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**“Sisters of Men”:  
Syrian and Lebanese Women’s Transnational Campaigns for  
Arab Independence and Women’s Rights, 1910-1949**

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A dissertation submitted to the  
Graduate School - New Brunswick  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Graduate Program in History  
Written under the direction of

Bonnie G. Smith and Toby C. Jones

and approved by

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New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA

May 2015

## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

**“Sisters of Men”:**

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Independence and Women’s Rights, 1910-1949**

by NOVA E. ROBINSON

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This transnational history of Syrian women’s activism argues that Syrian women’s identities were shaped by activism at home and abroad at the League of Nations. In the early twentieth century, women in Ottoman Syria—later divided by the French into Syria and Lebanon—forged regional as well as diasporic and activist connections to lobby for rights as Arabs and as women. Drawing from research in over twenty archives in Lebanon, Egypt, Switzerland, France, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United States, this project provides new historical evidence about how a pan-Arab women’s identity developed and how it was used in relation to domestic and international audiences. In the 1910s, Syrian women focused on providing basic social services to women and the poor. In the 1920s, when the League of Nations imposed the French Mandate for Syria and the British Mandates for Palestine and Iraq, a regional women’s network desirous of Arab independence was born. Women’s rights,

which initially meant the right to citizenship, became an international issue during the League of Nations era, 1920-1945. Syrian women seized upon this transformation and channeled the regional Arab women's network toward the League in the name of Arab independence and women's rights in the 1930s. Arab women's activism directed toward the League of Nations decentered the West as the only model for women's rights.

A gendered history of Syrian women's pan-Arab activism problematizes the existing narrative that the UN Decade for Women, 1975-1985, was the moment when women's rights first galvanized transnational activism in the global south. The existing history of the international women's movement erases alternative definitions of women's rights that circulated in the early twentieth century. In demonstrating the early global engagement of Syrian women on behalf of women's rights and Arab independence, this history changes the narrative of the origins of transnational women's activism and internationalizes the study of Arab women's history. The project uses the lives and activism of Alice Kandaleft Cosma, Julia Tu'mi Dimashqiyya, 'Afifa Karam, Anbara Salam Khalidi, Nour Hamada, and Ibtihaj Qaddura to challenge the pervasive stereotypes about Arab women's passivity, which still have currency today.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The support of colleagues, archivists, librarians, fellow seminarians, mentors, friends, and family made this dissertation possible. My committee has been an invaluable resource through all the stages of the dissertation from preparing the proposal to the final defense. Bonnie Smith was a staunch supporter of my project and me. Her trenchant insights developed the international connections explored by this project. Toby Jones provided excellent training in the history of the modern Middle East and how to teach it. His questions and comments pushed me to take my project in new, qualitative directions. Temma Kaplan's support was boundless. She reminded me to set a scene and tell a story, a message I tried to channel. Beth Baron has been a wonderful mentor since I wrote my undergraduate thesis. She is a tireless champion of the importance of incorporating gender into histories of the Middle East—a project I have tried to forward.

Many teachers and professors have expanded my intellectual horizons and encouraged my studies, starting from my days at Whitcomb High School in Bethel, Vermont. The independent research projects I conducted under the guidance of Annelise Orleck and Gene Garthwaite at Dartmouth College sparked my interest in fusing Middle Eastern history and women's history. I have had three gifted Arabic-language instructors. Sinan Antoon first introduced me to the language my freshman fall; Khaled AbuAmsha helped me revive my language skills; Khaled al-Hilli taught me “Lebanese” and was always available to answer translation and transliteration questions. I am intellectually indebted to Seth Koven, Belinda Davis, Barbara Cooper, Paul Hanebrink, Nancy Hewitt, Judith Surkis, Jennifer Mittlestadt, and Julie Livingston who enriched my time at Rutgers by opening their classrooms and office doors to me. And, thank you to Dawn Ruskai for

her tireless support of history department graduate students.

I incurred many debts and received many favors while researching: Tarif Khalidi generously shared an advance copy of the English language translation of his mother's memoir; Nouha Ghosn gave me access to the Village Welfare Society archives; Anja Najjar arranged an oral history with Anissa Najjar; Michael Provence shared an important document from the Palestinian Mandate files. Hilary Buxton, Mary Elston, and Christopher Casey all helped me get archival material. A special thanks to Jacques Oberon and Lee Robertson at the League of Nations Archive for their research assistance. I would like to thank Magda Nammour and Walid Khalidi at the Bibliothèque Orientale (Beirut), Imane Abdallah Abu Nader at AUB, and Annie Metz at the Bibliothèque Marguerite Durand for their assistance in locating sources.

Three intellectual communities were especially formative as I developed this project. My fellowship year at the Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis during the “Narratives of Power: New Articulations of Race, Gender, Sexuality, and Class” project exposed me to new scholarship as I drafted my prospectus. A fellowship at the Institute for Research on Women during its “Gendering Decolonization/Decolonizing Gender” seminar coincided with the transition from research to writing. Thank you to the IRW seminarians for improving the chapter excerpt (and consequently the whole project) with their suggestions. I was fortunate to be part of Rutgers’ Middle East Studies Graduate Forum.

I presented segments of this project at various conferences. In particular, would like to thank Naghmeh Sohrabi, Janet Afary, and Susan Pedersen for their constructive comments. Thank you to Klaas Dykmann, Katherine Marino, and Isa Blumi for inviting me to participate on conference panels. Liat Kozma, Leila Dakhli, Ellen Fleischmann,

and Camilla Pastor kindly shared their expertise and answered research questions. Rashid Khalidi, Akram Khater, and Jonathan Gribetz read early project proposals and offered helpful guidance. Temma Kaplan's Women and Gender History seminar gave excellent feedback on Chapter Three.

I gratefully acknowledge the support of The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. A Rosenthal Award from the history department and a predissertation fellowship from the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences aided the completion of this project. A Dartmouth General Grant supported Arabic language study at Middlebury's Summer Language Institute. Many thanks to Teresa Delcorso for her expert advice on how to prepare grant applications. Dalila Ghodbane and Nicolette Boehland let me use their apartments in their absence, which made research in Paris and Cambridge, Massachusetts possible. Thank you to my aunts and uncles, Barb, Mike, Patsy, and Kacey for providing places to stay while at conferences and conducting research and for their encouragement.

The camaraderie of Jen Wilson, Molly Giblin, Ben Resnick-Day, Pat McGrath, Julia Bowes, and Danielle Bradley made completing coursework, preparing for exams, and dissertating all the more enjoyable. I am grateful to Andrew Daily, Steven Allen, and Carmen Gitre for their advice about life after the dissertation. Thanks to Khaled al-Hilli, Rasha al-Arabi, Jeffrey Culang, and Seçil Yılmaz for welcoming me into your MEMEAC community. A special thanks to Niral Shah for reading drafts of this project and offering erudite feedback and excellent edits. Thank you to Meredith Fraser, Hayley Thornton-Kennedy, Andy Townshend, Stuart Reid, Jacqueline Loeb, Elise Waxenberg, and Jenny Ratner for their company around the dinner table and on long walks in Prospect Park. Thanks to Aaron Sarfatti for his companionship, understanding, and support.

My family has encouraged my curiosity and championed my studies from Rose Juliani's kindergarten class to the present. My sister Maya has been a tremendous friend and advocate all throughout graduate school. Rebbie, Jim, and Maya, I could not have completed this dissertation without your love and superlative support at each stage along the way. *Alf shukr* (a thousand thanks)!

This dissertation about Greater Syria has Bahraini roots. The movement of Bahraini women regionally and globally forced me to acknowledge the limitations of using the nation-state to study women's movements in the Arab world. Political oppression and violence in Bahrain has fractured Bahraini society since February 14, 2011. My intention was to turn my Fulbright research on the history of the Bahraini women's movement into my dissertation, but given the climate of government repression it did not feel socially responsible or respectful to do so. I would like to mark my privilege in being able to enter and exit places that are in political and social turmoil. My sincere hope is that in moving across borders to research this project I am contributing to breaking down barriers of misunderstanding in my society about women's history in the Arab world rather than constructing new ones.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AUB	American University of Beirut
CADN	Centre des archives diplomatique de Nantes
IACW	Inter-American Commission on Women
ICW	International Council on Women
IJMES	International Journal of Middle East Studies
IWSA	International Woman Suffrage Alliance
LN	League of Nations
NWP	National Women's Party
PAAAW	Pan-American Association for the Advancement of Women
PAU	Pan-American Union
SDWL	Social Democratic Women's League
SSC	Sophia Smith Collection
WCL	Women's Committee of Lebanon
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
WIDF	Women's International Democratic Federation
UN	United Nations
UNCSW	United Nations Commission on the Status of Women
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
USINS	United States Immigration and Naturalization Service
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

## NOTE ON NAMES AND ARABIC TRANSLITERATIONS

When transliterating from Arabic, I used the standard system used in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*: the initial *hamza* is unmarked; an ‘ represents an  $\epsilon$ , and the  $\text{ḥ}$  is captured by an “-a” or “-at.” I depart from this system to use the common English spellings of place names. In addition, I follow the spellings of personal names in Latin script preferred by the women themselves. When a woman’s name can be transliterated differently, I note the alternative spellings in a footnote to facilitate identifying actors across sources. I use the prefix “al-” when listing a woman’s full name and drop it when referencing the last name alone. In the appendix and in bibliographic citations, names are transliterated using the standard system (e.g. using diacritical marks) to help locate sources in library catalogues. When there are differences between the English, French, and Portuguese systems for transliterating from Arabic, the English language system is used.

All translations from Arabic, French, and Portuguese are my own, unless specifically noted. I emphasize readability in my translations, while preserving fidelity to the original texts. When a word could have been translated another way, the original word is placed in brackets.

## INTRODUCTION

On March 28, 1949, Ibtihaj Qaddura addressed a crowd of foreign dignitaries about women's rights in the newly independent state of Lebanon.<sup>1</sup> The occasion of Qaddura's speech was the Third Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) hosted in Beirut, the Lebanese capital. Representatives of the Women's Committee of Lebanon flanked Qaddura on both sides as she spoke to the assembled Lebanese government officials, foreign diplomats, and UNCSW representatives from fifteen countries. The Women's Committee of Lebanon presented a petition that targeted the officials from the Lebanese government and the United Nations gathered before them. The members of the Women's Committee of Lebanon had hoped independence from the French mandate (1920-1946) would yield changes in their access to political, social, educational, and economic rights as women in Lebanon.

Women in Greater Syria—the modern-day nation-states of Syria and Lebanon—in conjunction with women from the greater Arab world had been working for four decades to alter conversations about women's rights at the UN and its predecessor, the League of Nations. The petition circulated at the UNCSW meeting made clear that both the Lebanese government and the UN had failed to provide the women's rights the Women's Committee of Lebanon felt were needed in their country. The petition did not represent a new effort. Women's organizations from Greater Syria had been working since the 1910s to change how women's rights were defined and enforced locally and internationally. A regional, pan-Arab women's identity emerged as a result of local and international organizing for women's rights and Arab independence.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibtihaj's first name can be transliterated Ibtihaje. Likewise, her last name can be transliterated Kaddoura.

Qaddura was an *ukht al-rijāl* (sister of men). Qaddura and her cadre were collectively, “sisters of men.”<sup>2</sup> A “sister of men” is an Arabic expression that captures a sense of respect and novelty suggesting that the woman is as capable as a man. Qaddura and the other “sisters of men” used the attention of the international women’s rights community at the UNSCW meeting to present an alternative vision of women’s rights, an “Eastern” vision. “Eastern” women’s rights were grounded in the family rather than in the individual. “Eastern” was a gendered, regional women’s rights framework that emerged in the early twentieth century and gained wider support in the 1920s as Arab women tried to counter Western hegemony in discussions about women’s rights.<sup>3</sup> Despite their efforts, women’s rights were internationalized through the League of Nations as individual rights; the United Nations absorbed this women’s rights framework. This dissertation restores the history of Syrian and Lebanese women’s efforts to develop an alternative vision of women’s rights in the first half of the twentieth century. Their efforts did not succeed, but they do offer a window into the multiple conceptualizations of women’s rights that circulated during the League of Nations era.

The history of Syrian and Lebanese women’s activism on behalf of women’s rights in the early twentieth century cannot be contained within the boundaries of the Ottoman territory of Syria or the successor colonial state—the French Mandate for Syria. The early twentieth century was an especially global moment in the region with the

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<sup>2</sup> The original phrase, *ukht al-rijāl*, is in the singular. I follow Shereen Khairallah, *The Sisters of Men: Lebanese Women in History* (Beirut: The Institute for Women Studies in the Arab World, 1996) in using the phrase in the plural.

<sup>3</sup> I use “Eastern” because it was the term used by the activists. I acknowledge the simplifications inherent in dividing the world into an East-West binary, but the activists I study saw the world in those terms. I keep “Eastern” in quotes to reflect the fact that I am referencing their usage. For the history of Arab women’s usage of “Eastern” to describe their identities, see Beth Baron, *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society and the Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 105-109.

overlapping processes of missionary work, massive Lebanese and Syrian emigration to the Americas and the West Coast of Africa, and the arrival of new European colonial powers. From its inception Syrian and Lebanese women's organizing was entwined with global economic and political forces. This is a global history. It is about how Syrian and Lebanese women's efforts to represent themselves were shaped by their global context.

Syrian and Lebanese women's activism outside the nation-state targeted two interconnected international frameworks: the sphere of international women's organizations and the realm of international governance, the latter being embodied by the League of Nations and later the United Nations. Syrian and Lebanese activists used the "Eastern" framework for women's rights to appeal for a more expansive and globally representative conceptualization of women's rights in both international forums. "International" refers to the supranational realm of governance, institutions, and organizations that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Both "international" frameworks blocked Syrian and Lebanese women and other women from the colonized world from participating in discussions about women's rights. The colonial world system, preserved in the structure of the League of Nations' mandates, did not accommodate representation from colonized peoples.

To gain access to international forums and international conversations about women's rights, some Syrian and Lebanese women relied on transnational organizing tactics.<sup>4</sup> "Transnational" describes actions taken by women and women's organizations

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<sup>4</sup> The majority of scholarship on transnational women's organizing focuses on the contemporary movement and looks at transnational networks anchored in the United States; my project recovers a transnational women's movement in the 1930s centered in the Arab world. For an analysis of the concept of "transnationalism" see Laura Briggs, Gladys McCormick and J. T. Way, "Transnationalism: A Category of Analysis" *American Quarterly* 60.3 (2008): 625-648; Mary Louise Roberts, "The Transnationalization of Gender History," *History and Theory* 44.3 (Oct., 2005): 456-468; and Amanda Lock Swarr, *Critical Transnational Feminist Praxis* (Binghamton, NY: SUNY, 2010). Scholarship on women's organizing in the United States is increasingly utilizing a transnational framework. For an assessment of the state of the

that bypass the nation-state: women's organizations working directly with each other without a mediating governmental presence. Transnational women's organizing is often conceptualized as a contemporary phenomenon. The activism of Syrian and Lebanese women's organizations directed toward the League of Nations demonstrates the historical antecedent to transnational women's organizing in the interwar era. Recovering the history of transnational women's organizing exposes the privileged positions actors and organizations from Europe and the United States hold in the existing historiography on the international women's movement before the United Nations Decade for Women, 1975-1985, which is often referenced as the beginning of transnational women's activism in the global south.

Three interconnected forces shaped the viability of the Syrian and Lebanese women's movement locally, regionally and internationally: the international women's movement's dismissal of the perspectives of women in the colonized world; the relationship of women's rights activists and organizations to local governments—at times collaborative and at times antagonistic; and the creation of international women's rights protections at the League of Nations. The project emphasizes the confluence of local, regional, and international campaigns undertaken by Syrian and Lebanese women to

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field see Leela Fernandes, *Transnational Feminism in the United States: Knowledge, Ethics, Power* (New York: NYU Press, 2013); Inderpal Grewal, *Transnational America: Feminisms, Diasporas, Neoliberalisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Sandra K. Soto, "Where in the Transnational World are U.S. Women of Color?" in *Women's Studies for the Future: Foundations, Interrogations, Politics*, ed. Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Agatha Beins (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 125-42; and "The Future of Women's History: Considering the State of U.S. Women's History" Roundtable Discussion in the *Journal of Women's History* (Spring 2003). Recent books on black transnationalism include Nico Slate, *Colored Cosmopolitanism: The Shared Struggle for Freedom in the United States and India* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Lara Putnam, *Radical Moves: Caribbean Migrants and the Politics of Race in the Jazz Age* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013). For examples of transnational organizing in the early twentieth century and examples of transnational women's networks grounded outside the US see Leila Rupp, "Constructing Internationalism: The Case of Transnational Women's Organizations, 1888-1945," *The American Historical Review* 99.5 (Dec., 1994): 1571-1600; Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, and Minoo Moallem, *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

expand women's access to rights at home and in the international community.

Syrian and Lebanese women's organizations utilized a range of tactics across local and international spheres to secure the linked goals of women's rights and national sovereignty. Some organizations collaborated with the mandate government, some were explicitly anti-colonial and nationalist, and still others adhered to a socialist ideology. Despite differing activist methodologies, these organizations often collaborated. Using the lives of six women and four women's organizations, this dissertation presents a collective portrait of the women's movement in Syria and Lebanon between 1910 and 1949. The lives of Alice Kandaleft Cosma (1902-?), Julia Tu'mi Dimashqiyya (1884-1954), Nour Hamada (1897-1960), 'Afifa Karam (1883-1924), Anbara Salam Khalidi (1897-1986), and Ibtihaj Qaddura (1893-1967) convey the many modes of activism deployed by Syrian and Lebanese activists.<sup>5</sup> These and other women who formed the core of the women's movement belonged to an economic and educational elite. The life-trajectories and activism of these women's rights activists, coupled with the profiles of several women's organizations, captures the verve of the Syrian and Lebanese women's movement at the turn of the century, an energy that persisted until mid-century—and well

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<sup>5</sup> Like Qaddura's name, each of these names can be transliterated in a variety of ways: Alice Kandaleft Cosma is sometimes rendered Kozma or Kuzma. I use her own transliteration of her name as registered on her Resident Alien Border Crossing Identification Card, 22 August 1951. Julia Dimashqiyya is also variously transliterated Dimeshkie or Dimashqiyyi. 'Afifa is sometimes rendered Afifé. These changes are the result of different transliteration practices between French and English and are the result of the challenges of rendering certain sounds in Arabic into the English alphabet. Nour Hamada is often transliterated Nur Hamada. I use "Nour" because it reflects how she signed her name in Latin script. Hamada wrote handwritten letters to the League in Arabic. She also submitted letters to the League typed in French and English. She also signed these translated correspondences "Nour." The names used in this dissertation reflect the most commonly used transliteration, the transliteration used by the woman herself, or the transliteration that mirrors the simplified IJMES transliteration standard. These lives of these women and their activism are understudied. Julia Tu'mi Dimashqiyya's life is covered in an MA thesis: Hala Ramez Dimechkie, "Julia Tu'mi Dimashqiyyi and *Al-Mar'a al-Jadida*, 1883-1954," (Unpub. MA thesis, American University in Beirut, 1998). Anbara Salam Khalidi left behind a memoir, *Jawla fi al-dhikrayāt bayna Lubnān wa-Filasṭīn*, (Beirut, 1978). It was recently translated into English by her son as *Memoirs of an Early Arab Feminist: The Life and Activism of Anbara Salam Khalidi*, trans. Tarif Khalidi (London: Pluto Press, 2013). One of Nour Hamada's speeches was translated into English: "A Speech by Nour Hamada: Tehran, 1932" *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, trans. (from Persian) Haleh Emrani 4.1 (Winter 2008), 107-124.

after the close of this dissertation. Four women's organizations are profiled in depth: the Drop of Milk Society (Damascus, 1922), *Yaqzat al-Mar'a al-Shāmiyya* (the Syrian Women's Awakening Society, Damascus, 1928), the Lebanese Women's Union and its extension group the Women's Committee of Lebanon (Beirut, 1930s and 1940s), and the Social Democratic Women's League (Beirut, 1942). These organizations are among the many women's organizations that operated in Syria and Lebanon before, during, and after the world wars.

Very little information is available about the lives of some of the activists referenced in the dissertation, due in part to their movement across international borders. The lives of some of the women profiled in depth are only partially reconstructed. For example, Cosma's professional life and education are documented, but nothing is known about her youth in Damascus. Whenever possible, biographical sketches of the activists referenced in passing are included in Appendix 2 of the dissertation. Appendix 3 provides information regarding the "big three" international organizations that Arab women interacted with: the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA),<sup>6</sup> the International Council of Women (ICW), and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). The appendix also includes brief biographical details and career highlights of women's rights activists from Europe and the Americas that Arab women contacted, lobbied, and befriended.

The leaders of the Syrian and Lebanese women's movement wanted some of the same rights demanded by international women's rights organizations—suffrage,

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<sup>6</sup> The International Woman Suffrage Alliance changed its name to the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship in the late 1920s. The name was changed again in 1946 to the International Alliance of Women. Throughout the dissertation, I have used its original name, the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) to avoid confusion. In Arabic the organization is referred to as the *al-ittiḥād al-nisā'ī al-dawlī* (International Women's Union).



citizenship, and equal pay for equal work. Yet, they did not want those rights to come at the expense of their own cultural traditions. Their methods for securing women's rights changed in relation to the political realities in Greater Syria. During the Ottoman era, many women's organizations focused on providing basic charity to needy women and children and on expanding access to education. The start of the French mandate politicized women's organizations, and activists began to agitate for rights. The Syrian and Lebanese governments operating under the supervision of the French tried to use women's rights to demonstrate readiness for self-rule. Even before women's rights were formally addressed by the League of Nations, the international governing organization emphasized women's rights as a barometer of a nation's progress. In conjunction with domestic women's rights campaigns, Syrian and Lebanese women's rights activists lobbied the League of Nations for the right to participate in conversations about women's rights and national sovereignty. And they agitated for national independence, because without independence, women's rights were a vacant promise offered by a colonial power.

This project regionalizes and internationalizes the history of women's organizing in the Arab world. Syrian and Lebanese women's activism at home and at the League of Nations demonstrates that Arab women were active in Arab nationalist campaigns. Furthermore, the international reach of their campaigns decenters the nation-state and nationalism as the only frameworks through which to study the Arab world in the early twentieth century. Syrian and Lebanese women's activism directed toward the League also reveals that "third world feminism" predates the 1950s. Finally, looking at the League of Nations as an actor in developing women's rights protections exposes that women's rights were transformed from a national issue to an international concern at the

League. This national-to-international transformation in the classification of women's rights gave Syrian and Lebanese women a point of entry into conversations about women's rights. These four interventions connect to three existing historiographies: the history of Arab women's organizing for national independence; the history of the international women's movement; and the history of women's rights and international governance.

Studies of nationalism in the Middle East focus on the development of the Arab nationalist ideology<sup>7</sup> or on the development of a nationalist identity within the confines of a single nation-state. The histories of Arab nationalism sideline, or altogether ignore, the presence of Arab women. The existing literature focuses on the development of new national identities in Palestine and Lebanon and on the relationships between the region's many nationalisms. For example, it focuses on how Syrian and Palestinian nationalisms were connected, or how Arab nationalism interacted with Syrian nationalism.<sup>8</sup> Women's

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<sup>7</sup> "Arab nationalism" [*al-qawmiyya al-'arabiyya*] is used instead of "pan-Arab" or "pan-Arabism" when referring to the shared goal of Arab political unity. "Pan-Arab" describes the unity of Arabs regardless of connection to claims or desires for a nation state. Nationalist movements contained within one nation-state are identified as such, i.e. Palestinian nationalism, Syrian nationalism. For a synthesis of the complexities of defining Arab nationalism see Adeed Dawisha, *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Scholarship on Arab nationalism has proceeded through three phases. The first study of Arab nationalism was George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening* (London: H. Hamilton, 1938). The first generation produced scholarship between the 1950s and 1970s. Loosely labeled "the critics," these scholars identified some of the flaws in Antonius' narrative and worked to reintegrate Islam into the origin story of Arab nationalism. See: Ernest C. Dawn, "From Ottomanism to Arabism: The Origin of an Ideology" in *From Ottomanism to Arabism: Essays on the Origins of Arab Nationalism* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1973), 122-47; Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973); Zeine Zeine, *The Emergence of Arab Nationalism* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1973). The second and third generations came along in the 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s. The second group of scholars studied Arab nationalism from the perspective of journalists, educators, and the Middle Class. Rashid Khalidi, "Ottomanism and Arabism in Syria Before 1914: A Reassessment," in *The Origins of Arab Nationalism*, ed. Rashid Khalidi, et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 50-69; Philip Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus, 1860-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). The third generation argued that Arab nationalism was not a phenomenon cultivated and circulated by the elite, but rather that Arab nationalism was a bottom-up phenomenon. James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). The most recent research on Arab nationalism places the formation of the identity in transnational context. See: Leyla Dakhli, "Arabisme, nationalisme arabe et identifications transnationales

contributions to the nationalist movements in each of the post-Ottoman nations of Egypt,<sup>9</sup> Palestine, Iraq, and Syria are recorded in the existing literature.<sup>10</sup> But the women's movement in Syria and Lebanon is less studied than other national contexts. However, these local identities were not forged at the expense of a regional identity. Women simultaneously claimed an Arab identity as well. Glimmers of pan-Arab women's activism come through in the existing literature on women's movements in individual nation-states in the Arab world.<sup>11</sup>

The nation-state is not the most useful framework for understanding women's movements or nationalist movements in Middle East after World War I. In fact, a regional (pan-Arab) and international perspective is most able to capture the activist networks forged by Arab women in the name of Arab independence and women's rights.

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arabes au 20<sup>e</sup> siècle." *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 103: Proche-Orient: foyers, frontières et fractures (Jul.- Sep., 2009): 13-25.

<sup>9</sup> There are more histories in English on the Egyptian women's movement between 1880-1950 than any other movement in the region. Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society and the Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Laura Bier, *Revolutionary Womanhood: Feminisms, Modernity, and the State in Nasser's Egypt* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011); Hanan Kholoussy, *For Better, For Worse: The Marriage Crisis That Made Modern Egypt* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing and Liberating Egypt, 1805-1923* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Limited literature exists on the women's movement in other countries in the Arab world. For Palestine: Ellen Fleischmann, *The Nation and its "New" Women: The Palestinian Women's Movement, 1920-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). For Iraq see: Noga Efrati, *Women in Iraq: Past Meets Present* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012). For Syria and Lebanon: Malek Abisaab, *Militant Women of a Fragile Nation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010); Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege and Gender in French Syria* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Leyla Dakhli, "Beyrouth-Damas, 1928: voile et dévoilement," *Le Mouvement social*, Special Issue: Des engagements féminins au Moyen-Orient (XXe-XXIe siècles) 231 (Avril-Juin 2010), 123-140; Shereen Khairallah, *The Sisters of Men: Lebanese Women in History* (Beirut: The Institute for Women Studies in the Arab World, 1996); Hanifa Khatib, *Tārīkh taṭawwūr al-ḥaraka al-nisā'īyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Hadatha, 1984); Imilie Faris Ibrahim, *al-Haraka al-nisā'īyya al-lubnāniyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqafa, 1965?).

<sup>11</sup> Ellen Fleischmann, "The Other 'Awakening': The Emergence of Women's Movements in the Modern Middle East, 1900-1940," in *A Social History of Women & Gender in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Margaret Meriwether and Judith Tucker (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999), 89-139; Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 223-241.

Pan-Arab activism was internationalized through the diaspora and through international institutions.<sup>12</sup> “Pan-Arab” activism refers to activism grounded in a shared Arab identity that sought to leverage Arab unity to achieve Arab sovereignty. Such activism did not necessarily seek a single, unified Arab state, which is why women could simultaneously make claims as Arabs and as Syrians, Egyptians, and Iraqis. The pan-Arab women’s movement consisted of multiple, concomitant local and international projects from around the Arab world.<sup>13</sup> “Arab world” describes the geographic area where Arabic is the dominant language; it does not encompass the diaspora.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1920s, the incipient Arab women’s movements connected to local national identities tried to secure representation in international women’s organizations. The first Arab women’s organization was admitted to the IWSA in 1928. Yet, European and

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<sup>12</sup> The Middle East was internationally linked through diasporic connections and economic activist networks in the early twentieth century. Ilham Makdisi-Khuri, *The Eastern Mediterranean and the Making of Global Radicalism, 1860-1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010) traces Syrian and Lebanese participation in global activist networks. New scholarship emphasizes the presence of Syrian and Lebanese diasporic communities in the Americas and West Africa and the role of these diasporic communities in forging nationalist identities in their countries of origin and in the countries to which they emigrated. Andrew Arsan, *Interlopers of Empire: The Lebanese Diaspora in Colonial French West Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico: Middle Eastern Immigrants in Modern Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas, 2007); Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California, 2009); Anne Monsour, *Not Quite White: Lebanese and the White Australia Policy, 1880 to 1947* (Brisbane: Post Pressed, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> There are a few regional surveys of the women’s movement in the Arab world Jean Said Makdisi, Noha Bayoumi, and Rafif Rida Sidawi, eds. *Arab Feminisms: Gender and Equality in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2014); Pernille Arenfeldt and Nawar Golley Al-Hassan, *Mapping Arab Women's Movements: A Century of Transformations from Within* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2011); Lila Abu-Lughod, ed. *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

<sup>14</sup> Defining what forces gave rise to an “Arab” identity is a contentious academic issue. There are four commonly cited sources of that helped solidify Arab identity in this early twentieth century. (Arab women were affected by all of them): 1. The arrival of missionaries and foreign intervention (first espoused by George Antonius in *The Arab Awakening* (1938); 2. The diffusion of the Arabic press, including the women’s press. See Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), Chapter 6, and Beth Baron, *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society and the Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); 3. The Turkification of the Ottoman Empire. See Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and 4. The rise of political Islam. For a cursory overview of the phenomenon see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), especially Chapters 5-11.

American activists dominate the histories of international women's organizing before World War I.<sup>15</sup> Some new scholarship reveals women's networks in other parts of the world before World War II.<sup>16</sup> Leila Rupp's pioneering *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* examines the origins and actions of international women's organizations between the first international women's conference in Paris in 1892 and World War II. During this period, women's conferences became an important sphere for creating regional and international identities for women.<sup>17</sup> Rupp recovers the

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<sup>15</sup> The history of "international feminism" and women's activism has emphasized connections between women's organizations on the European continent and connections between women's organizations in England and the United States. Books focusing on transatlantic networks include Leila Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Rupp, "Constructing Internationalism: The Case of Transnational Women's Organizations, 1888-1945," *The American Historical Review* 99 (1994): 1571-1600; Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Peace as a Woman's Issue: A History of the U.S. Movement for World Peace and Women's Rights* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1993); Mineke Bosch and Annemarie Kloosterman, eds. *Politics and Friendship: Letters from the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, 1902-1942* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1990); Gertrude Bussey and Margaret Tims, *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1965* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965); Carrie Ann Foster, *The Women and the Warriors: The U.S. Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1946* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995); Margaret McFadden, *Golden Cables of Sympathy: The Transatlantic Sources of Nineteenth-Century Feminism* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2009); Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); Linda K. Schott, *Reconstructing Women's Thoughts: The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Before World War II* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997); Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World, Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991).

<sup>16</sup> Ellen DuBois, "Woman Suffrage: The View from the Pacific," *Pacific Historical Review* 69 (2000): 539-551 encouraged scholars to decenter European and American models of organizing for suffrage. Recent scholarship answers DuBois' call to put women's organizing in Latin America in international context. Francesca Miller, "Latin American Feminism and the Transnational Arena," in *Globalizing Feminisms, 1789-1945*, ed. Karen Offen (New York: Routledge, 2009): 193-203; Megan Threlkeld, "The Pan American Conference of Women, 1922: Successful Suffragists Turn to International Relations," *Diplomatic History* 31 (2007): 801-828; Ann Towns, "The Inter-American Commission of Women and Women's Suffrage, 1920-1945," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 42 (2010), 779-807; Katherine M. Marino, "Transnational Pan-American Feminism: The Friendship of Bertha Lutz and Mary Wilhelmine Williams, 1926-1944," *Journal of Women's History* 26. 2 (Summer 2014): 63-87.

<sup>17</sup> An additional vein of scholarship on women's organizing that did not interact with Europe or the United States explores the creation of women's networks in Asia through a series of women's conferences hosted in regional capitals in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Fiona Paisley, "From Nation Of Islam To Goodwill Tourist: African-American Women at Pan-Pacific and South East Asia Women's Conferences, 1937 and 1955," *Women's Studies International Forum*, Special Issue: Circling the Globe: International Feminism Reconsidered, 1910 to 1975, 32 (2009): 21-28; Marie Sandell, "Regional Versus International: Women's Activism and Organisational Spaces in the Inter-War Period," *International History Review* 33.4 (2011): 607-625; Charlotte Weber, "Between Nationalism and Feminism: The Eastern Women's Congresses of 1930 and 1932," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Special Issue: Early Twentieth-Century Middle Eastern Feminisms, Nationalisms, and Transnationalisms 4.1 (Winter 2008): 83-106; Rumi Yasutake, "The

presence of Egyptian women who attempted to gain a position within the structure of international women's organizations. Syrian and Lebanese women also attempted to participate in international women's conferences and the debate about women's rights that the conferences sparked. But Syrian and Lebanese women's efforts to become equal participants in discussions about women's rights at the League of Nations were thwarted by prejudices against women from Europe's overseas colonies acting for themselves.<sup>18</sup>

Focusing on how women from Syria and Lebanon interacted with the League integrates new actors into the "(re)turn" to the League of Nations.<sup>19</sup> My project looks at the League as a site of Syrian and Lebanese women's activism and in doing so exposes the structural barriers that prevented their participation. "Failure" is commonly associated

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Rise Of Women's Internationalism in the Countries of the Asia-Pacific Region During the Interwar Years, From a Japanese Perspective." *Women's History Review* 20.4 (2011): 521-532.

<sup>18</sup> Women, women's rights, and the image of "women" had many roles in empire. Lelia Ahmed coined the phrase, "colonial feminism" to describe the phenomenon of male colonial officials capturing the language of feminism and redirecting it in service of colonialism in *Women and Gender in Islam: The Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (Yale University Press, 1992). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak described the process of women supporting imperial projects through their efforts in the name of women's rights as "white women saving brown women from brown men" in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Nelson Cary (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988). The article spawned a series of explorations into how white women were complicit in the colonial structure. The following books address the theme from a variety of angles: Ann L. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Mrinalini Sinha, *Specters of Mother India: The Global Restructuring of an Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Nupur Chaudhuri and Margaret Strobel, *Western Women and Imperialism: Complicity and Resistance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); and, most recently Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), especially Chapter 1 "Do Muslim Women (Still) Need Saving?" A robust literature on women standing against empire exists. Some important titles include Jodi Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Leila J. Rupp, "Challenging Imperialism In International Women's Organizations, 1888-1945," *NWSA Journal* 8.1 (1996): 8-27.

