



# LA AYMTAN

## (TILL WHEN)

The Lebanese Dilemma, from A to Z...

In all Honesty...

Yet with All the Love...

Dr. Marc ACHKAR

© 2023

Original photo in grayscale, 1976.

*Author contact details: +961 3 50 42 45; [markashkar@hotmail.com](mailto:markashkar@hotmail.com)*

Dr. Marc Achkar

## **Take - Home Messages**

**Lebanon** is a historical land known by its name since at least 5000 years. Lebanon is also a country, specifically a republic, since 1920, to an administratively one sole People, the Lebanese, with a sole citizenship. Lebanon is not a nation. It is not a homeland to a sociologically one sole People with a sole identity.

**Christianity** is just a religion; it does not englobe a culture / worldliness (dunya). There is no Christian People anywhere in the world; that is not even suggested within the core Christian doctrine. Of note, this has not prohibited the Church from having mingled into worldliness and elaborating teachings, cults, habits and customs up to elaborating an “add - on quasi - culture”. In that, not abiding by said teachings may at most put a Christian under the label of “sinner” who should repent: a Christian cannot be treated as an “infidel” by a co - religionist.

**Maronites and Rums** are not Peoples. They are sects / denominations / confessions (the terms intertwine), on the borderline of\_ but not\_ being established as distinct confessional communities, because they generally admix. Sectarially, those to be Rums since 742 and Maronites since ~ 900 were Chalcedonians.

But "Rum" was indeed used ethnically and politically since ~ 450, before being used sectarianly since 742, since it is short for Romans, and was an appellation for those Levantines of Greek liturgy due to Byzantine hegemony. Said appellation was coined by the Syriacs and then used by the Arabs, because Byzantine was the Eastern Roman Empire.

As for “Maronites”, it was also \_ and is still \_ used ethnically, politically and sectarianly, but only after ~ 900. Before that, it simply meant "followers of Maron", and was not used in its (erroneous) nationalistic context. John - Maron I founded the “Church of Lebanon” in 676 and not “The Maronite Church”.

So - called Christian Lebanese are sociologically / ethnically **Canaanites**. In other words, they are the same Canaanite People of old times, in their descendants, and not what could be understood as "they are Lebanese (or whatever), having descended from Canaanites". They are current Canaanites. Around 11% of those are of other ethnic origins (Armenians, Copts, Syriacs, Assyrians and Chaldeans (we shall not tackle the last 3 groups in their problematic)) and retain aspects of their former cultures (just as any Lebanese American would be in USA: an American of Lebanese ethnic origin, retaining some aspects of his / her former culture). Minorities who join a People may enhance evolution and change; but they do not change the definition of said People. Of note, a few from among those 11% may not sociologically identify as Canaanites: a good analogy would be Lebanese Nigerians: they do not really sociologically blend within Nigerians, contrary to Lebanese blending within Americans.

That said, a large part of the "Lebanese Christian" diaspora descendants cannot be categorized as Canaanites anymore, but may retain aspects of their original Canaanite ethnicity within the new Peoples they have blended in (and should thus be labeled as "of Canaanite origin").

Of note, this does not prohibit the right for them to reobtain their Lebanese citizenship in case lost. As for "more recent" permanent emigrants who still hold ties with their identity of origin, they still fit into the Canaanite category. There is no clear - cut line when the identity crosses the border between original and new identity.

We note, for completeness, that "Christians" of Tartus province in Syria are also sociologically Canaanites. For other "Christians" in the former larger land of Canaan (the rest of northwestern Syria, and Palestine), their issue will not be hereby tackled. We just note that they evolved as independent Peoples with independent though quasi - Canaanite cultures.

**Islam** is a religion (deen) and culture / worldliness (dunya). Muslims are a People, a nation (an umma). Islam even calls upon having one state for said nation.

**Sunnis, Shiites, Druzes and Alawites** are not Peoples. They are sects, yet more, established as distinct confessional communities, because they generally do not admix.

