After what must have been a hot day in August 1909, a journalist for a Beirut newspaper felt inclined to take an even walk. Jubran Massuh decided that he would “pretend to be European,” and that meant donning a tie and other European apparel and adopting European behavior. But suddenly it occurred to him that it was entirely un-European to walk around amlessly “wasting time”; after all, as Europeans said, “Time is money.” Young Jubran therefore turned on his heels to get back behind his desk and spend his time studying something useful. The time-conscious European was one of several temporal identities that Jubran Massuh was juggling.1

Four years earlier, roughly twenty-five hundred miles and an entire ocean farther to the west, another journalist, this one anonymous, had written about time. His article criticized the introduction of standard time (Greenwich Mean Time) to the city of Bombay, where the citizens insisted on keeping local Bombay time. According to the journalist, standard time had no legitimacy. It was British time, tied to the specific circumstances of British rule over much of India. The British traders and bureaucrats who advocated it were not representative of Bombay or of India as a whole.2 In consequence, after widespread protests, a pluralistic landscape of times was not just maintained but enhanced throughout British India as cities such as

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1 See Jubran Massuh, “Kayfa Naqtul al-Waqt,” Lisan al-Hal, August 14, 1909, 3. Massuh used the Arabic verb and neologism tafarnaja, derived from the Arabic word ifranji (“Frank”/European), to describe his temporary identity switch. “To tafarnaja” was a common expression in the period.

Bombay (and to a lesser degree Calcutta) followed local time on most public clocks except for a few government offices until 1950.3

These instances illustrate two different ways in which a multitude of different times prevailed in much of the world during a roughly seventy-year period from the 1870s to the 1940s, when, under the advocacy of the North Atlantic world, time was presumably becoming more standardized, or as contemporaries put it, “civilized” and “uniform.” As the episode from Beirut illustrates, by the turn of the last century, social time—notions of how to use and pass one’s time in daily life and in interactions with others—had multiplied to the extent of being a consciously comparable and deliberately interchangeable constructed concept. The account from Bombay demonstrates how orders of time multiplied and continued to coexist at a moment when the goal was to impose more uniformity. As a result of such encounters with time or unintended consequences of unifying time, up until the 1940s and 1950s, the concept of a worldwide grid of standardized, uniform mean times, and coherent notions of social time, was largely a fiction in the heads of a few mainly Euro-American railway engineers and scientists.4

The unification of clock times and social times was a vexed, contested, and long-winded story, as exemplified by the inflections that time took on in two different locales, the late Ottoman Levant and Beirut, on the one hand, and British India and Bombay, on the other. Today, Jubran Massuh’s stance toward different approaches to time management and the Bombay journalist’s assessment of standard time may appear unrelated. But to contemporaries, both were part of a global preoccupation with time that encompassed clock times, calendars, social times, and more material questions of time technologies alike.

Ultimately, over the course of several decades, the process of time unification touched on localities all over the globe, as mean times were introduced, locally specific ways of keeping time slowly disappeared, and social times lost some though by no means all of their flexibility. How should the history of global flows and connections be conceptualized when it encompasses potentially nothing less than “the world,” since all-inclusiveness is obviously not an option? One way to capture such processes is to conceive of global history and the history of globalization as the interplay of geopolitics and scales. In a world of layered sovereignties, centralized nation-states occupied different positions in networks of flows and connections than did dependent colonies and colonial empires or multiethnic land empires. Global

3 “Local time” (meaning sun time) is not scientifically accurate, but I prefer its usage over the correct “local mean time” (clock time) due to the latter’s similarity to “mean time” as used to describe the midpoint of an hour-wide time zone. Given the uneven length of the apparent solar day over the course of the year, “local mean time” corrects for these variations and has been used since the early nineteenth century to replace “local solar time” (sundial time, sun time, local time).

4 These time unification schemes have been the subject of many history of science and technology-based studies that have examined individuals and institutions involved with the sciences behind time reform. Since these accounts draw on personal papers, scientific publications, and institutional archives of observatories instead of using the administrative and legislative archives of governments, the protracted political and social dimensions of time reform and the imaginary and practical variety of times that continued to exist among different, less specialist slices of the population do not normally form part of these stories. See, for instance, Ian R. Bartky, Selling the True Time: Nineteenth-Century Timekeeping in America (Stanford, Calif., 2000); Bartky, One Time Fits All: The Campaigns for Global Uniformity (Stanford, Calif., 2007); Peter Galison, Einstein’s Clocks, Poincaré’s Maps: Empires of Time (New York, 2003).
connections and flows, moreover, scaled up and down through different local, national, regional, and international planes. A comprehensive account of the history of time reform and other global processes should therefore engage a variety of politics and different degrees of scale, ranging from international congresses and organizations to domestic contexts within nation-states, to empires, colonies, and local contexts alike. In this perspective, a panoramic picture of different responses to and varieties of time reform would emerge, capturing both the high-altitude deliberations of scientific conferences and the street-level view of urban local public clocks. Such an account would highlight a range of different aspects of the broader topic of time unification, including internationalism, nationalist competition, the role of capitalism and the world economy, imperial control, bureaucratization, state-building, self-improvement, and social times. Beirut and Bombay exemplify only two aspects within the broader story of time unification. Both are local urban environments, the one located in an Arab province within the Ottoman Empire, the other situated in a full-fledged colony within the British Empire; the one showcasing imperial time, the other self-improvement in the face of imperial encroachment. The two are sufficiently different to illustrate certain dynamics of globalization, and sufficiently similar to be juxtaposed in the first place.

Beirut and Bombay had important commonalities. Beirut was a multi-religious commercial hub in a longstanding land empire that had recently come under pressure from European expansionist aspirations. In this context, local intellectuals pondered the challenge and threat that Europeans posed. Bombay was a multi-religious commercial center in a longstanding European colony where local elites were cautiously beginning to express criticism of British rule. In both places, integration into the world economy had in previous decades wrought important changes in the political economy and the social fabric. As a result of expanding indigenous as well as Western education, both cities were home to a growing local middle class that had come in contact with European ideas and produced a “vernacular field of publicity” in the form of newspapers, journals, and pamphlets in a lively public sphere. And yet, as cities within a multiethnic land empire, on the one hand, and a full-fledged European colony, on the other, Beirut and Bombay differed enough to illustrate the ways in which globalization generally and a universalizing process such as time reform in particular were shaped by local constellations.

For such a perspective, see my forthcoming book on the topic, with the working title *Contesting Time: The Global Struggle for Uniformity and Its Unintended Consequences* (under contract with Harvard University Press).

For other works that have recently engaged in comparisons between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean region, see Nile Green, “Maritime Worlds and Global History: Comparing the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean through Barcelona and Bombay,” *History Compass* 11, no. 7 (2013): 513–523; and Leila Tarazi Fawaz and C. A. Bayly, eds., *Modernity and Culture: From the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean* (New York, 2002).


Manu Goswami has analyzed a similar print culture, especially in the United Provinces, in her *Producing India: From Colonial Economy to National Space* (Chicago, 2004), 168. On the press in the Middle East, see Ami Ayalon, *The Press in the Arab Middle East: A History* (New York, 1995).

On the methodology of comparison, the best contribution is still Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Jürgen Kocka, “Historischer Vergleich: Methoden, Aufgaben, Probleme: Eine Einleitung,” in Haupt and
It has become a commonplace to assert that globalization somehow involved interactions between the global and the local. Yet contrary to the assumptions peddled by even some of the more convincing social science studies on present-day globalization, besides local elements, incipient national identities played a significant role in regionalizing and localizing time reform. Such nationally colored articulations appear almost as a product of the interplay between global processes and localities. The history of time reform in Beirut and Bombay helps shed light on how particular local conditions on the ground shaped global transformations, on how time took on different, nationally colored meanings and functions attuned to these localities, and on how, in consequence, a multitude of times continued to exist in both places for much longer than has commonly been assumed. Within the colony of British India, it mattered to the local Bombay citizens who rejected standard time that this was the time of the colonizer, British time. In a situation where discontent with British politics had been stoked by other recent unpopular measures implemented by the colonial government, protest against the introduction of British time became a vehicle for expressing criticism of foreign rule more generally. In this atmosphere, members of Bombay’s middle class could claim that their refusal to follow British time was born not out of local concerns but out of India-wide, “national” concerns about mismanagement of the entire colony and a resulting loss of legitimacy of British rule over India. In Beirut, on the other hand, European formal empire was only threatening to become an all-out occupation in the future. In the second half of the nineteenth century, missionaries, consuls, and merchants landed on Levantine shores in growing numbers. Once settled, they founded their own educational institutions, established their own courts, extracted tax exemptions, and crowded out local competitors in landing major construction contracts for ports and railways. In nearby Egypt, foreign occupation became a reality in 1882 after a protracted phase of European influence, indebtedness, and destabilization. Levantine elites had to be alarmed at this prospect. The Beirut middle classes therefore urged their contemporaries not to reject European time practices but to adopt elements of them as a means of self-strengthening Arab civilization against the serious European challenge.