<sup>19</sup> Susan Pedersen's "Back to the League of Nations," *American Historical Review* 112:4 (October 2007), 1091-1117 chronicles an academic turn to the League of Nations to restore it as an important actor in constructing our international system. The turn is still in process; several other books are forthcoming on the League of Nations. Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Ruth Henig, *The League of Nations: The Makers of the Modern World* (London: Haus Publishing, 2010); Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013); Susan Pedersen, *The Guardians: The League of Nations and the Crisis of Empire* (Oxford, forthcoming, May 2015).

with the League of Nations.<sup>20</sup> Rather than studying the League's institutional structure for reasons why the League did not triumph in promoting international peace and security and forestalling war, this project emphasizes the League's successes.<sup>21</sup> Women, especially from the well-connected international women's organizations based in Europe, helped forge many of the League's successful programs.<sup>22</sup> The League was instrumental in drawing attention to and drafting plans to address a bevy of social ills: ending the slave trade, stemming traffic in women and children, putting an end to global terrorism, stopping the drug trade, providing aid for refugees, and formalizing notions of "global health." At the behest of international women's organizations, the League also highlighted the need to establish international women's rights protections. While the League did not eradicate these social ills, as drugs still cross international borders, refugees flee conflict zones, women and children are trafficked, and terrorism is an operational tactic, the League succeeded in establishing a series of precedents that shape international perceptions and global initiatives today. One of the most influential actions the League took was to internationalize women's rights.

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<sup>20</sup> The League's inability to live up to its mandate to prevent war and forestall conflict has caused many scholars to explore why the league failed. George Scott. *The Rise and Fall of the League of Nations*. (New York: Macmillan, 1974). Martin David Dubin, "Transgovernmental Processes in the League of Nations," *International Organization* 37.3 (Summer, 1983): 469-493.

<sup>21</sup> The following texts describe the structure of the League of Nations and outline the work of the organization. The most recent scholar to take up this subject is Susan Pedersen. Her published works on the subject are listed in the bibliography; she has a forthcoming title on the structure of the League of Nations mandatory system. Francis Paul Walters, *A History of the League of Nations* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969); George F. Kohn, *The Organization and the Work of the League of Nations* (Philadelphia: Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 1924); Parker Thomas Moon, *Imperialism and World Politics* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929).

<sup>22</sup> The presence of European and American women at the League of Nations as actors has received scant attention; no scholarship exists on the demands for women's rights made by women in the mandates or colonized world at the League. Carol Miller, "Geneva – the Key to Equality: Inter-war Feminists and the League of Nations," *Women's History Review* 3:2 (1994): 219-245; Susan Pedersen, "Metaphors of the Schoolroom: Women Working the Mandates System at the League of Nations," *History Workshop Journal* 66:1 (2008): 188-207; Paula Pfeffer, "'A Whisper in the Assembly of Nations': United States' Participation in the International Movement for Women's Rights from the Nations to the United Nations," *Women's Studies International Forum* 8:5 (1985): 459-471; Susan Zimmerman, "Liaison Committees of International Women's Organizations and the Changing Landscape of Women's Internationalism, 1920s to 1945" Alexander Street Press (Women's History), n.d. Web.

In the Middle East, the most significant action taken by the League was the creation of a mandate system, which affected the trajectory towards independence of all of the former Ottoman territories in Greater Syria. Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations created the “A” mandates in Greater Syria. Britain was granted Palestine (comprising Transjordan) and Iraq; France was granted Syria. Article 22 read,

To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilisation and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant.

The best method of giving practical effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations who by reason of their resources, their experience or their geographical position can best undertake this responsibility, and who are willing to accept it, and that this tutelage should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League.<sup>23</sup>

Article 22 captured the sentiment held by the representatives of the victors of war—the British, the French, and the Americans—who controlled the post-war negotiations. They claimed the peoples in the mandates were not yet ready to govern themselves, but with proper guidance from the mandatory powers (Britain, France, Japan, and Australia), the indigenous populations would develop to such a point where they would be ready for self-government. These populations had the capacity for self-rule, they had just not achieved it yet. The populations subjected to the mandates disagreed.

The “A” mandates were forged out of the former Ottoman territories in the Arab world. The “B” mandates were created in the former German colonies in Africa and the “C” mandates were made out of the former German colonies in the Pacific. The lines of the “A” mandate closely aligned with the borders mapped out in the Sykes-Picot

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<sup>23</sup> The Covenant of the League of Nations, including amendments adopted until December, 1924. “The Avalon Project,” Yale Law School. Web. 27 January 2014. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp#art22](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp#art22)



Agreement (1916)—a secret wartime agreement between the British and French that established post-war areas of influence in the Ottoman Arab territories. Sykes-Picot was not the only wartime promise made by the British.

The British also promised King Husayn of Saudi Arabia an independent Arab state. Arab independence would be delivered in return for fomenting an Arab Revolt that would force the Ottomans to send troops to squash the rebellion in the southern part of the Empire and thereby split Ottoman forces onto two fronts. The Husayn-McMahon Correspondence (1915-1916) chronicled the terms of the agreement, but the borders of the independent Arab state were vague. King Husayn understood them to stretch north encompassing all of the area where Arabic was spoken, including the holy city of Jerusalem. Thus, the independent Arab state envisioned by Husayn included some of the same territory divvied up in the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

The contradictory promises of the British were not without consequences, especially in Palestine where the British declared their support for a homeland for Jewish people in Palestine in the Balfour Declaration (1917). The defeat of the Ottoman Empire disrupted the balance of the region. It is against the backdrop of these three overlapping promises made by the British—the Husayn-McMahon Correspondence, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and the Balfour Declaration—to three different populations—the Arabs, the French, and the British Zionists—that the Syrian and Lebanese women's movement took further shape. The League's role in imposing a new colonial order in the region made the League a target of women's campaigns about national independence, and also about women's rights.

This history of Syrian and Lebanese women's activism begins in 1910 during the

Ottoman Empire's reign over Greater Syria.<sup>24</sup> (Appendix 1, Map 1). "Greater Syria" stretched from the Eastern shores of the Mediterranean in the west to the Zagros Mountains in the east, north to Taurus Mountains and south to the Arabian Desert. Thus, Ottoman Greater Syria included parts of present-day Syria, Lebanon, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Jordan, and Iraq. The dissertation explores the histories of the geographic area that became modern-day Syria and Lebanon.<sup>25</sup> (Appendix 1, Map 3). During the twentieth century, the Eastern Mediterranean shifted from being under the control of the Ottoman Empire, to independence in the case of Turkey, and colonization in the case of Syria (under the French mandate) and Palestine and Iraq (under a British mandate). The French mandate split Syria into a series of administrative units: Lebanon, Syria (comprised of the State of Aleppo and State of Damascus), Jabal Druze (Mount Druze), an Alawite territory, and Alexandretta. Alexandretta was ceded to Turkey in 1938. Modern Syria is made up of the former French administrative categories of Syria, Jabal Druze, and the Alawite territory. (Appendix 1, Maps 2 and 3).

"Greater Syria," the rough equivalent of *bilād al-shām* in Arabic, is used throughout the dissertation to express the unity between Syria and Lebanon. Starting in 1918, Lebanon and Syria are used either collectively or separately. The French Mandate for Syria refers to the entire administrative unit. Syria and Lebanon gained independence

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<sup>24</sup> On Ottoman Syria see, Thomas Philipp, ed. *The Syrian Land in the 18th and 19th Century: The Common and the Specific in the Historical Experience* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1992); Engin Deniz Akarlı, *The Long Peace: Ottoman Lebanon, 1861-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Dick Douwes. *The Ottomans in Syria: A History of Justice and Oppression* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000); Philip S. Khoury, "Continuity and Change in Syrian Political Life: The Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *The American Historical Review* 96.5 (Dec., 1991): 1374-1395; Michael Provence, "Ottoman Modernity, Colonialism, and Insurgency in the Interwar Arab East," *IJMES* 43 (2011): 205-225.

<sup>25</sup> The Arabs of the Nejd and the Hejaz (the provinces that would be combined to form the modern nation-state of Saudi Arabia) and the small date-cultivating, fishing and pearl diving communities along the coast of the Persian Gulf were not yet included in definitions of "Arab" despite a shared linguistic heritage. The peoples of the Arabian Peninsula were overwhelmingly nomadic, so the prevailing definition of "Arab" was mixed with twinges of condescension toward the non-cosmopolitan Bedouins.

from the French in 1943 and 1946 respectively. I pay close attention to the national identity that women claimed in their essays and speeches. For example, if a woman living in Beirut claimed a Syrian identity, I use the label Syrian rather than Lebanese. Unless otherwise noted, the labels used to describe women are their own. In the absence of an expressed national identity, I use modern nation-state boundaries to categorize a woman or a man as Syrian or Lebanese. After 1920 when referring to the general women's movement in Syria and Lebanon or a group of activists, I use "Syrian and Lebanese."

Syrian and/or Lebanese were not the only identities used by the women at the core of this project.<sup>26</sup> The national labels that women used to describe themselves changed throughout the course of their lifetimes and were often used in conjunction with "Arab." Often the national affiliation claimed changed in relation to the audience. For example, when Hamada was asked about her origins by an immigration official in the United States, she said, "I am from Syria, but I am Arabian."<sup>27</sup> The identities claimed by Syrian and Lebanese women were fluid. In addition to Syrian and Lebanese, they claimed Arab, "Eastern," and "Oriental" identities when targeting external audiences.

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<sup>26</sup> On the emergence of a Syrian nationalist movement see Marie-Renée Mouton, "Le congrès syrio-palestinien de Genève," *Relations Internationales* 19 (1979): 313-328; Philip S. Khoury, "Factionalism among Syrian Nationalists during the French mandate," *IJMES* 13.4 (Nov., 1981): 441-469; Hanna Batatu, *Syria's Peasantry, the Descendants of Its Lesser Rural Notables, and Their Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); James L. Gelvin, "Demonstrating Communities in Post-Ottoman Syria," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 25.1 (Summer 1994): 23-44; Gelvin, "The League of Nations and the Question of National Identity in the Fertile Crescent," *World Affairs*, Special Issue: Woodrow Wilson and the League of Nations: Part Two 158.1 (Summer 1995): 35-43; Eliezer Tauber, "Syrian and Iraqi Nationalist Attitudes to the Kemalist and Bolshevik Movements," *Middle Eastern Studies* 30.4 (Oct., 1994): 896-915; C. Ernest Dawn, "The Formation of Pan-Arab Ideology in the Interwar Years," *IJMES* 20.1 (Feb., 1988): 67-91; L. Schatkowski Schilcher, "The Great Depression (1873-1896) and the Rise of Syrian Arab Nationalism," *New Perspectives on Turkey* 5-6 (Fall 1991): 167-189. On the development of a Lebanese national identity distinct from that of Syria, see Albert Hourani, *Syria and Lebanon, A Political Essay* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946); Carol Hakim, *The Origins of the Lebanese National Idea, 1840-1920*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Meir Zamir, "Faisal and the Lebanese Question, 1918-20," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27.3 (Jul., 1991): 404-426; Raghid El-Solh, *Lebanon and Arabism: National Identity and State Formation* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003); Kamal S. Salibi, *A House of Many Mansions: The History of Lebanon Reconsidered* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003).

<sup>27</sup> USINS RG85/55907/916. Nour Hamada File. Sworn statement made by Nour Hamada before U.S. Immigrant Inspector Charles R. Hayek in Detroit Michigan, 12 October 1935.

The period explored in this dissertation does not align with common historiographical conventions. Many histories of the Ottoman era stop around 1918 with the Armistice of Mudros, which signaled the defeat of the Ottomans in World War I.<sup>28</sup> The Ottoman Empire ceased to function as an autonomous political entity in 1918, but its cultural and social legacy loomed large in the region until the aftermath of World War II when the region was free from colonial rule.<sup>29</sup> Many histories of Syria and Lebanon start with the French mandate in 1920 and end with independence in the mid-1940s.<sup>30</sup> General histories of the region commonly end in 1948 when the state of Israel was declared, which changed the political borders of the region. This dissertation concludes in 1949 with the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women meeting in Beirut. It is an ending point that captures the continuation of Syrian and Lebanese women's activism to expand the limited rights awarded by the state and to change the way women's rights were framed by the UNCSW. The analysis of the UN meeting exposes the continuities between the League of Nations and the UN with regards to women's rights.

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<sup>28</sup> The Armistice of Mudros was followed by the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920. This treaty partitioned the former territories of the Ottoman Empire between an independent Turkey and the Allied powers. The Treaty of Sèvres was supplanted by the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 following the Turkish war of independence.

<sup>29</sup> The Sultanate was formally dissolved on 1 November 1922. An emerging line of inquiry focuses on Ottoman legacies in the Arab territories. The end of the empire did not represent a clean break between the old imperial system and the mandates.

<sup>30</sup> Scholarship on French rule in Syria and Lebanon has increasingly focused on the mechanics of how the French ruled over its territories in the Middle East and the legacies of its policies. This line of inquiry was shaped by Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987). See Daniel Neep, *Occupying Syria under the French Mandate: Insurgency, Space and State Formation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege and Gender in French Syria* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); Benjamin Thomas White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Jennifer M. Dueck, *The Claims of Culture at Empire's End: Syria and Lebanon under French Rule* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Martin C. Thomas, "French Intelligence-Gathering in the Syrian mandate, 1920-40," *Middle Eastern Studies* 38.1 (Jan., 2002): 1-32; Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon Under French Mandate* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958); Peter A. Shambrook, *French Imperialism in Syria, 1927-1936* (London: Ithaca Press, 1998); William Shorrock, *French Imperialism in the Middle East: The Failure of Policy in Syria and Lebanon, 1900-1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976).

The region's women's movements were energized by the multiple political reorganizations of the region. Charting the Syrian and Lebanese women's movements through transitions in governmental structure—Ottoman Empire to French Empire to independence—brings to the fore the elements of the women's movement that remained the same despite changing governing structures. The belief that Syrian and Lebanese women were unable to act on their own behalf in local and international forums was one constant in each political transition. The hope with which Syrian and Lebanese activists lobbied local and international actors on behalf of their conceptualization of rights was another constant. Recovering the tenacity of Syrian and Lebanese actors in the face of exclusion changes the narrative of when women from the colonized world turned toward the international sphere to help secure women's rights protections, commonly seen as the UN Decade for Women. This dissertation exposes the forgetting embedded in the narrative of the early international women's movement that preserves the presence of actors from Europe and the United States and ignores the contributions of other women's rights activists, such as those from Syria and Lebanon.

## **Chapter Outlines**

Chapter One charts the transformations in the women's movements in Greater Syria as the region transitioned from Ottoman rule to the French Mandate for Syria—from one empire to another. An informal, local women's movement dedicated to providing charity and educating girls emerged in response to the societal changes caused by the changing structure of the Ottoman Empire, the presence of Protestant missionaries, and massive emigration to the Americas.<sup>31</sup> The First World War wreaked havoc on the Middle East.

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<sup>31</sup> Missionaries, migration, and the changing structure of the Ottoman Empire all altered the social structure of Syria and Lebanon. Read together the following literatures capture the many ways the region's social

The Ottoman Empire did not survive the war.<sup>32</sup> The war and its aftermath—the imposition of the French Mandate for Syria—sparked a regional consciousness about the status of women throughout the former Arab Ottoman territories. The arrival of the French ended a brief moment of Arab independence (March-July 1920).<sup>33</sup> Local populations revolted against the French mandate in July 1920 and again in 1925.<sup>34</sup> In both rebellions, women served on the frontlines and worked as nurses. The childhoods and young adulthoods of the six women introduced in this chapter—Cosma, Dimashqiyya, Hamada, Karam, Khalidi, and Qaddura—occurred against the backdrop of regional tumult and war. The lives of these women narrate the dissertation. These women provided educational opportunities for girls and women, founded new women’s organizations, published women’s journals, and emigrated in search of new

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fabric was altered between 1880 and 1910. On the impact on missionaries in the region see Beth Baron, *The Orphan Scandal: Christian Missionaries and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014); Mehmet Ali Dogan and Heather Sharkey, eds. *American Missionaries in the Middle East: Foundational Encounters* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011); Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008). On the effects of return migrations on Mount Lebanon and the state of Lebanon, see Akram Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). On the changing structure of the Ottoman Empire see Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Selim Deringel, *The Well-Protected Domains: Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876-1909* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> The “World War” has received little attention outside of Europe in the English language historiography. Yet it was a war of Empire and much of the fighting took place in the colonies outside of Europe. The centenary of the start of World War I has sparked a renewed focus in the war in the Middle East. Such as the *IJMES*, Special Issue: World War I 46.4 (2014). In addition, a few forthcoming edited volumes bring renewed focus to the conflict’s effect on the region. These titles have not yet been published. A series of conferences in 2014 on the war in global perspective will also likely yield additional scholarly output on the war’s impact on the daily lives of the peoples living in the Ottoman territories. See Melanie Tanielan, “Politics of wartime relief in Ottoman Beirut (1914-1918),” *First World War Studies* 5.1 (2014): 69-82.

<sup>33</sup> See James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) for a detailed profile about the period that led to the creation of the short-lived Arab state and the fight to keep it alive as the French invaded.

<sup>34</sup> For information regarding the 1925 anti-French revolt that started in Jabal Druze, see Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas, 2005). For its gendered and transnational ramifications see: Maria del Mar Logrono Narbona, “The ‘Women Question’ in the Aftermath of the Great Syrian Revolt,” *Al-Raida*, Special Issue: Arab Diaspora Women XXIV: 116-117 (Winter/Spring 2007) 5-9; Reem Bailony, “Transnational and the Syrian Migrant Public: The Case of the 1925 Syrian Revolt,” *Mashriq & Mahjar* 1.1 (2013): 30-54.

opportunities.<sup>35</sup> This range of activities—teaching, publishing, campaigning, migrating—displays the varied responses of individual women to the changing imperial structure of the region. From its infancy, the formal women’s movement in Syria and Lebanon was connected globally.

Chapter Two explores a series of women’s conferences hosted throughout the Arab world. It was through these conferences—the first of which was hosted in Beirut in 1928—that individual women’s organizations in Syria and Lebanon came into contact with women’s organizations from the Arab world and the expanding international women’s rights community. The conference in Beirut was followed by additional “Arab” and “Eastern” women’s conferences in Jerusalem, Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad, Cairo, and Tehran between 1929-1938. These regional conferences provided a forum for defining “Eastern” woman’s rights, which presented the family as the foundation for women’s rights. The “Eastern” notion of women’s rights counterpoised the hegemonic notion of women’s rights certain European and North American women promoted. The conferences addressed three interlocking audiences: the international women’s movement; international governing bodies; and local nationalist movements. Arab women wanted to participate in the conversations about women’s rights and Arab independence that were taking place in each of these spheres. To gain entry they had to overcome ingrained colonial biases regarding Arab women’s ability to represent themselves and the “progressive mystique”—national governments using the status of Arab women to demonstrate their nation’s progress vis-à-vis less advanced nations.

Chapter Three considers the theme of absence. This chapter charts the global conversation about women’s rights that occurred in the late 1920s and early 1930s and

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<sup>35</sup> Marilyn Booth, *May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender Politics in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

addresses the League of Nation's exclusion of Arab women from the conversation, even though Arab women were present in international conferences hosted by international women's rights organizations. The chapter presents a history of the League's engagement with the "women's question," which queried whether women should have rights, and if yes, what those rights should be. When the League was incorporated in 1920, women's rights were classified as national issues, and at first, the League refused to see them as an issue of international concern. Concerted lobbying from international women's organizations with European and American leadership boards and from "small states," predominantly postcolonial states in the Americas, lodged women's rights within the cluster of issues categorized as "international."

Chapter Four chronicles how Syrian and Lebanese women responded to their exclusion from discussions about international women's rights at the League of Nations. Syrian and Lebanese women launched two small-scale campaigns directed toward the League. In 1936, the *Union Féministe Arabe* appealed to the League to remedy British policies in Palestine. A year and a half later, another group of Syrian and Lebanese women wrote to the League in an attempt to secure a seat for an "Eastern" representative, or a "friend of the East," on the League of Nations' Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women. The League was a space to make claims for national independence and an inclusive conceptualization of women's rights—claims that could not be made at home. The Syrian and Lebanese women who wrote letters to the League did not necessarily believe their campaign for inclusion on the Committee of Experts would achieve its goal. The campaign for inclusion achieved partial success when the League contemplated expanding the membership of the Committee of Experts to include an "Eastern" member. Ultimately, the ranks of the committee remained resolutely European



and American.

Despite decades of concentrated activism on behalf of women's rights in the international realm, Syrian and Lebanese women failed to gain access to conversations about international women's rights.<sup>36</sup> Chapter Five uses the short history of the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women (1937-1940) to investigate the structure of the international system that prevented Syrian and Lebanese women's rights activists from participating. During its brief tenure as the international body dedicated to exploring the status of women, the Committee of Experts conducted a global survey. The survey was predicated on the idea that it was possible to measure the status of women—an idea that outlasted the committee. During World War II, the Syrian and Lebanese women's movement abandoned its national and international campaigns for women's rights. Instead, the movement focused on wartime relief efforts and staging nationalist demonstrations. The war destroyed the League and brought chaos and destruction to Syria and Lebanon. Women hoped that their activities during the war would yield women's rights protections in the independent states of Syria and Lebanon that emerged in the wake of the war.

In Chapter Six the international sphere becomes the backdrop for the conversations about how to protect women's rights that occurred in the newly independent states of Syria and Lebanon. The UNCSW meeting in Beirut serves as a case study for the interconnected national, regional, and international definitions of women's

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<sup>36</sup> A limited, but growing, number of sources exist on World War II in the Middle East. See: Barry Rubin, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014); Sarah D. Shields, *Fezzes in the River: Identity Politics and European Diplomacy in the Middle East on the Eve of World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Elizabeth Thompson, "The Climax and Crisis of the Colonial Welfare State in Syria and Lebanon during World War II" in *War, Institutions, and Social Change in the Middle East*, ed. Steven Heydemann (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

rights.<sup>37</sup> The Lebanese state showed its support of the UN's women's rights rhetoric through grand speeches proclaiming women's equal status in independent Lebanon. Women's organizations used the Beirut meeting as a site to highlight the state's shortcomings in granting women's rights. The Women's Committee of Lebanon hoped the attention of the international community would pressure the Lebanese government to implement its women's rights pledges. It also hoped the UNCSW would accommodate the "Eastern" women's rights framework, positioning the family as a possible foundation for the international women's rights system. Their efforts floundered, but the UNSCW meeting in Beirut offered an opportunity for self-representation, something women's rights activists from Syria and Lebanon had long been denied.

All social movements are infused with hope and then often face disappointment when some of their goals are not met. Syrian and Lebanese women hoped that their activism directed toward local governments would yield greater protections of their rights. They also hoped that their campaigns for rights at the League would expand the international women's rights system to include an "Eastern" conceptualization of women's rights. This project traces the complex mix of forces that affected the activists' ability to secure rights and protections as women at home and abroad. The project also explores why the leaders of the Syrian and Lebanese women's rights movements were

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<sup>37</sup> Literature on how women's issues are addressed by international organizations focuses predominately on women in the United States and Europe. Nitza Berkovitch, *From Motherhood to Citizenship: Women's Rights and International Organizations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002); Rebecca Cook, *Human Rights of Women: National and International Perspectives* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); Karen Garner, *Shaping a Global Women's Agenda: Women's NGOs and Global Governance, 1925-1985* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2010); Patricia Grimshaw, Katie Holmes and Marilyn Lake, eds. *Women's Rights and Human Rights: International Historical Perspectives* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Deborah Stienstra, *Women's Movements and International Organizations*. (New York: MacMillan Press, 1994); Ann E. Towns, *Women and States: Norms and Hierarchies in International Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); *Journal of Women's History*, Special Issue: Human Rights, Global Conferences, and the Making of Postwar Transnational Feminisms, 24:4 (Winter 2013).

unable to participate in international conversations about women's rights—and, addresses how the international women's rights community failed Syrian and Lebanese women. By putting Syrian and Lebanese women's movements between 1910-1949 in an international context, it becomes clear how Syrian and Lebanese activists played the international against the national and vice versa in their campaigns to secure rights for women in independent Arab states.

This project is not just about registering disappointments and failures, it is also about recording the Syrian and Lebanese women's movement's responses to the challenges their movement faced. The movement's inability to change the local distribution of women's rights compelled the movement to reach out to international women's organizations and the League of Nations. When inroads into the international women's rights community were blocked, Syrian and Lebanese women focused on domestic issues. The Syrian and Lebanese women's movement was malleable but determined to secure rights protections. Documenting disappointments and recovering hope helps us understand histories of women's organizing not just in the Arab world, where such histories are buried, but also in the larger international women's rights movement. Furthermore, this international history of Arab women's organizing provides a new look at the history of the international women's movement in the early twentieth century and encourages new studies of the history of the international Arab world—two areas of study that often ignore the presence and influence of Arab women.

## CHAPTER ONE:

From Empire to Empire:  
Emergent Women's Activist  
Networks in Greater Syria, 1910-1928



"The weight of the child is registered four times per month in the Society's Laboratory" (Original Caption), Drop of Milk Society - Founded in 1922, Damascus. Source: *Drop of Milk Society brochure*, Box 41, Countries Collection, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

In June 1917, the windows on both sides of Julia Dimashqiyya's living room in Beirut were wide open. The open windows channeled a summertime Mediterranean breeze across the room. The late afternoon light spilled long shadows into the well-appointed sitting room. All of the chairs in the room were filled. The women and men gathered inside were engrossed in conversation and barely noticed that dusk was falling over Beirut. Tea glasses sat empty or partially consumed as conversation flitted from national independence, to the role a mother had in her child's education, to how to care for war orphans, to talk of women's organizations in other Arabic-speaking countries, and the international women's movement.<sup>38</sup> The women's *nahḍa* (awakening) predated Dimashqiyya's literary salon, which was founded in 1917, but her salon and the women's journal and society that sprang from it propelled the *nahḍa nisā'iyya* (women's awakening) forward. Dimashqiyya was not a lone leader. Nor were her tactics unique. Dimashqiyya was joined at the helm of the women's movement in Syria by women, and some men, who deployed a range of tactics to improve the status of women.

The development and evolution of regional women's networks is presented through the lives of six women. Alice Kandaleft Cosma from Damascus, Julia Dimashqiyya from Moukhtara (Lebanon) and later Beirut, Nour Hamada from Baakline (Lebanon), 'Afifa Karam from Amsheet (Lebanon) and later Shreveport, Louisiana, Anbara Salam Khalidi from Beirut and later Jerusalem, and Ibtihaj Qaddura from Beirut. The lives of these six women capture the diversity of the women's movement that emerged in Greater Syria in the twilight decade of the Ottoman Empire. Hamada was a women's rights activist invested in getting Arab women integrated into the emergent

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<sup>38</sup> Although no record exists about what was discussed at Julia Dimashqiyya's literary salon, these topics were all covered in the first year of *al-Mar'a al-Jadida* (The New Woman) published by Julia Dimashqiyya from 1921-1928. The literary salon predated the journal; the two forums were closely connected. See *Fahras majalla al-sana al-'ulā, al-Mar'a al-Jadida, al-juz' al-awwal, al-sana al-'ulā* (1921), 290-295.

international women's right system. Dimashqiyya published a women's journal that circulated throughout the capitals of the Arabic-speaking world. Cosma was a principle at two schools for girls before becoming the government-appointed representative to the United Nations Committee on the Status of Women in 1947. Karam was a pioneering novelist and publisher in the Syrian-American diaspora. Qaddura ran the *Dār al-Aytām al-Islāmiyya* (Islamic Orphanage) in Beirut for two decades before becoming active in campaigns for women's rights. In 1952, Qaddura was one of the first three women elected to the Beirut City Council. These women and their activism on behalf of women's rights and Arab independence serve as the focus of the rest of the dissertation.

The transition between the French and Ottoman Empires was important for the development of a pan-Arab women's movement. Moving from one imperial structure to another, both of which denied Arabs independence, helped solidify an Arab identity. The development of an Arab identity and women's deployment of the identity was shaped by a mix of local, regional, and international forces, among them foreign migration, missionary activity, and colonialism. Arab women living within the confines of the Ottoman Empire were not the only Arab women to engage in discussions about the creation of an Arab state or states. Using the experiences of Syrian and Lebanese women in small towns, in larger cities, in diaspora, and in relation to international women's organizations, this chapter charts the emergence of Arab women's activist networks that transcended regional and international borders and united women around the goal of Arab independence.

A pan-Arab women's identity was influenced by four factors: the centralization and ultimate collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the increase in educational opportunities provided by foreign missionaries, the mobility of Syrian and Lebanese women in and out

of diaspora, and the post-war imposition of French (and British) mandates on the region, which classed Arabs as not-yet-ready for self rule despite their attempts to claim the right. Imperial, religious, and social forces contributed to the development of a pan-Arab women's movement that bolstered the male movement and differed from it in slight ways—the biggest difference was linking women's rights and independence. In the 1910s, women started to use anti-Ottoman rhetoric and the language of Arab independence to demonstrate their support for the male pan-Arab movement.

The devastation that accompanied the First World War and the imposition of the French Mandate for Syria compelled many women to transform the language of Arab independence into action on behalf of the ideal. The circulation of the press and contact with women's movements around the Arab world helped spark an Arab women's consciousness. The women's movement in Syria and Lebanon was never confined to the Ottoman or post-Ottoman borders of Greater Syria. Rather, from its beginning the movement was interconnected with international women's organizations and with other Arab women, mostly of Syrian and Lebanese descent, living in diaspora in Egypt and the Americas. Despite international connections, most early women's organizing in Greater Syria happened locally, that is within a single town or city, until the late 1920s.

### **The Ottoman Origins of an Arab Women's Identity**

Julia Tu'mi Dimashqiyya was born in a small village, Moukhtara, in the Shouf District of Mount Lebanon on November 14, 1882. The road to Moukhtara from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea takes a serpentine path up the Western side of the foothills of Mount Lebanon. The road, flanked by poplars, curves along a ridgeline tracing the Mediterranean coastline. Along this road lies Moukhtara. It had a small cobblestone lined square with a central fountain. From this central square a townspeople can see specks of

sunlight reflecting off of the distant sea. The houses in the village spread outward, up and down the hill. At the time of Dimashqiyya's birth, the Shouf District of Mount Lebanon was part of the Ottoman Empire. The village *mukhtar* (leader) of Moukhtara answered to the local governor Mustarrifiyet of Mount Lebanon who in turn answered to the regional governor of the Ottoman territory for Syria—himself the ultimate link between the tiny mixed confessional town and the Sublime Port. (See Appendix 1, Map 1)

The Ottoman Empire was a vast and geographically diverse empire. The sights, sounds, and rhythms of late Ottoman Damascus were far removed from the pace of life in the villages in the Anti-Lebanon Mountains along the Mediterranean Sea. In 1910, Damascus had about 190,000 thousand inhabitants. Damascus' economy depended on transit and trade, especially in refined agricultural products from the surrounding countryside. Damascus had long been a transportation hub for pilgrims making their way to Mecca on the Hajj and in 1908 the Ottomans built a railway from Istanbul to Mecca that passed through Damascus. Rail spurs from the main line expanded the reach of Damascene traders by connecting Damascus to the coast via Beirut and other Mediterranean port cities. Ottoman Beirut was bigger than a fishing village, but not a massive metropolis. Its port was its pulse. The port opened the city up to world through trade. It was through this port that many thousands of Syrians left the region for America in search of a better standard of living.

Damascus and Beirut were both the administrative seats of *vilayat* (provinces) of the Ottoman government. Ottoman Damascus and Beirut were joined by Aleppo, Haifa, and Jerusalem as the largest Arab cities of the Empire. Women's organizations and associations dedicated to providing charity and social services sprang up in each major Ottoman city, and likely in the small towns too. Women's associations in the late



nineteenth and early twentieth century Ottoman Empire were dedicated to improving health conditions, aiding indigent and poor women through vocational training, and providing educational opportunities for girls.

The first women's society, the Sisters of Love, was established in 1847 in Beirut; the organization provided girls with literacy training, created a home for wayward girls, and maintained a tuberculosis sanatorium. Another early women's organization was the Orthodox Aid Society for the Poor. It was founded in 1903 in Acre, Palestine. The organization provided trousseau items for poor women to ensure that they were eligible for marriage. These early organizations were joined by other aid projects that responded to individual crises. Many early aid projects and associations run by women were motivated by the Islamic and Christian principles of helping the poor. By the 1920s, many women's organizations identified themselves as women's aid societies, rather than a Christian or Muslim women's societies, and welcomed members from all religions and denominations. Women's literary societies emerged in the 1910s. These societies fused philanthropy and intellectual exchange.<sup>39</sup>

In 1913, a call went out to the leading figures of the Arab nationalist movement in the Arab world and to the leaders of the Arab immigrant communities in the Americas and in Europe to attend a pan-Arab conference in Paris. The conference sought strategies for securing Arab independence from the Ottomans. The Ottomans repressed nationalist movements; thus the conference was held away from the confines of the Empire.

Additionally, a European location was more accessible for immigrants who had settled along the western shores of the Atlantic from São Paulo to Boston—and the communities

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<sup>39</sup> These references to early women's organizing in the Ottoman territories comes from Ellen Fleischmann, "The Other 'Awakening': The Emergence of Women's Movements in the Modern Middle East, 1900-1940," in *A Social History of Women & Gender in the Modern Middle East*, ed. Margaret Meriwether and Judith Tucker (New York: Westview Press, 1999): 102-103; 105.

that settled away from the coastline in places like Detroit and Tucuman, Argentina.

The call to participate in the Paris conference circulated widely. Three young Beirut women, aged sixteen, read the call and sent a letter to the conference delegates in Paris. No women were among the official delegates, but the letter sent by three young women, Shafīqa Ghurayyib, Wadad Mahmasani, Anbara Salim Salam (married name: Khalidi) demonstrated that women were aware of the conference and supported its ideal of Arab independence from the Ottoman Empire.<sup>40</sup>

The letter began praising the conference for bringing attention to the plight of the Arabs who “had only known repression under the Ottomans.”

You have raised your voice and it has reverberated, touching all hearts and stirring all emotions among Arabs, hitherto repressed. You have revived hopes hitherto in despair. You have brought life back to moribund Arab glory. You have shown that the Arab spirit will not accept humiliation nor bow to servitude. You have realized that nets had been set to trap our beloved Syria and have risen to escape from the noose of imprisonment, crying out: The Arab nation is a nation that does not die!<sup>41</sup>

The letter writers praised an independent and united Arab nation as a means of liberating the Arabs and their land from “the yoke of Ottoman imperialism,” which was cast as a form of “imprisonment.” The precise boundaries of the independent Arab state desired by the conveners of the conference and the young women who corresponded with it are unclear, but the Arab nation seems to have been synonymous with Greater Syria. “Syria” referenced an expansive geographic category that stretched between the Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf (Arabian Gulf); “Arab,” however, had a more restricted

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<sup>40</sup> This anecdote comes from Anbara Salam Khalidi’s memoir *Jawla fī al-dhikrayāt bayna Lubnān wa-Filasṭīn*, (Beirut, 1978), which was recently translated into English as *Memoirs of an Early Arab Feminist: The Life and Activism of Anbara Salam Khalidi*, trans. Tarif Khalidi (London: Pluto Press, 2013). My sincere thanks go to Tarif Khalidi who shared an advance copy of the English translation with me. No further references to this conference or the women’s telegrams were found in women’s journals circulating at the time—the veritable boom in women’s publications came in the early 1920s. However, a second reference to women’s engagement with the conference was found in Hassan Hallaq, *Beirut al-Muhrusa fī al-‘ahd al-Uthmani* (Beirut: al-Dār al-Jam‘aia, 1987), 120.

<sup>41</sup> Anbara Salam Khalidi, *Memoirs of an Early Arab Feminist: The Life and Activism of Anbara Salam Khalidi*, trans. Tarif Khalidi (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 50.

membership. An “Arab” identity was based on a shared language, culture, and history, and it was used to describe people who lived in cities and villages, not nomadic populations like the Bedouin who lived in the Arabian Peninsula. Syrians were Arabs.