So - called Muslim Lebanese are sociologically / ethnically **Muslims**. In other words, they are part of the Muslim People of the worldwide Muslim nation, further divided sociologically into ethnicities and administratively into countries, both divisions which Islam refuses. But man being man, and besides the west having partitioned the last Islamic State, the Ottoman one, Muslims themselves have generally not been able to put Islam above their ethnicities, that said regardless of internal disputes within each ethnicity. Around 98% of Muslim Lebanese retain some aspects of their Arab, Tanukhid or Canaanite original ethnicity. Those of Arab or Tanukhid original ethnicity have been influenced by Canaanism due to integration with the originally locals, and vice versa. Around 2% of Muslim Lebanese are of other ethnic origin (mainly Kurds) and retain minor aspects of their ethnicity. Of note, retained elements should not contradict Islamic teachings. Moreover, there is no clear - cut line when the identity crosses the border between "truly" being a Muslim or being prone to being treated as being alien to the doctrine or even as being alien to Islam itself ["infidels"] (we mean for worldliness issues, and not for solely religious beliefs): still, this remains a Muslim internal affair

That said, for a part of local / diaspora Muslim Lebanese who are believers but moderate or liberal in their way of life, and for a part of local / diaspora Muslim Lebanese who are non - believers and usually liberal in their way of life, and regardless of how they are treated by their co - religionists, this non - fundamentalism still marginalizes the issue of having been imbued by Canaanism or by any other culture they have migrated to: they remain closer to Islam, unless they quasi - completely revoke its cultural elements.

Obviously, this does not prohibit the right for the diaspora part of them to reobtain their Lebanese citizenship in case lost, bearing in mind that Muslim Lebanese retain the right to contest belonging to a Lebanese republic, as is the right for any People to determine its own fate, all the more that Muslim Lebanese sociologically belong to the worldwide Muslim nation, regardless if they prioritize an ethnic group over another, and may have an incentive to belong to a larger Muslim group (Syria, Arab...). Needless to say, Canaanites also retain the right to contest belonging to a Lebanese republic.

Now speaking of **Canaanites**, they are, at the personal level, in majority Christians, with an **irreligious minority**. They are distributed over sects (Maronites, Orthodox Rums, Catholic Rums (all three 88%) and other (12%), diaspora aside). The 1% difference with the ethnicities issue is that the 1% of Latins and Protestants splintered from Maronites and Orthodox Rums respectively. As mentioned earlier, all these sects almost organized into confessional communities, and continue to apparently do so, but we emphasize on the words "almost" and "apparently", on the basis that they admix spontaneously. Yet they all remain one People, on the basis of still being homogeneous at the culture - civilizational level.

As for sociologically / ethnically **Muslims**, again regardless of their **internal discrepancies**, they are in majority religiously Muslims. Their culture is Islamic, all while retaining minor elements of Canaanism and Arabism (or Tanukhidism, and much less, Kurdism). Yet, due to said discrepancies, the more the non - Muslim elements in Muslims' daily lives, the larger the part of Muslims that may be considered not to be Muslim in the eyes of other co- religionists, even if said part identifies as Muslim. A **minority** of them is **irreligious**, most retaining Muslim and Canaanite / Arab / Tanukhid / Kurdish elements and thus currently sociologically / ethnically uncategorized, with very few having shifted to pure Canaanism. As mentioned earlier, Lebanese Muslims are distributed over sects (Sunnis, Twelver Shiites, Druzes and Alawites) which have organized as confessional communities, on the basis that they do not admix spontaneously, yet they remain one People, based on still being homogeneous and integrated at the cultural level.

Of note, all what is **Phoenician** is Canaanite: Phoenician is the Greek and now western appellation. Also of note, so is **Punic**, a later "distortion" of the term "Phoenician" by the Romans for Carthaginian Canaanites.

And Canaanites inhabited all of Lebanon (and even beyond), meaning the coast, the mountain and the Bekaa plain. And they embraced Christianity, ending into being either mostly Maronites in Mount Lebanon, or mostly Rums around the latter.

And some Maronite monks from Syria sought refuge to Mount Lebanon with some families who used to work in monasteries that would be attacked by Syriacs (sectarianly Monophysites), Byzantines and Muslims, but Maronites are not a whole People who came into a quasi - empty Mount Lebanon to admix with a local minority.

Also, **Mardaites** were Caucasian mercenaries brought in by Byzantines for 9 years, from 676 until 685 (and not at all more, as largely believed). Most importantly, they are not a People who came as families and blended sociologically with the locals, though their genes can be traced within some Lebanese Christians (just like Crusader or Arab genes), because some Mardaites did not obey command to leave Lebanon in 685.