Kocka, eds., Geschicthe und Vergleich: Ansa¨tze und Ergebnisse international vergleichender Geschich- tschreibung (Frankfurt/Main, 1996), 9–49.

10 In the social science literature on globalization, this point has been made most convincingly by Roland Robertson, “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity,” in Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash, and Roland Robertson, eds., Global Modernities (London, 1995), 25–44; and Arjun Appadurai, Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization (Minneapolis, 1996). For a historical perspective on globalization, though without much conceptual reflection, see some of the contributions in A. G. Hopkins, ed., Global History: Interactions between the Universal and the Local (Basingstoke, 2006).

11 In the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, “nationalism” in British India and the Levant was certainly not the anticolonial nationalism of the interwar years and immediate pre-1947 period or something akin to the ideology of (pan-)Arab nationalism in the twentieth century. But I prefer the term “nationalism” over “proto-nationalism” and the like because the latter implicitly posits a European model nationalism and non-Western derivatives.

12 The social science literature on globalization has much less to offer on nationalism and the nation-state than on localization. Arjun Appadurai in fact wrote his account of global-local interactions based on the assumption that “the very epoch of the nation-state is near its end.” That view is problematic even for contemporary globalization, and completely untenable for nineteenth-century globalization. Appadurai, Modernity at Large, 19.
In the second half of the nineteenth century, the world was rapidly becoming more interconnected. Markets for goods, capital, and labor; migration, imperialism, and colonialism; and internationalist movements reaching beyond the nation-state were different dimensions of globalization. A new infrastructure of railways, steamships, and telegraphs underpinned these cross-border movements. Distance seemingly was annihilated, and time was accelerating. While in earlier periods different world regions had certainly seen interactions and cross-border connections, a combination of technology and the spirit of imperialism propelled nineteenth-century globalization to new levels of density and intensity. As a consequence, this brave new globalized world could at times appear chaotic to contemporaries. Uniformity, in nineteenth-century language, or standardization, as it would be termed in the Fordist middle decades of the twentieth century, was therefore hailed as the necessary lubricant for the uninterrupted flow of people, goods, and ideas. Several international agreements and institutions, such as the meter convention and the International Telegraph Union, sought to unify procedures, prices, and formats. The formal-

13 For an account of early modern global and universalizing projects, see Joyce Chaplin’s work on circumnavigators who similarly thought about the world in holistic, universal, planetary terms: Chaplin, *Round about the Earth: Circumnavigation from Magellan to Orbit* (New York, 2012). In periodizing globalization, the nineteenth-century “wave” of globalization is most commonly seen to end with the outbreak of World War I, which in this understanding is viewed as disrupting globalization until it took off again in the 1960s. However, many prewar trends associated with integration and interconnection, such as internationalism and certainly imperial ties, continued in the 1920s and 1930s and came to an end or were reorganized only during and after World War II. For arguments about the ongoing interconnectedness of the world after World War I, and 1914 as a Eurocentric caesura, see Adam McKeown’s very helpful “Periodizing Globalization,” *History Workshop Journal* 63, no. 1 (2007): 218–230, here 226. Nineteenth-century globalization bears a striking resemblance to present-day globalization when we consider the flow of capital, the integration of markets, and political internationalism as globalization’s main tenets. But that in no way implies that earlier periods and waves of interconnectedness were not global. On other eras of globalization such as archaic or proto-globalization, see A. G. Hopkins, “Introduction: Globalization—An Agenda for Historians,” in Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History* (New York, 2002), 1–10. For a historiographical survey of literature on historical globalization, see Hopkins, “The History of Globalization—and the Globalization of History?,” ibid., 12–44. The most succinct survey so far is Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels P. Petersson, *Globalization: A Short History*, trans. Dona Geyer (Princeton, N.J., 2005). For an economic perspective, see Kevin H. O’Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, Mass., 1999): as well as the contributions in Michael D. Bordo, Alan M. Taylor, and Jeffrey G. Williamson, eds., *Globalization in Historical Perspective* (Chicago, 2003). Michael Geyer and Charles Bright have argued for the need not only to write histories of globalization as a process but to “globalize” the writing of history: Geyer and Bright, “World History in a Global Age,” *American Historical Review* 100, no. 4 (October 1995): 1034–1060; in a similar vein, see Charles S. Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era,” *American Historical Review* 105, no. 3 (June 2000): 807–831. “Globalization” is used here as the term that best, if not ideally, captures the process in which increasing interconnections are built and integration is sustained. On the other hand, the many limits, frictions, and disruptions in interconnections between different regions, the inequality and unevenness that connectedness can equally create, should be viewed as just as central to globalization as integration. On the limits of “globalization” as a category for historians, see Frederick Cooper, “Globalization,” in Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, Calif., 2005), 91–112.

ization of a growing body of recognized international law in the nineteenth century established another, more abstract standard of conduct that would guide a growing number of nation-states in international politics.\(^\text{15}\)

The unification of time was perhaps the most universalizing project among these efforts. Euro-American scientists and railway entrepreneurs declared uniform time rational, neutral, free from politics or other petty questions of identity, and hence universally applicable across societies. “Time reform,” as contemporaries termed it in typical nineteenth-century idiom, targeted different aspects of time, from clock times to calendars to social time.\(^\text{16}\) The most well-known movement formed to unify time was that advocating the introduction of time zones. In 1884, scientists and diplomats at the Washington Prime Meridian Conference promoted the introduction of a global system of time zones based on the meridian at Greenwich, England, as well as the adoption of a universal day beginning at midnight rather than at noon or, as in some non-Western societies, at sunset or sunrise.\(^\text{17}\) Out of the standard time movement grew attempts to end the waste of daylight by introducing so-called daylight saving or summer time. European countries implemented such measures during the First World War but later suspended and reintroduced them irregularly in the 1920s.\(^\text{18}\) Neglected by existing scholarship, concurrent efforts to reform calendars were another important dimension of reorganizing time. Calendar reform started

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\(^{16}\) On missionaries and time discipline, see Giordano Nanni, The Colonisation of Time: Ritual, Routine and Resistance in the British Empire (Manchester, 2012), which does not deal with the British Empire but rather with the Cape Colony and parts of Australia.


\(^{18}\) On summer time, see Bartky, One Time Fits All, chap. 10; as well as two more popular accounts: Michael Downing, Spring Forward: The Annual Madness of Daylight Saving (Washington, D.C., 2005);
out as an effort to convince the non-Western world and Russia to adopt the Gregorian calendar; by the turn of the twentieth century, advocates were calling for the global introduction of a culturally and religiously neutral and uniform “world calendar,” a project that was eventually pursued vigorously by the League of Nations.19

To some of the astronomers involved in advocating uniformity, time reform may have been a purely technical matter. But as soon as the reorganization of time moved from circles of scientific experts to legislators, bureaucrats, and government officials, it took on far-ranging social and political implications. Even seemingly more economic measures such as summer time were always aimed at changing social behavior as well. Summer time was promoted as a way to curb unhealthy behavior such as rising late in the morning or idling in pubs after sunset, and to encourage a ball game or other physical recreational activities after work instead. Time reformers saw questions of calendar times, clock times, social times, and time technologies as pertaining to the same broader issue.20

Several intertwined factors contributed to the slow advance of time unification. Compelling the entire globe to implement new time practices was a tremendously ambitious task. Local populations were reluctant to let go of accustomed practices. But among Europeans seeking to implement unification schemes, it was a lack of imaginary flexibility that posed obstacles to uniform time. When British, French, and German journalists, government officials, and railway personnel discussed the benefits and complications of introducing uniform mean times, they revealed a remarkable ineptitude at imagining such units of time as hours or zone times as constructed entities that would be grafted onto the duration of a full rotation of the earth. Parliamentary discussions and administrative correspondence are replete with references that demonstrate how Europeans implicitly combined absolute, natural, “true” time with a newly introduced measure such as standard time or summer time. Many people came to conclude that under the new standard time, hours had to be adjusted to make activities previously carried out at one point in “absolute” time fall at the same absolute moment in time as before. The most illustrative example of such reasoning was a measure passed in western Germany after the introduction of a nationwide standard time for German railways in 1892. In order to make trains run at the same absolute point in time as they had under local sun time, officials adjusted timetables accordingly. Hence, in a location where the new standard time ran eighteen minutes ahead of local sun time, a train that had previously departed at 9 A.M. was now rescheduled to run at 9:18 A.M.21 Behind such measures was the belief that the course of things would still be determined by “real” time, and that any event, being as intrinsically stable and immovable as it was, would merely receive a new name (9:18 instead of 9:00). Such reasoning was common in Europe as late as the 1920s in discussions about summer time. These arguments betray a striking imag-

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19 On early calendar reform at the League of Nations, see League of Nations Archives, Geneva, Communications and Transit Section, 1919–1927, 14/12478/22679, report, March 9, 1922.
20 See, among the many examples, British National Archives, Kew [hereafter NA], HO 45/11626, Summer Time—Notes of Deputations from the Early Closing Association.
inary difficulty among European legislators and administrators to conceive of time abstractly and to separate different conceptions of time as Germans and other Europeans instead sought to combine them.

