an organizing principle and laid the groundwork for its campaign to reform educated youth and rural life in one stroke. The summer camps put this dual mission to work. Organizers sought to provide the volunteers with a well-ordered experience, one that would infuse summer vacation with purpose and make hygienic and recreational interventions the seeds of a local will to progress. Through such mechanisms, the VWS summer camps provided a stage on which the discursive figures of the educated youth and peasantry could be synthesized, affirming the underlying belief that modernization in both groups was necessary and desirable but needed to be submitted to a verifying procedure in which the authenticity of each would be protected. Anxieties about each of these two groups becoming

93 Ibid., 44.

94 Ibid., 47.

“rootless”, to use Chiha’s term, suffused the summer camps. Both educated young people and villagers had to perform modernity without becoming unmoored from culturally authentic rural modes of being. In sum, the Service’s efforts to bring students into rural space and to provide the conditions for a renewal of village life can be understood as attempts to modernize at a pace set by expertise, both technical and cultural.

The case of the VWS also expands our understanding of the breadth of the interwar discourse on youth in the Middle East. Ambiguously nationalistic but stubbornly apolitical, the Service represented a proto-developmental manifestation of middle-class political identification with youth. Tannous would recall that members of youth-identified nationalist political parties participated in the summer camps, an unsurprising fact given the common base of recruitment among AUB students in Beirut.⁹⁵ Unlike many such groups, however, the VWS did not oppose notable elites.⁹⁶ In its openness to support from National Bloc politicians in Syria, the VWS resembled the situation of the interwar Aleppan middle class, where “members of the *a’yan* [...] increasingly drew on the literary skill, linguistic ability, communal identity, and legal training of a group of young, Western-educated, middle-class men in their opposition to the French Mandate.”⁹⁷ The task of rural revitalization, of course, necessitated a different skill set, one which VWS organizers and volunteers mobilized through their access to a transnational network of missionary institutions, American foundations, and social-scientific knowledge. The summer camps did, however, offer a non-sectarian, coeducational “communal identity” for educated young people willing to sublimate their leisure time to higher ends and develop a practice of rural intervention in hygiene, literacy, agriculture, and more. The trajectory of the VWS also suggests that the middle-class mobilizations channeled through the figure of youth provided not only a means of confirming or contesting notable rule in urban contexts, but also an avenue for the extension of welfare services and political networks into rural areas in the interwar period. Zurayk’s insistence on differentiating “social projects” like the VWS from paternalistic charity hinted at a model of service provision as “popular efforts emanating from the heart of the nation” carried out by an educated youth dedicated to something more than mere “political independence”.⁹⁸ National Bloc support for the VWS thus represents a rural historiographical counterpart to the largely urban political projects that pushed interwar Syrian and Lebanese politics “beyond elite

95 Tannous, “Rural Problems and Village Welfare in the Middle East”, 278.

96 Baun, *Winning Lebanon*, 5–6.

97 Watenpaugh, “Middle-Class Modernity”, 259.

98 Zurayk, *al-Wa’i al-qawmī*, 101, 103.

nationalists' focus on independence," including the women's, workers', and Islamic popular movements alongside middle-class political activities.⁹⁹

Finally, the VWS can be situated not only in the conjunctural politics of the interwar period, but also in a longer trajectory of elite subject-formation equally inflected by the figure of youth. By encouraging its volunteers to thinking of themselves as mediators between a scientific modernity and rural cultural integrity, the VWS project resonated with what Lucie Ryzova has described of the young Egyptian *efendi*, who excelled in "code switching" between modern and traditional idioms and markers in "a performance of identity according to the contingencies of context."¹⁰⁰ In 19th- and 20th-century Middle Eastern societies negotiating the terms of modernization in a global context of European imperialism, positive invocations of youth often implicitly rested on this capacity to navigate different cultural registers. Negative portrayals of youth, on the other hand, raised the specter of a superficial adoption of Western civilization and a selfish abandonment of local cultural forms. These included such figures as the 19th-century young Europhile fop "imitating the behaviors, accessories and clothes, prodigal customs of the Franks that they themselves refuse to appreciate [...] unaware of [their] own true nature and failing to preserve [their] nation" or the interwar Iraqi *efendi* who in British imperial eyes was "young, loud, self-centered and self-seeking, and overly influenced by a half-formed understanding of European politics and culture."¹⁰¹ VWS disdain for "city youths" and "useless students" reiterated this discursive differentiation between youth as "peril" and as "promise" in a new context.¹⁰² Tannous's post-war writings echoed these patterns by anticipating the dissolution of traditional forms of leadership by brash urban nationalists or ill-informed technical experts who lacked the VWS volunteers' and social scientists' sensitivities. In this way, the VWS's conception of youth reframed broader processes of nationalist subject-formation, making its young volunteers the vehicle for a performance of the expertise to manage the material and cultural disjunctures of a colonial modernity.

99 Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 70.

100 Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya*, 61. See also the discussion of the "neglect-moderation-excess paradigm" in Michael Gasper: *The Power of Representation: Publics, Peasants and Islam in Egypt* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 218–225.

101 M. Alper Yalçinkaya: *Learned Patriots: Debating Science, State, and Society in the Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Empire* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 120; Toby Dodge: *Inventing Iraq: The Failure of Nation Building and a History Denied* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 71.

102 El Shakry, "Youth as Peril and Promise".