Claiming an Arab nation aligned with the global nationalist moment: nation-states were replacing colonies as the normative governing structure. In the years before the pan-Arab conference in Paris, anti-imperial and nationalist uprisings occurred in China and the Balkans. The Arab nation sought by the pan-Arab activists in Paris and their female interlocutors was forged around notions of a shared history (in particular a shared history of Ottoman repression and an Arab “Golden Age” that had been lost, but could be resurrected: “The Arab nation is a nation that does not die!”) and a shared language, Arabic. The women argued that the Arab nation would be revitalized through national independence. The pan-Arab enterprise drew from a shared history and language to unite Arabs into a political project that used ethnic bonds of unity across regional borders to secure independence from the Ottomans.

One form of repression decried by Arabs, and by the women conveying their support of the conference’s aims, was the Ottoman push towards centralization, which impinged upon the system of relative autonomy of the Arab provinces of the empire. The trio of authors continued, “[y]ou have recognized that decentralization is a basic principle adopted by all living nations and thus have requested it of your own government.”<sup>42</sup> “Decentralization” described the process by which empires were reorganized into smaller more autonomous units. Arabs located within the contiguous Arab world observed an opposite trend: instead of achieving greater autonomy, they saw their autonomy limited by imperial reforms, which sought to consolidate the sultan’s power.

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<sup>42</sup> Anbara Salam Khalidi, *Memoirs of an Early Arab Feminist: The Life and Activism of Anbara Salam Khalidi*, trans. Tarif Khalidi (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 50.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the Sublime Porte explicitly tried to centralize through a series of reforms called the *Tanzimat* (reorganization). The period of *Tanzimat* was shaped by two royal decrees made by the Ottoman sultan: the *Hatt-i Sharif of Gülhane* (1839)<sup>43</sup> and the *Hatt-i Hümayan* (1856). The *Hatt-i Sharif of Gülhane* promised varied administrative reforms. Among the reforms were vows to end corruption, to standardize military conscription, and to abolish tax farming. Many of these items had been promised in earlier decrees. What makes the *Hatt-i Sharif of Gülhane* novel was its explicit pledge to extend the reforms to subjects regardless of religion. In a second decree, *Hatt-i Hümayan*, the same promises were made, but the equality of all subjects, regardless of religion, was explicitly detailed. Thus, Muslim and non-Muslim men had equal opportunities for state employment and for enrollment in state schools in exchange for equal levels of military conscription. The *Tanzimat* reform period was sealed by the passage of the short-lived Ottoman Constitution of 1876 (in effect until 1878), which turned former Ottoman subjects into citizens by guaranteeing equal rights.

The decrees and constitution eliminated the *millet* system (Ottoman management for ethnoreligious diversity). Under the *millet* system non-Muslim Ottomans were subjects—so too were Muslims. Yet, the *millet* system had given religious minorities semi-autonomy over their religious affairs in exchange for paying taxes. Often, religious minorities were exempted from military service. The decrees tried to eradicate the *millet* system and unite Ottomans in a common Ottoman identity that did not discriminate among ethnic or religious groups. The push towards centralization threatened the

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<sup>43</sup> The *Hatt-i Sharif of Gülhane* sometimes cited as having found inspiration in European reforms, but there is debate on the origins decree as there is no clear European antecedent. See B. Abu Manneh, "The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript," *Die Welt des Islams* 34 (1994): 173-203 and Nora Lafi, "Mediterranean Connections: The Circulation of Municipal Knowledge and Practices at the Time of the Ottoman Reforms, c. 1830-1910" in *Another Global City: Historical Explorations into the Transnational Municipal Moment, 1850-2000*, eds. Pierre Yves Saunier and Shane Ewen (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008): 35-51.

independent religious networks that buttressed the Ottoman Empire, such as French trade networks with Christians in Lebanon. The centralization policies also fomented non-Ottoman nationalisms connected to either an ethnic or religious identity, such as Arab nationalism. Bestowing citizenship on ethnic and religious minorities was not enlightened; it was an attempt by the sultan to consolidate his power over a fracturing Empire. However, the Ottoman turn toward equal citizenship came too late to preserve the empire. The seeds of non-Ottoman nationalisms had already germinated.

The centralization policies of the 1860s and 1870s and the subsequent enactment of the constitution fomented a series of nascent nationalist movements in the Empire's non-Anatolian dominions that would gain momentum through the turn of the century. Separatist nationalist sentiments emerged among the religious and ethnic minorities of the Ottoman Empire that had been living under semi-autonomous government systems in the Levant and North Africa. These semi-autonomous regions did not want to be folded into the central bureaucracy of the Empire.

The Paris conference was staged in response to the actions of the Young Turks, whose 1908 revolt sought to preserve the Ottoman Empire by foregrounding a Turkish identity, while maintaining control over non-Turkish territories. Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians, Greeks, and Armenians living under Ottoman rule considered themselves Ottomans, but not Turks.<sup>44</sup> The pan-Arab conference in Paris was a forceful articulation of claims for Arab independence from the Ottomans and followed Bulgarian and Albanian independence in 1908 and 1912 respectively. Bulgarian and Albanian national independence were the latest in a long line of Ottoman territories splintering away from

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<sup>44</sup> Hasan Kayali notes that "Young Turk" is a misnomer, as not all of the Ottomanist reformers were Turkish, some were Arab, Kurdish or representative of another minority population within the Ottoman Empire. Hasan Kayali, *Arabs and Young Turks: Ottomanism, Arabism, and Islamism in the Ottoman Empire, 1908-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 4.

the Empire, a process that began with Greek independence in 1832. The letter sent by the three young Arab women was decidedly anti-Ottoman, but was not anti-Turk. The women who wanted to secure Arab independence viewed the Ottoman Empire under the leadership of the Young Turks' Committee of Union and Progress as a threat to their movement toward independence. Ethnic Turks were not seen as a force that would challenge Arabs in their pursuit of an independent Arab nation, or cluster of independent Arab nation-states. Yet, there was no consensus about what form an Arab state or states should take.

The young women's letter to the congress concluded: "[b]e steadfast in your march towards achieving your just demands, you who are an example of true Arabism, and may history immortalize you!"<sup>45</sup> The grammatical person in this final line is interesting: "be steadfast in *your* march towards achieving *your* just demands." Instead of using the first person—e.g. "be steadfast in *our* march toward achieving *our* just demands"—Ghurayyib, Mahmasani and Salam did not claim a position for themselves in the pan-Arab movement, which sought national independence from the Ottomans. The pan-Arab conference in Paris did not secure an independent Arab state for the nation, but it impressed the notion of a unified Arab identity in its future constituents of both genders. Arab women would come to make claims of nationalists, but at the Paris conference women did not challenge the Arab nation to include equal rights for women.

In 1913, when Ghurayyib, Mahmasani and Salam wrote to the pan-Arab conference, an independent Arab women's movement was gestating but had not fully formed its own feminist ideology. The confluence of increased access to education, the circulation of a women's press and the regional and global mobility of its writers and

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<sup>45</sup> Anbara Salam Khalidi, *Memoirs of an Early Arab Feminist: The Life and Activism of Anbara Salam Khalidi*, trans. Tarif Khalidi (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 50.

editors as well as increased awareness of shared philanthropic efforts throughout the Arab world facilitated the emergence of a pan-Arab women's identity under Ottoman and French imperial rule.

### **Julia Tu'mi Dimashqiyya: An Educator with a Mission**

Julia Tu'mi Dimashqiyya's natal village, Moukhtara was a mixed town of Druze, Greek Catholic, and Maronite families.<sup>46</sup> The most powerful families in the town were Druze, with Julia's family being the most powerful land-owning Maronite clan. Her father, who was raised in the Greek Catholic faith, opened the doors of his home to travelers, regardless of their faith. Among the travelers who found refuge in the Tu'mi home while passing through the Shouf were American Protestant missionaries, who converted the Tu'mis to Protestantism.<sup>47</sup>

The missionaries passing through Moukhtara and stopping at the Tu'mi household did not operate in isolation. By the 1870s there was a large network of missionaries in the region.<sup>48</sup> Nor were Protestant missionaries from the United States a new presence in the region. The first permanent contingent of American missionaries arrived in Syria in 1820 and encountered an already crowded field of Catholic missionaries from France and

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<sup>46</sup> The Druze are a monotheistic religious and social community that is connected to the Ismailism branch of Shi'a Islam. The Druze are spread throughout Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel. The Maronites are an ethnoreligious community concentrated in the Mount Lebanon region. There are diasporic Maronite communities throughout the Americas. The Maronite Church is connected to the Holy See.

<sup>47</sup> Julia Tu'mi Dimashqiyya, *Min 'afarat al-Fajr*, 10-11. *Min 'afarat al-Fajr* is Dimashqiyya's memoir. It was never published and remains in the private collection of Lady Hala Cochrane in London. All citations from this document come from Hala Ramez Dimechkie, "Julia Tu'mi Dimashqiyya and *Al-Mar'a al-Jadida*, 1883-1954," (Unpub. MA thesis, American University in Beirut, 1998). The sections excerpted here were translated by Dimechkie for her M.A. thesis.

<sup>48</sup> For insight about how the Protestant missionary community operated and for information about how it viewed the local population, see Henry Harris Jessup, *The Women of the Arabs* (Boston, 1873). The book is available online at [http://www.gutenberg.org/files/17278/17278-h/17278-h.htm#Page\\_158](http://www.gutenberg.org/files/17278/17278-h/17278-h.htm#Page_158)

Orthodox missionaries from Russia.<sup>49</sup> The efforts of the Americans to convert Syrians to Protestantism were initially unsuccessful since the local population was uninterested and the Ottoman government forbade the conversion of Muslims.

The missionaries discovered the way to curry favor with the local population was to provide female education. Ottoman schools for girls did not satisfy demand. The Protestant missionaries' first tried to encourage the conversion of pupils; this system led to a rapid decline in enrollments. Parents wanted an education for their children, but they were not willing to have their children assume a new faith in the process. Thus, the missionaries compromised and began educating the local populations without the conversion requirement in the hopes of gaining a few converts.<sup>50</sup> The missionaries furthered their aim of converting the children by creating boarding schools, which took the children away from their home environments.

Missionary schools were not free, but the cost of enrollment was not prohibitively expensive, thus opening up girls' education to a new class of Syrians, which yielded a new generation of educated women and girls who otherwise would have been unable to pursue an education.<sup>51</sup> Educating daughters had only been available to the very wealthy

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<sup>49</sup> These missionaries were connected to the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (ABCFM). These American Protestant missionaries were not the only missionaries active in Greater Syria, nor were they the first missions to the region. For more information on the history of American missionaries in the Middle East see Mehmet Ali Dogan and Heather Sharkey, eds. *American Missionaries in the Middle East: Foundational Encounters* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011). See Ussama Makdisi. *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East*. (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 2008) for further information on early attempts by Protestant missionaries to convert the Middle East.

<sup>50</sup> The effects of missionary education on nationalist sentiment in Syria and Lebanon has been studied by Ussama Makdisi, *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991); and, David H. Finnie, *Pioneers East: The Early American Experience in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

<sup>51</sup> For additional information on the impact of foreign missionaries on girls' education in Syria see Ellen Fleischmann, "Under an American Roof": The Beginnings of the American Junior College for Women." *Arab Studies Journal* 17.1 (2009): 62-84 and "Our Moslem Sisters": Women of Greater Syria in



and the Tu'mis were not among this class of people. The predominance of Christian missionary schools contributed to a disproportionate number of Christian girls receiving an education. Few government schools operated at the time and Muslim parents were less inclined to send their daughters to a school with a Christian curriculum. Some Muslim, Druze, and Jewish parents sent their daughters to mission schools, nonetheless.

The demand for girls' education in Syria changed the dynamics of the American missionary system. Women had originally not been incorporated into the mechanics of the mission as individual actors; instead they accompanied their husbands on their missions abroad. The demand for girls' schools meant that there was a need for female missionaries to run the schools and teach the classes, however. The need for more American and British women to work in the missionary school system in Syria corresponded with an increase in single, educated women in both countries who sought fulfilling careers and found them through missionary work in educational, medical, and social welfare fields.<sup>52</sup> Some women responded to the demand for girls' education in Greater Syria without official board sanction. The first girls' school in Syria founded by an American, with the quintessential American name, Mrs. Smith, opened in 1835. Mrs. Smith was not directly connected to the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions. Mrs. Smith's school was quickly joined by other schools founded by American women with loose connections to the official Protestant mission in Syria.

The schools taught a variety of topics, including reading, spelling and writing, geography, arithmetic, English, and Scripture. Occasionally lessons in sacred music,

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the Eyes of American Protestant Missionary Women," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 9.3 (1998): 307-323.

<sup>52</sup> For more information on the "push" factors that caused single American and British women to turn toward mission work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Beth Baron, *The Orphan Scandal: Christian Missionaries and the Rise of the Muslim Brotherhood* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 39.

needlepoint, and Arabic were mixed into the curriculum. In 1902, there were fifty-six primary and secondary educational institutions along with a teacher-training center connected to the missions. With a staff of twenty female missionaries and 128 Syrian teachers, these schools educated a total of 4,262 pupils.<sup>53</sup>

Dimashqiyya's education began in Moukhtara at a school started by English missionaries. In 1892, at the age of ten, after she had mastered the basics of reading and mathematics, she was selected for her academic merits to attend the American School for Girls in Sidon.<sup>54</sup> She attended the school from the ages of eleven to fifteen.<sup>55</sup> She described her time in Sidon as four, "lovely, precious years."<sup>56</sup> In her memoir she recalled that after her move to Sidon,

I was now ready to begin my life's battle: I would stand alone without the help of any man, husband or brother; I would free my mother from her servitude. I would teach my brothers and sisters and free them too.<sup>57</sup>

Dimashqiyya's resolve to be an independent woman came from the social dynamics in her household. She recalled that her mother "was ignorant and all she knew was how to rock the cradle so the children would not wake her husband."<sup>58</sup> She did not want her life to replicate her mother's. Dimashqiyya's determination to use education to improve the lives of women of all ages captures the faith that she had in education's transformative value for women and girls; a belief developed in the course of her own missionary education.

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<sup>53</sup> Billie Melman, *Women's Orients: English Women and the Middle East, 1718-1918: Sexuality, Religion, and Work* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 55.

<sup>54</sup> For more information on the girls' schools in Sidon see Ellen Fleischmann, "Lost in Translation: Home Economics and the Sidon Girls' School of Lebanon, c. 1924-1932," *Social Sciences and Mission* 23 (2010): 32-62.

<sup>55</sup> Ruth Gage Colby, Sidebar on "Julia Toumeh Dimeshkie." *The Arab World*, Special Issue: *Today's Arab Woman* 4.5 (May-June, 1958): 8.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.* and Julia Tu'mi Dimashqiyya, *Min 'afarat al-Fajr*, 30.

<sup>57</sup> Julia Tu'mi Dimashqiyya, *Min 'afarat al-Fajr*, 21.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, 27.

Dimashqiyya continued her education in the teacher training program at the Shwayfat School, located in a Beirut suburb. She graduated from the program with a teaching diploma at the age of seventeen or eighteen. She tried to assume a teaching position at an English school in Palestine on the recommendation of her teacher from the Shwayfat School. The Englishman in charge of the school declared, however, “you are far too pretty to last as a teacher.”<sup>59</sup> Dimashqiyya returned to her room, grabbed a pair of scissors, gathered her long golden hair in a clump and cut it off. She brushed her newly shorn locks back like a boy’s and returned for a second, more successful interview—she got the job.<sup>60</sup> Dimashqiyya remained in Shefa-‘Amr, Palestine for two years before returning to Lebanon around 1900 to help care for her family after her mother died. In Lebanon, she took up teaching again at the Broumana High School in the town where her family had moved. She taught in Broumana for about ten years. From her teaching position in Broumana, she continued her program of improving women’s access to education with missionary-like zeal.

One day in 1910 Julia Dimashqiyya was walking down *Sharia Bliss* (Bliss Street)—named after the founder of the Syrian Protestant College, Daniel Bliss—near the college in the *Ras al-Hamra* neighborhood of Beirut. A young student at the university rode by on horseback. His horse startled and knocked Julia over into a ditch. She sustained serious back injuries as a result of the fall; the injuries and pain would affect her for the rest of her life. Yet, the accident yielded a surprising result. Unable to stop the charging animal, the student whose horse had hit Dimashqiyya directed the horse home where he told his father of the accident. His father, Salim ‘Ali Salam, was the president of the *Maqāṣid* Association, which was a prestigious site for Muslim scholarship in

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<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Dounia Mrowa, “Julia Touhme Dimeshkie.” *al-Kuliyah* 4 (April 1954): 15.

Beirut.

Salam went to the hospital to see if there was anything he could do to aid the victim. In spite of her physical pain, Dimashqiyya's mind was lucid when she received him. Salam was so impressed with her learning and eloquence that he continued to schedule visits to the hospital. He brought along Badr Dimashqiyya the scion of an important Muslim family in Beirut. Confined to a hospital bed, Julia met Muslim families for the first time in her life. Until then, her life had been conducted within the confines of the Druze and Christian communities of Mount Lebanon and Palestine; it was not uncommon for religious communities to self-segregate in neighborhoods in Beirut and in the surrounding countryside. Christians were clustered along the northern coast, in the northern valleys, and in the anti-Lebanon mountains; Muslims, Sunni and Shi'a, in the southern countryside, and along the southern coast in the cities of Saida (Sidon) and Sur (Tyre), and in the Bekaa; the Druze were in the Shouf Mountains southeast of Beirut.

When Julia Dimashqiyya had fully recovered, Salam asked her to become the director of the *Maqāṣid* Girls' College. Employing a Christian woman to administer a Muslim school was unprecedented. The appointment caused a scandal, until it became clear that Dimashqiyya was a talented instructor, who was invested in her students. She used unconventional teaching materials in the classroom. Among the materials she brought into the classroom were copies of recent Arabic language magazines and journals, including articles written by women. One of her pupils was Anbara Salim Salam, the second daughter of Salim Salam and one of the drafters of the Arab women's appeal sent to the pan-Arab conference in Paris. Anbara remembers that Dimashqiyya "applied herself with an open heart, ready to love and do her best for the students, teachers and *Maqāṣid* Association members. She had a magical effect on both her female

students and their parents.”<sup>61</sup> Dimashqiyya would go on to charm not just her pupils at the *Maqāṣid*, but also a whole generation of women. Her charisma helped her branch her career beyond the classroom. In the next few years Dimashqiyya would start her literary salon, which spawned a women’s society and a women’s journal, *al-Mar’a al-Jadīda* (The New Woman, 1921-1928).

In a series of public speeches in 1910 and 1911, Dimashqiyya began to make a name for herself as a reformer and advocate for improving the status of women in Syria. Her first public speaking engagement was not planned. She attended a fundraiser to establish a tuberculosis sanatorium in Lebanon. One of the organizers of the campaign, George Sursock, an influential man in Beirut, called on Dimashqiyya to add to the program on the spot. She stood up and talked to the audience from her seat.<sup>62</sup> She spoke so well that one audience member remembered “the room filled with gold.”<sup>63</sup> So too did the coffers of the campaign: her speech “greatly moved the audience, and the campaign fund swelled with contributions.”<sup>64</sup> After this impromptu address about her experience tending to and restoring to health a consumptive woman who had been left to die alone in a shack, Julia gave more speeches.

Three planned speeches followed the improvised address. The speeches *al-Samā’ al-awwal* (“The First Heaven”), *al-Malāk al-awwal* (“The First Angel”), and *al-Malāk al-thani* (“The Second Angel”) were published in *al-Muqtaṭaf* (The Digest, 1876-1952)—a popular Arabic-language journal published in Cairo by two Syrian immigrants who knew Dimashqiyya. The first speech presented the home as the “first heaven.” Dimashqiyya listed four ways that a woman could make her home warm and welcoming: maintaining a

<sup>61</sup> Khalidi, *Jawla fī al-dhikrayāt bayna Lubnān wa-Filasṭīn*, 67.

<sup>62</sup> Dounia Mrowa, “Julia Touhme Dimeshkie.” *al-Kuliyah* 4 (April 1954): 15.

<sup>63</sup> Emily Nasrallah, *Nisā’ Rā’idaāt min al-Sharq wa min al-Gharb* (Beirut: Mu’assasat Nawfal, 1986), 186.

<sup>64</sup> Dounia Mrowa, “Julia Touhme Dimeshkie.” *al-Kuliyah* 4 (April 1954): 15.

beautiful and orderly physical appearance, good household management (cleanliness), efficient home economics (thriftiness), and “you”—a reference to a woman’s character and soul. She emphasized to her audience, a meeting of the Orthodox Benevolent Society in Tripoli,

[y]ou are a queen and the home is your private kingdom. Love it and those in it. Make it great, and raise your children well. Let your home be a first heaven ... for it is the source of eternal happiness.<sup>65</sup>

The tone of Dimashqiyya’s first speech echoes the pervasive sentiment of the women’s movement in Syria at the time: women could contribute to society through the home. Many journal articles published at the same time addressed the same fact. If women focused on their role in educating their children, they would be contributing to society. This rhetoric closely mirrored the lessons inculcated by missionary schools, which emphasized that a woman’s place was in the home.

The second and third speeches orbited around similar themes of a woman’s role in society via raising good children—a theme called “Republican Motherhood” in the United States and Europe—and keeping a clean home using the latest home economic methods.<sup>66</sup> The themes of rearing children and keeping an efficient home surfaced in many countries at the turn of the twentieth century. Her second speech was before the *Jam’iyya al-Tahdhīb al-Fatāt al-Sūriyya* (The Refinement of Young Syrian Women Society) in January 1911. The organization chose its membership from “the most virtuous

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<sup>65</sup> Julia Tu’mi Dimashqiyya, “al-Samā’ al-awwal.” *al-Muqtataf* 37 (August 1910): 797-80.

<sup>66</sup> For further information on Republican Motherhood in the Middle East see Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation: The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing and Liberating Egypt, 1805-1923* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), especially Chapters 1, 4, and 5. The idea of “Republican Motherhood” was developed by Linda K. Kerber in *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1980). On Republican Motherhood in a non-American context, see also, Jenny B. White, “State Feminism, Modernization, and the Turkish Republican Woman,” *NWSA Journal* 15.3 (2003): 145-159.

Syrian women.”<sup>67</sup> In this speech the “first angel” lived in “the first home.”<sup>68</sup> It was clearly meant to be in conversation with the speech about the “first heaven.” The tone of the speech was didactic and emphasized the theme of “cheerfulness.” She told her audience that suffering, struggle, and strife could be full of important lessons. She exhorted her listeners “you should face your problems and troubles, accepting them and dealing with them patiently, learning from them and seeing the good in them ... You will be all the wiser for it.”<sup>69</sup> Dimashqiyya extolled her audience to use challenging moments to shore up the family because the family was the aperture through which women could influence society. Real beauty, Dimashqiyya emphasized at the close of the “first angel” speech, is joy and goodwill.

Dimashqiyya gave a second speech at the National Tuberculosis Hospital in Beirut. Despite being delivered to separate audiences, the second speech built out of the first and addressed the “second angel.”<sup>70</sup> The “second angel” was *‘atifa* (compassion), the sister of cheerfulness and goodwill. Combining the “first angel,” cheerfulness, and the “second angel,” compassion, was key to opening up a woman’s potential to contribute to society. Without compassion, Dimashqiyya explained to her audience, humans would be no different than animals. The language used by Dimashqiyya in her speeches, “good education,” “hard work,” “household management,” and “thriftiness” reflected the ethos of the Protestant work ethic, which had undoubtedly suffused her education.

Dimashqiyya’s speeches coupled this Protestant work ethic with general Christian

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<sup>67</sup> Julia Tu’mi Dimashqiyya, “al-Malāk al-awwal.” *al-Muqataṭaf* 38 (January 1911), FN 161.

<sup>68</sup> Julia Tu’mi Dimashqiyya, “al-Malāk al-awwal.” *al-Muqataṭaf* 38 (January 1911): 161-164, 217.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> “al-Malāk al-thani,” *al-Muqataṭaf* 38 (August 1911): 179-182. *Al-Muqataṭaf* published an additional speech of Julia’s in 1930, “al-ittiḥād al-nisā’ī al-sūrī al-lubnānī,” *al-Muqataṭaf* 77 (November 1930). These articles were cited in Hala Ramez Dimechkie, “Julia Tu’mi Dimashqiyyi and *Al-Mar’a al-Jadīda*, 1883-1954,” (Unpub. MA thesis, American University in Beirut, 1998).

principles of compassion.

With her trio of speeches about a woman's potential to change society from within the inner-sanctum of the home, Dimashqiyya, "inherited the banner of the women's awakening."<sup>71</sup> In delivering a speech and then having its transcript published in a journal or magazine, Dimashqiyya was able to preempt claims she did not create the content herself. Audiences could attest to her delivery and by all accounts she was a skilled orator. In time, Dimashqiyya turned to the press as a site for original production and not just a record of an action taken. Originally she had been reticent to write because she "fear[ed] people will spurn me if they don't like what I write, or that they will think that it is my father writing for me and that I am simply signing my name."<sup>72</sup>

These early speeches were an outgrowth of her missionary education and her faith and were thus products of their time. 'Afifa Sa'ab (1900-1989), another writer, teacher, and journalist, remembered these speeches as being groundbreaking because they emphasized a woman's autonomy from a male relative. The speeches advocated for a position for women that was new at the time. Sa'ab recalled

[t]oday [in 1954] we may not appreciate the full force of this call ... to truly appreciate its impact, we have to go back fifty years to a time when the jungle was really thick and women were really considered the possession of men.<sup>73</sup>

Dimashqiyya thought that a woman could expand her place in society through the influence she exerted at home. Dimashqiyya's thoughts on how a woman could contribute to society evolved as Syria changed from being under the control of the

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<sup>71</sup> "Jaridat Beirut" obituary reprinted in *Sawt al-Mar'a* 10 (October 1954): 28.

<sup>72</sup> Jirji Niquila Baz. *Sawt al-Mar'a* 10 (October 1945): 12. This fear of being accused of signing an article penned by a male was founded in truth. Margot Badran and miriam cooke explain in *Opening the Gates* that it was common for women to be accused of claiming men's work as their own. See Margot Badran and miriam cooke, eds. *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing*, Second Edition (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), xxvii.

<sup>73</sup> 'Afifa Sa'ab, "*Al-Ruwwad: Lidhikra Julia Dimashqiyya* (The Pioneers: In Memory of Julia Dimashqiyya)" (no publication listed) cited in Hala Ramez Dimechkie, "Julia Tu'mi Dimashqiyyi and *Al-Mar'a al-Jadida*, 1883-1954," (Unpub. MA thesis, American University in Beirut, 1998), 50.



Ottoman Empire to being disrupted by the chaos and devastation of World War I.

Dimashqiyya's earlier pledge to disavow marriage changed too. Badr Dimashqiyya, who had visited Julia in the hospital alongside Salim Salam, was so taken with her that he began courting her. At first she fled his advances. She left Beirut and traveled to Cairo. Badr followed Julia to Cairo where she had sought refuge at the home of the publishers of *al-Muqtataf*. Julia then fled to Europe. Eventually, Badr won her over and she returned to Beirut. Badr and Julia married in 1913. Their marriage caused a scandal in Beirut because inter-religious marriages, especially between a Maronite Christian and a Sunni Muslim, were uncommon in early twentieth century Beirut.

Dimashqiyya's path from the classroom to a position as a public advocate for improving the status of women in society at large was not the norm. Many Syrian women remained educators throughout the entirety of their professional careers. Throughout the region and especially in Syria due to the concentration of missionaries, more women were gaining access to education through the efforts of leaders like Dimashqiyya who were dedicated to expanding classroom sizes and educational opportunities to a new class of girls. The effects of increased female education were manifold and not just limited to increasing access to education for the next generation of women.

A by-product of women's education was a growing class of readers—women who were literate, curious, and committed to continuing their education outside the classroom. The population of female readers expanded rapidly in the Arabic-speaking world. For example, in the course of a decade, due to increased female education, female literacy in Egypt increased fifty percent, compared with only a six percent increase in male literacy.<sup>74</sup> The marked increase in literate women in Egypt in the span of a decade was

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<sup>74</sup> Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt*, 82. Similar figures are not available for Greater Syria.

not anomalous; instead it reflected a region-wide trend toward investing in female education. A vibrant field of women's newspapers and magazines emerged to cater to this new reading public, among them Dimashqiyya's *al-Mar'a al-Jadida*. Mixed in with the content germane to women's journals of the era were articles advocating for independence from the French and British. Women's writings about Arab nationalism and women's place in society were the major engine for disseminating a women's pan-Arab sentiment in the 1910s into the late 1920s. While readership was limited, women's journals circulated beyond the cities where they were published, thus reaching women outside the publishing capitals and facilitating the movement of ideas across local and international borders.

### **Mobile Writers, Moving Ideas: Women's Rights and Arab Nationalism in the Lebanese Diasporic Press**

The press was one means of circulating ideas about women's rights and Arab independence across in the Arab world and abroad. The journals, magazines, and newspapers were distributed to many subscribers in the Arab world and were also sent by mail to Arabs living in diaspora. Journals published and postmarked in Beirut made their way to Boston and São Paulo; journals printed in Arabic traveled through diasporic channels from Mexico City and Tucuman, Argentina to Beirut. The journals were not the only mobile part of the intellectual exchanges about women's rights and Arab independence: the female publishers and writers were mobile as well. Thus, two moving parts—the physical journals and the migrations of the women themselves—helped transport ideas about women's rights from other world regions. Ideas about national sovereignty and Arab independence, in particular, were also exchanged in the pages of women's journals. Writers and publishers living abroad recorded their experiences in the

Americas or in Europe for audiences in the Arab world and in the *mahjar* (Arab diaspora). The purpose of journals and magazines published in diaspora was to keep links with the *waṭan* (homeland) alive. Many Syrian women who had started women's journals in Cairo, Beirut, or Damascus, published new journals while abroad in permanent or temporary migration.

The first Arabic-language journal targeting a female audience, *al-Fatāt* (The Young Woman) was published in Alexandria in 1892. In 1910, there were fifteen Arabic-language women's journals.<sup>75</sup> By 1919, there were 29 Arabic-language publications printed by and for women.<sup>76</sup> The journals paired topics of interest to women with literary, educational, or scientific topics.<sup>77</sup> Women's publications in Beirut ran profiles of women leaders in Cairo and reported on concurrent women's activism in Alexandria and Aleppo. Syrian women in Beirut or regional diaspora in Egypt's main coastal city and in its capital—or even further afield in the *mahjar* in the Americas—founded the majority of these titles.<sup>78</sup> Women's journals were also published in smaller cities such as Zahlé and Tripoli in Lebanon and Hama and Homs in Syria.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Shereen Khairallah, *The Sisters of Men: Lebanese Women in History* (Beirut: The Institute for Women Studies in the Arab World, 1996), 177. She cites an article in *al-Ḥasnā'* written by Jirji Niquila Baz on the state of women's publishing, but the article is not cited.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.* and Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt*, 1.

<sup>77</sup> Home economics was classed as a science in these journals. Articles addressing modern and scientific means for keeping a house and for rearing children were frequently published in women's journals regardless of whether or not the journal labeled itself a scientific journal.

<sup>78</sup> Rose Antun (married name: Haddad), a Beirut woman living in Cairo, published *Majalla al-Saīdāt wa'l banāt* (the masthead listed an English title, "Ladies' and Girls' Review," Alexandria, 1903-1906), which changed its name to *Majalla al-Saīdāt* (translated by the editor as "The Ladies' Review, Arabic Magazine," Cairo, 1918-1921) and later *Majallat al-Saīdāt wa al-rajāl* ("Ladies' and Men's Review," Cairo, 1925-1931). The "Ladies' and Men's Review" was published with her husband Nicola Haddad. Labiba Hashem was Syrian; she published *Fatāt al-Sharq* (Daughter of the East) in Cairo from 1906 until 1937.

<sup>79</sup> Elizabeth Thompson conducted research in the early 1990s in Damascus and was able to access the national library where the Damascene journals, and those published in Hama and Homs, were stored. In the fall of 2012, when I was conducting research in the region, the national Syrian national library was closed because of the on-going conflict in Syria. My references to Syrian women's journals published in Damascus, Aleppo, Hama, and Homs are limited to the material quoted and cited by Thompson and the few editions of journals held in libraries in the United States.

Alexandra Avierino (1872-1927), the publisher of *Anīs al-Jalīs* (The Confidant) estimated that there were 31,200 potential readers in Egypt for her journal. Her figure included Syrian immigrants and non-Egyptian readers of Arabic.<sup>80</sup> Her estimate does not include readers outside of Egypt. The number of literate females in Syria, and elsewhere in the Arabophone world, who would also have been able to subscribe to Avierino's journal, is harder to estimate. Female readership of the Arabic press throughout the Arabic-speaking world probably did not exceed 75,000 people by the turn of the century.<sup>81</sup> Women's journals circulated within the most elite sliver of society. The vast majority of women in Syria at this time were illiterate. Reading articles aloud extended the reach of the journals to illiterate women.

Many of the readers, publishers, and authors who contributed to women's journals had received missionary educations. Some of the writers received supplemental Arabic tutoring. The access that women had to missionary education and Arabic tutoring signaled their status as educational and socioeconomic elites. Women's migration was possible because they came from families of traders and merchants and therefore had the income to leave Syria in search of greater prosperity abroad. The ability to migrate or travel to a new part of the world was another sign of the comparative privilege of the women who wrote and published abroad. Between 1880 and 1914, fifteen percent of the population of the people living in the Arabic-speaking Ottoman territories migrated to another city in the Ottoman Empire or emigrated abroad, mostly to the Americas. People from the Mount Lebanon region accounted for the vast majority of these migrants.

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<sup>80</sup> *Anīs al-Jalīs* 1.1 (1898): 15. Cited in Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt*, 81. Baron notes that the exact figure for literate females in Egypt in the 1897 census, including foreigners, was 35,199 (source: Census of 1907, 97). *Anīs al-Jalīs* has also been translated in English as "The Intimate Companion."

<sup>81</sup> This estimate is based off of rough school enrollment figures recorded by missionaries.

Before women founded their own journals in the Arab world or abroad, women contributed to the general Arabic press. *Al- Muqtaṭaf*, which had published Dimashqiyya's speeches, was one such journal. It is difficult to categorize the content of *Al- Muqtaṭaf* in terms other than eclectic. It ran articles on infectious diseases and microbes alongside articles about the differences between men and women. The same issue ran articles about the philosophical analysis of a man's position among the animals and another on the administration of Lebanon under Rustum Pasha, a vizier to Ottoman sultan in the sixteenth century. It also carried a summary of a report by an American commission on the bases of education; a collection of sayings about the dove drawn from Arabic literature; shorter notes about new industrial and agricultural methods and scientific discovers; and extracts from articles in the foreign press.<sup>82</sup>

*Al-Muqtaṭaf* was among the first journals to address women and women's issues, and it allowed women to contribute to its pages. The journal moved its editorial offices from Beirut to Cairo to take advantage of the more liberal atmosphere in Cairo at the time. The editors also founded *al-Muqattam* (1888-1956), which similarly addressed women's issues. Even in journals that welcomed female contributors, women usually used the byline "as translated from the foreign press."<sup>83</sup> The byline preserved anonymity and helped shelter the writer from backlash; not all readers would have wanted to read the thoughts of a woman. One exception to the rule of women not including their names in the byline was Sulayma Abi Rashid (1887-1919). She wrote using her own name for *al-Naṣīr al-Bayruti* (The Beirut Advocate) a daily newspaper published by her brother, 'Abbud. She later started her own periodical *Fatāt Lubnān* (Daughter of Lebanon, 1914).