Measured by their own goals, Euro-Americans who attempted to make time more uniform thus failed widely. In much of the non-Western world, mean times were adopted only between the 1920s and, more often, the 1940s, frequently in initial disregard of the Greenwich system. What is more, the actual application of legally mandated official times always remained patchy long after the enactment of legislation, in Europe as much as anywhere. Passing a law on time was one thing; ensuring the application of said law was another. Calendar reform efforts petered out in the 1950s without any achievements to speak of, and social times remain elastic to this day. Most importantly, however, leading minds in the non-Western world had simultaneously and independently of Euro-American debates engaged in their own conversations about different aspects of time, whether it concerned the reform of the Parsi and Hindu calendars, the accuracy of the Islamic lunar calendar, or the use of clocks and telegraphs in transmitting the news of the moon-sighting to determine the start of Ramadan. The simultaneity of a globalized world had become impossible to steer. Europeans were certainly not the only ones who were preoccupied with time.

While Germans adjusted train schedules, the denizens of Bombay harbored their own assumptions about trains and time. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Indians made time the topic of conversations, novels, and journalistic reporting. Intellectuals reflected on the compression of time and space that railways brought. Colonial subjects integrated the rhythms of timetables and trains into their everyday life but did not refrain from complaining about the inconveniences of certain scheduling arrangements. Moreover, Hindu and other religious reformers were enth-

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22 In 1942, the British Dominion Office compiled a list of times in use in the dominions after acknowledging that nobody was able to establish which times were observed in different parts of the empire. Multiple British possessions followed zone times with half-hour differences from GMT even though the Washington system of time zones had stipulated hour-wide mean times. See NA, DO 35/1123, December 6, 1945, 26.

23 On Hindu calendar reform, see “Reform of the Hindu Calendar,” The Leader, May 31, 1912, 6; on Parsi calendar reform, see “Parsi Festivals: The Unreformed Calendar,” Times of India, August 13, 1915, 6; see also Ahmed Mukhtar Pasha, La réforme du calendrier (Paris, 1893). Mukhtar Pasha was an astronomer who for some time lived in Paris and worked at the Paris Observatory. His book on calendar reform was first published in Ottoman Turkish and later translated into Arabic and French. On Mukhtar Pasha and astronomy in Egypt more generally, see Daniel A. Stolz’s impressive Ph.D. dissertation “The Lighthouse and the Observatory: Islam, Authority, and Cultures of Astronomy in Late Ottoman Egypt” (Princeton University, 2013). On the use of technology and Islamic law, see especially Jamal al-Din al-Qasimi, Irshad al-Khalq ila al’Amal bi-Khabar al-Barq (Damascus, 1911), and the several references to similar works it contains, as well as fatwas by Rashid Rida, one of the most well-known Islamic reformers of the period who was based out of Cairo. They were published in his journal, al-Manar. See, for example, al-Manar 6 (1903): 705–707, 862. See also Samuel Marinus Zwemer, “The Clock, the Calendar, and the Koran,” Moslem World 3, no. 3 (1913): 262–274; and Muhammad Bakht al-Muti’i, Kitab Irshad Ahl al-Milla ila Ithbat al-Ahilla (Cairo, 1911).

siastic followers of the principle of self-help and saw time discipline and time manage-
ment as central to their efforts at self-strengthening. When the colonial
administration first considered the idea of reforming timekeeping, Indians were
therefore no strangers to Euro-American and other times.

Between 1881 and 1905–1906, the West Indian city of Bombay became the stage
for protests against the abolition of local time and the introduction of the new so-
called Indian Standard Time, which was set in accordance with the Greenwich sys-
tem. Bombay’s citizens were infused with a sense of local urban pride and identity,
fueled not least by the recent economic upswing the city had witnessed during the
American Civil War, when cotton production came to a halt in the South, and mill
owners in Lancashire and elsewhere turned to other outlets. In 1881, the British
governor of Bombay, James Fergusson, had failed to calculate his way through the
thicket of simultaneously existing different times and schedules applied by railway
lines, telegraph bureaus, and local town hall buildings across British India. The gov-
ernor missed a train. Out of this mishap an idea was born, and later that year the
governor moved to introduce Madras time to Bombay. The time of the southern
Indian city and its observatory was the standard that had been widely adopted by
most Indian telegraph bureaus and railways since the 1860s. Bombay denizens,
both Indian and British, were quick to reject Madras time as confusing, and above
all as imposing the time of a rival city upon the proud denizens of Bombay, who
confidently claimed for their city the status of Urbs Prima in Indis. Meanwhile, a
handful of government offices had adopted Madras time, as had the clock at St.
Thomas Cathedral, whereas private offices, schools, and even the High Court ran on
local Bombay time. “Consequently great inconvenience is felt by a large number of
people,” the Bombay Samachar wrote. Such diversity created an environment of
multiple times that required knowledge not only of which time was kept where, but
also of who would follow which time. “Supposed I submit and keep Madras time,
how am I to know that Jones and Smith do the same?” one reader summed up the
ambivalence. Two years later, in 1883, the application of Madras time still remained partial, and criticism continued. The governor eventually succumbed to public pressure and rescinded his decision. Bombay returned to local time.

After this first brush with standardizing time, authorities left Indian times untouched for roughly fifteen years. In the late 1890s, however, several scientific organizations, including the Royal Scottish Geographical Society and the British Association for the Advancement of Science, approached the India Office in London and submitted schemes for introducing an Indian Standard Time in accordance with GMT. A uniform time for all of India, they claimed, would finally abolish the “present barbarous arrangement, unworthy of a country pretending to civilization, by which every place keeps its own time.” Europeans frequently justified their universal project of time reform by contrasting the civility of uniform times with the barbarism of “irregularities,” as they referred to them.

Officials initially objected, citing considerable opposition to a new time in all of India’s bigger cities, but in 1903 they finally relented. The government of India agreed to adopt the meridian five hours and thirty minutes ahead of Greenwich as the colony’s standard time. This was an interesting choice insofar as the 1884 Washington agreements had called for only hour-wide zones and even mean times to be adopted. The Indian government’s decision therefore demonstrated that national interests easily overrode collective internationalist agreements. Indeed, even an irregularity such as the half-hour difference suddenly became acceptable when it was deemed politically opportune to bestow upon British India a single time zone. Given the colony’s latitudinal extension, many with knowledge of the geographic and scientific questions involved had advocated two Indian zones, one four hours fast on GMT, one six. But government and railway officials in India were wary of operating more than one time zone, as in some cases it would amount to handling more than one time in one administrative unit—a province/presidency or a district, for instance. Officials feared a loosening of their administrative grip on British India in such an arrangement.

Eventually, the viceroy and regional governments in the provinces settled on one time zone for all of India. The new time was to be introduced on July 1, 1905, initially for use only by railways and telegraph bureaus. If local British authorities wished, the decree specified, they were at liberty to extend the use of Indian Standard Time

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32 APAC, IOR, P/5664, GOI, Proceedings of the Department of Revenue and Agriculture, 1899, Royal Scottish Geographical Society to Secretary of State for India, June 7, 1898; see also APAC, IOR, P/5664, GOI, Proceedings of the Department of Revenue and Agriculture, 1899, Meteorology, Royal Scottish Geographical Society, memorandum Notes on Standard Time.
34 Ibid., 1899, George F. Hamilton, Secretary of State for India, Simla, August 10, 1899. See also ibid., Hamilton to the Asiatic Society, September 1, 1899, with similar reasons stated.
to official purposes in their respective purview. Rumors began to circulate in the local press, and resistance to these plans was such that, for example, in Calcutta the government quickly recanted and agreed to permit the city to set local “Calcutta time” for all municipal and local purposes. Surprisingly given recent history, Bombay was not subject to such concerns, and the government of India decided to introduce GMT for government purposes in the city as of January 1906. But it chose to leave it up to the local self-governing body, the Bombay Municipal Corporation, to hammer out the precise details of applying standard time to the city. The corporation shifted back and forth, and after endorsing the new time in January eventually decided against it in April 1906. In 1908, the matter was again brought before the corporation, this time with a provision to keep two specific public clocks at Crawford Market and Victoria Garden on local time while changing all others.