So no, **Mount Lebanon** was not empty before "said Maronite" presence, nor before Muslim presence. Indeed, the Shuf Druzes came in to escape persecution to an empty Shuf back in 1020, but Christians had been expelled out of it by the Abbasids in ~ 800 and out of Hammana in ~ 850. Also, Aley Druzes, the formerly Tanukhids, and formerly Sunnis (and Christians before that), were brought in by the Abbasids to combat the Christians in the nearby mountains. Similarly, indeed the Shiites entered an empty Mount Lebanon (Jbeil / Kesrouan), though not in escape from any persecution but just filling a void, and not in year ~ 800 but since 1305, before being driven back out by the Christians between 1382 and 1392 (and not by the Mamluks in 1306) (except for a few who pledged allegiance and who are the ancestors of current Shiites of Jbeil), and most importantly, this void had been created by the Mamluks in 1305 when they sacked back then purely Christian northern Mount Lebanon.

Elsewhere, Canaanites did not originate as a People in Arabia (Herodotus was wrong as in many other topics, though surely not in everything). And Arabs are not Canaanites, though they were heavily influenced by them.

And "**Semitism**" is a term being abandoned, because it was a "recent" (~ 1781) theory based on similarities among Levantine languages. There is scientifically no Semitic People, nor a Semitic language. Much, and mostly in the Levant, of what is Semitic is Canaanite.

Genetically, Arabs aside, Canaanites (of which will splinter current northwestern Syria Peoples) and Bedouins around their land who will later evolve into Hebrews, Aramaics and Amorites (later branching into Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites) have generally common ancestry. And Arabs, of which Tanukhids and Nabateans will splinter, share generally common ancestry. Of note, Nabateans will be heavily Canaanized, but not Tanukhids.

Linguistically, there were at first a **Canaanite** and Sumerian **language** having much in common basically due to an older common language. Sumerian is thought to have more influenced Canaanite at first because they invented writing earlier and spread towards the Land of Canaan, through using cuneiform syllabary, not cuneiform alphabet (which was elaborated by Canaanites of Ugarit, inspired by the Sumerian cuneiform syllabary) neither letter alphabet (the Canaanite alphabet we know, elaborated by Canaanite of Lebanon and of (later) Palestine).

That said, all what is **Aramean (or Aramaic)** (and which basically relates to a language and its alphabet, and which was blown up to be a considered a civilization due to said language and script) will soon be categorized into either being Canaanite, when between years 590 BC and AD 400, or being Syriac if after year AD 400. Thus, Imperial Aramaic language and script are actually

Imperial Canaanite, which would be a more recent version of what is currently considered Canaanite and Phoenician. Of note, many references erroneously use the date 700 or 900 BC (or some other date of that period) instead of 590 BC. Aramaic - proper will continue to apply to back then inhabitants of Aram proper (Golan / Horan / Zabadani - all in Syria, and their language, the latter before its disappearance ~ 590 BC).

And all what is **Syriac** will soon be categorized as Assyrian if before AD 250 (first Syriac manuscript dated to AD 243), while remaining Syriac thereafter, the confusion having been due to an erroneous appellation by a German archaeologist (Weissbach) who had himself recognized the error, but to no avail back then. The name "Syria" is not linked to the name "Assyria" (Ashur).

And all what is **Syrian** will soon be categorized as Assyrian if before AD 14, while remaining Syrian thereafter, the confusion having been for the same previous reason.

Syriac and Syrian remain a same name, the former for the People of northeastern Syria, and the latter for the land we know now. But "Syria" was originally for southern current Syria, back then named Aram. And the name "Syria" was coined by Roman emperor Tiberius in AD 14, for said land as observed from the peak of Mount Sarone (Canaanite name) / Mount Hermon (Hebrew name) / Mount Sheikh (Arabic name).

Also of note, "**Lebanese**" (**vernacular**) **dialect** is actually of the Canaanite language. Generally, Lebanese Christians have a variety of Canaanite language, as do Lebanese Muslims, that said besides Syrians, Palestinians / Western Jordanians, and possibly Hejazites. Each variety has its regional dialects, and each dialect has its accents. So the spoken language in Lebanon and all these countries / regions is Canaanite.

This Canaanite language ought to be the formal language and ought to be written in its **Canaanite alphabet** (that needs a light update). This may not concern Muslims because of their religious consideration of Arabic, and they deserve respect whatever their choice, even if religious wins over scientific. The Canaanite language does not need any update but its vocabulary and grammar rules need to be put down into a standardized version.

The **Syriac language** is the aboriginal language (spoken, literary and liturgical) of the Syriac People in northeastern Syria and of the rest of the fiefdom there, as well as specifically the liturgical language of Maronites (it was as well their literary language between ~ 500 and ~ 1910, being alongside Canaanite between ~ 500 and ~ 1250).