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<sup>82</sup> This summary of articles is taken from the January 1896 issue of *al- Muqtaṭaf*. This list of articles is cited in Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 246.

<sup>83</sup> Khairallah, *The Sisters of Men*, 175; 'Amrusi, "Kharajna," 162-166.

It was a literary scientific journal that began publication in Beirut in January 1914 and ceased publication after eight issues due to the start of World War I. It was the first women's journal to be published in Beirut. The first women's journal published in Damascus was *Al-'Arūs* (The Bride, 1910-1926) founded by Mary 'Ajamy (1888-1965).

The publishing origins of women's journals were varied. Some journals that addressed women's issues were founded and published by men. Other journals paired women with men on the masthead. Most women worked independently as publishers and editors; sometimes women worked alongside a male partner—most commonly a male relative like Sulayma Abi Rashid's partnership with her brother. The tradition of women pairing with their male kin in publishing endeavors did not begin with the Abi Rashids, however. Hind Nawfal (1875-1957), a pioneering journalist from Tripoli who later moved to Alexandria, founded *al-Fatāt* (The Young Woman). Nawfal's father served as the editor of the journal, which used a blend of political and religious topics to defend women's rights.<sup>84</sup> The journalist Rose Antun Haddad (1882-1955), also from Tripoli, published *Majallat al-Sayyidāt wal Banāt wal Rijāl* (Magazine for Women, Girls, and Men) in Cairo alongside her brother Farah Antun, who independently wrote and published in the Arabic language press. Most Lebanese women who started publications prior to World War I did so away from the historic confines of Mount Lebanon and its surrounding territory. Many women, like Nawfal and Haddad, did so in Egypt.<sup>85</sup>

Jirji Niquila Baz (1881-1959), an early and ardent advocate for women's rights in

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<sup>84</sup> Khairallah, *The Sisters of Men*, 179. Beth Baron records the trend of husband and wife—or father and daughter, or brother and sister—pairs joining forces in publishing women's journals in *Women's Awakening in Egypt*, 71.

<sup>85</sup> Thomas Philipp, *The Syrians in Egypt, 1725-1975* (New York: Steiner, 1985); Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi, "The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration" (The Centre for Lebanese Studies and I.B. Tauris, 1992); Marilyn Booth, "Constructions of Syrian Identity in the Women's Press in Egypt" in *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Identities, and Pioneers*, ed. Adel Beshara (New York: Routledge, 2012), 223-246.

Syria, observed that the press was one of three anchors of the women's movement in Syria; the other two he identified were education and women's societies. Baz earned the nickname "*Naṣīr al-Mar'a*" (supporter of women).<sup>86</sup> His support of women's issues ran in the family—he was the son-in-law of Warda al-Yaziji (1838-1924), the preeminent female Lebanese poet of the late nineteenth century—and was evident in *al-Ḥasnā'* (The Beauty, 1909-1912) a magazine for women he founded in Beirut in 1909.<sup>87</sup> He observed

[e]ducated Syrian women soon realized that Eastern women could get to know their rights and duties and broaden the scope of their ideas only through the press, the most efficacious instrument after schools and associations. ... Only in Egypt that they were able to make their dream come true.<sup>88</sup>

Baz saw Egypt as a space that enabled women to execute their dream of running a women's journal, through which women could disseminate information about the rights of Eastern women.

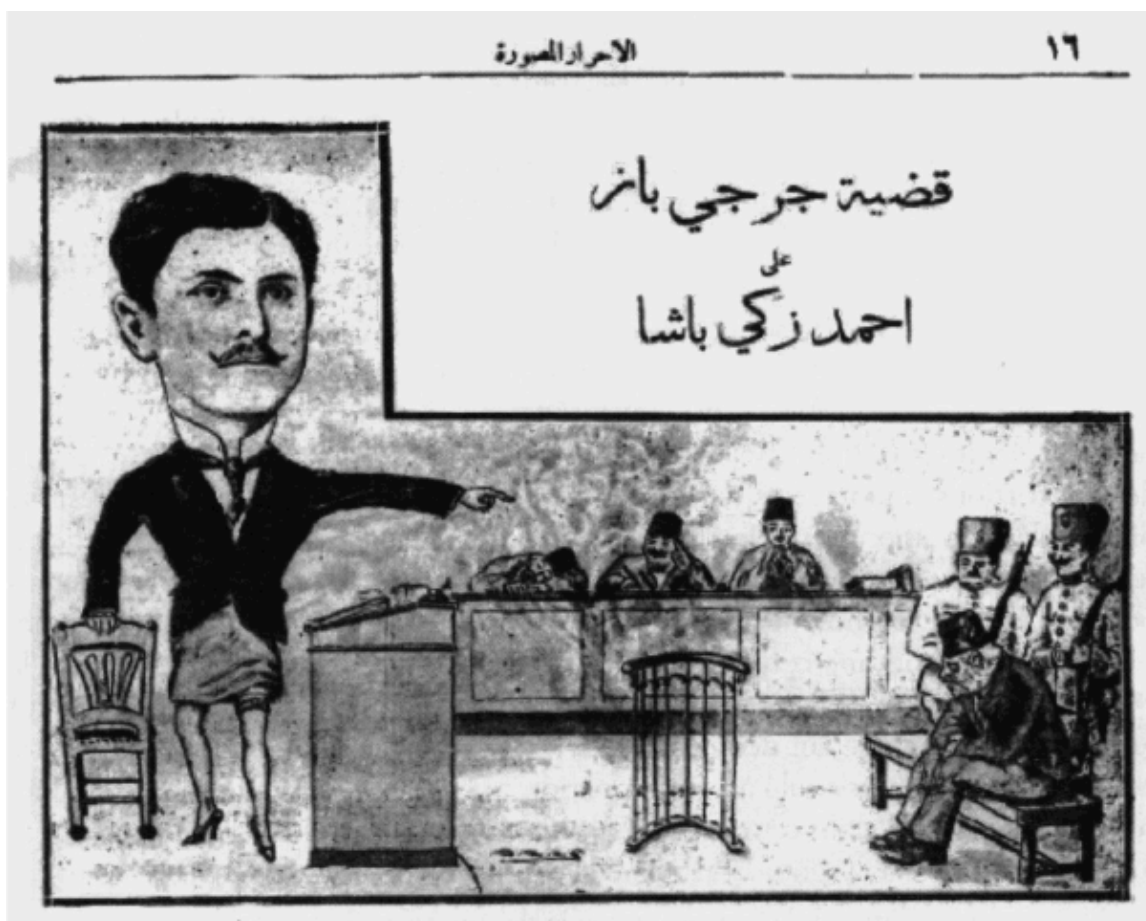
After *al-Ḥasnā'* shut down, Baz continued to contribute to other journals about women's issues. He produced a series of studies on the state of the field of women's publishing, first in *Fatāt al-Sharq* (1908), then in his own journal (1909), and finally in *Fatāt Lubnān* (1914).<sup>89</sup> Baz's final tally of women's periodicals listed twenty-five periodicals. The majority of the titles published by women were centered in Egypt (twenty)—many of these were published by Syrian women—with three titles published in Syria, one in Algeria, and one in New York. His tally missed a few short-lived titles, but was fairly comprehensive.

<sup>86</sup> *Al-Mar'a al-Jadīda* (March 1924): 91.

<sup>87</sup> The magazine ran from 1909-1912. A journal with the same title is published today.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Khairallah, *The Sisters of Men*, 176. The issue of *al-Ḥasnā'* is not cited.

<sup>89</sup> Jurji Niqula Baz, "Majallāt al-Nisā'iyya," *Fatāt al-Sharq* 2.6 (1908): 212-215; "Majallāt al-Nisā'iyya al-'Arabiyya," *al-Ḥasnā'* 1.1. (1909): 12-15; "Majallāt al-Nisā'," *Fatāt Luban* 1.1 (1914): 7-10.



Cartoon of Jirji Niqula Baz dressed in high heels—a woman’s shoe—addressing Ahmed Zaki Pasha concerning the rights of women. The image simultaneously lauds and ridicules Baz for his defense of women’s rights. Source: *Al-Ahrar al-musawwara*, illustrated supplement to *Al-Ahrar* (Free men), 1926.<sup>90</sup>

*Al-Hasnā’* and *Fatāt Lubnān*, like many other publications catering to a female readership, did not last for very long. About half of the journals did not last a year. A further fifth of the journals did not survive three years in print.<sup>91</sup> The short publication runs were caused by a variety of reasons ranging from financial difficulties to the publishers moving to the Americas, or in the case of *Fatāt Lubnān* the start of a global war. However, financial difficulties stemming from a lack of revenue brought in from advertisements and subscriptions were the most frequent factor in a magazine sending its last issue to press. Not all journals had short print runs; some journals survived for a

<sup>90</sup> Also referenced in Leyla Dakhli, “Beyrouth-Damas, 1928: voile et dévoilement,” *Le Mouvement social*, Special Issue: Des engagements féminins au Moyen-Orient (XXe-XXIe siècles) 231 (2010), 132.

<sup>91</sup> Baron, *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt*, 78.



decade or longer. Among those titles was Labiba Madi Hashim's *Fatāt al-Sharq* (Daughter of the East, 1906-1939), which ran an issue a month, with some slight breaks in publication in the summer months, for thirty-three years. Hashim also started a short-lived women's journal in Chile.

Some women picked up their pens for the first time away from their homelands, while others continued a practice they had begun before they emigrated; some women emigrated permanently, others only for a short time.<sup>92</sup> Even though Syrians had migrated abroad, they were still identified as Syrians and were invested in the future fate of Greater Syria. They used their status as naturalized citizens in new nations to try and bolster the Arab independence movement.<sup>93</sup> Contributing to the diasporic press and writing for journals printed in Syria and Lebanon with a diasporic dateline helped them stay connected to Syria.

The lives of three women—Labiba Hashim, Salwa Atlas, and 'Afifa Karam—help represent the publishing trends of women in diaspora and the mobility patterns of the Lebanese and Syrian diaspora. Hashim, Atlas, and Karam's migration away from the Mount Lebanon region of Greater Syria fits into a larger pattern of Syrian migration that began in 1870 and continued quite steadily for the next seventy years. United States immigration data recorded seventy-four immigrants from the Eastern Mediterranean between 1869-1885.<sup>94</sup> In 1897, 4,732 people from the Eastern Mediterranean emigrated

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<sup>92</sup> For more information on the effects on return migrations on Mount Lebanon and the state of Lebanon, see Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Home, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), especially Chapters 5, 6, and the Epilogue.

<sup>93</sup> Reem Bailony, *Transnationalism and the Syrian Migrant Public: The Case of the 1925 Syrian Revolt. Mashriq & Mahjar* 1.1 (2013), 8-29.

<sup>94</sup> Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985), 108.

to the United States.<sup>95</sup> In 1899, the United States Immigration and Naturalization Service office, then a branch of the Justice Department, added “Syrian” to its immigration records, which previously had categorized the populations arriving from Greater Syria as “Turks.” The new “Syrian” category caused confusion at the border, however. People the Bureau of Immigration categorized as Syrian—Arabs from Greater Syria—would refer to themselves as Arabians, Armenians, Assyrians, and Turks often synonymously and simultaneously with “Syrian.” However, the change in immigration data gathering made it easier to keep track of who was entering the United States from Greater Syria.

The United States Immigration and Naturalization Service recorded 86,111 Syrian immigrants between 1899 and 1914.<sup>96</sup> Men escaping the Ottoman draft pushed up immigration numbers in 1910. During WWI, Syrian immigration numbers reached a peak of 9,200 immigrants. By 1924, there were an estimated 200,000 Syrians in the United States; the tally included foreign-born Syrians and children born to Syrian parents in the United States.<sup>97</sup> The estimate accounted for return migrations. The 1924 Immigration Act by the United States Congress complicated immigration to the United States. Despite quotas, immigrants from Syria continued to enter the United States through the late 1940s. However, the United States was not the only destination for the women and men who left Greater Syria. Some migrated to Egypt and others boarded steamers headed for the ports of Central and South America—and onward to landlocked destinations. Like the United States, Argentina experienced waves of Syrian immigrants. In 1910, there were 51,000 immigrants from Syria in the country. By 1927, the number of Syrian immigrants

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<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *ibid.*

in Argentina had reached 165,000.<sup>98</sup> Argentina had the second-largest Syrian immigrant colony after the United States.<sup>99</sup> By 1914, approximately 450,000 people had emigrated from Greater Syria, which translated to more than fifteen percent of the regional population. The majority of the émigrés from Greater Syria were Christians.<sup>100</sup>

Labiba Madi Hashim (1882-1952), the founder and publisher of *Fatāt al-Sharq*, (Daughter of the East), was born in Beirut in 1882 and moved to Cairo when she was eighteen. Hashim gained a reputation as an expert on education after a series of her lectures were published as *Kitab fil-Tarbiya* (Book on Education) in Cairo in 1912. *Fatāt al-Sharq*, the journal she published in Cairo, focused on educational and family issues and targeted a female readership, started publication in 1906, the journal continued through 1939. When Hashim left Egypt in 1920, the journal was edited by Michel Tahhan and published by her daughter Elise As'ad Daghir.<sup>101</sup> Hashim traveled first to Lebanon and Syria and then to Chile. Soon after the end of World War I, Hashim returned to Khandaq al-Ghamiq, the neighborhood in Beirut where she was born. Her reputation as an education expert helped her secure the position of inspector general of schools in Syria during the brief period of King Faysal's Arab Government. She returned to Egypt after the Arab forces loyal to Faysal were defeated at Maysalun in July 1920.<sup>102</sup> Wanderlust, or perhaps the promise of new opportunities struck the following year, and Hashim boarded a steamship bound for the Americas. Once in Santiago, Hashim started another women's

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<sup>98</sup> Steven Hyland, "'Arisen from a Deep Slumber': Transnational Politics and Competing Nationalisms among Syrian Immigrants in Argentina, 1900-1922," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 43 (2011): 553.

<sup>99</sup> Kemal H. Karpat. "The Ottoman Emigration to America, 1860-1914," *IJMES* 17:2 (1985), 185.

<sup>100</sup> For example, 8,000 of the 51,000 Syrian immigrants in Argentina in 1910 were Muslim; in 1927, 61,000 of the 165,000 Syrians in Argentina were Muslim.

<sup>101</sup> Khairallah, *The Sisters of Men*, 182; Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt*, 27.

<sup>102</sup> Khairallah, *The Sisters of Men*, 182.

periodical, *al-Sharq wal Gharb* (East and West).<sup>103</sup> Hashim lived in Chile for two years, 1921-1923, before returning to Egypt. Little is known about either her motivations for immigrating to Chile or her decision to return to Egypt. Once back in Egypt, she picked up where she left off as a writer, publisher, lecturer, and educational advocate.

Hashim was not the only woman to leave a viable women's publication behind in exchange for the prospects of immigration to the Americas. Mary Yanni (1895-1967) started her career as a journalist for other women's publications and started her own journal *Minerva* in 1917. She emigrated to the Santiago, Chile in 1926 and left *Minerva* in the hands of her brother.<sup>104</sup> *Minerva* ceased publication shortly after Yanni emigrated. Yanni did not start her own journal in Chile but continued to write for the expatriate press, including *al-Waṭan* (The Homeland). Najla Abillama Ma'luf (1895-1967) started publishing *al-Fajr* (The Dawn, 1919-1926) in 1919. The publication remained viable until she emigrated to the United States in 1926. In the United States, she married Yusuf Ma'luf, who was the owner and publisher of *al-Ayyām* (The Days). She attempted to start her own publication in the United States, but the journal failed to take off and instead she joined the staff of *al-Huda* (The Guidance, 1898-1968), which was based in New York and circulated widely among the Maronite *mahjar* (diaspora) in the United States, including in Boston and Dearborn, Michigan.<sup>105</sup>

Salwa Atlas (1883-1949) had never written for an Arabic-language publication before emigrating to Brazil. In spite of her inexperience, Salwa Atlas founded a successful Arabic-language journal for the Syrian diaspora community there. Salwa Atlas

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<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, 183. The journal is cited by Khairallah, but I have been unable to locate it.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, 184.

<sup>105</sup> *Al-Huda* was a Maronite Christian publication that was published in New York City. For more information on its history and its influence on the Lebanese diasporic community in the New York metropolitan area until the 1960s, see Mary Mokarzel, *Al-Hoda, 1898-1968: The Story of Lebanon and its Emigrants Taken from the Newspaper al-Hoda* (New York: al-Hoda, 1968).

was born in Homs in 1883 and moved with her husband to São Paulo, Brazil in 1913. Her journal *al-Karma* (The Grapevine) began publication in 1914 and ceased publication with her death in 1949.<sup>106</sup> *Al-Karma* was the first magazine to be published by a Syrian woman in South America, but the content did not target a female audience. *Al-Karma* was a general magazine that targeted men and women of Maronite background. It published a range of articles: some reprints from journals in Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt; serial stories that unfolded over the course of many issues; excerpts and translations from classic literature and poetry; images of the weddings of the sons and daughters of the Syrian Christian community that had emigrated to São Paulo; pictures of the Syrian club; pictures of a Maronite Bishop's visit to São Paulo.

The Arabic language title *al-Karma*, and its Portuguese translation *A Vinha*, and the images of grapevines wrapping around the title of the journal evokes the connection between immigrants and their homeland and the larger Christian community. The magazine's heading quoted Proverbs 128:3 "[t]hy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house; thy children like olive plants round about thy table." The articles that targeted a female demographic in the magazine adhered to the vision presented in the passage from Proverbs. Women should be connected to the house and from that anchored position, they could serve their husband and children. Atlas' vision for women's role in society closely aligned with the vision put forth by Julia Dimashqiyya around the same time. Women were seen as tethered to the home in Greater Syria and in the Syrian diaspora in the pre-war era.

With time, the immigrant communities became increasingly integrated into the fabric of Brazilian, Argentinian, Mexican, and American society. The gradual shift from

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<sup>106</sup> The title was transliterated into Portuguese as *al-Carma*.

Arabic-only immigrant publications to publications that printed in Arabic, English, Portuguese or Spanish, depending on the country of residence, captures the porous boundaries of the immigrant community through the language-acquisition of immigrant children. *Al-Karma*'s publication history mirrors this trend. Over the 35 years of its publication, *al-Karma*, integrated more and more Portuguese content and eventually became a bi-lingual glossy magazine.

Arabic language publications printed in North and South American capitals ran articles that addressed the status of women in their new countries, but they were also acutely aware of the status of women back home. Women in diaspora hosted charity events to raise money for a variety of causes. During World War I, the Society for the Relief of Syria and Lebanon in Boston raised funds for communities in Greater Syria affected by wartime famine.<sup>107</sup> Similar organizations operated in Mexico and Brazil. Many Syrian and Lebanese women's civic, cultural, and auxiliary clubs were created in major cities in North and South America.<sup>108</sup> Often these women's charity organizations emerged out of Syrian *nādi* (clubs) that were community centers for Syrian immigrants.

Syrian women turned to the press as a means of sharing their interactions with the world with a curious readership back home and perhaps to work through their experience

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<sup>107</sup> See the records of the Lebanese Syrian Ladies' Aid Society (Boston), 1917-2005 at the Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts. The minutes of the organization are open to the public, but the files on the organization's aid activities are closed to the public to preserve the privacy of the families who received aid.

<sup>108</sup> Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico: Middle Eastern Immigrants in Modern Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), especially Chapter 6. The book uses Spanish sources and accordingly the book is an intervention into the historiography on Mexican national identity. The book encourages scholars in that field to expand the sources of Mexican national identity beyond indigenous and Spanish traditions. Other scholars look at how Arab national identity was forged in diaspora. See Stacey Farenthold, "Making Nations in the Mahjar: Syrian and Lebanese Long-Distance Nationalisms in New York City, São Paulo, and Buenos Aires, 1913-1929," (Unpub. PhD dissertation, Northwestern University, 2013); Farenthold, "Sound Minds in Sound Bodies: Transnational Philanthropy and Patriotic Masculinity in *al-nadi al-homsi* and Syrian Brazil, 1920-32," *IJMES* 46.2 (May 2014): 259-283.

of being torn between two societies. One woman especially active in using the press to share her experiences was ‘Afifa Karam. Karam was born in 1883 Amsheet on the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean in the Mustarrifiyet of Mount Lebanon. The city runs to the water’s edge and is encircled by groves of olives and citrus. Ernest Renan (1823-1892), a French archeologist and philologist, who lived in the small town with his wife and sister-in-law while in Greater Syria on an archeological dig, called Amsheet “paradise.”<sup>109</sup> Karam’s father and mother ensured that she received her primary education as she was a promising student. When she outgrew the limits of the school in her native village, her parents sent her to the School of the Holy Family in nearby Jubail (Byblos). Karam’s education was cut short by the death of her father in 1895, leaving the family without funds to support her studies. ‘Afifa married her elder cousin Karam Yusuf Karam the following year when she was thirteen.

Karam Yusuf Karam had already emigrated to the United States and had a successful business there. The couple settled in Shreveport, Louisiana. Shreveport did not have the same concentration of Arabic-speaking immigrants as New York, Boston, or Dearborn, Michigan.<sup>110</sup> To keep in contact with the larger *mahjar* (Arab diaspora) in the United States, ‘Afifa started to write and became an astute observer of life in America.

She contributed frequently to *al-Huda*. After a few years as a contributor, Karam started

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<sup>109</sup> Renan gave a famous speech in 1882 entitled “What is a Nation?” The speech sparked a lively debate between Renan and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, a wandering Islamic philosophe who was influential in laying the foundations for political Islam. Renan believed that Islam was incompatible with science and the modern world system. Al-Afghani believed the success of Islam lay in its ability to blend Islamic tradition and modern science.

<sup>110</sup> Kathleen Benson and Philip M. Kayal, *A Community of Many Worlds: Arab Americans in New York City* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002); Alixa Naff, *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985); Sarah Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California, 2009); Evelyn Shakir, *Bint Arab: Arab and Arab American Women in the United States*. (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1997). One contemporary study on gender in diaspora is by Jamillah Ashira Karim, *American Muslim Women: Negotiating Race, Class, and Gender within the Ummah* (New York University Press, 2009); another is edited by Rabab Abulhadi and Evelyn Alsultany, *Arab & Arab American Feminisms: Gender, Violence, and Belonging* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010).

her own journal *Majallat al-'aālam al-jadīd al-nisā'iyya* (The New World, A Ladies Monthly Arabic Magazine, 1909-1913).<sup>111</sup> This journal fit into two larger publishing trends: the burgeoning of Arabic-language publications produced in Little Syria in Lower Manhattan along the Hudson in New York City and the development a publishing industry dedicated to producing journals for women.<sup>112</sup>

In Karam's correspondence with women's journals back in Syria, she worked through what it was like to try to forge a life as an Arab immigrant in the United States. Karam was a young woman when she emigrated to the United States and she never returned to her native village. Her comparison of the quality of life for women in the United States with that of women in Syria is influenced by the taint of memory and the material she read in the Arabic press entering the United States from the Arab world.

Karam occasionally wrote letters for Julia Dimashqiyya's magazine *al-Mar'a al-Jadīda*. This correspondence was published under the title "letter from abroad." She also wrote a column for *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* (The Egyptian Woman, 1920-1939) owned by Balsam 'Abd al-Malik.<sup>113</sup> The column in the Egyptian journal was called "*Hadith al-Mahjar*" ("Talk of the *Mahjar*"). The articles for the Egyptian journal ran between 1913-

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<sup>111</sup> Other sources cite the start of this journal as 1911; however it seems likely that the journal published its first issue toward the end of 1909 and may have had a spotty production record until 1911. A copy of the journal from 1913 states that the journal was in its fourth year. No records of the journal exist after 1913 and it seems likely that the journal ceased publication that year, probably due to financial difficulties and paper shortages during the war.

<sup>112</sup> The community of Arabs that lived in Little Syria, which flanked Washington Street and the small streets running into it from Battery Park to Rector Street, was displaced in the 1940s to make way for the construction of the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel and later the World Trade Center. The cornerstone of a St. Joseph's Maronite Christian church was found in the rubble left behind by the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. Many of these immigrants relocated to Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn, where a large concentration of Arab-Americans continues to live and own businesses to this day. Though more recent waves of immigrants from the Arab world have settled in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn (predominately Lebanese immigrants) and Ditmars Boulevard, Queens (mostly Egyptian immigrants; the neighborhood is dubbed "Little Egypt.")

<sup>113</sup> The column is referenced in Imilie Faris Ibrahim, *Adībāt Lubnaniyāt* (Beirut: Dār al-Rihani, 1964), 52. Ibrahim cites the journal she wrote for as an Egyptian *al-Mar'a al-Jadīda*. However, no women's journal with this title was published in Egypt at this time. It is likely that Karam wrote for *al-Mar'a al-Misriyya* (The Egyptian Woman), which was owned and published by Balsam 'Abd al-Malik.



1916 and covered a range of topics and often addressed the differences in women's rights in the United States and Greater Syria, as she perceived them. Her letters-cum-columns described life for middle-class women in the United States. She noted their access to education, their fight for political rights (the suffrage movement was on the cusp of securing the franchise for women), and their contributions in literary and scientific fields.

The main purpose of her column was to chronicle the experiences of the immigrant woman. "Would you permit me—oh, the daughter of my less developed country—to tell you something about your emigrant compatriot?"<sup>114</sup> She wrote frankly about the challenges immigrant women from Syria faced in the United States. One challenge was that the immigrant woman straddled "two contradictory cities, one of which was purely Eastern, and the other is absolutely American. And we [emigrant women] are incapable of reaching the degree of status we want in either of them."<sup>115</sup> As women in Lebanon they were barred from certain rights and privileges; as immigrant women in the United States they looked at the campaign for women's suffrage that was forming around them, but they realized that as immigrants they would be denied the vote.

Karam was aware that creating articles full of comparisons between the traditions of Syria and those she witnessed in the United States might seem as if she favored the American system. She asked, "[d]id you imagine from reading my past letters that I lean towards favoring your emigrant sister over you? If that is what happened, then it is clearly a mistake."<sup>116</sup> Instead, Karam emphasized that her intent was "to show a state of which you are ignorant, and to introduc[e] you to a sister with whom you have become at

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<sup>114</sup> Ibrahim, *Adībāt Lubnaniyāt*, 52. Translated by Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home*, 157. All translations of Ibrahim's discussion of Karam's letters to the Egyptian *al-Mar'a al-Jadīda* come from *Inventing Home*.

<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*, 99.

<sup>116</sup> Ibrahim, *Adībāt Lubnaniyāt*, 100.

opposite ends of the spectrum. That is all I want.”<sup>117</sup> Telling women in Lebanon about the status of immigrant women in the United States was not meant to exalt American and immigrant women in the United States at the expense of the women who had remained in Lebanon. Rather the intention was to demonstrate the complicated position that immigrant women were in: through their migration they had catapulted into a new and different framework for women’s rights and one “at the opposite end of the spectrum” from what they had experienced in Syria. Condescension sometimes crept into Karam’s correspondences with women in Syria. In spite of some lapses in tone, Karam was sincere in her efforts to inform her sisters back in the mountains and valleys of Lebanon about what life was like for her and other immigrant women in the United States. Readers back in Lebanon were indeed interested in the experiences of the women who had left Syria in search of opportunities elsewhere.

Karam’s column and musings on migrant life were popular. She emphasized the possibilities that knowledge of the status of women in the Americas might open up for women who had not emigrated. The editor of *al-Mar’a al-Misriyya* introduced Karam’s column by thanking her for her contributions. “We thank Mrs. ‘Afifa and beg of her to continue corresponding with us with these worthy benefits that cannot be obtained except by living amongst the most advanced peoples of this earth in literature and science.”<sup>118</sup> The editor of the journal saw that there were elements of society in the United States that could benefit women in Egypt and Syria. The editor did not go as far as to advocate for a wholesale adoption of Western traditions. Karam stopped short of this as well. Instead, Karam advocated for a selected adoption of traditions from elsewhere.

If the result came to be as all of us wish for it, which is for us to have in the old country a

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<sup>117</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Ibrahim, *Adībāt Lubnaniyāt*, 100.

renewed and innovated Eastern civilization [that is] not a Western imitation, [but] which will equal Western civilization in advances and elevation, and not be of them, then the advantage will be yours [the woman in Lebanon] in your country, where are your schools, your language, and your customs, and your intellectual salons. But if the future hides a grafting unto the civilizations of the West and our becoming part of it ... your emigrant sister will be without a doubt ahead of you for what she has available to her of means, power, and capabilities.<sup>119</sup>

Karam saw a renewed Eastern tradition as promising for the status of women in Syria.

She was aware of the obstacles that women in the West faced and believed that some of those obstacles could be eliminated if an “Eastern” tradition emerged to balance the Western one. Karam imagined a future for women in the homeland that built out of local languages, cultures, and existing networks of intellectual exchange as offering a promising option for the advancement of women. She was living in the United States and while there were some things that the Western system got right (opening up avenues for women to make scientific and literary contributions; the right to vote), she did not think the system of women’s rights that she experiences in the United States would serve her “sisters” at home in their quest to secure more educational opportunities and political rights for women. She encouraged her readers to innovate and come up with a future that fit Syria.

Some of Karam’s letters and articles circulated in the general press, such as a 1921 article “*Athar al-Mar’a fawqa Darih al-Mar’a*” (Memory of Women), which appeared in *al-Akhlaq* (Ethics) in New York City and later in *al-Muqtataf*.<sup>120</sup> This article recorded her views on two contemporary women writers, Malak Hifni Nasif and Mayy Ziyada.<sup>121</sup> Karam’s profile of Ziyada reflects her awareness of contemporary Lebanese

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<sup>119</sup> *ibid.*, 101-102.

<sup>120</sup> Khairallah, *The Sisters of Men*, 183.

<sup>121</sup> For more information on the lives of Malak Hifni Nasif (pen name: Bahithat al-Badiya) see Wen-chin Ouyang, “Mapping Arab Womanhood: Subject, Subjectivity and Identity Politics in Biographies of Malak Hifni Nasif,” in *Sensibilities of the Islamic Mediterranean: Self-Expression in a Muslim Culture from Post-Classical Times to the Present Day*, ed. Robin Ostle (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2008). On the life of Mayy

women writers. Karam's article about famous Lebanese women writers fits into a publishing pattern: it was not uncommon for women's journals and magazines to offer biographical articles about historic and contemporary women leaders.<sup>122</sup> The reprinting of the article captures a general fascination with the output of contemporary women writers and an awareness of those writers outside Greater Syria and Lebanon.

Karam's own life was filled with literary output. In addition to writing for her own short-lived publication, for other women's publications, and for the general Arabic press, 'Afifa Karam wrote three novels. *Badi'a wa Fu'ad* (Badi'a and Fu'ad), the first of the three, was published in Cairo in 1906. A second, *Fatima al-badawiya* (Fatima the Bedouin) was published in 1908 in New York. Her third novel came two years later in 1910, *Ghadat 'Amshit* (The Beauty of 'Amsheet). The final title was also published in New York City.<sup>123</sup> These were among the first novels written in Arabic by a woman and were the first novels printed by an Arab-American woman in the United States.<sup>124</sup> Karam continued to publish articles about the status of women and translate books from English into Arabic until her death in 1924.

Karam predeceased her contemporaries from the 1880s generation, but she influenced how women from Greater Syria came to understand the rights awarded to

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Ziyada, see Rose Ghorayeb, "May Ziadeh (1886-1941)," *Signs* 5.2 (1979): 375-382. For translations of selections of their work see, Bahithat al-Badiya's "Warda al-Yaziji" and May Ziyada's "The Elopement and the Impossible Joy" in Margot Badran and miriam cooke, eds. *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004). This dissertation does not focus on female poets and novelists from Syria and Lebanon.

<sup>122</sup> For more information on and cogent analysis of the production and circulation of biographies of famous women, see Marilyn Booth. *May Her Likes Be Multiplied: Biography and Gender in Egypt*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), especially "Chapter 6: Jeanne D'Arc, Egyptian Nationalist: Community, Identity, and Difference" and Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home*, 147-159.

<sup>123</sup> For more information on 'Afifa Karam's literary career, see the forthcoming dissertation by Elizabeth Claire Saylor. "A Bridge Too Soon: The Life and Works of 'Afifa Karam, the First Arab Woman Novelist in America," (PhD. Dissertation (not yet defended), Department of Near Eastern Studies, University of California, Berkeley). For a preview of its argument see: "Elizabeth Claire Saylor on Little Syria and 'Afifa Karam as an Early Arab Literary Model and Feminist" <http://vimeo.com/66605766>.

<sup>124</sup> For information on other early Arab female novelists see Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt*, 51-57.

women in the United States. She provided a point of comparison for women's rights campaigns in Greater Syria at the end of the Ottoman era and in the beginning of the French mandate. Karam was not alone in expanding the horizon of Syrian women. The first edition of Nawfal's *al-Fatāt* (1892), printed in Alexandria, published articles about women's activities in Cairo and Lebanon. By the mid-1920s the connections emphasized by women's journals had expanded in scope to include profiles of women in other parts of the world, such as the short reports on leaders of the women's movement in China or Turkey published in *L'Egyptienne* (The Egyptian Woman, 1924-1937). Information about women's movements elsewhere helped the women who read the press in Greater Syria generate ideas about what rights and privileges could be secured from the state, such as girls' education and basic health services—services that women's societies had provided. Accounts of the rights won by women not just in the United States, but also in Brazil and Chile and biographies written about women from Europe and Asia helped the women who never left their reading rooms learn about the wider world of women. This information helped shape the future of the women's rights movement in Syria and Lebanon. The *mahjar* (diaspora) connections of women from Syria helped open up the horizons of women in the region to the stirrings of the women's movement in other world regions.

The women's literary *nahḍa* in Greater Syria and in the diaspora was accompanied by a women's awakening in other sectors of society.<sup>125</sup> The elevated educational status of the leaders of the *nahḍa al-nisā'iyya* (women's awakening) put them in the position to engage in activities in each of the spheres demarcated by Baz—

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<sup>125</sup> The women's journals founded between 1893 and 1925 represent the first wave of women's publishing. A second flourishing of the women's press would accompany independence from French and British rule in the 1940s.

education, the press, and charity. These spheres were not discrete: the drive to improve women's access to education was one of the primary objectives of early women's organizations; salons were often the incubator for starting girls' schools. Dimashqiyya was among the women who did many things in the women's movement: she wrote content for and edited a journal, brought women together to discuss ideas in a literary salons, and engaged in local charity. Through these many points of convergence and contact, local women's networks began to take root. A regional women's consciousness started to form before World War I as local networks grew out of women's salons, publications, and organizations and radiated regionally. World War I catalyzed the creation of a regional women's network grounded in an Arab identity.

### **World War I and Nascent Nationalist Networks**

World War I was brutal in Europe. It also devastated the Middle East—the forgotten front.<sup>126</sup> As the Ottomans entered the war with the Germans, the war arrived in the region via French-orchestrated port blockades to prevent Ottoman trade. The closure of the ports of the Eastern Mediterranean caused food shortages among the civilian population because food was rationed to the armed forces. The food shortage in Greater Syria tipped into a famine in 1916 after local harvests failed for three successive years between 1914 and 1916. A locust infestation in 1915 killed the few crops that managed to grow and had not been appropriated to feed troops. The civilian death toll was particularly pronounced in the Mount Lebanon region, where the combination of famine and disease killed a third of the local population—more than 100,000 people.<sup>127</sup> The population of Beirut more than

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<sup>126</sup> On World War I in the Middle East see the *IJMES*, Special Issue: World War I, 46.4 (2014).