When Indian Standard Time was to be debated at one of the meetings of the Bombay Municipal Council in 1905–1906, Indian residents of the city flocked to the town hall meeting primarily to hear and see Pherozeshah Mehta in action. Mehta, also known as “the Lion of Bombay,” was a prominent figure in early Indian institutional nationalism. He had been president of the Indian National Congress, which was headquartered in Bombay, and became one of the most vocal opponents of applying Indian Standard Time to the city. “It is not fair and proper that the population of this City should be driven like a flock of dumb cattle because the Chamber of Commerce and the Port Trust adopted Standard time . . . a measure adopted by Government without consulting the feelings and sentiments of the people and without giving them an opportunity of expressing their opinion,” he argued. It was Mehta’s fiery speech that eventually convinced the Municipal Corporation to reject the new time once and for all. Such comments indicated that objections to standard time were beginning to be couched in the vocabulary of political legitimacy and representation, or rather the lack thereof. Standard time might have been termed “Indian” Standard Time, but Mehta and other members of the Eng-

36 APAC IOR, P/7073, Proceedings of the Department of Revenue and Agriculture, 1905, Meteorology, Secretary of State for India, April 27, 1905. See also ibid., press communiqué, June 1, 1905.

37 Municipal councils were among the first bodies to be staffed with both Indian and British members and were thus experiments in limited self-government on the local level. On municipal government in Bombay, see Kidambi, The Making of an Indian Metropolis, 43.


lish-educated Bombay middle classes did not fall for the ruse: it was British time that was being imposed, and the legitimacy of such an act was called into question.

Newspapers soon joined the swelling chorus of voices condemning the new time as not only cumbersome but also “artificial.” “We are asked to forget our natural time, the same that we have been familiar with from times immemorial, and adopt the new ‘standard’ which the ingenuity of the Astronomer Royal (at Greenwich Observatory) has devised,” the newspaper Kaiser-i-Hind complained, adding that nature herself must be in rebellion against this time.43 “Nobody has asked for artificial time” to replace a time “which Nature has given to us and which mankind has faithfully followed these eight thousand years at least,” the newspaper confirmed a few months later.44 Pointing to the dishonest and disingenuous nature of the new time neatly gave way to accusations of interfering with the religious practices of Hindus, Muslims, and Parsis alike, all of whom relied on solar time in one way or another to perform their religious duties.45 And yet, contrary to Europeans, who rarely grasped that there was no “absolute” time that would continue to determine the course of things under the new standard or summer time (hence the adjustment of train schedules), even Indians who preferred nature’s sun time over standard time for religious or philosophical reasons had no problem imagining the two as distinct and interchangeable rather than entwined.

Fueled by such criticism, factory workers and cotton mill hands began to unleash protests against working hours under standard time. In January 1906 roughly five thousand mill hands gathered in front of the city’s cotton mills and factories, adamantly refusing to return to their looms under the new time regime.46 They associated standard time with another innovation that had recently been introduced to the workplace. When electric lighting was installed in the factories, working hours, which had previously lasted from dawn to dusk, were suddenly increased to up to fifteen hours, independent of the seasons. In a number of strikes in 1905 and 1908, workers therefore adopted the slogan “We want no electric light.”47 Standard time was seen as yet another measure that would extend the working day and, most importantly, shorten the period between sunrise and the beginning of work; hence it would interfere with morning breakfast routines and deprive workers of daylight time outside of working hours. Only when factory owners promised a return to Bombay time did workers agree to resume their work.48 Later, a demonstration against Indian Standard Time in Bombay drew some three thousand participants. Several

44 Ibid., Rejection of Standard Time for Calcutta by Bengal Chamber of Commerce, August 13, 1905.
45 APAC, IOR, P/7073, GOI, Proceedings of the Department of Revenue and Agriculture, 1905, Secretary to the Government of Bombay to Secretary to the Government of India, Bombay Castle, Oct. 17, 1905. See also ibid., Lukhamsee Nappoo, Chairman of the Grain Merchants’ Association, to Chief Secretary of the Government of Bombay, October 13, 1905.
petitions circulated, on some of which as many as fifteen thousand signatures were collected.49

In 1905–1906, criticism of time standardization grew more openly political than it had been in 1881–1883, when it was focused primarily on inconveniences and the Madras origin of the new time. Roughly twenty years later, the flourishing local press became the stage for the public and political contestation of time. Now, the fact that Bombay was a city within a colony determined how this renewed round of time contestation played out. Once British commercial circles had been identified as the main beneficiaries of the new time, it was but a small step to ask how “representative” these circles were of Bombay and India, and thus how much weight their opinions ought to carry. The anonymous Bombay journalist who objected to the introduction of standard time was among those who wrote in this vein. When the Bombay Chamber of Commerce endorsed Indian Standard Time, Kaiser-i-Hind wrote about its members, “surely, they are not permanent residents of Bombay. They are aliens and foreigners . . . They are only birds of passage—a microscopic minority.”50 As the same newspaper succinctly put it, those benefiting from the reforms constituted but “a few hundred globe-trotters and exalted officials.”51 Above all, it was the British viceroy in India, Lord Nathaniel Curzon, who served as a lightning rod for public anger. In July 1905, the same month in which standard time was announced, the much-despised Curzon carried out what would come to be known as the first partition of Bengal, far away from Bombay across the subcontinent in the eastern part of British India.52 But opponents of standard time in Bombay now linked their dissatisfaction with government impositions in their own city to the plight of Bengalees and the entire imagined community of the Indian “nation.” Curzon’s partition measure prompted the so-called Swadeshi movement, one of the first India-wide protests that boycotted British goods for several years and instead promoted the consumption of local products.53 In this atmosphere, opposition to Indian Standard Time in Bombay took on anti-British tones. Curzon’s decision to introduce the new time was now seen as “adding fuel to the flame of intense dissatisfaction prevailing in the country.”54 Applying Indian Standard Time to Bombay on the western coast and partitioning Bengal in the east were viewed as expressions of a certain style of leadership: after “having performed his Herculean miracles in matters administrative and executive, . . . His Lordship . . . seems to be engaged in the task of over-riding Nature herself,” Kaiser-i-Hind scoffed, calling Curzon an “imperial Caesar.”55 Standard time was condemned as one of the “ despotic measures thrust upon the Government of


51 Ibid., Kaiser-i-Hind, August 13, 1905.

52 The partition of Bengal meant that the eastern parts of the previously largest administrative unit in British India would be united with Assam, the west with Bihar and Orissa.


55 Ibid., Kaiser-i-Hind, June 11, 1905.
Bombay by the late Viceroy of India.” Nile Green has argued that the industrialization of communication and transportation allowed Persian- and Urdu-speaking Muslims to reconceptualize Islamic history and the space that Muslims inhabited. The same could be said for standard time, another element of industrialized communication, and the ways in which it led Indian elites to conceptualize abstract time as the historical time of British rule in India. In turn, as Manu Goswami has shown, it was possible to frame Indian history as the history of a national space.

In light of such criticism and the increasingly contested situation of British legitimacy in India, authorities eventually shunned any heavy-handed attempt at enforcing compliance with the new time in metropoles such as Bombay and Calcutta. In Bombay, half a year after the new time had been officially introduced in 1906, it was reported that “only a very small portion of the people of Bombay have obeyed the Government Resolution.” The Bombay Gazette informed readers, not without some sense of Schadenfreude, that the new time had not yet percolated into the households in the “native town,” and that even at local police stations, it was old Bombay time that remained on display. Another round of protests against even the partial application of standard time took place in 1908, ultimately to no avail. A number of renewed but futile attempts to bring the matter of urban time unification before the Municipal Council were made in subsequent decades, but local Bombay time stayed in use until 1950.

As a consequence, even after the introduction of Indian Standard Time, its application remained uneven for several decades. In Calcutta, railways and telegraph bureaus had switched to the new time standard, and the twelve-o’clock-gunshot (along with the time ball, a common time signal in the period) had been adjusted accordingly as well and was now fired nine minutes earlier than previously. But public clocks continued to indicate local Calcutta time, as did church bells. Calcutta, too, after urban dissent, refrained from introducing Indian Standard Time until as late as the mid-1920s. In 1919, a newspaper could still suggest that adopting standard time would merely add another layer of time to an already multifarious landscape of times: “Calcutta is already possessed of more times than she knows what to do with.” Hence, the decision to adopt standard time eventually created an even more variegated envi-

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58 The interplay between notions of uniform time and coherent national space and its history is beyond the scope of this essay but can be gleaned in part from Goswami, Producing India, especially chaps. 5 and 6. On early nationalists’ datings of national histories, see also Jim Masselos, “Time and Nation,” in Sujata Patel, Jasodhara Bagchi, and Krishna Raj, eds., Thinking Social Science in India: Essays in Honour of Alice Thorner (New Delhi, 2002), 343–354, especially 344.
60 See Masselos, “Bombay Time,” 179.
61 The protests against introducing Indian Standard Time to Bombay in 1906 were by no means the end of this protracted story of local disobedience that lasted until 1955. Protests flared up time and again in 1906 and 1908, and the question of introducing Indian Standard Time to the city was discussed by the Municipal Corporation several times in 1921, 1924, 1927, 1935, and 1939. During World War II in 1942, Bombay seems to have introduced Standard Daylight Savings Time at least temporarily; see “New Time,” Times of India, September 1, 1942, 5. See also “Bombay Municipality Adopts Indian Standard Time: 44-Year Old Battle of Clocks Ends,” ibid., March 15, 1950, 5.
ronment of urban times in cities such as Bombay and Calcutta, as certain buildings and institutions followed the new time while others ostensibly did not.