The **Greek language** in Lebanon is the liturgical language of the Rums.

As for **Arabism**, it is a concept that was elaborated in its nationalistic aspect starting the 1860's, and it failed to unite Muslims of the later coined "Arab world", and it is just starting to be slowly abandoned. Yet Muslims who consider themselves Arabs in face of Muslims of other original ethnicities ought to be respected as to their consideration. That said, we must say that if some Muslims consider themselves Persian or Turks or Kurdish, the Muslims who might have a link to

consider themselves Arabs are the Saudis (even yet without the Hejaz), the Gulf (Gulf side) and the Sham desert tribes (Syria / Iraq / Jordan). Other (Levantine, Egyptian, North African, Hejazite and Yemenite) Muslims are heirs of their pre - Islamic belongings, not of (pre - Islamic) Arabism, but seemingly have been Arabized during their Islamization. Even "previously Tanukhid" Muslims, who splintered from Arabs, and thus retained much Arab culture before Islam, are to consider themselves scientifically Tanukhids and not Arabs. So all this mix -up occurred due to the concept of nationalism having been elaborated based on a literary language that was of common use, Arabic. And of note, true Muslims would not let any ethnicity prevail and would simply identify sociologically (alongside religiously) as Muslims.

All **Arabs** and Tanukhids Islamized (as well as the five Yemenite Peoples). Thus, scientifically, there are no Arabs or Tanukhids nowadays, but Muslims of Arab or Tanukhid ancestry (the Tanukhids are also of Arab ancestry as pointed out earlier). But these Muslims retain some former Arabic elements, the most prominent being the Arabic language, now considered the holy language of Islam.

So these two Peoples in Lebanon, Canaanite and Muslim, have not integrated one into the other: there is pluralism in Lebanon. Furthermore, the Muslims do not generally admix among sects, which is explained by their social organization into confessional communities. And keeping the expression "Christians and Muslims" in use in politics gives the impression of dealing with one (sociological) people but following two religions, hence a misdiagnosis for the Lebanese dilemma.

Of note, **liberals (especially of which irreligious)** of both Peoples, including of the 4 Muslim confessional communities, remain in social belonging within their original social sphere albeit without clinging to religious belief and practice, with extremely rare "said Muslim" irreligious" individuals having integrated into "Canaanites".

So diversity in Lebanon is cultural - civilizational, and not only religious, though religion remains a main aspect of any culture / civilization. This implies that the Lebanese dilemma's solution lies not in passing from sectarianism to secularism (the latter already being partially applied since 1926), nor in rooting within sectarianism, but in organizing the co - existence in a politically scientific manner, which has not been efficiently carried out

Of note, diversity does not include a socio - economical / educational parameter in such a manner that if solved, would solve the diversity dilemma. That means there is no conflict between sociological strata of a same People, or of a same Muslim confessional community.

This is why the "Pact" was needed; this is why binary equality was needed. And we know that a unitary state cannot respect more than one collective identity. Diversity needs a federal system for two or more Peoples to run their administrative affairs through one country. Thus, a federation of present - day Lebanon would not be a division, but a union of its two components in such a way that would manage pluralism. Lebanon had been split into these two components since 634, and that until 1920, when they were administratively united though a centralized unitary political



system instead of being united through a decentralized federal system. This is the correction that should be carried out.

And if the relatively mild concessions that both Peoples must accept, in order to maintain the Republic of Lebanon as an administrative entity, is unbearable to any of the two factions, they can also go for peaceful partition, as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. New states can then go for some confederation. Each choice has its advantages and its inconveniences that we detail in our work.

This federal system needs to adopt a minimal atmosphere of secularism in the federal Constitution for the country to be able to exist. Cantons may or may not adopt secularism. Quotas can be a solution for a portion of "unsatisfied" citizens. An Ombudsman tribunal protects minorities. Neutrality in foreign affairs is a must, as, of course, absence of armed factions besides the army and police.

All what preceded being understood, this is the primary cause of Lebanon's ailments.

This remains a summary for a 600 - A4 page book. Many political, social, biological, religious, linguistic, alphabet, historical and geographical details are hereby overlooked. There is also a detailed proposal with maps pertaining to the application of a federal order in Lebanon someday. The maps are based on a list of Lebanese towns approved by the Lebanese Army Directorate for Geographical Affairs, a map depicting the borders of the ~ 1450 Lebanese towns used by the United Nations and the electoral lists from the Ministry of Interior.

We remain at your disposal for further clarification.