<sup>127</sup> Melanie Tanielian. "Politics of Wartime Relief in Ottoman Beirut (1914–1918)," *First World War Studies* 5:1 (2014), 69. The estimate regarding number of deaths caused by the famine range from the most commonly cited figure of 100,000 to 500,000. George Antonius cites the death toll from the wartime famine

halved from 180,000 to 75,000 between 1914 and 1916.<sup>128</sup> As a percentage of the total local population, more people died in Greater Syria during World War I than anywhere else.

In the face of widespread devastation and tragedy, women's organizations, such as the *Jam'iyyat al-Sayyidāt al-Suriyyat* (Syrian Women's Association) tried to provide whatever services they could to the local populations. Khalidi recalled her mother taking bread with her to distribute to the starving when she left home. Distributing change to the needy was useless because there was no food to buy.<sup>129</sup> More dramatically, women orchestrated anti-Ottoman bread riots in 1916. Syrians living abroad in the *mahjar* tried to funnel aid into the country to help alleviate the humanitarian crisis begot by the conditions of war. The Ottomans also tried to deliver aid, but their efforts to provide relief to its starving citizens were too little too late.<sup>130</sup>

The Arab Revolt, which was orchestrated by the British and led by T.E. Lawrence, is arguably the most famous World War I campaign in the Middle East.<sup>131</sup> The revolt is a misnomer because it did not represent all Arabs. The revolt started in the northern deserts of the Arabian Peninsula and traveled north to Damascus. The revolt was

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in Greater Syria as close to 350,000 people (*The Arab Awakening*, 241). Using German records, Linda Schatkowski Schilcher records the number of deaths at 500,000 ("The Famine of 1915-1918," in *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon*, ed. Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann (Beiruter Texte und Studien, Bd. 96. Würzburg: Ergon in Kommission, 2004), 230).

<sup>128</sup> Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege and Gender in French Syria* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 21.

<sup>129</sup> Anbara Salam Khalidi, *Memoirs of an Early Arab Feminist: The Life and Activism of Anbara Salam Khalidi*, trans. Tarif Khalidi (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 68.

<sup>130</sup> Melanie Tanielian, "Politics of Wartime Relief in Ottoman Beirut (1914–1918)," *First World War Studies* 5:1 (2014), 69 and Tanielian, "Feeding the City: The Beirut Municipality and the Politics of Food during World War I" *IJMES*, Special Issue: World War I, 46.4 (2014): 737-758.

<sup>131</sup> T.E. Lawrence published his memoirs, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922), about his experiences serving as a liaison officer in the British Army during the "Arab Revolt" against the Ottoman Empire from 1916-1918. He led rebel forces during the revolt. David Lean transformed Lawrence's memoirs into the Hollywood epic, *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). New scholarship is countering the hagiographic tradition of the role of Lawrence in fomenting an Arab identity, see Scott Anderson, *Lawrence in Arabia: War, Deceit, and Imperial Folly and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Doubleday, 2013).

staged in an effort to split the Ottoman forces onto two fronts and aid the British in securing their wartime aims in the Middle East. The British promised Sharif Husayn of Mecca an independent Arab state after the war, in return for leading a revolt against the Ottomans. The Arabs aligned themselves with one colonial power—the British—in an effort to secure their independence from the Ottoman Empire, which many Arabs had come to identify as a foreign occupying force.

However, Arab designs for post-war independence were thwarted by post-war political maneuverings orchestrated by the British, French, and Americans in Versailles after the war. During the war, the British promised the French government that it would support its claims to areas of influence in Greater Syria. The French Mandate for Syria was the result of the British honoring their wartime promises to the French and revising the promises to the Arabs. The Arabs were denied independence, but the Hashemite family was rewarded for its loyalty. The revolt cemented the allegiance of the Hashemite family to the British Empire—an allegiance that would have lasting consequences after the war in Syria, Iraq, and Jordan.<sup>132</sup>

When the Arabs learned of French claims to an area of influence that extended through much of Greater Syria, they worked through all available channels to prevent the French from entering Syria as a colonial power. The locals had not forgotten the devastation and starvation caused by the French only a few years prior. At the Syrian General Congress, hosted in Damascus in 1919, the assembled delegates went as far as to advocate that the mandate be given to the Americans.<sup>133</sup> The Arabs believed the promises

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<sup>132</sup> The Hashemite family is still in power in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

<sup>133</sup> Congress debated whether or not the United States should assume a mandate. The debate in Congress was about a proposed American mandate for Armenia. It was ultimately decided that the US would not take on a mandate. On the debate over the American mandate for Armenia see Max Reibman, “The Case of William Yale: Cairo’s Syrians and the Arab Origins of American Influence in the Post-Ottoman Middle



of President Wilson's famous "Fourteen Points Speech," which advocated for the self-determination of nations.<sup>134</sup> Letters and resolutions registering Arab condemnation of the fact they were denied self-rule were dispatched to the statesmen assembled in Versailles, who decided the postwar fate of the Arab world after the defeat and dismembering of the Ottoman Empire.

When the League of Nations established the French Mandate for Syria in 1920, there was widespread popular revolt, which took a variety of forms, ranging from petitions to the League of Nations to armed resistance. Arabs from around the world, including those in diaspora, dispatched telegrams to the British, American, and French governments and to the League of Nations registering their disbelief and displeasure. One telegram sent by the Palestine Arab Women Union of Jerusalem read "[t]he draft mandate for Palestine as submitted to the League usurps Palestine Arabs of the most sacred rights for which Palestine Arab women are prepared to die ..."<sup>135</sup> This impassioned telegram was just one of many thousand censuring the mandates. Another telegram read, "The Arab students in Beirut, 512 in number, protest against the Balforie

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East, 1917-1919." *IJMES*, Special Issue: World War I, 46.4 (2014): 681-702 and Mark Malkasian, "The Disintegration of the Armenian Cause in the United States, 1918-1927." *IJMES* 16.03 (1984): 349-365; Merrill Peterson, *"Starving Armenians": America and the Armenian Genocide, 1915-1930 and After*. (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2004), Chapters 3 and 4; Jay Winter, ed. *America and the Armenian Genocide of 1915*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Harry Howard, "An American Experiment in Peacemaking: The King-Crane Commission," *The Muslim World* 32.2 (1942): 122-146; Philip Marshall Brown, "The Mandate over Armenia." *The American Journal of International Law* 14.3 (1920): 396-399.

<sup>134</sup> For more information on the Syrian National Congress of 1919 see Philip Khoury, "Factionalism among Syrian nationalists during the French Mandate." *IJMES* 13.04 (1981): 441-469; Khoury, "Divided Loyalties? Syria and the Question of Palestine, 1919-39." *Middle Eastern Studies* 21.3 (1985): 324-348. For more on the global reverberations of this speech and how it was received in colonized territories, see Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford, 2009). The book provides a history of how the ideals espoused in Wilson's famous Fourteen Points speech were heard, absorbed, and later articulated by populations that sought independence from colonialism, especially new colonial orders that were imposed after the close of World War I.

<sup>135</sup> LN R15 1/15385/2413. Mandates Section. Telegram to League of Nations Secretary-General from the Palestine Arab Women's Union of Jerusalem. 1 July 1922.

[sic] declaration.”<sup>136</sup> Collectively, Arabs decried the denial of the opportunity for self-rule.

The French Mandate for Syria was not the only mandate imposed upon Arab populations without their consent. The British mandate for Palestine and the British mandate for Iraq were also secured by the victors of the world war through post-war negotiations—negotiations conducted without representatives from the Arab world—and sanctioned by the League of Nations. World War I removed the Ottomans and replaced them, except in Turkey, with a foreign occupying power. The mandates forced citizens in Beirut, Damascus, Aleppo, and in smaller towns as well to understand a common Arab fate across the borders of the mandates.

There was a fleeting moment of victory for Arab independence at the close of World War I. King Faysal, one of the sons of Sharif Husayn, ruled over an independent Syria from March to July 1920.<sup>137</sup> Faysal was crowned King of Syria because of the deal his family arranged with the British. As the French forces landed and sought to depose Faysal, armed anti-French warfare spread throughout Syria, including women. Some women took up arms; a greater number women took up bandages and tended to the war wounded.<sup>138</sup> One female volunteer reportedly asked her brother “how can you go and not me?” Before departing to fight at Maysalun, the famous battle the Syrians waged against the French army to stave off the arrival of the French mandate, she reminded her brother

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<sup>136</sup> LN R15 1/15385/2413. Mandates Section. Telegram to League of Nations Secretary-General from Arab students in Beirut. 10 November 1926. On Palestinian petitions to the League, see Natasha Wheatley, “Mandatory Interpretation: Legal Hermeneutics and the New International Order in Arab and Jewish Petitions to the League of Nations” *Past and Present* (forthcoming May 2015).

<sup>137</sup> See James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) for a detailed profile about the period that led to the creation of the short-lived Arab state and the fight to keep it alive as the French invaded.

<sup>138</sup> An article in *al-‘Asima*, 22 (December 1919): 3, described two women from Iraq who also joined the Syrian military. The article does not mention whether the unit(s) they joined consisted of regulars or irregulars. James Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*, 213.

“[t]he wife of the prophet waged jihad.”<sup>139</sup> Another woman, Nazik ‘Abid (1887-1959), took part in the battle. She served alongside the Syrian Minister of Defense, who supposedly died in her arms. For her bravery and service to the Syrian nation, King Faysal gave ‘Abid the honorary rank of captain in the Syrian army. It was a title with short-lived currency.

The anti-French battles culminated in defeat at the battle of Maysalun. With French control over the territory secured, one of the first acts of the French mandate government was to redraw the administrative borders of Ottoman Greater Syria. The Lebanon district was carved in an oblong circle around the peaks of Mount Lebanon, which remained white into the summer months. The locals say the white mountain peaks resembled *laban*, a local thick, tart yogurt. The mountain’s name comes from this culinary association.<sup>140</sup> The borders of the administrative district of Lebanon were not drawn only in relation to Mount Lebanon; the French carved the borders of the Lebanon district around an area with a high concentration of Christians. However, the Lebanese district was not exclusively Christian, but rather comprised adherents of fifteen religious sects affiliated with the Christian, Islamic, and Judaic religious traditions. The other districts of the French Mandate for Syria were Syria and Alexandretta, which was ceded to Turkey in 1938. The Syrian district was comprised of the sub-districts of Aleppo, Damascus, Jabal Druze, and an Alawite State. (See Appendix 1, Map 2).

The war and the taste of independence changed the women’s movement. During the brief moment of independence, women raised the question of women’s suffrage. Accounts differ regarding how the Syrian National Congress in 1920 responded to

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<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> The Semitic root “l-b-n” means white. It is likely that both the word for the region around the white peaks as well as the word for this white yogurt product derived from this root.

women's request for the vote: some contend the conference delegates voted to award women the franchise. Regardless of the outcome, at the first possible moment, women's organizations tried to secure political rights within the Syrian nation, including the right to vote, which hints that other aspirations were simmering beneath women's philanthropic activities.

Women continued to engage in charitable and philanthropic activities after the French occupied the region. Even though charity persisted after the war, the tone of the campaigns turned more explicitly nationalist than before the war. For example, Nazik 'Abid started an Arab nationalist school for girls after the war. The school was intent on educating girls to becoming ardent advocates of Syrian independence. Her school is one example of how the war and the arrival of the French mandate sparked a change in the tenor of Syrian women's activism. The names of the journals founded after the war are another example. Following the war women's journals started to be produced in Beirut and Damascus. They had titles like *al-Mar'a al-Jadida* (The New Woman, Beirut) in Beirut, *al-Hayāt al-Jadida* (The New Life, Paris and Beirut), *al-Fajr* (The Dawn, Damascus). These journals were part of a larger post-war vision the journals themselves variously labeled, an "awakening," something "new," a "dawn." The editors of the journals envisioned a dawn of a new era of women's awareness about their status in society and a dawn of a newly independently Arab world.

Women's salons emerged as spaces to discuss further all of the dimensions of the *nahḍa al-nisā'iyya* (women's awakening). Nine women's salons emerged in cities around the region between 1880 and 1920<sup>141</sup>: those of Yaqt Barakat Sarruf, Habbuba Haddad,

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<sup>141</sup> On regional histories of women's salons and intellectual gathering places, see Orit Bashkin, "Representations of Women in the Writings of the Intelligentsia in Hashemite Iraq, 1921-1958," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4.1 (2008): 53-82; miriam cooke, "No Such Thing as Women's

and Julia Tu'mi Dimashqiyya in Beirut; Mary 'Ajamy and Zaynab Fawaz in Damascus; Mayy Ziyada<sup>142</sup> and Princess Nazli in Cairo; Alexandra Avierino in Alexandria, and Maryana el-Marrash in Aleppo.<sup>143</sup> These salons were essential in forging connections among like-minded (and like-classed) women; some salons also created new social spaces for men and women to mix and exchange ideas. These connections yielded a rich network that engendered many women's organizations such as the *Yaqzat al-Mar'a al-Shāmiyya* (Syrian Women's Awakening Society, 1928). In addition to spawning new women's organizations, many lasting friendships also formed through women's salons, often between women who also had salons. For example, Dimashqiyya became great friends with Mayy Ziyada. When Ziyada visited Beirut and Damascus in 1924, Dimashqiyya published an edited volume *Mayy fī Suriyya* (Mayy in Syria) that collected all of the articles written about Ziyada on her visit to Syria in addition to some of Ziyada's own publications.

There were two particularly important literary salons in Syria. Julia Dimashqiyya organized one salon and Habbuba Haddad established the other. Both Dimashqiyya and Haddad ran women's journals in tandem with their salons. Habbuba Haddad was born in 1897 in Barouk, another small village in the Shouf. Like the other women of her generation, she was educated at the British mission school in her village before moving to

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Literature," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* (2005): 25-54; Heghnar Zeitlian Watenpaugh, "The Harem as Biography: Domestic Architecture, Gender, and Nostalgia in Modern Syria" in *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces*, ed. Marilyn Booth (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 211-236; on Princess Nazli Fazil's salon (she was connected to the khedival family in Egypt), see Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press*, 41 and on the larger context of women's salons see Chapter 4.

<sup>142</sup> For more information on Mayy Ziyada's literary salon see Boutheina Khaldi, "Arab Women Going Public: Mayy Ziyādah and Her Literary Salon in a Comparative Context," (Unpub. PhD dissertation, Indiana University, Depts. of Comparative Literature and Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, 2008).

<sup>143</sup> George Kallas, "Le rôle de la femme dans la renaissance arabe, 1849-1928," (Unpub. PhD dissertation, Lebanese University, 1981), 808-849. Referenced in Hala Ramez Dimechkie, "Julia Tu'mi Dimashqiyyi and *Al-Mar'a al-Jadīda*, 1883-1954," (Unpub. MA thesis, American University in Beirut, 1998).

a larger missionary school in a nearby town. Haddad continued her education in Shimlan. She married a relative Barakat Haddad in 1914, but the marriage ended by 1920. After her marriage ended she traveled going to Paris and then on to New York, where she met Gibran Khalil Gibran (1883-1931), who encouraged her literary pursuits.<sup>144</sup> She returned to Paris and started a monthly magazine, *al-Hayāt al-Jadīda* (The New Life) in 1920, just as the League of Nations was creating the French Mandate for Syria. The journal took its name from the new beginning she imagined for Lebanon and its people, including its women.

The first issue started with the proclamation, “Peace to you, O land of my fathers; peace on your majestic cedars, on your towering mountains, on your crystal springs, on your people.”<sup>145</sup> *Al-Hayāt al-Jadīda* did not address an exclusively female readership. Her journal was not limited to content about women; rather it increasingly became a general political organ, attacking the mandatory power, for example.<sup>146</sup> When she moved back to Beirut in 1921, the journal traveled with her and continued to appear until 1926.

Haddad’s salon began upon her return to Beirut from Paris and lasted until 1930 and shared the political tone of the journal. It was a gathering place for the intellectuals of the day: Najla Abillama Ma’luf, Jamil Bayhum (1887-1978), Jirji Niqla Baz, Julia Dimashqiyya, Felix Faris (1882-1939), Shibli Mallat (1875-1961), Ramiz Sarkis (1889-1955), Salma Sayigh (1889-1953), Shaykh Amin Taqyi’l Din (1884-1947), Jibran al-

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<sup>144</sup> Gibran Khalil Gibran was the most famous Lebanese literary figure of his generation. He wrote *The Prophet* (1923) a book of twenty-six prose poetry essays in English. The poems represent the conversations the Prophet, Almustafa, had with people on his way to board a ship after thirteen years living in a foreign city. The conversations he had on his way to the ship were about love, marriage, death, sickness, health, and a variety of other topics about the human condition. The poems are widely considered to be about his experiences living in the United States and then returning to Lebanon.

<sup>145</sup> Ibrahim, *Adībāt Lubnaniyāt*, 183-184. The cedar is the national symbol of Lebanon.

<sup>146</sup> Ibrahim, *Adībāt Lubnaniyāt*, 184. Very few editions of *al-Hayāt al-Jadīda* remain in print. The only one I was able to locate was an issue published in Paris in 1920, thus it is impossible to cite the anti-mandatory rhetoric that Ibrahim emphasizes in her analysis of Haddad’s editorials.

Tuwayni (1890-1947), and Mary Yanni.<sup>147</sup> The fact that her salon brought male and female intellectuals together broke social taboos about the social mixing of men and women.

Julia Dimashqiyya was a member of Haddad's salon and also started her own salon in 1917 or 1918 around the same time that she formed the Lebanese Women's Association (1917). The women's organization and the salon both predated the creation of *al-Mar'a al-Jadida*. Her speeches in Tripoli and Beirut, emphasized women's role in the home. The motto of *al-Mar'a al-Jadida*, "*inna al-umma nasij al-ummahāt*" (the nation is the creation of mothers), demonstrates the transformation in Dimashqiyya's thinking about women's role in society. After the war, her faith in women's potential to aid the Syrian nation was emblazoned on the cover page of her publication. A woman's role was no longer limited to the home but was connected to the well-being of homeland and nation. In effect, the nation became the home.

Dimashqiyya's monthly column in the journal, "To the Women of My Country," discussed women's problems. The rest of the journal's content focused on encouraging women to liberate their minds through education and to use their liberated status to help improve the nation. Her husband, Badr, supported her publishing—and her salon. He contributed articles and helped with the logistics of transforming a series of articles into a cohesive edition of a journal. Because they were both linked in creating the journal, their home turned into its editorial offices.<sup>148</sup> The journal was quite popular and circulated in in Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus, and Jerusalem, as well as Beirut.<sup>149</sup> By 1928, however, the

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<sup>147</sup> Khairallah, *The Sisters of Men*, 187.

<sup>148</sup> Beth Baron records the trend of husband and wife—or father and daughter, or brother and sister—pairs joining forces in publishing women's journals in *Women's Awakening in Egypt*, 71.

<sup>149</sup> Ruth Gage Colby, Sidebar on "Julia Toumeh Dimeshkie." *The Arab World*, Special Issue: *Today's Arab Woman* 4.5 (May-June 1958): 8.

journal encountered financial difficulties and folded.

In addition to the press, classrooms became a venue through which women were able to promulgate their vision of an independent Syria and combine charity and political work. Dimashqiyya was not alone in metamorphosing into an educational advocate after a period teaching at girls' schools in Syria. Ibtihaj Qaddura was also an educator. She spent most of her career educating and caring for children at the *Dār al-Aytām al-Islāmiyya* (Islamic Orphanage) in Beirut. She too moved away from the classroom and into women's organizing. Her transformation from educator to educational and women's rights advocate happened in the 1940s at the end of her career.

Cosma was another educator turned advocated. Cosma left the city of her youth, Damascus, to pursue educational opportunities first in Beirut and then in New York City. Cosma lived in New York City on two separate occasions. During her first sojourn, she received her Masters of Arts in Educational Psychology and School Administration from the Teachers College, Columbia University.<sup>150</sup> She had every intention of returning to Syria with her degree to improve the quality of education for girls in Syria, which she accomplished. In the late 1940s, Cosma returned to New York City when she was appointed by the independent government of Syria to serve as its representative on the UN Commission on the Status of Women in 1947. Cosma served as the Syrian delegate for four years before resigning the position.

Cosma was driven to improve girls' access to education. She put her training to good use in Syria and neighboring Iraq. Cosma and Dimashqiyya both moved within the Arab world—Dimashqiyya to Palestine and Cosma to Iraq—as teachers demonstrating

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<sup>150</sup> "Arab Educator Discusses Near Ears Problem at Summer Session Luncheon," *The Keystone* (State Teachers College, Kutztown, Pennsylvania), 9 July 1947: 1. I have not been able to determine the exact year she graduated from Columbia. It was sometime around 1921 or 1922, however.



the need for female educators to meet the demand for girls' schools. Cosma's first position was at the Baghdad Central College for Women. She left the position and became the principal of the Moslem Girls' College in Beirut. It was a privately supported primary and secondary school designed to prioritize Arabic as the language of instruction and put less emphasis on French. Part of what the school aimed to combat was the condition of mandate schools. Ruth Frances Woodsmall (1883-1963), the Near East regional coordinator for the World's Young Women's Christian Association, observed that the Government schools in the French Mandate for Syria mixed French and Arabic, though the mixture was not equal parts French and Arabic. "The atmosphere is distinctively French with Arabic as a second language and culture."<sup>151</sup> Woodsmall describes a kindergarten classroom that was filled with "picture[s] of a French kitchen, a French home, a French barnyard," which the author observes built "up the child's vocabulary in a French atmosphere."<sup>152</sup> She continued, "the group of little five-year-olds sing with great enthusiasm '*c'est le musique du Moulin.*' But they also sing with equal fervor the anthem of the Lebanese Republic, a good example of Syrian adaptability."<sup>153</sup> "Syrian adaptability" and a "French atmosphere" were not the goal of educators like Cosma. By the mid-1920s, after a few years of witnessing the mandate educational system at work, educators were increasingly interested in wresting control of the curriculum from the mandatory power.

In 1928, there were 54,145 girls in school in Syria, of which 14,208 were Muslim and 39,937 were Christian.<sup>154</sup> The imbalance between the educational figures of Muslim

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<sup>151</sup> Ruth Frances Woodsmall, *Moslem Women Enter a New World* (New York: Round Table Press, Inc., 1936), 204.

<sup>152</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *ibid.*, 205.

<sup>154</sup> *Bulletin Annuaire for Syria, Premier Trimestiel*, 1929.

girls and Christian girls was the direct result of the missionary educational presence in Syria, which made education more easily available to Christian girls.<sup>155</sup> Of the Muslim girls in school, 13,338 attended government schools and 1,920 attended non-governmental schools like the one under Cosma's direction.<sup>156</sup> Due to parental reluctance, few Muslim girls attended missionary schools in Syria. The enrollment of Muslim and Christian girls in government and non-governmental schools was not quantified by the Ottoman officials. Without educational statistics from the Ottoman government about girls' education in Greater Syria before 1920, it is difficult to measure what kind of effect the mandate educational system had on girls' education.

Christians of all denominations were a minority in the French Mandate for Syria, yet Christian girls outnumbered Muslim girls in school by more than two to one. The population of Syria at the time was 2,139,182 according to French government statistics from the entire mandate. The Muslim population of the territory was 1,593,000 people, or slightly more than half of the population of the territory. The confessional breakdown of the rest of the population is not further elaborated and was presumed "Christian." Four years later in 1932, the process of counting the Christian and Muslim populations for the census of Lebanon was fraught with political calculations that tipped the population balance in favor of the Christian population.<sup>157</sup>

Given that the general trend throughout the region was toward increasing girls' access to education, it is likely that the mandatory power did not significantly increase girls' access to education. Rather the government happened to benefit from the efforts of

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<sup>155</sup> There is limited government data (from the Ottoman Empire) about education for girls. The existing estimates of girls' enrollments come from missionaries.

<sup>156</sup> Statistical information secured by Ruth Frances Woodsmall from the French Inspectress of Girls' Schools. Cited in Woodsmall, *Moslem Women Enter a New World*, 204.

<sup>157</sup> See Rania Maktabi, "The 1932 Lebanese Census Revisited: Who are the Lebanese?" *British Journal of Middle East Studies* 26.2 (November 1999): 219-241.

a pioneering group of female educators, Cosma, Qaddura, and Dimashqiyya among them, who were intent on ensuring that the next generation of girls had the same educational opportunities that were afforded them. The majority of women who served as educators in the 1920s had passed through missionary education programs in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, like Cosma, Dimashqiyya, Hamada, Karam, Khalidi, and Qaddura.

From their positions as principals and teachers, the generation of Syrian educators born at the end of the Ottoman Empire, began to challenge the French-oriented seeds planted in the minds of susceptible five-year-olds by mandate kindergarten programs. By teaching Arab history and teaching the Arabic language and its literature, these pioneering educators counterbalanced the mandate curriculum and forged Syrian citizens loyal to the larger project of Arab independence. This new class of female educators did not want their children and the next generation of Syrians to orient themselves toward the French. Instead, they wanted to raise the next generations to want an independent Syria for Syrians. The nationalist classroom was not the only staging ground for anti-mandate activism. The practice of delivering aid to the less fortunate in Syria became a politicized activity as providing charity was co-opted by the wives of French mandate officials. Classroom practices and charity programs that emerged during the mandate era demonstrate the complicated connections that women in Syria and Lebanon had to the colonial power: some women's organizations aligned themselves with the mandate, others opposed the mandate subtly, and still others opposed the mandate openly.

### **Nationalizing Charity: Negotiating Women's Rights and Nationalism in Post-War Women's Organizations**

The French mandate government did not crack down on general women's charitable

activities; the mandate did stop nationalist women's organizations, such as an Arab nationalist school for girls started by Nazik 'Abid—the female hero of Maysalun—and the Red Star Society, that were connected to pan-Arab or Syrian nationalist ideologies.<sup>158</sup> The start of the French mandate was a moment of increased women's organizing and a series of new women's organizations were founded. Some new women's charitable organizations tacked closely to the project of the French mandate because their membership ranks were filled with the wives of French mandate officials who were keenly invested in raising the status of the women in the mandate: the Drop of Milk Society is an example of women's organizing aligned with the mandate government.<sup>159</sup> Other new women's organizations distanced themselves from the mandate: the *Yaqzat al-Mar'a al-Shāmiyya* (Syrian Women's Awakening Society) is an example of an organization that pursued its own projects independent of the mandate government. Other organizations looked beyond the mandate government and sought connections with international women's organizations; the *al-Majam' al-nisā'ī al-ādabī al-'arabī* (Women's Arabic and Cultural Assembly) is one such example.

The organizations that opposed the mandate and sought Arab independence were careful not to present their activities as in direct opposition to the mandate, for such organizing, even for charity was not allowed. Some Syrian women joined organizations dominated by the wives of French officials and simultaneously maintained membership

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<sup>158</sup> “al-Hawadith al-shahriya li-jam'iyat nur al-fayha” and “Tarikh jam'iyat nur al-fayha,” *Nur al-fayha* 1 (Feb. 1920), 24-29; Mohammed Jamil Bayhum, *Fatāt al-sharq fī ḥadārat al-gharb* (Beirut: Matba'at Kalfat, 1952), 118-119; Widad Sakakini, *Sabiqat al-'asr*, (Damascus: al-Nadwa al-Thaqafiya al-Nisā'iya, 1986), 22-25.

<sup>159</sup> On French practices of elevating the status of women in its colonies see Julia Clancy-Smith and Frances Gouda, eds. *Domesticating the Empire: Race, Gender, and Family Life in French and Dutch Colonialism*. (Charlottesville, Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 1998), Chapters 8, 9, 10; Ann Laura Stoler. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Martin Thomas, *The French Empire Between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics and Society* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2005), Chapter 5; Claire Midgley, *Gender and Imperialism* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1998).

in anti-mandate organizations.<sup>160</sup> Joining an organization did not necessarily mean a wholesale endorsement of its activities, or the activities of its sponsoring organization—the French mandate. One activist later recalled, “[t]he women who worked with French societies were the same women who participated in demonstrations against the [French].”<sup>161</sup> Women were caught between wanting to improve the status of women in Syria and opposing French rule. There were very few resources to aid Syrian women, so sometimes women aligned themselves with organizations connected to the French mandate government to have access to resources to provide basic health and educational services. Importantly, the French mandate government itself did not invest in projects to improve the status of women, even though such projects were part of its governing mandate.<sup>162</sup>

The mandate government was invested neither in improving local industry nor in improving women’s status in society. Absent from the reports the mandate government commission issued to the Permanent mandates Commission at the League of Nations was any discussion or evaluation of the economic and civil status of women in Syria.<sup>163</sup> The government counted how many Muslim, Christian, Jewish, and Druze girls were in school. However, counting the number of girls enrolled in school is a very different project from providing the education. Not providing social services to citizens, the

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<sup>160</sup> Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 95.

<sup>161</sup> Bushara Shaykh al-Ard, interview with Elizabeth Thompson, Damascus, 9 October 1992.

<sup>162</sup> Relying on private charities and philanthropic organizations to provide social welfare services was not a tactic unique to the French mandate government. The British also used this tactic in Egypt. See Beth Baron, “Nile Mother: Lilian Trasher and the Orphans of Egypt” *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960*, ed. Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar, and Connie A. Shemo (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010): 240-265.

<sup>163</sup> The mandate government in Syria issued yearly reports from each of its governing sectors. None of the reports between 1920 and 1939 discuss women’s status in territories under the French mandate. The lack of data on this front is conspicuous because of the turn toward measuring the status of women that accompanied the League of Nations engagement with the “women’s question.” Women surface as a measured category in relation to female prison populations. No information about the female prison population—why women were jailed, for example—accompanies the data. Prostitutes are also counted and measured. Apart from prison inmates and prostitutes, women do not often surface in the official reports of the mandate government.

mandate government relied on women's organizations and religious charities to aid the poor.

The Drop of Milk Society in Syria was linked to the wider *Goutte de Lait* network, which was supported by the French government. *Goutte de Lait* started in France in 1894 with the goal of eradicating infant deaths caused by inadequate maternal health.<sup>164</sup> To ensure an infant received its needed nutrients, the society provided new mothers with pasteurized milk. The first recipients of its pasteurized milk aid were French factory women. Through its work in French colonies before and after World War I, *Goutte de Lait* became a global charity network.<sup>165</sup> The activities of the Syrian branch were inspired by the latest scientific methods aimed at improving women and children's health. The Syrian Women's Awakening Society focused its energies on improving domestic industry and securing women's position within industry. It is an example of an organization that, while not politically oriented, worked to undermine the objectives of the French by shoring up local skills and industry. When seen together, these organizations illustrate the range of actions undertaken by women's organizations, but do not represent the entire range of women's organizing under the mandate.

Founded in Damascus in 1922, the Drop of Milk Society was invested in five interlocking projects that sought to improve children's health: the distribution of milk to children in need of mother's milk, medical treatment of poor children, health supervision of children, supplying clothing to needy children, and education and guidance for

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<sup>164</sup> Pierre Girard, "La 'Goutte de Lait'" *Revue d'Histoire de l'Amérique Française* 36.4 (Mars 1983): 522-523.

<sup>165</sup> Louis Lagard, Le Docteur Léon Dufour. <http://www.vieux-fecamp.org/Dr%20Leon%20Dufour.html>. Accessed: 28 January 2015.

mothers.<sup>166</sup> The program's investment in the education of mothers was mostly grounded in the belief that to truly improve children's health mothers needed to be educated in the most "scientific" health practices of the day. Improving the quality of the mothers' lives through education was not the point of this program. The Drop of Milk Society's emphasis on science reflected an international trend that foregrounded science in delivering aid to women and children: aid delivery emphasized science and data over compassion and empathy. Organizations operating under a similar science-forward ethos operated around the world.<sup>167</sup>

The Drop of Milk Society was led by a number of "Damascus Ladies" who "devoted and sacrificed their time and combined their efforts to aid of the deprived children and needy mothers."<sup>168</sup> These Damascene ladies were the wives and daughters of Syrian officials in the mandate government. The society claimed it provided services in "the field of benevolence and service to humanity." The organization had a project of social uplift and was proud of the work that it provided to the poor and needy in

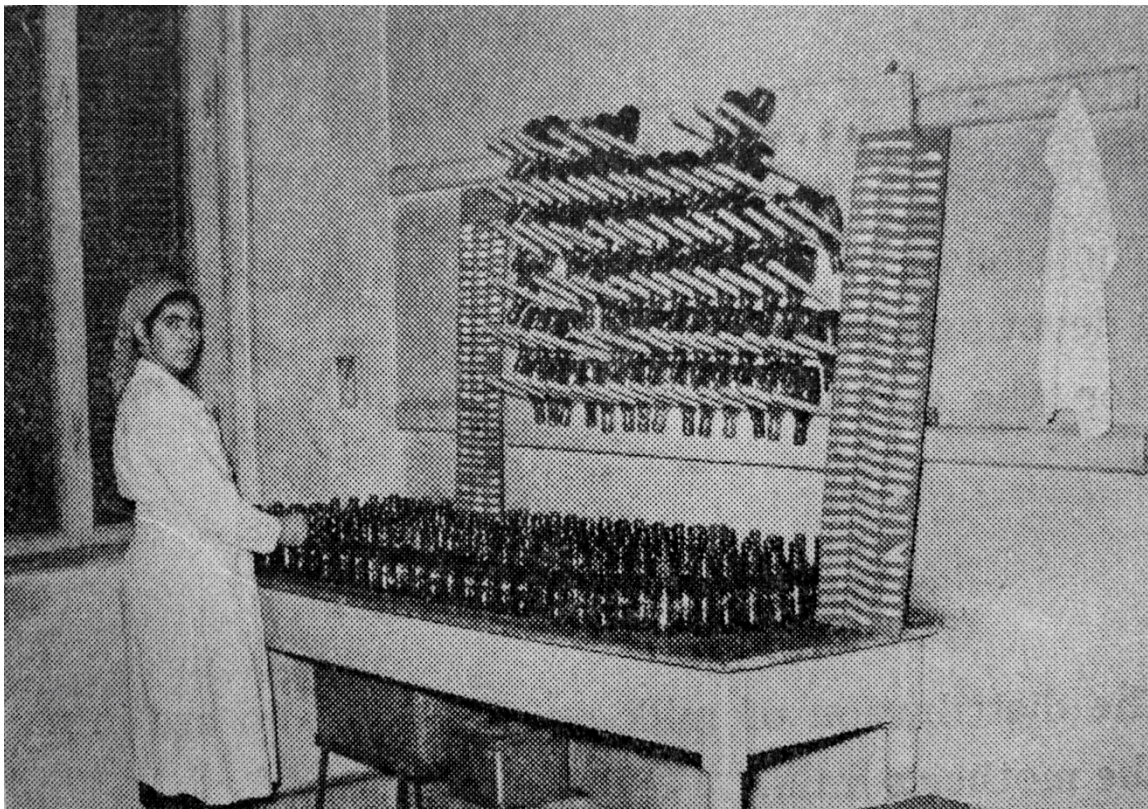
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<sup>166</sup> Drop of Milk Society brochure. Box 41. Countries Collection, Regions, "Arab and Moslem Women," SSC, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. The Drop of Milk Society issued a promotional brochure that was published sometime after 1934—the brochure proudly displays an image of the society's building on El-Nasser Street in Damascus with a caption that says "Drop of Milk Society's Building—Erected in 1934." Given the prepositional usage, it seems the document was originally drafted in Arabic and then translated into English. Quotations from the original text of the brochure have been edited to eliminate spelling and grammatical mistakes, while preserving the original intent of the author. A French language version may have been produced as well. It seems likely that publishing the brochure in English was meant to broadcast the activities of the organization to an audience outside of the French mandate. The fact that a copy of the brochure ended up in the United States may signal the reach of its distribution to a Syrian immigrant community in the United States. This brochure provides information about the organization's goals and its institutional history.