The protesters who clung to local Bombay time had harnessed the motivational forces of urban identity against British rule in India. Local matters became a vehicle to disapprove and voice criticism of imperial rule. Attempts to introduce a new political, social, and economic order of time catalyzed the formulation of local identities that had become more pointedly anticolonial and now claimed nationwide relevance. It was here that Bombay and India’s colonial status mattered most when compared to Beirut’s position as a provincial capital with a growing and challenging Euro-American presence. The protracted path to uniform time in British India therefore showcases a broader trend in the global history of time reform. In an age when nationalism defined parameters of belonging for a growing number of people, universal concepts such as uniform time were translated into national terms. India was no exception to this rule. In France, where idiosyncrasies paired with nationalism had prevented the introduction of “British” time for decades, GMT was adopted as late as 1911 under the official title of “Paris time minus nine minutes and twenty-one seconds.”

When Germany formally abolished its total of five regionally deployed mean times in lieu of a new nationwide time, it introduced the time of GMT+1 as *mitteleuropäische Zeit*, a term insufficiently rendered as “Central European Time” in English, as its German original conveys strong geopolitical, imperial, and even racial notions tied to ideas about where Germany was situated and how far it should extend eastward. Japan’s comparatively early and eager introduction of standard time occurred against the backdrop of an aggressive program of self-reform as part of the Meiji Restoration, a set of measures launched not least with the aim of propelling the country into a future where it would be able to avoid colonization. While many other instances of adopting universal standards occurred fairly unceremoniously and without a national rebranding of uniform time, these examples nevertheless speak to the pliability and adaptability of universalizing concepts as well as to the importance of national frames of reference even in an age that was characterized by increasingly transnational cross-border exchanges. Globalization certainly consisted of interactions between the global and the local, but these contacts could bring national differences to the fore.

It is at such junctures that the different levels of scale at play in the history of globalization emerge most visibly. Reactions to British efforts at synchronizing India with the global order of timekeeping emerged out of specific local constellations that took on national flavors. In this regard, the introduction of Indian Standard Time resembled the reorganization of time in another context. Here, however, the preoccupation with time was a very different one.

**CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM INTELLECTUALS** in the late Ottoman Levant were similarly galvanized by time. By the turn of the last century, the provincial capital of Beirut

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had grown from little more than a fishing hamlet to a vibrant community of merchants, missionaries, consuls, and an incipient middle class. Beirut’s growing integration into the world economy made it increasingly attractive to those European powers that were vying for formal and informal control of Ottoman lands. At the same time, under mounting pressure from the Great Powers, the Ottoman Empire had embarked on the so-called Tanzimat, a program of ambitious reforms modeled primarily after European ideas about education, conscription, citizenship, and the rule of law. On the peripheries of the empire, the Tanzimat entailed raising the provinces to the level of modernity now claimed by the imperial center. One effect of the twofold European and Ottoman challenge was that Levantine intellectuals and public moralists began to feel politically, economically, and culturally besieged and in turn devised ways and means for “Easterners” to withstand such encroachment. They ushered in what came to be known as the Nahda (Arabic: “Renaissance,” “awakening”), a program consisting of educational and intellectual efforts to politically and culturally educate the Arab subjects of the Ottoman Empire to reform themselves. In Beirut, the Nahda brought with it the emergence of a flourishing local press, initially edited primarily by Christian intellectuals, who were soon joined by their Muslim contemporaries. Men such as Butrus al-Bustani, Abd al-Qadir al-Qabbani, Khalil Sarkis, and Ya’qub Sarruf were among the most prominent members of an incipient middle class to write and comment professionally on contemporary affairs. In their editorials, these intellectuals admonished fellow Easterners

66 On the rise and transformation of Beirut, see Fawaz, Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut; on the history of the city in this period more generally, see Jens Hanssen, Fin de siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital (Oxford, 2003).

67 For a recent introduction to the Tanzimat and the late Ottoman period in general by one of the foremost historians of the late Ottoman Empire, see M. Şükrü Hanioglu, A Brief History of the Late Ottoman Empire (Princeton, N.J., 2008). Selim Deringil, The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909 (New York, 1998), analyzes the representational contestations between the Ottoman imperial center and the provinces over the program of reform and Ottoman legitimacy to carry it out in the provinces.


70 In addition to print culture, new educational institutions such as schools run by reform-minded individuals as well as reform societies aimed at promoting knowledge among adults were another central element of the broader reform movement; see Hanssen, Fin de siècle Beirut. Beirut was home to a number of such institutions, while at the same time it was at the center of the Nahda publishing culture. Butrus al-Bustani, a Maronite who converted to Protestantism, founded one of the first papers, al-Jinan, in 1870. Ya’qub Sarruf and Faris Nimir established one of the most influential journals of the period, al-Muqataf, in 1876. In 1885, the journal moved to Cairo over struggles with Ottoman censorship in Beirut and thus helped create a network of intellectual exchange and readership between Beirut, Alexandria, and Cairo. In Beirut, other important publications included Lisan al-Hal, founded in 1877 by Khalil Sarkis; and Thamarat al-Funun, founded and edited by Abd al-Qadir al-Qabbani in 1875. See, for instance, Hisham Nashabi, “Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Qabbani and Thamarat al-Funun,” in Marwan R. Buheiry, ed., Intellectual Life in the Arab East, 1890–1939 (Beirut, 1981), 84–91; Dagmar Glass, Der Muqataf und seine Öffentlichkeit: Aufklärung, Räsonnement und Meinungsstreit in der frühen arabischen Zeitschriftenkomunikation, vol. 1: Analyse mediader und sozialer Strukturen (Würzburg, 2004), 86, 88; Butrus Abu-Manneh, “The Christians between Ottomanism and Syrian Nationalism: The Ideas of Butrus al-Bustani,” International Journal of Middle East Studies 11, no. 3 (1980): 287–304; on Bustani, see also Jurji Zaydan, Tarajim Mushahir al-Shaq f al-Qarn al-Tasi’a Ashar, 2 vols. (Beirut, 1970), 2: 35–44. On Ya’qub Sarruf, see Philippe de Tarrazi, Tarihik al-Sahafa al-’Arabiyya (Beirut, 1967), 124–129. Christians were at least initially at the forefront of the new publishing industry, but Muslims, as is apparent in articles from Thamarat al-Funun, were similarly interested in “time” and devoted significant space in their columns
to embark on a project of self-invigoration, urging them to reconcile religion and modernity, to learn about the scientific progress and discoveries recently made in Europe, and to adopt the most promising such developments.71

In Beirut, in contrast to Bombay, Arab intellectuals’ interest in time was not sparked by the introduction of GMT by a colonial power. GMT was formally introduced to the city in 1917 with the arrival of French troops, but its application was another matter.72 Until the late 1920s, at least, locally produced almanacs contained a detailed explanation of “international time” (the Greenwich-based system of zone times), as well as a list of well-known cities throughout the world and their respective zone times. The fact that it was necessary to introduce the concept of time zones in such a way and to infer Beirut’s zone time in a second step accordingly seems to indicate that these times were not common knowledge and practice among the readers of the several Levantine almanacs circulating in the region.73 What heightened local sensitivities to questions of time instead was the extraordinary plurality of times that coexisted in the city.

Beirut’s temporal landscape was uniquely diverse. Arabs and Europeans counted time differently, calling it either “Frankish” (European) or Arabic/Turkish time. The Islamic day began at sundown, the European day at noon. For the Muslim population, the day was structured by the fivefold daily prayer announced by the call of the muezzin. As in many other cities of the Ottoman Empire, a clock tower, built in 1897, added a public dimension of time to the urban environment in which “Ottoman time” was also competing with the tower clocks of the city’s several churches.74 Home to Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant Christians as well as (mainly Sunni) Muslims and a smaller population of Druze, and centered around Wadi Abu Jamil, an even smaller Jewish community, Beirut was, moreover, a city of different calendar times—the Gregorian calendar, the “unreformed” old Julian calendar, the Islamic lunar calendar, and the Jewish calendar.75

71 The classic reference for Nahda authors and the topics they embraced is still Albert Hourani, Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939 (Cambridge, 1978), here 101, 115.

72 Nikula Shahin, an astronomer at the American University of Beirut’s Lee Observatory in the 1950s, mentioned in a radio-broadcasted lecture that GMT was introduced to Beirut in 1917. See AUB Jafet Archives and Special Collections, Nikula Jurjus Shahin Collection: AUB Faculty 1918–1966, box 1, file 5: Hīwar ‘ilmī li-l-‘idha’a.

73 For one such almanac, see Taqwim al-Bashir 1928 (Beirut, 1927), 96.


75 Another calendar frequently used especially for official government purposes was the Ottoman financial year and calendar, Maliye, beginning on March 1 and combining Hijri months with the Gregorian solar year. It had been introduced in 1789 mainly because Ottoman tax collection, in its relation to agriculture and the seasons, occurred on a Gregorian schedule, but salaries were paid following the
In this environment, local elites regularly encountered a variety of times: European time prevailed in missionary schools, for instance, when the director of the new Syrian Protestant College, an American missionary institution, complained about the absence of a properly working clock for the school and ordered one from America because, in his words, time and discipline were essential for the college’s work. Through foreign publications, Levantine journalists learned about standard time, wrote about its adoption, or commented on calendar reform. Technologies of time were another favorite topic. Descriptions of famous historical or modern clocks are among the most frequently recurring non-political article topics in the 1900s. Newspapers also provided readers with practical information on time such as prayer times, steamboat schedules, court hours, and the beginning of Ramadan. In several instances, local newspapers such as Lisan al-Hal and al-Bashir published information about sunrise and sundown times or the beginnings of holidays, which was in turn contested by readers who wrote letters to the editors complaining that a different paper had indicated a different time, and demanding explanations of such inaccuracies. In one instance, the leading newspaper for Muslim readers, Thamarat al-Funun, got into an exchange over several days with al-Bashir, a paper published by the Jesuits, over whose stated sunrise times and whose measuring systems were more accurate. Hence, while local writers were not explicitly facing an Ottoman or British administration introducing GMT, they nevertheless attentively followed and debated questions of time. Moreover, these encounters with different types of “industrial communications” led contemporary Arab historians and authors writing on history to reframe both the religious and secular historical times of the region and to position their own societies within a comparative scale of progress (taqaddum) and backwardness (ta’akhkhur).

Among all these topics, one stood out to the growing number of writers, businessmen, and better-off citizens who were attracted to matters of time: the much older idea that time should be saved and spent wisely, the time-is-money logic that turned homogenous time into a currency that could be spent and exchanged. Such moralizing exhortations went hand in hand with the spread of more affordable clocks and watches throughout the region, as timepieces quickly became the latest fashion officially used Islamic lunar calendar. On the Ottoman fiscal calendar, see Richard B. Rose, “The Ottoman Fiscal Calendar,” Middle East Studies Association Bulletin 25, no. 2 (December 1991): 157–167. Newspapers regularly indicated at least two different dates in their header, Islamic and Christian. François Georgeon has charted some aspects of this temporal pluralism for Ottoman Istanbul especially in the Young Turk period: Georgeon, “Temps de la réforme, réforme du temps: Les avatars de l’heure et du calendrier à la fin de l’Empire Ottoman,” in François Georgeon and Frédéric Hitzel, eds., Les Ottomans et le temps (Leiden, 2012), 241–279.

76 See “Shuruq al-Shams,” Thamarat al-Funun, January 18, 1892, 2.


78 The term “industrial communications” is Nile Green’s. On writing history and conceptualizations of historical time that occurred concurrently with the encounters of industrial time, see Green, “Space-time and the Muslim Journey West”; Yoav Di-Capua, Gatekeepers of the Arab Past: Historians and History Writing in Twentieth-Century Egypt (Berkeley, Calif., 2009); and Elliott Colla, Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity (Durham, N.C., 2007).
of the day in fin-de-siècle Beirut.79 Watch merchants routinely placed advertisements in newspapers and other widely circulating publications. One such seller functioned as the representative for Swiss Longines watches in Syria and promoted timepieces from “the biggest factories in Europe.”80 Another merchant boasted that he had spent five years in Australia working as a representative for the most famous watches from London as well as Waltham watches, a well-known American brand. Upon returning to his Levantine homeland, he “brought with him all the modern machines used in this industry.”81 A contemporary lexicon of métiers practiced in the wider region of “Greater Syria” even deemed it necessary to warn readers about the black sheep that had recently infiltrated the profession without proper knowledge and training, unjustifiably claiming the title of sāʾāṭī (watchmaker), so popular had watches become.82

In the writings of local journalists, technological devices such as watches were easily tied to more abstract and conceptual musings about time. One important source of Levantine contemplations on time, then, was the industrial time of watches and other time technologies rather than European social and political standards alone.83 One especially talented inventor of watches, Elias Ajiya al-Sa’ati, was even awarded a prize for a particularly sophisticated piece he had crafted. In a laudatory ceremony led by the head of the Lee Observatory (part of the Syrian Protestant College, founded by American missionaries, today’s American University of Beirut), Ajiya was described as having made an invaluable contribution to the trades so desperately needed in the region. His diploma, reprinted in a newspaper, stated: “he was among those who spent their time . . . on useful inventions for the nation.”84

Not by coincidence did the trope of spending time working for the greater good of the nation find its way into Ajiya’s diploma. The exhortation to heed the call, pull oneself up by the bootstraps, make good use of one’s valuable time, and through such self-improvement contribute to the health of the body politic overall was a leitmotif of the Nahda’s plea for the self-induced invigoration of Easterners.85 In a largely

79 See Earnest Weakley, Report upon the Conditions and Prospects of British Trade in Syria (London, 1911), 163.
80 See L’indicateur Libano-Syrien, 1922, 92.
81 See Lisan al-Hal, December 31, 1897, 1.
83 In a similar vein, see Green, “Spacetime and the Muslim Journey West,” 415.
84 See “Shahhada fi Thurayya Falakiyya Tushakhhish Nizam Dawrat al-’Ard, Ikhtara’aha al-Khawaja Ilyas Ajya,” Thamarat al-Funun, February 8, 1881. 3. Elias Ajya (meaning “Hagia”) was a member of an Aleppine Syriac-Catholic family and specialized in different sorts of artisanal inventions. Later, Ajya even traveled to Paris, where he presented his piece in front of the Société de Géographie at a meeting on June 6, 1883. See “Mutafarriqat: ‘Ard al-Sa’a al-Falakiyya,” Al-Tabib 1 (June 15, 1884): 137–139.
85 In this regard, I contribute to recent attempts to contextualize the Nahda and lay open its several, often variegated, often heterogeneous strings of thought. Instead of viewing the Nahda as merely a precursor to Arab nationalism, such attempts highlight the several different elements of Nahda thought, which come into profile only once the movement is placed in a broader context. For a recent work situating the Nahda within frameworks of global discourses of radicalism and socialism, see Khuri-Makdisi, The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism. Other important networks of intellectual exchange were those sustained by Muslim reformers who began to advocate for a more modernist version of Islam and religious renewal. Egypt became a harbor for some of these more radically reformist Muslim thinkers as well, among them most prominently Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (temporarily), Muhammad Abduh, and Rashid Rida. For more on these reformers, see the respective chapters in Hourani, Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age.
FIGURE 1: Watchmaker Fadlallah Asmar advertises the products and services offered in his store in Beirut’s Souk al-Tawila in the newspaper *Lisan al-Hal*, January 24, 1905, 4.
overlooked instance of translation and appropriation, some of the central features of Nahda ideas about self-improvement had been adopted from the Victorian champion of all self-made men, Samuel Smiles, who in 1859 had published a global best-seller titled *Self-Help*. Under headings such as “perseverance,” “energy and courage,” “knowledge as a means of rising,” and “punctuality,” the book offered his Levantine readers a tableau of advice on everything that had vexed them. Most noteworthy, the section on “Men of Business” spoke of the value of time: “Men of business are accustomed to quote the maxim that time is money, but it is much more; the proper improvement of it is self-culture, self-improvement, and growth of character. An hour wasted daily on trifles or in indolence, would, if devoted to self-improvement, make an ignorant man wise in a few years.” At the same time, such conduct allowed individuals “to get through business and carry it forward, instead of being driven by it.” And remorse for past sins of profligacy was pointless, Smiles held, as “lost wealth may be replaced by industry, lost knowledge by study, lost health by temperance or medicine, but lost time is gone forever.” First published in 1859, *Self-Help*—the book that would establish the genre—offered Victorian Britons sketches of successful self-made men’s lives and thus suggested that even an individual of modest means could make it big in life provided that he internalized Smiles’s bible of Victorian values. The Christian Arab author and publisher Ya’qub Sarruf requested permission from Smiles’s Scottish publisher, John Murray, to translate *Self-Help* as early as 1874, and the Arabic version that finally came out in 1880 circulated widely in Beirut and Cairo.