<sup>167</sup> For more information on the scientific aid programs used as a model by the Drop of Milk Society see Alice O'Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Mathias Gross, "Collaborative Experiments: Jane Addams, Hull House and Experimental Social Work" *Science Information* 48.1 (March 2009): 81-95; Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at Hull-House: With Autobiographical Notes* (New York: Signet Classics, 1999).

<sup>168</sup> Drop of Milk Society brochure, 5. Box 41. Countries Collection, Regions, "Arab and Moslem Women," SSC, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. The original English text reads "deprived." I have opted to keep this word as it was used in the original rather than substituting another word that might be used to describe a poor or underprivileged child today.

Damascus. Thus, the women involved in the project had colonial and class status over the populations they sought to improve through their charity work. The society's largest project was the one that inspired its name, "Drop of Milk."



"Purification of milk glasses" (Original Caption). Source: Drop of Milk Society brochure. Box 41. Countries Collection, Regions, "Arab and Moslem," SSC, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts. All photos in this section come from the same brochure.

The society adhered to contemporary medical wisdom that a "mother's milk is the best food for children."<sup>169</sup> However, the members of the society were aware that some mothers were unable to provide milk for their children—or were unable to provide "suitable milk."<sup>170</sup> Without access to his or her mother's milk, the society warned that the

<sup>169</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> It is unclear what constituted "suitable milk" (*ibid.*, 6)—was "suitable" a reference to quantity or to quality. It may have meant the mothers were malnourished and therefore unable to provide milk to their children.



child “will be an easy prey of many illnesses, sometimes he may lose his life.”<sup>171</sup> The society was invested in stemming needless child mortality and expressed that in the event that a child’s mother could not provide the child with “suitable milk,”

the first task of the society was to supply those deprived children, instead of their mother’s milk, with a healthy and antiseptic milk, purified in a special laboratory equipped with modern tools for this purpose. This milk is given to each needy child according to his need, his age, and his healthy potentialities.<sup>172</sup>

The Drop of Milk Society was proud of its facilities for purifying milk for distribution to children and of its command of “science.” The organization proudly distributed images of its milk purification services—rows and rows of bottles ready for sterilization were waiting for the attention of a nurse to prepare them for another round of distribution.

The images that the organization distributed often showed a veiled woman holding a young child against a background image of the society’s laboratory equipment for purifying the milk. The woman who handed the basket of bottled milk to the mother with a child in her arms was well-coiffed and dressed in the Western fashion of the day—loose-fitting drop-waist dresses in plain colors or small patterns with Peter-Pan collars and elaborate ruching or pleating in the bodice area. These were modern, educated women who used their status to “better” poorer Damascene women.

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<sup>171</sup> Drop of Milk Society brochure, 6. Box 41. Countries Collection, Regions, “Arab and Moslem Women,” SSC, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

<sup>172</sup> *ibid.*, 7.



“The deprived child looking to the bottle of milk” (Original caption).

The society understood that milk alone, however antiseptically purified, was not enough to raise a child in good health. The society supplemented its milk distribution with other health services for children from birth to age five. A doctor-in-residence examined sick children and offered treatment. The society was equipped to handle wellness visits as well. (See Chapter One cover image.) The practice of weekly wellness visits was a new medical practice. The society had a “laboratory equipped with the necessary instruments for child care, where the child is weighed four times monthly. His weight is registered in a special file kept in the Society’s Clinic.”<sup>173</sup> The data collected during the weekly visits to the clinic helped the society dole out the appropriate amount of milk. New rations of milk were available for the children daily. Given the daily visits to the clinic that mothers needed to take, the clinic likely served a local population in the neighborhood surrounding its center on El-Nasser Street in Damascus.

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<sup>173</sup> *ibid.*, 8.



“The members of the Society tailoring clothes for children in the tailoring ward” (Original caption).

The Drop of Milk Society also supplied clothing to the children that it served. It is likely that this branch of the organization’s charity reached a larger population of Damascene poor due to the non-perishable quality of clothing items. The society had a special tailoring ward where women gathered and sewed clothing for needy children. Women socialized as their needles and thread stitched two pieces of fabric together to form tiny garments. The brochure included a picture of the activities of the tailoring ward. To participate in the tailoring projects of the society, a woman did not be an official member. The society “welcome[d] all ladies wishing to give a share in this field.”<sup>174</sup>

The final facet of the Drop of Milk Society’s charity work was educating the mothers of the children the society served in “the best ways of keeping their children and [in] guid[ing] them to the right system of medical rule, to clear their minds by showing educational films subsequently.”<sup>175</sup> The members of the Drop of Milk Society believed that there was a “best” way to raise children. Their campaigns demonstrate that the system that the adult beneficiaries—the mothers—used to rear children was “backwards.”

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<sup>174</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *ibid.*

They advocated replacing the old system with the latest science on motherhood emanating from laboratories in Europe and the United States. The charity women sought to improve poor mothers' knowledge about children's health through small educational seminars and by showing films. Films were seen as having a lot of potential as educational tools; the League of Nations established a commission to explore the capacity for films to disseminate standardized health information.<sup>176</sup> The desire to improve women's knowledge about healthcare was not entirely grounded in a sense of Western superiority. There was a real need to improve infant care because of high infant mortality in the mandate.<sup>177</sup> The mandate government relied on women's organizations to provide these basic services.

The Drop of Milk Society was well endowed and well connected. It had funds to build a new building equipped with a laboratory. It is likely that the society sustained its activities through philanthropic donations from its members; the French mandate government may have supplemented its coffers. The society produced a photo-filled brochure as means of appealing to donors. An English-language edition of the brochure, brimming with photos, was produced with a foreign audience in mind.<sup>178</sup> Many of the pictures in the brochure have a posed quality. Yet some of the images capture candid moments. The expressions of gratitude on the faces of women receiving the charity of the society women were probably genuine as were the benevolent smiles on the faces of the women distributing new clothing or bottles of milk to poor mothers.

In addition to soliciting donations from foreign audiences, the society held two

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<sup>176</sup> The films shown to audiences in Damascus were likely educational films produced in the United States or Europe. The League of Nations may have participated in disseminating the films shown by the Drop of Milk Society.

<sup>177</sup> Data on infant mortality was not captured in French mandate reports.

<sup>178</sup> No Arabic language versions are known to exist.

annual events to showcase the society's functions: "Celebration of Mother's Day" and a "Celebration of Child Day"—the first in May and the second in October. While not explicitly fundraisers, these events likely brought in potential donors to the society and demonstrated to them that the funds they would donate would be used responsibly and in the service of the social good, as advertised. The celebrations had a secondary purpose. The society used the events to "teach mothers medical guidance [and] distributes gifts and money as well as foodstuffs [to] needy mothers."<sup>179</sup> Child Day celebrations offered a similar opportunity for the organization to give lectures to mothers and to distribute charity to needy children.



"Celebration of Child Day" (Original Caption).

The brochure pictured the Mother's Day and Child Day celebrations. The picture shows about sixty women and children, including members. The society reached close to 200 women.<sup>180</sup> The image captures a profile of the women that the society helped. It is easy to spot the members of the Drop of Milk Society versus the women who received

<sup>179</sup> Drop of Milk Society brochure, 11. Box 41. Countries Collection, Regions, "Arab and Moslem Women," SSC, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

<sup>180</sup> "Goutte de Lait." *Les Echos* 15 January and 14 March 1943: 15.



milk and clothes and other charity from the society. Most of the women who benefitted from the society's charity wore a hijab and a loose outer garment; the women who staffed the society dressed in Western fashions, indicating their socioeconomic status. The Drop of Milk Society was well-connected and used those connections to raise awareness about its activities. The society hosted Helen Keller on her visit to Syria and they honored her with a banquet.<sup>181</sup> Keller was a pioneering social advocate.



"Helen Keller in the reception ceremony given in her honour in the Society Center." (Original caption). Keller is the second from the left.

The membership of the Drop of Milk Society represented women who benefitted from the mandate government. Not all Syrians viewed the presence of French government officials in Syria as favorable. In 1925, an anti-French revolt took shape in the Jabal Druze region of the mandate (Appendix 1, Map 2). Initially, the French were ill-

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<sup>181</sup> Keller's memoir, *The Story of My Life*, captures her life up until the second year of her education at Radcliffe in 1902. The visit to the Drop of Milk Society came in the 1930s, thus is not addressed in her memoirs.

equipped to stand against the revolt. Druze fighters destroyed a French troop garrison. Its early successes helped spread the revolt through Greater Syria. The Jabal Druze revolt turned into a widespread Syrian nationalist revolt that sought to unseat the French mandate and secure independence. Many populations participated in the revolt including the Druze, who had instigated the revolt from Jabal Druze, the Sunni, Shi'a, Alawites, and Christians. The revolt was not coordinated by a central command. Each population fought against the French in the name of different nationalist movements, though to secure their separate nationalist objectives, they fought alongside each other. The early successes did not last. The revolt lasted for two years, though much of the fighting stopped after the French began aerial bombing campaigns against restive villages and mutinous quarters of Damascus. The Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations investigated whether the French use of airpower against the anti-French rebels was an appropriate use of force, but no action was taken against the French.

Prior to the revolt, the mandate governments in the Arab world were wary of any nationalist organizing, even if it came from women. The French started investigating women's organizing during the Syrian revolt against the French. One woman from Damascus, Madame Shahbandar, hosted a series of meetings with the wives of exiled and jailed Damascene nationalists and with other prominent women. In addition to hosting anti-mandate coffee-klatches, Shahbandar organized women's marches and decried the lack of courage among the men of Damascus and the failure of merchants close to the bazaars.<sup>182</sup> Twenty or thirty women attended Shahbandar's events and participated in writing appeals to foreign governments and the League of Nations to try and end the

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<sup>182</sup> CADN ISL/1/V/1704, Bulletin du Renseignement 159, "Attitude of de Mme. Shahbandar," 2 September 1925.

mandate.<sup>183</sup> The women gathered to discuss the heroism of the fighters on Jabal Druze, their support of patriotic martyrdom, and their desire to aid the diffusion of the protest to all of Greater Syria. French intelligence opined that Mme. Shahbandar's house was a "hotbed of anti-mandatory propaganda."<sup>184</sup> Women's anti-mandate conversations could be fierier because women were not seen as a true threat to the mandate government. Women used the dismissal of their potency as nationalist agitators as license to make vocal claims for independence that were unavailable to male activists.<sup>185</sup> French government surveillance of women involved in charity and nationalist causes continued through the end of the mandate even as women continued to find ways to undercut the mandate during its existence.

In 1928, a series of elite women gathered together and established the *Yaqzat al-Mar'a al-Shāmiyya* (Syrian Women's Awakening Society).<sup>186</sup> The Damascene organization had three major goals, all of which were connected to improving the status of women in Syria. Their programs addressed raising the status of both themselves—the educated elite—and the workingwomen of Syria. Many of Syria's workingwomen labored in agriculture. Some worked in industry; women were especially concentrated in the tobacco industry.<sup>187</sup> The first bullet point of the organization's constitution issued a "call to women to awake side-by-side to developing the status of women through actions

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<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 87.

<sup>186</sup> *Yaqzat al-Mar'a al-Shāmiyya* (Syrian Women's Awakening Society) Constitution. Box 23, Folder 13. Ruth Frances Woodsmall Papers, SSC Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

<sup>187</sup> On women working in the tobacco industry, see Malek Abisaab, *Militant Women of a Fragile Nation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010).



that fit her environment.”<sup>188</sup> The call captured an awareness of class differences. The founders of the society believed that by working side-by-side across differences in environment and circumstance a Syrian woman could help “lift her [fellow sister] from the dangers of the passing social evolution.”<sup>189</sup> The founders of the organization thought Syrian women should combine efforts to ensure that the status of women improved as the region passed through the period of colonial rule into an era of independence. The language here references Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant, which stipulated that the mandates were supposed to be temporary. The Syrian Women’s Awakening Society was invested in improving the status of women in Syria so women could hasten the end of the mandate era.

The society’s constitution indicates it had its eyes on the present and the future. Improving women’s status under the mandate would help bring about the era of independence and would better the nation once independence was won. The society proposed that women seek the resources and education to help themselves become capable of existing without external support—perhaps male, perhaps colonial.

2. To encourage women and to help them to understand her responsibilities of labor, life, and to facilitate her liberal labor which will enable her to earn her living and educate in her the spirit of self-dependence.<sup>190</sup>

The founders of the organization use the language of women’s uplift to demonstrate their commitment to improving women’s access to education and to launch a critique of the French colonial government. Education would prepare women to become active members of society and would, importantly, empower them to earn a living and operate independently in society. Emphasizing independence did not require a woman, to eschew

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<sup>188</sup> *Yaqzat al-Mar’a al-Shāmiyya* (Syrian Women’s Awakening Society) Constitution. Box 23, Folder 13. Ruth Frances Woodsmall Papers, SSC, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

<sup>189</sup> *ibid.*, 1.

<sup>190</sup> *ibid.* Cardinal formatting original.

social traditions and never marry, aid their families, or raise children. Instead, the Syrian Women's Awakening Society was invested in preparing women for the possibility of independence and self-reliance. The value of self-reliance was important, even if never utilized. A society full of capable women was seen as a good, desirable thing and was connected to a larger project of preparing for independence. Women's self-reliance was connected to the larger goal of national self-reliance. The final aim of the Syrian Women's Awakening Society was simply, "3. To encourage native industry and try to make it better."<sup>191</sup> The founders of the organization acknowledged their responsibility to help women engaged in native industries improve their working conditions through advocacy and social programming.

Combined, these three goals highlighted the Syrian Women's Awakening Society's vision for improving women's status in Syria. It envisioned women's improvement by and through their own actions. Neither the state nor religious organizations are referenced in the constitution as helping women attain social security in society. If women wanted to advance, they needed to invest in the project of "uplift" because no external source was going to work to improve access to education or enhance social protections in the workplace. There were limits to women working together as equals however. The organizational structure of the Syrian Women's Awakening Society enshrined a social hierarchy based on educational attainment. Educated women were in the position to help other, less-educated women as they all worked together—though not as equals—toward the same aim of national self-reliance or independence.

While the organization sought to improve the status of women in all strata of Syrian society, its membership ranks were not inclusive. The first membership criteria was that the

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<sup>191</sup> *ibid.*

women be Syrian; no foreign women were allowed to participate in improving Syrian women's ability to be self-dependent through education and industry training. "1. The society is formed of native women of good character, known to be moderate in their social life." This criterion was meant to provide distance from the membership model of organizations like the Drop of Milk Society, which was founded by French women and counted the wives of French mandate officials, including the wives of Syrians working for the French mandate government, among its members. The Syrian Women's Awakening Society was by and for Syrian women; no French women need apply.

The emphasis the Syrian Women's Awakening Society placed on a woman's good social standing was not unusual. Women's organizations drew their membership from the ranks of the well-to-do and women with enough leisure time to dedicate energies to philanthropic work. In addition, women's organizations were invested in improving how society viewed women's potential to participate in national projects. Ensuring that organizations such as the Syrian Women's Awakening Society had a reputable membership and rejecting women who were rumored to engage in less-than-reputable activities—gambling, drinking, partaking in extra-marital affairs—helped prove women's fitness for participation in national projects. An organization membered by reputable women forwarded the organization's goal of challenging the conception that women could not be active members of society.

The group had three membership ranks. Constitutional members paid 100 gold piasters each year. The admitted members paid 50 gold piasters a year.<sup>192</sup> The honorary

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<sup>192</sup> Absent data on the average wage of a worker, my guess is that 50-100 gold piasters was a significant membership fee and was prohibitively high for most Syrians.

members were “not obliged to pay an entrance fee.”<sup>193</sup> The honorary members were women who had been invited to join the society by its members, presumably for good works done in the community. The constitutional members, those who paid the highest membership fees, set the course of the society. The section of the organization’s constitution dedicated to detailing the membership of the society clearly stated “[c]onstitutional members are those elected the administrative group by secret ballot.”<sup>194</sup> The administrative group comprised seven members with distinct roles: the president, the vice president, the treasurer, the correspondence secretary, the minutes secretary, the library director, the handiwork director. Six additional members joined these officers to form the core of the administrative group. These thirteen women were the heart of the organization: they set the course of the organization and decided which projects the organization would address. The constitution stipulated that officers served in their elected positions for three years at which point they had to be reelected.

For a woman to be admitted to the society, she had to be “known by a virtuous moral character and national eagerness (practice)” and at least twenty years of age. A formal vetting process was devised to ensure the society only admitted “virtuous” women dedicated to independence into its ranks. Membership protocols specified women who applied for membership had to be nominated by two members, who could speak for her morals, and then her candidacy for membership would be voted on by secret ballot. It is impossible to know whether all of these formal membership procedures were followed.

The membership system as detailed in the organization’s constitution helped the Syrian Women’s Awakening Society keep its membership circle closed to women with

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<sup>193</sup> *Yaqzat al-Mar’a al-Shāmiyya* (Syrian Women’s Awakening Society) Constitution. Box 23, Folder 13. Ruth Frances Woodsmall Papers, SSC, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

<sup>194</sup> *ibid.*, 2.

no more than two degrees of separation from its membership core. While the organization professed its desire to work side-by-side with the women of Syria to improve the status of women in the country, it is clear that class prejudice got in the way of actuating this goal of partnership. This society saw women of the working classes as a population that could be aided, but who could not enter the organization's ranks as members and partners in improving women's path toward self-reliance in an independent Syrian nation.

The entire ranks of the society probably numbered between twenty and thirty members in addition to the thirteen people in the administrative group. The majority of the members likely came from Damascus. It is possible that members traveled from the areas surrounding Damascus to attend meetings. The constitution established a system for jettisoning inactive members. If an administrative member missed three meetings without "a valid, written excuse," she was considered withdrawn from the organization.<sup>195</sup> At the quarterly meetings new members were elected to replace the members who had left the group. At the quarterly meetings the administrative group summarized the activities that the organization had engaged in for the citizens of Syria—and its women in particular.

The organization's budget further demonstrated the elite status of its members. The society received its operating funds from membership fees, the contributions of philanthropic people, and returns on investments. In addition to membership fees and philanthropic donations, the organization also raised funds. Every member of the society was expected to give a piece of handiwork to the society each year. These handicrafts—most likely embroidery and lacework—were "placed under the dispensation of the administrative group for the support of society affairs."<sup>196</sup> Presumably these handicrafts were sold to raise funds for the society's activities and to pay the rent on the society's

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<sup>195</sup> *ibid.*, 4.

<sup>196</sup> *ibid.*

club, which was likely a small apartment with space for a library and a meeting room. In the event of surplus funds, the constitution stipulated “[a]ny surplus in the account of the society will be spent by an act of the administrative group for philanthropic purposes.”<sup>197</sup>

For the benefit of its members, the society maintained a “reading room of newspapers, magazines, character books.”<sup>198</sup> Creating a gathering space stocked with the latest periodicals mirrored other women’s salons, like those established by Julia Dimashqiyya and Habbuba Haddad. Women read the press, not just the women’s press, and created spaces to discuss the ideas circulating in society at the time. The idea for the Syrian Women’s Awakening Society may have emerged via one of the literary salons that brought women together. The society wanted to replicate the environment of intellectual exchange as part of its organizational mission. In addition to serving as a possible gathering site for the literate, leisure class of Damascus, the club was the organization’s hub: the administrative group met at the club once every two weeks and the entire membership of the society gathered at the club every three months. The final purpose for the club was to host entertainment and events where “moral addresses are delivered”; non-members were invited to attend these gatherings.<sup>199</sup>

The society wrote very clearly at the close of its constitution that it “will not interfere with political or religious questions.”<sup>200</sup> Listing the society’s apolitical and areligious stance at the close of the constitution rather than in its aims, signaled the group’s investment in charity projects to French authorities. The choice to avoid political questions may have been the result of the political climate under the French mandate, which actively squashed any nationalist agitating, especially after the 1925 revolt. The

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<sup>197</sup> *ibid.*, 3.

<sup>198</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>200</sup> *ibid.*

society was aware that it could have been disbanded at any time by the mandate government. Thus, the society established that in the “case of dismissal of the society its furniture will remain and the constitutional members will spend the remaining balance on philanthropic purposes in any way they like.”<sup>201</sup> The society operated for a few years. When and why it ceased to exist are unclear. It is likely that the motivations for the group’s members changed and the Syrian Women’s Awakening Society ceased to form a necessary function in the lives of its members.

Between the creation of the Drop of Milk Society in 1922 and the Syrian Women’s Awakening Society in 1928, the climate for women’s organizing under the mandate still only accommodated women’s formal engagement with charity and social service activities. Even so, women’s activism in Syria took on a slight more political cast. The Syrian Women’s Awakening Society formally disavowed politics but still integrated slightly anti-French actions into its constitution: only native women could be members; it was invested in preserving native industry. Some Syrian women came to nationalist organizing via charity work; others kept up their charity work and disavowed politics. The Drop of Milk Society continued to operate into the 1930s and 1940s and continued to be invested in improving the welfare of children by providing milk to children and education about maternal and child health to poor Damascene mothers. Its programs changed with the development of instant formula.<sup>202</sup>

The Drop of Milk Society was linked to the objectives of the mandate government, while the Syrian Women’s Awakening Society wanted to prepare women in Syria for independence. A third vein of women’s organizing emerged during the

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<sup>201</sup> *ibid.*, 3.

<sup>202</sup> The organization is still around—same name, different aim. The organization is now invested in providing services to differently abled children in Syria. The organization currently (May 2015) has a very active Facebook page, which documents donations given to the society.

beginning of the mandate era of government, one that turned away from the local sphere. To help foster ties with international women's organizations, Nour Hamada created *al-Majam' al-nisā'ī al-ādabī al-'arabī* (Women's Arabic and Cultural Assembly) in 1928. Her organization was given affiliate status in the International Woman Suffrage Alliance the next year.<sup>203</sup> Nour Hamada saw great potential in the international sphere for helping the women's movement in Syria achieve greater women's rights protections. She was one of the first Syrian activists to reach out to the international women's movement in hopes of joining the ranks of the international movement dedicated to raising the status of women worldwide.

Nour Hamada's was the daughter of a Druze religious leader, Shaykh Muhammad bin Qasim bin Husayn. She was born in Baakline, a Druze village on Mount Lebanon, on January 3, 1897.<sup>204</sup> Hamada's brother encouraged her interest in Arabic language and literature. Hamada's education started locally—in her own home under the direction of her father—and then continued at the Université Saint-Joseph (a Francophone Jesuit University) in Beirut. By the time Hamada finished her education, she was fluent in Arabic and Turkish and proficient in English and French. Hamada married, but never had children. Hamada's husband came from the same family; Said Bey al-Naaman Hamada was an officer in the Syrian-French military. He seemed to have been progressive and supportive of her activism. Hamada later recalled that he encouraged her unveiling.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> The society was admitted at the 1929 Berlin conference. The affiliation reads "Syria—The Women's Arabic Academic Association, President: Mme. Nour Hamada Bey, Bas-el-Naba, Beirut." International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (same organization as the IWSA), "Report of the Eleventh Congress, Berlin, 17-22 June 1929" (London, England: IWSA), 11.

<sup>204</sup> Sources are inconsistent in the year of her birth; some documents list 1887 instead of 1897. The date of her birth is always January 3. The later birthdate seems more likely given her date of marriage (sometime after the French mandate was created); she would have been in her early twenties if she was born in 1898. It was uncommon, though not unheard of, for a woman to marry for the first time in her thirties (an 1887 birthdate and a circa 1920 marriage) in the early twentieth century.

<sup>205</sup> "Women's Conference at Damascus and Baghdad." *International Women's News* 27 (1932): 17-18.



Her husband's cause of death and when he passed away are not evident, but by 1932 she was collecting a military pension.<sup>206</sup> Her position as a widow made it possible for her to engage in campaigns for women's rights at home and abroad that would have been more challenging if her husband had not predeceased her. Like other early women's activists from Syria she was mobile and moved across regional and international borders with ease.

Hamada was the product of the late-Ottoman, early mandate era: she was educated by missionaries, locally and internationally mobile, and a member of women's organizations. Hamada used the multilingual skills acquired through her missionary education when she organized local, regional, and international campaigns to improve state protections for women's rights in Syria and later at the League of Nations. Hamada did not contribute to or start her own women's periodical. Yet, she consumed them. She did not leave behind a robust written record because her preferred mode of delivery was oral. She was a stirring speaker. Hamada's activism was shaped by the transition between the Ottoman and French Empires—a transition that caused more women to claim an Arab identity. Hamada's Women's Arabic and Cultural Assembly is evidence of a growing regional consciousness that saw itself in relation not just to local forces, but also to an international network of women's organizations. Hamada helped direct the regional Arab women's identity toward international outlets, such as the international women's movement and the League of Nations.

Hamada was curious about how the women's movement in the United States was structured. She thus secured a visa to the United States so she could attend the Ninth

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<sup>206</sup> USINS 1935b February 4. Transcription of testimony from nephew to District Director, John L. Zubrick, Detroit, Michigan. I became aware of the USINS file through Ellen Dubois and Haleh Emrani, "A Speech by Nour Hamada: Tehran, 1932" *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 4.1 (Winter 2008): 109-124.

Annual Conference of the Committee on the Cause and Cure of War in Washington, D.C. in 1933. Once in the capital of the United States, she met with the leaders of the National Women's Party, including Alice Paul (1885-1977), and continued to tour women's organizations in along the Eastern Seaboard. In February, she attended a feminist meeting in New York City. At the meeting she claimed the purpose of her travels was to survey the state of the women's movement in the United States and to write its history "in my native tongue Arabic to be translated into English."<sup>207</sup> She expressed that the women of the Orient had a lot they could learn from the women's movement in the United States. She hoped to observe the movement from various angles—she wanted to meet its leaders, see its organizations, and to chronicle their campaigns. She came to

meet the women of the United States, to visit their organizations and to study their methods, so that I can take back to the women of the Orient a knowledge of how we can all work together for these things which we women are all seeking ... I find that we are truly sisters in our aims and purposes.<sup>208</sup>

The leaders that she profiled in the United States likely did not share her vision of a global sisterhood of the world's women working together as equals toward the shared goal of improving the status of women.

The Women's Arabic and Cultural Assembly shows the ways in which local modes of women's organizing in Syria and Lebanon bled into international channels. Rather than staggered stages—local organizing, followed by regional organizing, followed by international organizing—the actual picture is more complicated: women from Syria who were invested in improving the status of women engaged local, regional, and international connections all at the same time. Various types of women's organizations grounded in an Arab identity, while not explicitly connected into a single

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<sup>207</sup> "Doris Stevens Acclaimed Prized Columbia Alumna." *Equal Rights* (24 February 1934): 29.

<sup>208</sup> *ibid*, 28.

coordinated pan-Arab women's campaign, emerged during the transition between the Ottoman and French Empires and continued to be used by women from Greater Syria in subsequent decades.

## Conclusion

Cosma, Dimashqiyya, Khalidi, Karam, Hamada, and Qaddura represent a generation of "sisters of men." This generation of "sisters of men" was born between 1880-1905 in Ottoman Greater Syria and grew up to shape the many directions of the Syrian and Lebanese women's movements. The first hints of women's organizing in the Ottoman Arab territories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were motivated by religious conviction, such as the efforts to piece together trousseaus for poor women so they could be married. These projects were local: they addressed the needs of families in a village or a quarter of a larger city. Access to missionary education created a new class of educated women. The graduates of missionary institutions were infused with the social uplift ethos of their missionary education. Missionary school graduates expanded the existing charity networks and started to write about their social work programs in women's publications such as *al-Mar'a al-Jadida* (The New Woman) and *al-Hayāt al-Jadida* (The New Life). The circulation of the press and the mobility of the women themselves sparked a consciousness about women's status in other parts of the Arab world and around the globe.

World War I ended the Ottoman Empire and marked the arrival of new colonial powers. While an awareness of other regional contexts existed, the tactics for challenging colonial rule were based in a quarter of Damascus or a small city. Women living under the French Mandate for Syria used local philanthropic efforts to fill in the holes in the

services not provided by the mandate government. Charity often served as a critique of the mandate government, which was negligent in providing basic services. The charity and philanthropy provided by the Syrian Women's Awakening Society, for example, was implicitly connected to a larger pan-Arab program that sought independence. In the late 1920s, women's activism invested in independence in Beirut or Damascus tipped from being localized and implicitly anti-mandate to being more regionally connected and explicitly anti-mandate and pro-independence and therefore connected to the larger pan-Arab movement.

## CHAPTER TWO:

'Arab' and 'Eastern':  
Women's Conferences and the  
Development of New Regional Identities, 1928-1938



Delegates to the First Eastern Women's Conference hold the Arab flag - July 1930, Damascus.  
*Source: Front cover of the July 10 1930 edition of al-Nāqid (The Critic).*

On November 11, 1932 delegates from “all the Eastern nations”—Persia, Turkey, Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Japan, India, China, Syria, Lebanon, Nejd, Hedjaz, Java, Australia—convened at the Institute of Science and Literature in Tehran for the Second Eastern Women’s Conference.<sup>209</sup> The official representative of the Iranian government was Parliamentary Deputy ‘Abd al-Husayn Awrang.<sup>210</sup> Awrang served as a translator between Persian and Arabic, the working languages of the Second Eastern Women’s Conference. He was also a conference participant; he had been invited to the conference by the Union of Patriotic Women of Persia. Awrang used his position as government representative and participant to caution that women should not make unveiling a priority. The veil was a hotly contested issue in Iran and in other neighboring nations. Some reformers cast the veil as a bastion of old, “backwards” ways; others viewed the veil as a means of preserving indigenous culture in the face of foreign cultural encroachment. Nour Hamada, the president of the conference, viewed Awrang’s comment about the veil as a threat to the conference objectives. Hamada struggled to ensure the conference did not deviate from its message of raising women to higher levels of freedom and “participation”—an oblique reference to suffrage.

Hamada, not wanting the conference to devolve into a debate about the veil or be co-opted by male prerogatives or a male vision of the issues facing women, offered a succinct rejoinder to Awrang: “The veil and face veil will not slow progress or impede development [for women]. We have inserted broader principles in our platform because

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<sup>209</sup> The Nedjd and the Hedjaz are now part of the modern state of Saudi Arabia. The program does not cite just how many women came from each respective nation, so it is difficult to estimate how many women attended the conference as delegates. Furthermore, there is no clear estimate of the number of women and men who sat in the audience at the conference. Henri Massé, *Le Deuxième congrès musulman général des femmes d'Orient à Téhéran* (Paris: *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 1933), 4.

<sup>210</sup> His last name has also been transliterated Ewrang and Owrang. I have chosen to use “Awrang,” because it was the most commonly used transliteration.

we wish to say to Western women that Eastern women do not [merely] have limited goals.”<sup>211</sup> It is clear that the target audience of the conference was not just a local audience. This gathering of women for the Second Eastern Women’s Conference, which was held in three sessions in Damascus, Baghdad, and Tehran, was meant to catch the attention of activists in the West and send a signal that women’s rights were simultaneously being debated in other world regions. Conference organizers were keen on portraying their conference as on par with those hosted in Europe and therefore did not want the conference agenda to be sidetracked by discussion of a local tradition—a tradition that captured the attention and fascination of women’s activists in Europe and the United States. Instead, they wanted global issues that all women faced, such as the absence of a universal guarantee for citizenship rights and the right to vote, in the foreground of their conference proceedings.

The Second Eastern Women’s Conference in 1932 followed the First Eastern Women’s Conference, which was hosted in 1930 in Beirut and Damascus. The Eastern Women’s Conferences were part of a larger regional—and international—trend of women’s conferences that brought women together to discuss the status of women. The women’s conferences held in Beirut, Baghdad, Cairo, Constantine, Damascus, Istanbul and Tehran between 1928 and 1938 all explicitly challenged the global colonial order and provided a space for articulating alternative visions of an independent “Arab” and/or “Eastern” future that protected women’s rights. A final Arab women’s conference was hosted in Cairo in 1944 with Huda Sha‘arawi as president. Appeals for women’s rights grounded in the “East” or the Arab world had multiple target audiences, among them the

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<sup>211</sup> A.H. Hashemi Ha’eri, “Dat Jalaseh-e Dishab-e Banovan,” *Ettela’at* 1751, 7 (November 1932), 1 quoted in Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman: Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture, 1865-1946* (Gainesville, FL: Florida University Press, 2002), 195. This conference is also discussed in Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 102-103.

international women's rights community and local governments. The Hamada-Awraq exchange captures the tensions present at many of the conferences as women organizers tried to keep control over conversations about Arab women's rights or women's rights in the "East" rather than have the conversations be co-opted by forces external to the Arab or Eastern women's movements.

### **Local Arab Women's Conferences and the Global Women's Conference Moment: Beirut (1928) and Jerusalem (1929)**

The first women's conference in the Arab world, which addressed the "women's question" (*qaḍi'a*), was held in 1919 at the American University of Beirut. The second Arab women's conference was hosted by the Arab Women's Union at AUB in 1922.<sup>212</sup> The first widely documented Arab women's conference was held a few years later in 1928. The Lebanese Women's Union opened the 1928 conference by eulogizing the life of Warda al-Yaziji, a Lebanese poet who had passed away in 1924. In 1867, Warda al-Yaziji penned "Epistolary Poem to Warda al-Turk." The poem read, "Oh Rose of the Turks, I am Rose of the Arabs / Between us we have found the nearest of kinships."<sup>213</sup> The poem emphasizes the continuities between al-Yaziji and Warda al-Turk (1797-?), a prolific Lebanese female poet from the early nineteenth century. The "Rose of the Turks" and "Rose of the Arabs" shared a name, *Warda* (Rose). The poem references a literary "kinship"—both "Roses" were poets. However, the "kinship" the poem references runs

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<sup>212</sup> The first two conferences hosted at the AUB (then, the Syrian Protestant College) are referenced in Hassan Hallaq, *Beirut al-Muḥrusa fī al-'ahd al-Uthmani* (Beirut: al-Dār al-Jāmi'a, 1987), 120. No further references to these conferences were found in women's journals or newspapers printed around this time, nor are these conferences cited in any of the existing secondary literature on women's conferences in the Middle East.

<sup>213</sup> Excerpt from "Epistolary Poem to Warda al-Turk" written by Warda al-Yaziji in 1867. The poem evokes the life and colloquial poetry of Warda al-Turk, who was born in 1797. The poem plays on the first name of both the poets, "*warda*," which means "rose" or "flower" in Arabic. The poem excerpted above was translated from the Arabic by Marilyn Booth. Full text of the poem can be found in Margot Badran and Miriam Cooke, eds. *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 22.



deeper than vocational ties.

“Kinship” can also be read as meaning the connection between people in relation to a place through blood and communal ties. Both women were born and raised in the foothills of Mount Lebanon. During al-Turk’s lifetime the region was under Ottoman rule, so too during al-Yaziji’s youth and the majority of her life. The Mount Lebanon region had moved from being under Ottoman rule to being under the French mandate in al-Yaziji’s final years. As subsequent generations of women from the area surrounding Mount Lebanon and from Greater Syria came into their own as writers, editors, educators, charity workers, and activists, they sought a vocabulary to express their “kinship” to each other and to the land. As the territory transitioned from being the Ottoman territory of Syria into the French Mandate for Syria women used a variety of labels to express their connections to the women from Mount Lebanon, to women from the Eastern Mediterranean, and to women beyond in Europe and in the Americas. Women’s conferences were one site where new identities were crafted.