Arabic was not the only language into which *Self-Help* was translated. According to Smiles’s son, in 1912, translations existed in Armenian, Bengali, Chinese, Cro-

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87 Smiles, *Self-Help*, 199–200. Jurji Zaydan, another influential public intellectual of the period, who later founded the journal *al-Hilal* in Cairo, wrote an (unfinished) autobiography that almost reads like an example of the kind of self-made man Smiles envisioned. Zaydan describes how he raised himself from a modest background with illiterate parents and gradually climbed the ladder through various jobs to end up as a student who excelled in his studies of medicine at the Syrian Protestant College. Upon discussing his interest in acquiring knowledge in the sciences, he states, “I had read parts of the book ‘The Secret of Success’ which Dr. Sarruf had translated into Arabic. Vigor and zeal sprang up in me, I read, as I said, some of it but was unable to finish the rest. Too great was the enthusiastic impact it had upon me to read about the lives of men who reached highest achievements by their own diligence and efforts and self-reliance [sic]. Amongst them, barbers and shoemakers, servants, artisans and maids who rose through their eagerness and vigilance [sic] to the station of great people. If I read a few pages I would be so agitated that I could not sleep any longer or be calm, and, finding myself tied down, pity would overcome me and I would get depressed. So I would put the book aside and till today I have not finished reading it.” Zaydan, *Mudhakkirat Jurji Zaydan* (Beirut, 1968). The translation is Thomas Philipp’s from *The Autobiography of Jurji Zaidan: Including Four Letters to His Son* (Washington, D.C., 1990), 44. Zaydan’s *Tarajim Mashahir al-Sharq fi al-Qarn al-Tasi’a* ‘Ashar is a collection of short biographical portraits of successful historical and contemporary figures important to Ottoman/”Arab” history and intellectual life, some of which could have been taken straight out of Smiles’s *Self-Help*. They often tell the same “rags to riches” story that Smiles sold so successfully. See Thomas Philipp, *Gurgi Zaidan: His Life and Thought* (Beirut, 1979), 69.

Atian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Gujarati, Hungarian, Italian, Japanese, Marathi, Norwegian, Pali, Polish, Portuguese (published in Brazil), Russian, Siamese, Spanish (one from Buenos Aires as well as a European-Spanish edition), Swedish, Tamil, Ottoman Turkish, and Welsh. Smiles’s work was commercially even more successful in British India than it was in the Levant. As early as 1869, Smiles received a letter from a “Madras gentleman” requesting permission to reprint passages from his works; and by 1877, *Self-Help* had been translated into more than one language of the subcontinent. Letters from Indians on the subcontinent demanding permission for reprints are among the most frequent foreign correspondence in Smiles’s and Murray’s papers. Around 1906, this remarkable interest prompted the publishing house Murray & Sons to bring out a special edition for the Indian market, produced with slightly cheaper paper and binding techniques. Smiles received several letters expressing gratitude for the profound impact his writings had on helping Indians seize the opportunity to self-educate. Self-improvement was a global phenomenon beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. Smiles offered leading heads across the globe the perspective of self-invigoration and modernization from within.

Clearly inspired by Smiles, Arab authors of the period often expressed the perception of time as a transient good by transforming it into a currency that could be spent, gained, and lost. The phrase “killing time” (*qatl al-waqt*) frequently appeared in texts of the period, often bemoaning the tendency of Easterners to waste time idling in cafes, oblivious of its value (“because time is money”). In an exceptionally long and intense article, *Thamarat al-Funun* emphatically declared the need to radically change people’s moral economy of time. For this purpose, it printed in full a speech given by a sheikh named Muhammad Salih al-Bahrayni at a reformist school in Mecca. The lecture covered the topic of “man’s time, from the benefit of saving it and taking interest in it, from the vice of wasting and losing it.” It went on to state, “Time, or a man’s life” allows man to be “creatively industrious and produce good results, sow and you will harvest, work and you will do well, reflect and you will reach a judgment, contemplate and you will know with certainty, and your happiness lies

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89 National Library of Scotland, John Murray Archives [hereafter NLS, John Murray], Acc12927/285/H8, Samuel Smiles, General File, Samuel Smiles (the son) to John Murray, February 29, 1912. Some translations were made slightly later, in the 1920s and, in the exceptional case of the Persian version, 1933, but most seem to have been completed in the second half of the nineteenth century.

90 NLS, John Murray, MS 41099, fol. 173, letter Samuel Smiles to John Murray, March 8, 1869; see also MS 42203, letter Smiles to Murray, May 11, 1877.


in saving your time.” The speech continued, “What is the meaning of your life (ḥayātak) if you wasted your lifetime (ʿumrak) and lost your time (waqtak), and if the present circumstances lead you to calamitous future consequences. At this point you look at yourself and find yourself to be nothing, as if you did not live one minute in your time (zamanak), which you lost.” And according to the sheikh, spending time on “beneficial sciences and useful knowledge” was a means to “improve our current state.”

The interpretation of time as a tool for improvement required the author of such exhortations to conceive of time as an abstract and movable, malleable device that no longer depended on the movements of the heavens and the earth alone.

Another author combined the aforementioned topic of dividing up time with the question of work and working hours. “If man makes an intellectual effort, it is possible for him to limit his thoughts to earnestness, perseverance, hope, economizing and dividing up time, and to studying what is happening in the world. A man who is apprehensive of these features and devotes his attention to them is able to stand in front of his fate with a sturdy soul, not fearful of its turmoil.” Individual efforts were all the more important because “the well-being of the nation is dependent on the well-being of the nation’s individuals.”

This statement is an almost direct rendering of a passage from Smiles’s *Self-Help*:

For the nation is only an aggregate of individual conditions, and civilization itself is but a question of the personal improvement of the men, women, and children of whom society is composed. National progress is the sum of individual industry, energy, and uprightness, as national decay is of individual idleness, selfishness, and vice.

In some instances, European secrets of success were translated rather than emulated. When Arab writers alerted readers to the dangers of wasting time, they introduced a new term to the debate that simultaneously conjured up a rich tradition of philosophical and religious inquiry. These authors merged notions of linear-progressive clock time with the idea of a lifetime, and instead of merely using *waqt* (Arabic for “time,” used in connection with clock time), Arabs now wrote about *dahr*. This term denotes time in the sense of fate (the occurrences of a life’s time

93 “Qimat al-Waqt,” *Thamarat al-Funun*, May 11, 1908, 2–3. The school, named Madrassa Sawlatiya, was well-known in the Sunni Arab world, and its reputation resonated far beyond Mecca. It was the brainchild and lifelong project of Sheikh Rahmatullah Kairanwi “al-Hindi,” an Indian Muslim who had fought on the side of the “djihadists” during the 1857 revolt in India and was forced to leave the subcontinent rather helter-skelter in its wake. After a troublesome journey, he ended up in Mecca around the mid-nineteenth century, where he began to plan the establishment of a school. To that date, the only teaching available in Mecca happened at the Great Mosque. Named after a benevolent Calcutta woman and funded in part by Indian Princely States, the school was the first institution of higher learning offering both a religious and a worldly curriculum in Mecca. On the transnational exchanges among Muslim reformers in Istanbul, Mecca, and the subcontinent, see Seema Alavi, “‘Fugitive Mullahs and Outlawed Fanatics’: Indian Muslims in Nineteenth Century Trans-Asiatic Imperial Rivalries,” *Modern Asian Studies* 45, no. 6 (November 2011): 1337–1382.


95 Smiles, *Self-Help*, 1–2. At the top of the page, Smiles provided the reference to his own source for this quote, John Stuart Mill, who wrote, “the worth of the state, in the long run, is the worth of its individuals.”

96 On the concept of *dahr*, see Dalya Cohen-Mor, *A Matter of Fate: The Concept of Fate in the Arab World as Reflected in Modern Arabic Literature* (Oxford, 2001). On “time” in mostly ancient and medieval European and Arabic religious and philosophical writings, as well as linguistic differences between words used to denote time (e.g., *zamān*, *mudda*, *waqt*, *dahr*), see Hussam al-ʿAlusi, *Al-Zaman fi al-Fikr al-Dini wa-l-Fabāsī al-Qudīm* (Beirut, 1980).
span, lifetime) and is found in many pre-Islamic poems. It was later reinterpreted to fit into the Islamic tradition, where fate/time was placed under God’s absolute command. Such unrestricted sovereignty was at least temporally challenged by certain protagonists of the Nahda, including Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, who taught that Islam meant activity, and that individuals were responsible for shaping their fate as much as the welfare of the community, often undergirded by the Qur’anic verse “God changes not what is in a people, until they change what is in themselves” (13:11). In many turn-of-the-century articles on time management, waqt and dahr occur alongside each other and are used interchangeably. Interspersed with the language of dahr, the widespread appeals not to waste time could be understood as reprimands not to waste one’s fate mindlessly. Dahr hence became a vehicle for translocating what Levantine Arabs viewed as the European obsession with time into an Eastern context, where it resonated with a very different religio-philosophical tradition of thought.

As part of the history of flows and connections, the circulation of knowledge and concepts frequently generated nuanced variations on a common theme—in this case uniform time—when European ideas were refracted through the lens of the periphery, or when ideas originated at the margins altogether. Without such inflected meanings, functions, and contents, the percolation of “universal” time was impossible to conceive of. Public intellectuals such as those writing and publishing some of the first Arabic-language newspapers in the region had internalized criticism among Europeans that found non-Western cultures to lack a linear-progressive understanding of time and to display casual attitudes toward punctuality. What they translated and adopted into their own political, social, and religious context, however, was an exaggerated and essentialized notion of homogeneous time that was absent among Europeans themselves in this period.

Notions of time thrift are famously associated with theories about the emergence of modern capitalism. Samuel Smiles may have indeed intended his instructions to be a celebration of free individual entrepreneurship and mid-nineteenth-century laissez-faire economics. But to frame Arab readers’ interpretations of his material success stories simply in economic terms, as guidelines for making a fortune, would be to misconstrue their understandings. To those quoting Smiles, his was a recipe for the self-strengthening of an entire Arab people and civilization. Individually efficient time management would add up to a “nation” of studious, successful individuals, a nation that would be able to avoid falling under European colonial rule. Arab encounters with time, as in British India, were thus translated into a national, civilizational idiom and endowed with a function that served a national purpose.

97 See Cohen-Mor, A Matter of Fate, 47.
98 This verse is reminiscent of the saying “Help yourself and God/the sky/heaven will help you,” which has been attributed to various sources, including Adolphe Tiers and Jean de La Fontaine, and is used in Benjamin Franklin’s Poor Richard’s Almanac as “God helps them that help themselves.” Smiles’s Self-Help opens with the phrase “‘Heaven helps those who help themselves’ is a well-tried maxim” (1).
99 See “Qimat al-Waqt” as such an example, as well as Diyab, “Mulaqat al-Zaman.”
100 The notion of “timeless” societies of course was a trope in countless travelogues and later descriptions of colonial conquests and encounters. See Johannes Fabian, Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object (New York, 1983), and more generally Dipesh Chakrabarty, Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference (Princeton, N.J., 2000).
Ideas about national time management by no means replaced other times or sparked a desire to do away with Beirut’s plethora of times, although in European eyes, creating a more uniform landscape of time would arguably have been conducive to good time management. Beirut citizens seem to have lived quite comfortably in multiple times. In the 1930s, the mufti of Beirut relied on the astronomic times he received from the American University of Beirut’s Lee Observatory for announcing prayer times. And individuals lost among the medley of local times could always revert to one of the several almanacs published in the region, which printed calendars for all major denominations, formulas to convert the Islamic Hijri year into the Christian Era, Islamic prayer times, and the like. Hence, eventually, as in Bombay, the emergence of a notion of time management and the value of time added yet another concept of time to Beirut’s multiple times, which would coexist with religious and other clock times and calendars at least for several more decades, if not until the present day.

The lively debates on civilizationally defined times of Arabs and Europeans, on efficient time management, and on the language of time thrift emerged in a context where elites saw a creeping but ultimately forced political, economic, and cultural Europeanization looming large. It was this local constellation that led to specifically Levantine engagements with time. In contrast to British India, European colonialism was not yet a reality in Beirut. In the view of Bombay’s middle classes, British time was the illegitimate time of the colonizer, which was of no utility to those who truly represented the Indian “nation.” Beirut writers, on the other hand, saw a potential weapon in efficient time management that, if embraced collectively as a people, could be turned against the threat of colonialism. Instead of rejecting European time, they therefore encouraged fellow “Easterners” to adopt its most useful features. These different political outlooks mattered to such a degree that in Egypt, where a full-fledged British occupation had materialized in 1882, adopting European habits and technologies was occasionally criticized and ridiculed, or scrutinized to wrench strategic assets back from foreign competitors. In 1911 an Egyptian author, Ibrahim Ramzi, published Asrar al-Najah (The Secrets of Success), whose Arabic title echoed that of Smiles’s Self-Help, which had been translated as Sirr al-Najah (The Secret of Success). Ramzi’s book featured a section titled “Time Is Precious” (“al-waqt thamīn”), as well as advice on successful undertakings in agriculture, industry, and trade. Ramzi frequently paused to move from general advice to commentary on what had enabled the “foreigners” in Egypt to gain control of these sectors, and what was required of Egyptians to force them to abandon their dominant position.

**WHAT EMERGES IN LIGHT OF THE ABOVE** is the image of a highly interconnected and globalized world characterized by greater heterogeneity rather than homogeneity.

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102 See Ibrahim Ramzi, *Kitab Asrar al-Najah* (Cairo, 1911), e.g., 32, 35, 63–84, and especially the sections on trade.
This persisting, even increasing, heterogeneity reflected geopolitical constellations in which the citizens of colonies such as British India articulated different opinions on the global flows of concepts and practices than did those living in a provincial capital within another empire such as the Ottoman Empire. Speaking of space rather than time, Lauren Benton has shown how “legally very lumpy” the spread of territorial sovereignty remained at least through the nineteenth century, where her book ends.\textsuperscript{103} Besides time and space, we can imagine even more areas in which the global condition from the 1870s to the 1940s was characterized by the coexistence of hybrid norms and orders. The multiplication of nationalism, anticolonial and other, in the non-Western world could be regarded as another field in which tensions and interactions between universal features and much older particular local elements came to form a protracted stage of transition. Nationalism and the nation-state were not even always the default solution to colonial intellectuals, who often envisioned the non-colonial future as internationalist.\textsuperscript{104} Most pertinent is perhaps the case of legal orders and the move to gradually replace customary law and local legal traditions with European-style civil codes. While it was not part of an organized movement to spread uniformity, the second half of the nineteenth century saw the proliferation of legal pluralism in the colonial and semicolonial world as Europeans extorted capitulations and concessions or as mixed courts were introduced in China, the Ottoman Empire, and Egypt, for instance.\textsuperscript{105} These privileges were partially abrogated in the post–World War I peace treaties, but in China and Egypt only during World War II and in 1949, respectively.\textsuperscript{106} The periodization that emerges here points to the role that the eclipse of sovereignty, territory, and the nation-state may have eventually played in ironing out the lumps of legal pluralism and irregular times alike. For many parts of the world, this process came to an end only with decolonization.\textsuperscript{107}

Viewed through the lens of time reform, modernity—or, perhaps more appropriately, modern globality since the 1870s—appears not as a period of disenchantment, rationalization, and secularization in which old religious, political, and social temporal orders were rapidly crumbling, but rather as a protracted process that induced a pluralization of already variegated landscapes of time, as illustrated by the two accounts from Bombay and Beirut.\textsuperscript{108} The global condition that was ushered in during the second half of the nineteenth century challenged contemporaries to move between different times (or legal norms) and to convert one system into another. One important reason why it took so long for time to become more uniform is that such

\textsuperscript{103} See Lauren Benton, \textit{A Search For Sovereignty: Law and Geography in European Empires, 1400–1900} (Cambridge, 2010), xii. My thanks to David Armitage for suggesting that I capture the unevenness of time unification as “lumpiness” in Benton’s sense.


\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 13.

\textsuperscript{107} On the rise and fall of territoriality, see Maier, “Consigning the Twentieth Century to History.”

\textsuperscript{108} Not that the concept of modernity would require any more dismantling; for a recent critique, see the \textit{AHR} Roundtable “Historians and the Question of ‘Modernity,’” \textit{American Historical Review} 116, no. 3 (June 2011): 631–751.
switching between different times and moving between systems worked surprisingly well until surprisingly late, in the Western and non-Western world alike. But elites in such diverse cities as Beirut and Bombay may have had a strategic advantage: to them, the plurality of socially and religiously constructed times must have come naturally, and they occasionally appeared better-equipped for modern globality than their European contemporaries.

This is not to say that Indians commenting on standard time never once slipped and failed to remove themselves from the notion of absolute, natural time in which Europeans remained mired. They did so occasionally, but not consistently and repeatedly. It is remarkable that Jubran Massuh and the anonymous Bombay journalist both consciously treated time as a social and historical construct—one that could be put on and stripped off again like European clothing, or one that was part of the historical constellation of British colonialism and European ascendance during the nineteenth century. They clearly saw “universal time” for what it was—constructed and firmly rooted in historical time and space. Beirut and Bombay elites were fluent in different times, and under the global condition, this asset afforded them the ability to see the different times in play as historically optional choices. Europeans and certainly Germans soon stopped adjusting timetables to have trains run at the exact same point in sun time, the time that according to European legislators and bureaucrats would have to actually continue to dictate schedules even under standard time. The result, after all, was an uncoordinated disarray in which trains had been sun-time-adjusted but working hours had been left untouched under standard time, leaving workers stranded on the platform because there was no train that would take them to work at the required hour. But all in all, Europeans were slow to develop the same imaginary flexibility of abstraction and ability to juggle different times that those at the core of modern globality had displayed all along.

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