In their tribute to al-Yaziji, the Lebanese Women’s Union presented her as a mother of the Lebanese and Syrian women’s movements and used her life to construct a history of women in Greater Syria that began in the previous century. The women who organized the conference thought the female literary community that emerged in the late nineteenth century was the root of the *nahḍa al-nisā’iyya* (women’s awakening) in Greater Syria.<sup>214</sup> Following in the tradition of al-Turk and al-Yaziji, women poets, writers, and editors raised awareness about the status of women and reported on the

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<sup>214</sup> See “A Speech by Nour Hamada: Tehran, 1932” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies*, trans. (from Persian) Haleh Emrani 4.1 (Winter 2008), 114. The content of this speech and the original Persian record of the entire conference were recovered through the archival work of Historians Ghulam Riza Salami and Afsaneh Najmabadi. The documents from the conference were published in Persian as *Nahzat-i Nisvan-i Sharq* ([Documents from] the Eastern Women’s Movement) (Tehran: Shâirâzâh, 2005).

activities of women's organizations in other Arabic-speaking parts of the Ottoman Empire. Women's journals provided some of the first links between women in Syria and Lebanon with women in other parts of the Arab world, and with Arabs living abroad in diaspora in North and South America. The conference also rested on an infrastructure of women's organizing around social issues such as girls' access to education and social hygiene that went unfunded by governments in the final decades of the Ottoman Empire and in the mandate era.

The women's conferences that convened in the Arab world from the late 1920s to the late 1930s transformed literary and charitable connections into a network of women advocating for Arab independence and rights for women.<sup>215</sup> The titles of the conferences often included "Arab" or "Eastern" to describe the origins of the women. These new regional identities were used by women to help establish their identity in relation to local forces such as national identities and provincial governments, as well as pervasive stereotypes about the "East" and "Eastern women" circulating outside the region in international women's organizations and at the League of Nations.

The categories of Arab and "Eastern" were not the only ones that were in flux at the time. So too was the category of women. The conferences hosted in the Arab world, Iran, and Turkey all addressed the "women's question," which asked if women should be given women's rights. The question was just gaining traction at the world's governing organization, the League of Nations. Arab women were not new to international discussions of women's rights and status; they had tracked conversations about women's rights in the international women's press and were aware of what was happening in other

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<sup>215</sup> See Beth Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994) for a history of the women's press in Egypt. While a series of books draw from the women's press centered in Beirut, no comprehensive history of the women's press in Greater Syria has been written.

regions because of their mobility. In 1893 two Syrian women, Hanna Kasbani Kourani (1870-1898) and Ester Moyal (1873-1948), attended the International Women's Meeting in Chicago, which was connected to the World's Columbian Exhibition.<sup>216</sup> A delegation of Egyptian women attended the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) conference in Rome in 1923.<sup>217</sup> In 1926, a Syrian woman, Fareedah El-Akle, attended the IWSA's Congress in Paris.<sup>218</sup> El-Akle attended as an individual and was not connected to any of the women's organizations incorporated at the close of the Ottoman Empire or in the first few years of the mandate. Syrian women attended international conferences as "Syrians." Egyptians attended the conference as "Egyptians." At first, the delegates to the international conferences did not claim to represent the "Arab" world, nor did they claim an "Arab" identity.

In addition to attending international women's conferences organized by women's organizations in the United States or Europe, by the late 1920s some women's organizations from the colonies and from recently independent states were admitted to the ranks of the international organizations. *Al-Majma' al-Nisā' al-Adabī al-'Arabī* (The Women's Arabic and Cultural Assembly), chaired by Nour Hamada, was the first Syrian women's organization to gain international affiliation with the IWSA in 1929 after it played a role in hosting the first Arab Women's Conference. Huda Sha'arawi, a leader in

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<sup>216</sup> Shereen Khairallah, *The Sisters of Men: Lebanese Women in History* (Beirut: The Institute for Women Studies in the Arab World, 1996), 206-209 and Akram Fouad Khater, *Inventing Home: Emigration, Home, and the Middle Class in Lebanon, 1870-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 156.

<sup>217</sup> Huda Sha'arawi attended the conference and famously removed her face veil at the Cairo train station after returning from the conference. A detailed account of this appears in Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 92-98.

<sup>218</sup> Fareedah el-Akle is perhaps most well-known as T.E. Lawrence's (Lawrence of Arabia) Arabic teacher. Elizabeth Thompson discusses el-Akle's life in *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

the Egyptian women's movement, frequently represented the Arab world.<sup>219</sup> She served on the board of the International Alliance of Women in the 1930s. While they were members, non-Western women did not serve in the influential leadership positions of "international" organizations. Arab women wrote reports of the proceedings in women's journals such as *L'Egyptienne* and *al-Mar'a al-Jadida* ("The New Woman"), which increased domestic awareness about the international women's movement.

After years of being admitted as attendees, though not truly integrated into international conferences as participants on their own terms, women in other parts of the world convened their own women's conferences. Concurrently with the first Arab Women's Conference hosted in Beirut in 1928, a Pan-Pacific women's conference was hosted in Hawaii.<sup>220</sup> That same year, an Inter-American conference gathered in Montevideo, Uruguay.<sup>221</sup> The Arab, Pan-Pacific, and Inter-American conferences did more than imitate Western women's conferences. The conferences explicitly questioned the Western mode of defining women's rights and offering legal protections to women as the only viable means of protecting the rights of women. The Pan-Pacific and Inter-

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<sup>219</sup> For more information on the life of Huda Sha'arawi, see Huda Sha'arawi, *Harem Tears: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist (1879-1924)*, trans. Margot Badran (New York: Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1987).

<sup>220</sup> These conferences are explored in greater depth in Angela Woollacott, "Inventing Commonwealth and Pan-Pacific Feminisms: Australian Women's Internationalist Activism in the 1920s-30s" *Gender & History* 10.3 (1998): 425-448; Manako Ogawa, "The 'White Ribbon League of Nations' Meets Japan: The Trans-Pacific Activism of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, 1906-1930," *Diplomatic History* 31.1 (2007): 21-50.

<sup>221</sup> For further information on these conferences see Megan Threlkeld, "The Pan American Conference of Women, 1922: Successful Suffragists Turn to International Relations," *Diplomatic History* 31 (2007): 801-828; Christine Ehrick, "Madrinas and Missionaries: Uruguay and the Pan-American Women's Movement," *Gender & History* 10 (1998): 406-424; Francesca Miller, "The International Relations of Women of the Americas 1890-1928," *The Americas* 43 (1986): 171-182; Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and The Search for Social Justice* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991); Francesca Miller, "Feminisms and Transnationalism," *Gender & History* 10 (1998): 569-580; Asunción Lavrin, "International Feminisms: Latin American Alternatives," *Gender & History* 10 (1998): 519-534; K. Lynn Stoner, "In Four Languages But with One Voice: Division and Solidarity within Pan American Feminism, 1923-1933" in *Beyond the Ideal: Pan Americanism in Inter-American Affairs*, ed. David Sheinin (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2000).

American conferences, like the conferences in the Arab world, negotiated two identities: a women's identity and a regional (or national) identity. Together, these new identities attempted to reorient discussions around women's issues and claim access to discussions about the future of their nations. Women wanted to participate in defining what it meant to be a woman and what it meant to be Arab (or from the Pacific or the Americas) rather than to be defined by external and internal forces. They certainly did not want to leave discussions of women's rights up to the trans-Atlantic elite that reigned over the League of Nations.

### **Beirut, 1928**

At the Arab Women's conference in Beirut, Al-Yaziji served as a symbol of women's relationship to generations of Syrians, past and future. In an effort to connect women to the land and to the national history of Syria and Lebanon, the organizers of the conference hung al-Yaziji's portrait on the wall of the National Library during a conference outing to the national library and national museum. Al-Yaziji's portrait and the visits to the national library and museum served as a symbol of women's investment in the Syrian nation. The call to participate in a women's conference went out to women's organizations throughout Greater Syria. The call was answered by twenty-seven women's organizations from Greater Syria.<sup>222</sup> Nour Hamada was among the conference organizers.

Nour Hamada gave the opening speech of the conference. It called for a minimum marriage age of seventeen, equal inheritance, repression of polygamy, and greater power for women to initiate divorce. Altering the structure of family law, which encompassed the status of women before, during, and after marriage, seems to have been regarded as a

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<sup>222</sup> "al-Mu'tamar al-nisā'ī." *al-Khidr* 8 (May 1927): 300-6.

social rather than political issue. Abolishing polygamy and improving a woman's ability to initiate divorce, among other reforms grounded in altering social traditions and religious laws, would have improved women's status.<sup>223</sup>

The conference program contained visits to the national library and museum as well as time for making speeches and drafting resolutions. The Beirut conference passed resolutions calling for the teaching of Arabic and Arab history in schools to undermine the influence of mandate schools, which had a French curriculum, and to showcase women's support for the Arab independence cause. In addition, the conference passed a resolution demanding that more schools be created for educating girls. The resolutions passed at the conference focused on social issues rather than political ones.

The emphasis on social issues corresponded with a larger trend in women's organizing that emphasized women's ability to instill patriotic values in new generations. Elizabeth Thompson calls the emphasis on social issues in Greater Syria "patriotic motherhood."<sup>224</sup> Patriotic motherhood was a calculated choice. The women's movement in Greater Syria had deliberately vacillated between political and social issues. By the time the conference was convened in 1928, the women's organizations in Greater Syria that converged at the conference had begun a pendulum swing away from overt calls for political rights, especially the right to vote, which had been the target of an unsuccessful

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<sup>223</sup> The following titles address family law reform movements in various countries in the Arab world. They provide some historical context, but for the most part focus on contemporary efforts to reform family law. Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Marriage on Trial: A Study of Islamic Family Law* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001); John L. Esposito and Natana DeLong-Bas, *Women in Muslim Family Law* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001); and, Lynn Welchman, *Women and Muslim Family Laws in Arab States: A Comparative Overview of Textual Development and Advocacy* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press: 2007).

<sup>224</sup> Thompson's concept of "patriotic motherhood" mirrors the concept "republican motherhood" traced by several authors in the historiography of American women's history. See the work of Nancy Cott and Linda Kerber for further information on how the ideology was deployed in the context of the United States. For a more proximate regional analogy in Egypt, see Lisa Pollard, *Nurturing the Nation, The Family Politics of Modernizing, Colonizing and Liberating Egypt 1805-1923* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) and Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 143-148.

campaign in 1920.

Emphasizing women's ability to nurture future generations had two apparent goals. The first was to make the women's movement appeal to the urban middle class and thereby help the ranks of the movement grow.<sup>225</sup> The social classes in Syria and Lebanon existed in different strata and women's activism had been the domain of the elite.<sup>226</sup> The women who had represented Syria at international conferences or forged connections with the international women's movement centered in Europe represented a socioeconomically privileged, highly educated, and regionally mobile class. The women who attended the conferences were also well connected politically. Often their husbands or fathers, or both, were active in the Arab nationalist movement, which facilitated their own engagement in issues of Arab independence, as well as more localized women's issues. The second intended goal of embracing maternalism and abandoning campaigns for political rights was to garner greater support for women's rights from the larger, male-dominated nationalist movements and from the mandatory power—both forces that could control women's access to rights in the present, or in the case of the nationalist movements, in the future, once independence was secured. Women using maternalist language to claim rights was less threatening than women claiming political rights. Pursuant with the linked goals of expanding the ranks of the women's movement, securing a place for women in the Arab or Syrian nationalist movements, and having the mandate government grant women's rights, the 1928 conference in Beirut focused on cultural life and avoided controversial topics such as advocating for the right to vote and the veil.

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<sup>225</sup> Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

<sup>226</sup> Philip Khoury, *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus, 1860-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

While the veil could have been cast as a cultural or social issue, in line with the conference objectives, the conference excluded any discussion of the veil.<sup>227</sup> The veil had been politicized after Nazira Zayn al-Din (1908-1976), a young women's rights activist from Lebanon, had published *Al-Sufūr wal hijāb* (Unveiling and Veiling) in 1928.<sup>228</sup> In the book, Zayn al-Din asked the French mandate government to support unveiling, which went against religious conservatives in Lebanon. Zayn al-Din was seen as a traitor for asking the French for help.<sup>229</sup> The controversy surrounding the book, which was published on the eve of the 1928 elections in Syria, transformed the veil into a touchstone election issue. Shaykh Taj, who ran for and won the Syrian presidency under the French mandate, courted pro-veiling supporters in the 1928 election cycle. Given the charged environment surrounding discussions of the veil, the conference organizers decided to concentrate their energies elsewhere. The choice to quiet discussion of the veil at the conference and to abandon anti-veiling campaigns demonstrates a political calculation made by women to ensure the larger cause of women's rights was recognized by both the mandate government and nationalist organizations. Without state support, their campaign

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<sup>227</sup> For more information on the veil see Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987); Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), Chapter 8; Joan Wallach Scott, *The Politics of the Veil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009); Margot Badran, *Feminism in Islam: Secular and Religious Convergences* (London: One World, 2009), Chapter 9. On the veil's resurgence and revealing see Ahmed, *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004). Sadia Abbas challenges Mahmood's argument in *At Freedom's Limit: Islam and the Postcolonial Predicament*. (Fordham University Press: New York, 2014).

<sup>228</sup> Elizabeth Thompson discusses the controversy around the publication of Nazira Zayn (also Zain) al-Din's *Unveiling and Veiling* in *Colonial Citizens*, 127-140. Two selections from Zayn al-Din's books *Unveiling and Veiling* (1928) and *al-Fatah wa al-Shuyukh* (*The Young Woman and the Shaykhs*, 1928) have been translated into English and are available in miriam cooke and Margot Badran, eds. *Opening the Gates, Second Edition: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 270-278. The second title *al-Fatah wa al-Shuyukh* published some of the attacks against her and recorded her responses. Her Arabic language texts remain in circulation. The most recent reprint was in 2010.

<sup>229</sup> Material from an interview Elizabeth Thompson conducted with Nadida Shaykh al-Ard, Bushra Shaykh al-Ard, and Amal al-Husseini in Damascus, Oct. 9, 1992. *Colonial Citizens*, 146.



for rights as women could not alter the laws to ensure greater equality.

At the close of the conference, Anbara Salam Khalidi declared “neither Syrian nor Lebanese women make impossible demands.”<sup>230</sup> The conference organizers believed the mandate government had the ability to enact the reforms detailed in the resolutions—teach Arabic in schools, teach Arab history, improve girls’ access to education, and improve the legal security of women in family law. Khalidi thought it was possible to improve the station of women through governmental reforms.

Khalidi’s comment also captures a newly splintered identity. In 1913, Ghurayyib, Mahmasani, and Khalidi’s letter to the Pan-Arab Conference in Paris had evoked a Syrian identity. Fifteen years later the national boundaries between Syria and Lebanon had hardened and women in Syria and Lebanon were claiming distinct “Syrian” and “Lebanese” identities. These identities were not unmoored from an overarching “Arab” identity that brought women together at the Arab Women’s Conference.

### **Jerusalem, 1929**

Another Arab women’s conference in Jerusalem followed the Beirut conference. Women 150 miles (240 kilometers) to the south of Beirut in Jerusalem faced a different social and political situation in 1929. The organizing edict of the 1929 Palestinian Arab Women’s Conference was clear: “[w]e desire justice first, then we will work for peace.”<sup>231</sup> Peace was cast as a restoration of national rights that were usurped by an imperial power—the British, who had a mandate for Palestine. The call for the conference in Jerusalem went out shortly after a series of anti-mandate, anti-Zionist immigration uprisings in

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<sup>230</sup> “Le Congrès féminine à Beyrouth,” *Le Réveil*, 20 June 1928; Hanifa Khatib, *Tārīkh taṭawwur al-ḥaraka al-nisā’iyya fī lubnān 1800-1975* (Beirut: Dār al-Hadatha, 1984), 111, 136; Mohammed Jamil Bayhum, *Fatāt al-sharq fī ḥadārat al-gharb* (Beirut: Matba’at Kalfat, 1952), 120.

<sup>231</sup> Matiel Mogannam, *The Arab Woman and the Palestine Problem* (Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press, 1976), 77.

Palestine—the uprisings now referred to as the Wailing Wall Riots of 1929. The conference itself convened in October 1929. It brought women together from Greater Syria, including Palestine, to discuss strategies for combatting the mandates.

The women's movement in Palestine began much as it had in Greater Syria: elite women engaging in charity to improve social conditions for poor women. In 1919, a decade before the Arab women's conference gathered in Jerusalem, women in Jerusalem founded the Arab Ladies' Association. One of the first acts of the organization was to appeal to the fledgling independent Arab government for support in the organization's charity efforts, which were seen as integral to the project of Arab independence. The organization dispatched Madame Faiz Bey Haddad to Damascus in 1919 to convey the congratulations of Arab women in Jerusalem as King Faysal ascended to the throne. Her journey was not only to share a benediction, but also to seek the king's support and assistance in the organization's charity efforts.<sup>232</sup> By 1929, the organization had not completely abandoned its social work, but it now emphasized securing Palestinian independence, which was a different kind of political project (i.e. securing national rights versus women's rights). The women's movement in Palestine embraced politics just as women in Beirut renounced engagement with overtly political topics.

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<sup>232</sup> *ibid.*, 55.



Delegates at the 1929 Palestine Arab Women's Conference protest in front of the British High Commissioner's Residence, October 26, 1929, Jerusalem. Source: Original image cut in half. Left side of the image, Box 11a; right side of the image Box 81, Ruth Frances Woodsmall Papers, SSC, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. Image restored.

More than 200 women attended the 1929 Palestine Arab Women's Congress. The attendees voted on a series of resolutions that included abrogating the Balfour Declaration; establishing a representative council whose membership would be determined in proportion to population; and, developing national industries and boycotting Jewish goods supplemented by a refusal to sell land to Jews.<sup>233</sup> After the official congress proceedings ended, the women marched through Jerusalem and staged a demonstration that confronted the policies of the British High Commissioner. The demonstration, like the conference that it emerged from, united Christian and Muslim women in the collective venture of trying to alter colonial policies. The demonstration, like the conference, also showcased women's ability to participate in campaigns that demanded Arab independence.

<sup>233</sup> *ibid.*, 71.

At the 1929 congress, the organization hosting the conference, the Palestine Arab Women's Union, established that "[t]he objects of the Society shall be to work for the development of the social and economic affairs of the Arab women in Palestine," which the organization's Secretary Matiel Mogannam described as "us[ing] every possible and lawful means to elevate the standing of women ... to assist national institutions, and support any national body in any enterprise which may be beneficial to the country."<sup>234</sup> Raising the status of women was clearly linked to securing independence: a colonized woman could not be an empowered woman. To secure independence, the speakers at the conference urged "a national movement for consolidated action on the part of all women's organizations."<sup>235</sup> A united women's movement could help bring about the desired goal of independence from the British. To ensure unity among the different women's organizations dispersed among Palestine's cities and towns, the conference established an Arab Women's Executive Committee.

Mogannam later wrote that all of the efforts of the Palestinian Arab Women's Conference and the Arab Women's Executive Committee were aimed at "remov[ing] all causes of unrest and bloodshed," which she named as "the attempts ... being made to establish a National Home for an alien race in a country which is already populated."<sup>236</sup> British colonial policy, which condoned Zionist immigration, was identified as the cause of the bloodshed. Women's organizations stated that women should not be excluded in bringing about the end of colonial domination over their homeland.

The local Arab women's conferences in Beirut and Jerusalem further fostered a collective women's consciousness centered on an Arab identity: both conferences had

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<sup>234</sup> *ibid.*, 77.

<sup>235</sup> *ibid.*, 70.

<sup>236</sup> *ibid.*, 102.

“Arab” in their titles. An Arab identity brought women together across the colonial boundaries of the mandates and bridged the divide of increasingly prominent nationalisms. Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, Iraqi, and Jordanian nationalisms had all taken root by this point.<sup>237</sup> During the 1920s, Egyptians did not claim an Arab identity. The dual forms of colonialism in Palestine—Zionist settler colonialism and the British mandate—transformed Palestine into a symbol of the lack of Arab independence throughout the region. The issue of Palestine was integral to fomenting a regional Arab women’s movement.<sup>238</sup>

The connection surrounding a shared political reality (colonialism) and a shared ethnic identity (Arab) went a long way in solidifying a pan-Arab women’s identity that intersected with the male pan-Arab movement, but differed from it as well. The major point of divergence was the pan-Arab women’s movement’s emphasis on securing the rights of women in independent nation-states, once independence was achieved.

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<sup>237</sup> For information on Palestinian nationalism see Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); William B. Quandt, Paul Jabber, and Ann Mosely Lesch, *The Politics of Palestinian Nationalism*. Vol. 288. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Muhammad Y. Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Joseph Massad, “Conceiving the Masculine: Gender and Palestinian Nationalism,” *The Middle East Journal* (1995): 467-483. On the development of a Jordanian national identity under the Hashemites, see Joseph Andoni Massad, *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001) and Betty S. Anderson, *Nationalist Voices in Jordan: The Street and the State* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009). On the emergence of an Iraqi nationalist ideal see Sara Pursley, “The Stage of Adolescence: Anticolonial Time, Youth Insurgency, and the Marriage Crisis in Hashimite Iraq,” *History of the Present* 3.2 (Fall 2013): 160-197; Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009); Michael Eppel, “The Elite, the Effendiyya, and the Growth of Nationalism and Pan-Arabism in Hashemite Iraq, 1921–1958,” *IJMES* 30.02 (1998): 227-250. On Arab nationalism see the following edited volumes Rashid Khalidi, ed. *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991) and Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski, eds. *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). For further citations on Arab nationalism and Syrian and Lebanese nationalisms see the Introduction.

<sup>238</sup> For more information on how the issue of Palestine forged a collective Arab women’s consciousness see Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 227-246; Ellen Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its “New” Women: The Palestinian Women’s Movement, 1920-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 178-189, Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 147-148, and Charlotte Weber, “Making Common Cause?: Western and Middle Eastern Feminists in the International Women’s Movement, 1911-1948,” (Unpub. PhD dissertation. Ohio State University, 2003), Chapter 5 “The International Women’s Movement and the Question of Palestine,” 169-218.

Mogannam, among others, emphasized the importance of obtaining independence before subsequent issues such as peace or the rights of women could be broached. Women used the pre-independence moment to prove their importance to the nation through charitable activities, social work, and anti-mandate activism; women also used the moment to raise awareness about women's rights.

After the Arab women's conferences of 1928 and 1929, the local Arab women's movement registered on the radar of international women's organizations in Europe and the United States. The international women's movement, as represented by IWSA, ICW, and WILPF, formally integrated the Syrian and Palestinian women's organizations into their umbrella organizations by 1935. Becoming integrated into the international women's movement gave local Arab women's organizations a larger audience for their campaigns for women's rights and Arab independence.

### **The First Eastern Women's Conference, Beirut and Damascus (1930)**

The First Eastern Women's Conference was held in two sessions in Beirut and Damascus in 1930—the Beirut session happened in April, the Damascus session followed in July.<sup>239</sup> (See Chapter Two cover image.) The name of the conference, the “First Eastern

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<sup>239</sup> In Arabic (and Persian) *sharq* can be translated as both “Eastern” and “Oriental” and many women used the words interchangeably. The title of the conference has been translated as the First Eastern Women's Congress, the General Congress of Oriental Women, or the Oriental Women's Congress. I have opted to translate the title as the First Eastern Women's Conference because “Eastern” more accurately captures the organizing logic of the conference. Furthermore, “Oriental,” as it is used today, connotes a geographic frame that was beyond the actual scope of the conference. While Hamada and other organizers would have welcomed delegates from Korea, India, the Philippines, or China, delegates from these countries did not travel to Beirut or Damascus in 1930 to attend the conference. The Second Eastern Women's Conference in Tehran drew in delegates from a wider geographic area, including a few delegates from China, Java, Japan and Australia, but the majority of the delegates were from the more proximate region. I have opted to use “conference” instead of “congress” when referring to the amassed delegates because of the subtle difference between the two words. “Congresses” are slightly more political in nature than “conferences,” which are a gathering of people to discuss an idea or shared interest—advancing the status of women in the East. Furthermore, “congress” conveys a stable institutional structure that outlasts the event, which was not the case with the Supreme Council of Eastern Women. The Arabic word for “congress” and “conference” is the same, *mu'tamar*.

Women's Conference," captures the ultimate vision of the conference organizers: to link women's organizations in the East together in a unified Eastern women's movement. A delegate at the Eastern Women's conference declared "[w]e know that individual efforts do not achieve anything in this age, an age of associations."<sup>240</sup> Indeed, the early 1930s were an "association" moment. Women's associations hummed with the possibility of regional and international accord. The First Eastern Women's Conference assembled delegates from women's associations in the "Eastern" nations. The goal was to create an alliance of women's organizations that advocated for women's issues in the "East. The rationale was that if individuals could achieve little acting independently, then individual organizations also faced obstacles as lone operators. A collection of women's organizations faced a greater chance of securing social and civil rights for "Eastern" women on their own terms, which was the immediate goal.

Women from the Arab world had used *sharq* (east) to define themselves in relation to the West since the last decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>241</sup> The move to expand the "East" to include women from the Dardanelles to the Straits of Malacca was a novel construction. Expanding the scope of the East made it possible for Syrian women to claim common womanhood with women throughout Asia. The "Eastern" framework forged at the Eastern Women's Conferences was shaped in relation to the international women's rights movement. A unified "Eastern" women's movement would offer alternatives to Western constructions of women's rights, which dominated the international women's rights sphere.

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<sup>240</sup> "Ihda za'imat al-nahda al-nisā'iyya." *al-Nāqid* 1 (May 22, 1930): 3.

<sup>241</sup> I have not yet completed research into the first usage of *sharq* by an Arab woman to analyze how it was used in relation to a European "West." The geographic terms—*mashriq* (east) and *maghreb* (west; also, Morocco)—evoked in Arabic to describe the reaches of the Arab world are built out of the Arabic roots for east and west.

Invitations to the First Eastern Women's Conference went out to feminist leaders from "the East": Afghanistan, Australia, China, Egypt, the Hijaz, India, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Java, Lebanon, Syria, Tunis, and Turkey.<sup>242</sup> While the invitations were sent out to women's organizations throughout the "East," the vast majority of the women who attended the conference sessions as delegates came from the host cities and the surrounding territories. Nour Hamada, the president of the conference, attended both the Beirut and Damascus sessions. "The Eastern" identity broadcast on the invitations was an overarching geographic identity that women could adhere to, but not one that would subsume women's other identities. Thus, Hamada could claim to be Eastern, as well as Arab, in addition to claiming a Syrian or Lebanese identity. "Eastern," in this regard, operated much like its opposing directional identity, "Western."

Conference invitations were extended to the League of Nations and international women's organizations. Hamada additionally announced the upcoming conference in *Jus Suffragii*, the official organ of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance. The title of the journal translates to "the right to vote" and its name reflected the organizing goal of the organization: getting women the vote around the world. Aware of the professed goals of the organization, Hamada advertised that suffrage was one of the issues on the Eastern Women's Conference's agenda.<sup>243</sup> The IWSA sent Avra Theodoropolous to the conference to observe, but not participate, in the proceedings in Damascus.<sup>244</sup>

Upon learning about the plans to bring women together and suspecting that some

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<sup>242</sup> The call for participants also circulated in diaspora. Steven Hyland, a scholar of the Lebanese diaspora in Argentina, recalls coming across an advertisement for the conference in Syro-Lebanese publications published in Argentina.

<sup>243</sup> "Syrie." *Jus Suffragii* 24.4 (January 1930): 52.

<sup>244</sup> No record of the conference proceedings has been discovered. Thus, Theodoropolous' observations of the conference published in *Jus Suffragii*—"The Oriental Women's Congress in Damascus, Parts I and II: The Alliance Delegate's Report" 24.12 (September 1930)—paired with coverage in the Arab press help reconstruct the dynamics of the conference.



of the conference speeches would totter on the edge of being anti-mandate, the French mandate government actively attempted to thwart the 1930 women's conference in Damascus. Any large gathering required government approval. Two days before the conference, the conference organizers had not yet secured the necessary permission to host the event. Hamada recalls packing papers that proved that the conference was not explicitly anti-French—the conference bylaws and program—and heading out to try to secure a meeting with the French official in charge of issuing permits for large gatherings. Hamada later related that she said, “I am protesting to you that in forty-eight hours I will hold the conference. I requested a permit two months ago and you have not responded. This same silence toward my request is viewed as your permission.” According to Hamada, the French official she spoke with responded, “[h]ow dare you invite everyone and designate the location for the conference and have all these people enter Damascus through its gates? Now what excuse or justification do you have for such daring?”<sup>245</sup> Hamada replied,

First of all, I know the French government better than you do. I know it is a progressive government and would not prevent the movement of Eastern women. In addition, I was fearless. If you were to deny me permission, I would hold the meeting outdoors on the green carpet of the plains, under the trees, and because we would have no walls, but the horizon, and no roof but the sky, there would be no room for the government to object.<sup>246</sup>

Hamada persuaded the French government official to give her a permit and the Damascus session of the First Eastern Women's Conference began.

Both the Beirut and Damascus sessions of the First Eastern Women's Conference began with opening sessions that addressed the conference attendees and the general public. Hamada delivered the conference opening address in Damascus. Women from Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Hijaz, as well as Syria and Lebanon, “all of them ...

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<sup>245</sup> “A Speech by Nour Hamada: Tehran, 1932” *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, trans. (from Persian) Haleh Emrani 4.1 (Winter 2008): 118.

<sup>246</sup> *ibid.*

concerned with the history of the women's awakening in the East" attended the Damascus session of the First Eastern Women's Conference.<sup>247</sup> The Damascus session of the conference opened in July 1930 in the Great Hall of Syrian University. The opening session took place before a primarily male audience, something that Theodoropolous found peculiar. Perhaps she believed that the women's movement needed to address women to increase its ranks.<sup>248</sup> After the opening event, men were absent from the conference proceedings in Damascus.

After the opening session speeches, it seems both conferences broke down into smaller working sessions, though no record remains of these sessions. In Damascus, approximately one hundred women attended the smaller sessions hosted over the next four days, according to Theodoropolous' estimate.<sup>249</sup> Local newspapers recorded the broad strokes of the conferences, not the fine details of the substance of the smaller sessions; little is known about the conferences outside of the resolutions that were passed. The women who gathered in Beirut in April during the first session of the First Eastern Women's Conference passed a series of resolutions:

- (i) To secure the inclusion of political economy and housekeeping in the curriculum of girls' schools.
- (ii) To promote national industry and persuade the public to buy national goods.
- (iii) To examine matters affecting public morality, and to endeavour to secure the non-exhibition of films of immoral character, and to show the evils of the use of narcotics and intoxicating liquors.
- (iv) To examine the condition of woman and child labor in factories and industries.
- (v) To endeavor to reduce illiteracy amongst women and elevate the position of women.
- (vi) To study the conditions of prisons and child and women prisoners ...<sup>250</sup>

The conference's emphasis on social issues comes through in the resolutions discussed

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<sup>247</sup> *Al-Jām 'iyya al-'Arabiyya*, 10 July 1930 quoted in Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its "New" Women*, 180.

<sup>248</sup> Avra Theodoropolous, "The Oriental Women's Congress in Damascus, Part II: The Alliance Delegate's Report." *Jus Suffragii*, 24.12 (September 1930): 190.

<sup>249</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> Mogannam, *The Arab Woman and the Palestine Problem*, 63-64. Formatting original.

and passed by the assembled delegates.

Women called for greater equality between men and women but stopped short of asking for political rights. They discussed temperance, the promotion of Arabic language, literature, and history, and the protection of national industries—industries, such as embroidery and tobacco, in which women had secured employment.<sup>251</sup> Matiel Mogannam, the secretary of the Palestinian Arab Women's Conference in 1929 and a Beirut conference attendee in 1930, noted "the above resolutions include, as the reader will observe, matters of a purely public character, which in many independent countries are undertaken by the State."<sup>252</sup> In the absence of a strong state, women filled the vacuum with their activism. The Beirut session helped women active in improving the educational and employment conditions for poorer women in one country compare notes, so to speak, with women engaged in the similar projects in another country. Thus, the conference served as a forum for enhancing the structures of an existing women's movement that addressed local needs while simultaneously crafting a women's identity centered on a shared colonial experience forged in opposition to the definition of women's rights propounded by the West.

Like the Arab Women's Conference hosted in Beirut two years prior, the First Eastern Women's Conference prioritized social issues in the conference resolutions. Delegates requested greater equality between men and women in marriage, education, work opportunities, and compensation while they steered clear of asking for the right to vote. There was a soft boundary between social and political issues; women were careful to select issues that would improve women's status and not alienate women from the

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<sup>251</sup> For more information on women's role in the tobacco industry see Malek Abisaab, *Militant Women of a Fragile Nation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

<sup>252</sup> Mogannam, *The Arab Woman and the Palestine Problem*, 64.

larger pan-Arab movement. Women implicitly challenged the legitimacy of mandate rule by demonstrating the capacity of Arabs to provide their own social services, such as providing girls' education. They explicitly indicted the mandate government for not providing the services of the state—services and protections they believed a colonial government should deliver. For example, the mandatory power did not inspect prisons to ensure the conditions adhered to international norms. Women's organizations inspected the prisons in the mandate to make sure inmates were properly clothed, housed, and fed. Providing basic services, like education and sanitation inspections of prisons, was a way of demonstrating Arab capacity for self-rule.

Critiquing the French and British mandate governments for not providing social services was one area where the Arab women's movement differed from the male pan-Arab movement. The women engaged in the Eastern Women's Conference were out to prove that they could be seen as sisters in the movement for Arab independence and mothers of the nation rather than as competition, or worse, enemies in the cause of liberating the Arabs from the mandates. The conference resolutions served as a platform through which women could provide evidence of native competence in the face of colonial incompetence—and demonstrate that women were integral to the project of national independence.

The conference had many goals, including broadening the appeal of the women's movement, gaining entry into the international women's rights community, having women's rights protected by local governments, and being recognized by the pan-Arab movement as potential allies. The resolutions passed at the First Eastern Women's Conference spoke to these multiple audiences: local women, the international women's movement led by European and American women, the mandate government, and the

male-dominated Syrian and Arab nationalist movements. Some of the conference goals were more easily met than others. For example, the worldview of the leaders of the international women's rights sphere was shaped by the colonial distribution of power, which meant women from the colonies were effectively unrepresented in their organizations. The First Eastern Women's Conference reveals one way that women in non-European and non-American nations addressed their absence in discussions about women's rights: they attempted to rally around an "Eastern" identity and forge an alternative international women's rights space. Despite their appeals to the international women's rights community for support, the leaders of women's organizations in Syria and Lebanon were careful not to give Western organizations control over the content of their campaigns. Instead, they made claims for a distinct "Eastern" women's identity, a claim that was in itself anti-Western and anti-colonial.

Syrian and Lebanese women's movements' goals of expanding international women's rights to include an Eastern identity and securing national independence were intertwined. For example, government support would legitimize Syrian and Lebanese women's organizations in the eyes of the European-based international women's organizations that were drafting the blueprint of international women's rights protections. Without access to shaping the definition and allocation of women's rights on the international level, the women's rights that the mandate government might promise—though they were loathe to do so—were colonially imposed, foreign notions of women's rights. Being accepted into the ranks of established international women's organizations would help Syrian and Lebanese women demonstrate to local governments the validity and importance of their efforts to secure rights as women. Furthermore, recognition from international women's organizations may have persuaded the leaders of the male pan-

Arab movement, who denied women a position in nationalist campaigns, that Syrian and Lebanese women were seasoned activists worthy of inclusion in the pan-Arab movement (though it could have also had the opposite effect). Acceptance from the male-led Arab nationalist movement would help women toward achieving their goal of ushering in an era of independence that gave women national rights. The power to define women's rights for the Syrian context would come with independence. Syrian women, and Arab women more generally, were intent on securing independence and the right to define women's rights for their regional context.

**“Eastern” or “Mediterranean”: Debates About Women’s Status in Constantine, Algeria and Tehran, Iran (1932)**

The Second Eastern Women's Conference was scheduled to take place in three sessions in Damascus, Baghdad, and Tehran in the fall of 1932. Earlier in the year, in March, another women's conference brought women together around a new regional identity—a Mediterranean identity. The Second Eastern Women's Conference and the Mediterranean Women's Conference faced increased government interest (and meddling) in the women's movement. The local governments in the Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Algeria, the countries that hosted the 1932 conferences, were responding to the League of Nations' pivot toward questions of women's status. Increasingly, women's organizations had to contend with colonial governments trying to control the conversation about women's status in the “East.”

**Constantine, Algeria: An Attempt to Foster a Mediterranean Women’s Identity**

Constantine is an inland Algerian city near the Tunisian border. (Appendix 1, Map 4). In March 1932, Constantine hosted the Mediterranean Women's Conference. The objective of the conference was to bring women from the Mediterranean region together to discuss

the status of women. Constantine was selected as the conference site because it “is the meeting place that best shows how people from all the Mediterranean races, with their customs and their costumes, have much in common despite their infinite variety.”<sup>253</sup> The conference program claimed “[f]rom the most distant of times until the present day, the Mediterranean has united the diverse peoples that border it. This geographic situation created a shared set of customs and beliefs that could be called ‘the Mediterranean spirit.’”<sup>254</sup> How the Berbers and Arabs in Algeria and Arab populations elsewhere responded to the appeal for a unifying trans-Mediterranean womanhood is unclear. A delegation from Italy attended the conference; other European nations may have sent delegations.<sup>255</sup>

Foregrounding the Mediterranean Sea in discussions of women’s rights forged a connection between mainland France and its *outremer* territory.<sup>256</sup> The desire to connect Algeria to Europe by way of the Mediterranean Sea was likely a consequence of the fact that the women who organized the Mediterranean Women’s Conference were descendants of the French settlers who had populated the settler colony starting in the mid-1800s, or they were relatives of French-born governors of the colony. Algeria at this time was territorially part of France and all Algerians—those of Arab, Berber, and French

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<sup>253</sup> LN R3019 11A/31603/31603. Social Section, General. “Le congrès des femmes méditerranéennes” program. 1. The 1932 Mediterranean Women’s Conference has not received any attention in existing literature. A scant amount of archival material exists about the conference proceedings, none of it covers Arab women’s participation in the conference.

<sup>254</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>255</sup> United Nations S-0918, Box 24, File 3, Department of Social Affairs, Commission on the Status of Women. Consiglio Nazionale delle Donne Italiane, Congrès International des Femmes Méditerranéennes, Constantine (Algérie) 29-31 Marzo 1932.

<sup>256</sup> Scholars continue to engage questions of what the “Mediterranean” means as a geopolitical entity and the extent to which the “Mediterranean” can be discussed as a cohesive unit. For a recent inquiry into how the “Mediterranean” operates as a conduit of knowledge for women, see Fatima Sadiqi, ed. *Women and Knowledge in the Mediterranean* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

descent—were French citizens.<sup>257</sup>

In November 1931, the League of Nations received a request from Germaine Malaterre-Sellier (1889-1967) to send a representative to an upcoming conference on women in the Mediterranean to be hosted in Constantine, Algeria in March 1932.<sup>258</sup> In appealing to the League of Nations, the organizers of the Mediterranean Women's Conference wanted to align the conference with questions about women's status at the international level. As the conference convened in Constantine, the Assembly of the League of Nations was debating whether questions of women's status were of international concern. Not all of the member states thought an international women's rights standard should be established. The French government was among the skeptics regarding the internationalization of women's rights norms. Accordingly, the French government did not explicitly address the question of women's status in the French mandate in its yearly reports to the League of Nations.<sup>259</sup>

Women's issues writ large were not categorized as "international" by the League in 1932, but issues that were often gendered female, such as social hygiene and the protection of children, were commonly categorized as issues that transcended international borders and were therefore "international" in nature. Aware of the League's

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<sup>257</sup> See Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008) and Neil McMaster, *Burning The Veil: The Algerian War and the 'Emancipation' of Muslim Women, 1954-62* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2012) for information on how French-born women engaged in the colonial project in Algeria and how women's bodies were used to delimit French citizenship during the war of independence. There is also a rich historiography on how Algerian women participated in the war of independence.

<sup>258</sup> See S. Wierzbicki, "Germaine Malaterre-Sellier: Un destin aux croisées du féminisme et du pacifisme (1889-1967)," (Ph.D. Dissertation Université Paris I, 2002). Malatere-Sellier served as a delegate for the IWSA on its scouting mission to the Middle East ahead of its 1935 conference in Istanbul. See Weber, "Making Common Cause?: Western and Middle Eastern Feminists in the International Women's Movement, 1911-1948," 123-142.

<sup>259</sup> *Rapports sur la Situation de la Syrie et du Liban* were submitted to the League yearly between 1922 and 1938. The reports focused on the political situation and issues of agriculture, transportation, import tariffs, post offices, schools, and health services. Women surface in the discussion of prisoners and as pupils in girls' schools.



definition of which issues were categorized as “international,” the advance materials for the conference advertised “[t]he congress will address questions of social hygiene and the protection of women and children, those that live in the Mediterranean basin” and beyond.<sup>260</sup> The conference also promised to bring women together from a range of countries, which also fit the League’s definition of “international”—crossing at least one international border. Through both content and membership, the conference organizers attempted to appeal to emergent notions of “international.”

The League debated sending a representative to the conference, but ultimately declined the invitation because of the “strict economy” imposed on the League during the Great Depression. The conference organizers were undeterred. They returned to the League with an offer to pay for the passage of the League of Nations’ official. The funds to cover the cost of the official’s passage were raised among the women themselves and received approval from the French colonial government. In the end, the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, Sir Eric Drummond, accepted “with pleasure the honor of being listed as part of the Congress’ Honor Committee.”<sup>261</sup> He closed his letter wishing the conference organizers the best of luck in their endeavors—“your work is important.”<sup>262</sup> The other women’s conferences convened by Arab women that solicited League support and sanction did not receive the same approbation from the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, which exposes at the privileged access women from France and other colonial nations received within the League’s structure.

The goal of the conference was to research the differing status of women around

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<sup>260</sup> LN R3019 11A/31603/31603. Social Section, General. Letter to Ekstrand from Congress President Germaine Malaterre-Sellier, 4 February 1932.

<sup>261</sup> LN R3019 11A/31603/31603. Social Section, General. Letter from Secretary-General, Sir Eric Drummond to Madame Malaterre-Sellier. n.d.

<sup>262</sup> *ibid.*

the Mediterranean, raise awareness about the status of women, and search for a means of improving women's legal and moral condition in the region. The national delegations to the conference were asked to prepare a short, thirty-minute presentation about the legal and social situation that women faced in their country. The presentations emphasized the progress the women's movement had made in their country since the turn of the century and indicate what rights had been won.<sup>263</sup> The presentations were also supposed to cover the barriers that the women's movement faced. The country-by-country analysis of statistics, anecdotes and legal information about the status of women was meant to highlight the trends present in each nation: was the status of women improving? Was it stagnant? Was it declining? Furthermore, what were the larger women's rights trends in the region?

The conference organizers noted that "[f]rom the female point of view, we see throughout the Mediterranean that even if a woman fulfills all of her many family duties, she is still kept in a lower legal and social position."<sup>264</sup> Thus, the conference organizers defined the status of women in the countries who bordered the Mediterranean Sea as universally low, regardless of legal system. The conference split its inquiry into the legal status of women into two categories:

1. Legal, moral, and economic condition of women and children in the European countries of the Mediterranean.
2. Legal (customary law), moral, and economic condition of women and children in the Muslim countries of the Mediterranean.<sup>265</sup>

While the conference organizers tried to use the Mediterranean Sea to unify the diverse populations that lived along its shores, the call for unity was not one of unifying legal

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<sup>263</sup> LN R3019 11A/31603/31603. Social Section, General. "Le congrès des femmes méditerranéennes" program. 3.

<sup>264</sup> LN R3019 11A/31603/31603. Social Section, General. "Le congrès des femmes méditerranéennes" program. 1.

<sup>265</sup> *ibid.*, 2. Formatting original.

systems.

The conference divided its days into two sessions. Morning sessions revolved around listening to country presentations and debating programs for “researching the changes to be made” to address the gap between Muslim and European legal systems’ treatment of women.<sup>266</sup> The conference participants also discussed resolutions that would lead to the creation of an international permanent committee, which would “coordinate women’s efforts for improving the social station of women throughout the diverse countries of the Mediterranean.”<sup>267</sup> The afternoon sessions included outings to give “assistance to indigenous babies” and an “aviation party,” among other activities.<sup>268</sup> In proper conference fashion, the Mediterranean Women’s Conference closed with a banquet.

The Mediterranean identity that the conference organizers tried to cultivate operated along a north-south axis rather than truly encompassing the entire Mediterranean basin. Syrian and Lebanese women were by definition “Mediterranean” as their countries bordered the sea. But Syrian and Lebanese women were likely disinterested in aligning themselves with a Mediterranean women’s identity connected to the French Empire, which had usurped Syrian and Lebanese women’s ability to control the language used to describe their status and their origins—a “Mediterranean” women’s identity was a foreign, colonial construct.

The Mediterranean Women’s Conference demonstrates that women’s conferences could be a site where colonialism was both enforced and contested. Some women living in areas under French rule or colonized by the French supported the colonial system and

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<sup>266</sup> *ibid.*, 1.

<sup>267</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> *ibid.*, 3.

others challenged it. In the case of the Constantine conference, the colonial system was unchallenged. The major difference between the Mediterranean Women's Conference and the women's conferences hosted in Beirut in Damascus in 1928 and 1930 was that women's conferences in the Arab world cited the colonial system as the major impediment to advancing women's progress in the "East." It is unclear whether any Syrian or Lebanese women attended the Mediterranean Women's Conference. It seems unlikely they sent a delegation. The Mediterranean Women's Conference was too closely aligned with the French to entice the participation of Syrian and Lebanese women, who wanted to participate in conversations about women's rights in an Eastern context.

### **The Second Eastern Women's Conference (Tehran, 1932)**

The Mediterranean Women's Conference hosted in March 1932 attempted to introduce a new identity framework. The "Mediterranean" neologism did not reflect the practice of Syrian and Lebanese women using land and history as key markers of their identity. The poetry of Al-Yaziji is an example of the practice of yoking an identity to a physical space rather than a waterway. Nour Hamada referenced Al-Yaziji in her history of the Syrian women's movement when addressing a gathering of dignitaries and leaders in Iran ahead of the Second Eastern Women's Conference in Tehran, Iran in the fall of 1932. After presiding over the First Eastern Women's Conference in 1930, Hamada was once again president of the Second Eastern Women's Conference. The First Eastern Women's Conference in 1930 was a local affair with few representatives from outside the Arab world in attendance. The Second Eastern Women's Conference was a regional event.

The goal of the Second Eastern Women's Conference was to "to raise the Arab

and Eastern woman to higher levels of freedom and participation.”<sup>269</sup> The conference was held in three stages, to increase the reach of the conference. The first two stages of the conference, hosted in Damascus and Baghdad—it was the first time a women’s conference was hosted in Iraq—primarily recruited delegates from Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. Margaret Cousins, an Irish woman who was a leader in the All-Indian Women’s Conference and later the All-Asian Women’s Conference, attended the Baghdad session of the conference.<sup>270</sup> The Second Eastern Women’s Conference’s capstone session in Tehran brought more women together around the “Eastern” construct, though representatives from all the “Eastern” nations were not present.<sup>271</sup> The third and final stage hosted in Tehran concretized the “Eastern” rather than purely “Arab” nature of the conference.

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<sup>269</sup> *Filasṭīn*, 18 October 1932 quoted in Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its “New” Women*, 180.

<sup>270</sup> “Women’s Conferences at Damascus and Baghdad,” *Jus Suffragii* 27.3 (December 1932): 18.

<sup>271</sup> Arab women were not the only ones who were trying to construct a viable identity that would challenge the West’s grip over discussions of women’s rights. Women from Java, Japan, Burma, Afghanistan, Ceylon, Iran, and India gathered in Lahore, India (now part of Pakistan) in January 1931 to discuss the status of women in their countries and the general status of women in Asia. The conference aimed to “promote the consciousness of unity amongst the women of Asia as members of a common Oriental culture.” The conference proclaimed in the “the extremes of honor and of serfdom accorded to its womanhood, Asia is one”—that is, the subjugation of Asian women was one of the factors uniting women in the ecumene stretching from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Pacific shores of Japan.<sup>271</sup> Hamada was invited to attend. She sent a message of good will in lieu of physically attending. No women from Syria or Lebanon attended the conference, nor were any Arab delegates in attendance. The All Asian Women’s Conference advertised the forthcoming Second Eastern Women’s Conference. The plug for the second conference indicates there was awareness of the concurrent conferences trying to forge a cohesive identity for non-Western women. The conference organizers tried to appropriate two terms for the delegates to use to forge a cohesive regional identity—“Oriental” and “Asian.” “Quietness,” “simplicity,” and “agriculture” were linked to “Oriental,” which was defined in opposition to the West. After the devastation of the First World War, the conference organizers did not see much “substance in the much-vaunted Western concepts of fellow-feeling and humanitarianism” and called upon the women who attended the conference to be vigilant in not abandoning local traditions in favor of Western ways. “In our opinion it is fully time that we Oriental women should make a determined effort to understand one another and develop among ourselves a spirit of Asian sisterhood, with the object of preserving all that is valuable in our age-long national and social cultures and of discriminating what is best for us to assimilate from outside Asia.” The attempts of the All Asian Women’s Conference and the Eastern Women’s Conference to amass a unified collective of women that could speak for the women in the non-West faced logistical challenges. However, the impulse to create these conferences says something important about the many ways that women outside of the West were observing the West and were attempting to disrupt the prevailing system wherein women in the West spoke for all women. Not to mention an explicit campaign to gain independence.

Source: All Asian Women’s Conference, “All Asian Women’s Conference, First Session, Lahore, Jan. 19-25, 1931” (Mumbai, Maharashtra: Times of India, 1931). 8.

Hamada sent requests to participate to “many Arab organizations.”<sup>272</sup> Though, not all of her invitations yielded a representative from a country or territory—countries did not need to be independent to send a representative. The Palestinian press, for example, decried the lack of a Palestinian representative at the conference in Baghdad. Hamada emphasized that many attempts were made to include Palestinian women in the conference proceedings; she claimed that an invitation was also sent to the British High Commissioner for Palestine. The invitations sent to the Palestinian women’s organizations and to the mandate government in Palestine did not yield a representative.<sup>273</sup>

From the outset, the conference session in Damascus had a different relationship with the French mandate government in Syria than previous women’s conferences held in Damascus and Beirut. Instead of fighting against local governments for permits and recognition, the conference tried to partner with local governments to raise the local and international profiles of the conference. The Syrian Deputy Prime Minister, Sami Shawkat, welcomed the women to the Damascus session of the conference. His speech emphasized “part of the reason that Western countries have prospered is because women have taken their proper roles, something we still lack in the East.” He praised the conference delegates for helping to “raise the level of women” and thereby raise the level of the nation.<sup>274</sup> In Baghdad, delegates met with King Faysal and Prime Minister Ali Nuri Pasha.<sup>275</sup>

The conference resolutions passed at the Damascus and Baghdad sessions of the

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<sup>272</sup> “Women’s Conferences at Damascus and Baghdad.” *Jus Suffragii* 27.3 (December 1932): 18.

<sup>273</sup> Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its “New” Women*, 180-181.

<sup>274</sup> *Filasfīn*, 18 October 1932 quoted in Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its “New” Women*, 180.

<sup>275</sup> Faysal took the throne in Iraq after he was disposed in Syria.

Second Eastern Women's Conference addressed the status of women under family law.<sup>276</sup> Resolutions from the first two sessions of the conference proposed that the age of marriage—of both spouses—be raised. The conference also recommended the dowry and trousseau requirements for marriage be reduced as the high costs of marriage resulted in many unmarried men and women—women's organizations had long raised funds for poor women's dowries. The conference resolutions further advocated that spouses become acquainted with one another before marriage, that polygyny be prevented, that women obtain the right to divorce, and that women's guardians be invalidated for not upholding women's inheritance rights.

The conference did not seek to alter cultural practices grounded in religion. For example, one conference attendee expressed that the issue of the veil was to be resolved by time “because going into it now would only muddle things and electrify the atmosphere.”<sup>277</sup> Despite attempts to redirect the conversation away from the veil, it became impossible to ignore the issue at the Tehran session of the conference.<sup>278</sup> Early in the conference program, Hamada had an unplanned and heated debate with ‘Abd al-Husayn Awrang about who had the power to decide whether women veiled or not. As a riposte to Awrang, other local leaders, and the international audience who wanted to focus on the veil, the conference delegates decided to claim the issue of the veil as their own. The delegates at the Tehran conference adopted a resolution that addressed sartorial reforms. It read: “Women of the Orient must choose among the mores and customs of the

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<sup>276</sup> Given the lack of a written record of the conference proceedings in Damascus and Baghdad before the final stage of conference convened in Tehran, it is difficult to evaluate the actual content of the conference. However, it seems likely Damascus and Baghdad conferences hosted in October addressed both legal and social reforms to the status of women.

<sup>277</sup> *Al-Sirāt al-Mustaqīm*, 27 October 1932 quoted in Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its “New” Women*, 180.

<sup>278</sup> As far as the existing record shows, the preceding conferences in Damascus and Baghdad did not explicitly debate the veil.

West those which are good and commendable, leaving aside all which is founded on passions.”<sup>279</sup> The resolution, as phrased, preserved the choice to veil or unveil for women themselves. It also explicitly claimed that women had the right to choose what traditions and customs that they wanted to import or adopt from elsewhere.

The delegates preserved the choice for themselves about whether they would veil, or wear stockings, or pin their hair. The choice was theirs and not the choice of foreign operatives or domestic officials.<sup>280</sup> Awrang pushed against classifying the veil as a women’s-only concern. He said that as a representative of the Patriotic Women’s League of Persia, he should be privy to all conference conversations. Hamada responded that “the Patriotic Women’s League may delegate any [of its own] business to men, but it does not have the right to do so regarding the special affairs of women.” The veil was thus cast as a special women’s affair, not a man’s.<sup>281</sup> The sartorial choice resolution passed unanimously to sustained applause.

Hamada and Awrang’s exchange was not limited to the veil itself, but also what the veil symbolized. Unveiling was considered a symbol of women’s progress and the continuation of the practice of veiling was coded as the opposite of progress by many government reformers, such as the Shah and Atatürk, and by many members of the international women’s movement. Awrang touted the Iranian Marriage Reform Law of 1931 as the most progressive law in any Eastern nation. This law, Awrang contended,

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<sup>279</sup> Henri Massé, *Le Deuxième Congrès Musulman Général des Femmes d'Orient à Téhéran* (Paris: *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 1933), 96.

<sup>280</sup> Some women staked cultural pride on their ability to emulate the West. As Matiel Mogannam wrote in 1936, “[a]ll English women think Arab women are uncultured. They believe they only speak Arabic, that they wear veils and rush away at the sight of a man. How I wish I could take English women around to see my cultured Arab friends. How surprised they would be—European clothes, silk stockings, high heeled shoes, permanently waved hair, manicured hands” *Palestine Post*, 7 December 1936 quoted in Ellen Fleischmann, “Selective Memory, Gender, and Nationalism: Palestinian Women Leaders of the Mandate Period,” *History Workshop Journal* 47 (1999), fn 31.

<sup>281</sup> *ibid.*



proved that Iran did not actually need to address the changes advocated in the conference platform as it had already advanced beyond them.<sup>282</sup> Hamada did not agree with the assessment that Iran was the most advanced country in the East with regards to the status of women. Instead, Hamada offered a precise ranking of Eastern nations vis-à-vis each other

the women of Turkey have the highest degree [of progress] among [our] Eastern sisters, and after them the women of Egypt and the daughters of the land of the Pharaohs, and then Syria proper followed by Greater Syria. The women of Iraq have a new awakening, and most of the [progressive] women of the Hijaz are women from Syria and Greater Syria who have Hijazi husbands. And now that I have come to Iran and gathered with learned men and women, I am endlessly pleased that I am among them. I am also eminently satisfied that in Tehran, the imperial capital of Iran, with a great king such as the Pahlavi emperor, I see this awakening in [my] Iranian sisters. I can say that among the women of the countries I have listed, we can place them [the Iranians] in the middle—we should not exaggerate and say that they are the highest level [of progress] nor be unfair and say they are in the last place.<sup>283</sup>

The women's rights hierarchy that Hamada conveyed suggests that the franchise was the target. Hamada ranked the political and social status of women in countries throughout the "East" against Turkey, which was the regional apogee because it had given women the right to vote.

Hamada described the Eastern countries as if linked by a chain. The chain was strung between Turkey and Japan—the "Eastern" exemplars. Both countries were independent from foreign rule, one of the things women in other Eastern nations wanted to achieve in addition to greater women's rights protections. Hamada hoped that the movement along the ends of the chain would reverberate to other points along the chain.

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<sup>282</sup> Camron Michael Amin, "Globalizing Iranian Feminism, 1910-1950" *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4.1 (Winter 2008), 20.

<sup>283</sup> A.H. Hashemi Ha'eri, "Dat Jalaseh-e Dishab-e Banovan." *Ettela'at* 1751,7 (November 1932): 1 quoted in Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman: Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture, 1865-1946* (Gainesville, FL: Florida University Press, 2002), 195.

“This movement of the two ends ... will communicate itself to us.”<sup>284</sup> Hamada thought women in the East were linked by a shared colonial fate and by limited access to rights.

In a letter to the editor of one of Tehran’s daily papers, one outside observer questioned the merit of the *recherché* content of the conference speeches about the veil and women’s progress. The observer asked what good does all of the discussion of the veil do? She directed her letter to the “the President and other representatives and even the Persian ladies who are giving fine speeches. What do they mean? Have they thought of any plan for freeing us from all the miseries or are they after an unknown aim? If they have any plans, then why have they not expounded on them?”<sup>285</sup> According to this letter writer, the ideas about women’s equality and suffrage espoused by the conference organizers did not address the day-to-day struggles faced by many women in Eastern countries. Esoteric conversations about which Eastern countries were more advanced in delivering rights to women did not change the political and social realities on the ground. Many women in Iran and the other countries that had sent delegations were impoverished and uneducated. The conference did not, as the letter to the editor commented, actually propose a concrete plan for changing the status of women.

More than offering a specific plan for changing the strictures of family law, the Eastern women’s conferences were invested in raising awareness about women’s status throughout the region. Hamada emphasized the importance of privileging more local geographic and cultural ties in defining identity.

When I speak of Syrian woman, I am actually talking not only about Iranian woman and Arab woman, but also Eastern and non-Eastern woman. Speaking of Syrian woman, I am talking about the fact that the Syrian woman loves her homeland first, then her home,

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<sup>284</sup> Nour Hamada, “Débats et résolutions,” in Henri Massé, *Le Deuxième Congrès Musulman Général des Femmes d'Orient à Téhéran* (Paris: *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 1933), 93.

<sup>285</sup> *Sharfagh Sorkh*, 15 November 1932, Press Translation Service (2 December 1932), Box 40, Folder 1, Ruth Woodsmall Papers, SSC, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

then her relatives and neighbors, and then her more distant neighbors.<sup>286</sup>

Women's allegiances, as described by Hamada, moved in concentric circles that emanated from a woman's nation until the outer rings encircled the earth. While anchored in the East, Hamada's vision of the women's movement emphasized the interconnectedness of the world's women. Hamada's vision of a movement of women grounded to a place, yet simultaneously aware of the status of women in other places, reflected what she had hoped to find in the international women's movement.

Hamada was invested in the promise of the international women's movement. She had founded the *Al-Majma' al-Nisā'ī al-Adabī al-'Arabī* (Women's Arabic and Cultural Assembly) for the express purpose of cultivating connections with international women's organizations.<sup>287</sup> The international women's movement she encountered in 1929, when the Women's Arabic and Cultural Assembly was admitted as a member of the IWSA, used the women's rights systems in force in Europe and the United States as the baseline for international women's rights protections. The Western-centric definition of women's rights that operated in the international women's movement inspired Hamada to create an alternative international women's movement based in the East dedicated to transforming the status of women in her natal Syria, in the Arab world, and in the more expansive non-Western world, all of which were interconnected.

In connecting to an "Eastern" women's identity, Syrian and Lebanese women claimed a much larger constituency that could not be marginalized like more provincialized "Syrian," or "Lebanese" or even "Arab" identities. The more representatives from the Eastern ecumene, which ran from Turkey to Japan, that the

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<sup>286</sup> "A Speech by Nour Hamada: Tehran, 1932" *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, trans. (from Persian) Haleh Emrani 4.1 (Winter 2008), 113.

<sup>287</sup> Imilie Faris Ibrahim, *al-Haraka al-nisā'iyya al-lubnāniyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqafa, 196?), 94.

“Eastern” women’s movement counted as members, the more clout it hoped to achieve in international conversations about women’s rights. The conference did not equalize the gap between the Eastern women’s movement and women’s organizations agitating for women’s rights on the European continent. The conference represented a first attempt to solidify an “Eastern” women’s identity. The Eastern women’s movement resolved to make connections among women in the East and to make a firm claim for women’s ability to represent their own needs in international and domestic forums. The Eastern women’s conferences provided an important venue for women to cultivate a sense of solidarity. The conferences affirmed Eastern womanhood as a distinct category that required its own forums and actions to improve the status of women living within its bounds.

An “Eastern” women’s identity never gained much independent traction, but Syrian and Lebanese women continued to use the language of the “East” to connect themselves to women beyond the Arab world in their activism. The Third Eastern Women’s Conference, scheduled for Ankara in 1934 never happened, though it is unclear why. A Mediterranean women’s identity also never solidified, most likely because of its colonial connections. But the 1932 conferences—the Mediterranean Women’s Conference and the Second Eastern Women’s Conference—established two important parameters that helped facilitate the subsequent women’s conferences hosted in the Middle East: a more concrete idea of how to negotiate attempts to control the agenda and a heightened understanding of the limits of international feminism to help women in the “East” achieve their goals.

**The Twelfth International Woman Suffrage Alliance Conference, Istanbul (1935):  
The Apotheosis of East-West Cooperation**

In 1935, the International Woman Suffrage Alliance hosted its first non-Continental conference in Istanbul.<sup>288</sup> Istanbul's geographic location, its position as the point where "East" met "West," was one of the factors cited by the IWSA conference organizers for selecting the location. The conference announcement said, "[Istanbul] will prove a convenient centre for the women of those countries lying around the Mediterranean and beyond who for the most part have not won full suffrage and who in many cases are just in the early stages of an organized women's movement."<sup>289</sup>

Arab women welcomed the location. For two decades women from the "East" had been traveling to Europe to attend international women's conferences hosted in European capitals. The delegations from Egypt or Syria never numbered more than a few representatives. The delegations had primarily comprised of leaders of the women's movement in a given country—e.g. Huda Sha'arawi commonly represented Egypt abroad. The proximity of the IWSA conference in Istanbul made it possible for larger delegations of Arab women to attend as the cost of round trip train fare from Damascus to Istanbul was much cheaper than steamship travel across the Mediterranean to European ports. Accordingly, the ranks of the delegations from Arab countries expanded from the leadership ranks to more general membership. The higher concentration of women from non-Western nations corresponded with a greater number of panels and resolutions addressing the status of women in the "East" in language women from the region approved.

Arab women were excited about the possibility of open exchange with their

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<sup>288</sup> A comparatively large amount of secondary literature exists about this conference. See Kathryn Libal, "Staging Turkish Women's Emancipation: Istanbul, 1935," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4.1 (Winter 2008): 31-52; Nicole A. N. M. Van Os, "Ottoman Muslim and Turkish women in an International Context," *European Review* 13.3 (July 2005): 467-471; and Weber, "Making Common Cause?: Western and Middle Eastern Feminists in the International Women's Movement, 1911-1948," 121-168.

<sup>289</sup> "Twelfth Congress: Istanbul, 18-25 April, 1935." *Jus Suffragii* 28.9 (June 1934): 1.

“Western sisters” about the conditions they faced under European colonialism. Ahead of the conference, Samia ‘Abd al-Hadi wrote in *al-Difā’*, a Palestinian newspaper “if I say that the Western woman is superior to the Eastern woman, that is ... because the West lived under the sign of freedom and national sovereignty and the Arabs live under the sign of darkness and the protection of a foreign system.”<sup>290</sup> Al-Hadi acknowledged a gap existed between the rights afforded to women in the West and the rights that Arab women were awarded by the Western governments in control of their countries under the mandate system. The Western model of protecting women’s rights was not the only model that Arab women turned to however.

Women in neighboring Arab countries watched women’s reforms in Turkey with great interest because of a lingering Ottoman connection, despite the empire’s dissolution and despite increased Arab hostility toward the Ottomans at the empire’s end. The Ottomans had been the governing power during the childhoods of many of the activists assembled in Turkey. Nour Hamada’s 1932 speech in Tehran praised the Turkish government for its reforms, including giving women the municipal franchise. Many other women’s rights activists from the region held Turkey up as model of an independent, Muslim state that had undertaken legal reforms to ensure women’s equality. Palestinian women were impressed by the fact that Turkey had granted women the right to vote and to stand in national elections: “[w]hat catches the attention is that Turkish ladies ... have attained [in name] what the [Arab] Women’s Union aspires to: the right to vote.”<sup>291</sup> Since women in Turkey had succeeded in obtaining the right to vote, Palestinian women thought their campaign might have a chance at success because Turkey shared religious and cultural heritage. Women in Egypt also saw something worth emulating in Turkish

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<sup>290</sup> Samia ‘Abd al-Hadi, “Sayyida al-madi satakun sayyida al-mustaqbal.” *Al-Difā’* 12 February 1935.

<sup>291</sup> “Al-mu’tamar al-nisā’ī al-dawī fī Istanbul.” *Filisṭīn* 14 April 1935.

reforms. The Turkish Civil Code, which abolished polygamy and enshrined women's right to divorce, served as a strong model of how an "Eastern" system could eradicate some of the legal traditions that had come to impede women's progress.<sup>292</sup>

Despite the trend toward secularization of the Turkish government, Turkey was seen as more culturally connected to the Arab territories under the French Mandate than the countries in Europe that were also pushing through reforms in women's rights. Furthermore, many Turkish citizens still shared a religious link—Islam—with many Arab women. It would be easier for Arab women to import changes in the structure of women's rights from Turkey than from Europe. Huda Sha'arawi praised Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the first president of independent Turkey, for the ways his government protected women's rights and in doing so offered an example of how other "Eastern" countries could follow Turkey's lead in protecting women's rights. "I said that it was highly exemplary for Muslim countries that her big sister had encouraged all the countries of the East to strive for liberation and advocate the rights of women." Sha'arawi continued, "I hold him 'If the Turks have called you Atatürk [father of the Turks], I say that is not enough; for us you are Atasharq [father of the East]."<sup>293</sup>

Atatürk, while admired by Sha'arawi and other leaders of the women's movement along the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean, had not enacted the reforms in conjunction or consultation with the women's movement in Turkey. Under Atatürk's authoritarian rule, women were given no recourse to obtain rights not bestowed by the Turkish state. The Turkish government, under the leadership of Atatürk, won international

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<sup>292</sup> Fatma Ni'mat Rashid, "Muqaranah bayna al-Mar'a al-Misriyah wa-al-Mar'a al-Turkiyya" *al-Misriyya* 1 (May 1937): 10 quoted in Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 126. (I have been unable to obtain copies of the Arabic language journal of the Egyptian Feminist Union, *al-Misriyya*.)

<sup>293</sup> Huda Sha'arawi, *Mudhakkirat al-Ra'idat al-'Arabiyya al-Haditha*, 453 quoted in Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 213.

commendation in 1923 when it made a move to limit the circulation of customary forms of headgear, such as the fez and the veil. The 1923 law did not formally abolish the veil, however. In 1934, the year before the country hosted the Twelfth IWSA Conference, the Turkish government passed the “law relating to the wearing of prohibited garments.” Among the prohibited garments was the veil. The law actively promoted Western-style clothing and banned wearing traditional head coverings.

Abolishing the veil was not the only reform undertaken by Atatürk’s government in the early years of the republic to demonstrate a rupture with the Ottoman past and to project the legitimacy of the republic to domestic and international audiences. In 1930, Turkish women were granted the right to vote and run for office in municipal and local elections. In 1934, women were granted full enfranchisement rights: they could vote and stand for elections on the national level. Kathryn Libal has observed that the granting of the right to vote to Turkish women immediately prior to the IWSA’s conference in Istanbul was denounced by the Turkish public as a calculated choice that would “influence world public opinion of Turkey.”<sup>294</sup> In the end, the significance of the right to vote was curtailed by Turkey’s one party system.

Still, the full enfranchisement of Turkish women garnered international attention and praise as international delegations arrived via rail and steamship in Istanbul, which was precisely the point of the legal reform. Atatürk used women’s rights reforms to demonstrate the country’s natural affinities with the West, rather than with the countries that lay further to the “East,” or along its southern borders.<sup>295</sup> In this regard, Atatürk

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<sup>294</sup> Kathryn Libal, “Staging Turkish Women’s Emancipation: Istanbul, 1935,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 4.1 (Winter 2008), 37.

<sup>295</sup> See Hasan Kayali, “Liberal Practices in the Transformation from Empire to Nation-State: The Rump Ottoman Empire, 1918-1923,” in *The Roots of Liberal Thought in the Eastern Mediterranean*, ed.



continued a policy of what Ussama Makdisi has called “Ottoman Orientalism,” a practice wherein the Ottoman government demonstrated its relative cultural superiority over the Arab nations under its domain. “[H]ow Ottomans represented their own Arab periphery as an integral part of their engagement with, explicit resistance to, but also implicit acceptance of, Western representations of the indolent Ottoman East.”<sup>296</sup> Giving women the right to vote could be cast as “Turkish Orientalism,” which distanced the new republic from its Ottoman past and religious heritage.

The IWSA conference proceeded with full support of the Turkish government, which issued a series of six commemorative stamps with the imprint of the faces of five female Nobel Prize winners, two leaders of the women’s movement, and Atatürk. A second set of stamps pictured Turkish women in a range of professions: as secretaries, aviators, teachers, and agricultural laborers, which was meant to signal that the Turkish woman was an advanced, active member of society. The final stamp in the professional Turkish woman series depicted a Turkish woman casting her ballot.

The government also gave the conference access to the *Yıldız Kiosk*, which had been an Ottoman palace and had housed the imperial harem. The location of the conference in the former harem sent a direct message to the congress attendees about Turkish women’s progress: once confined to the harem, now the women were free to operate in society unencumbered by the veil and with full citizenship rights. *The New York Times* described the meetings in Istanbul as the “natural consequence and tribute to the evolution of Turkish women during the last fifteen years. No longer veiled dolls in harems, whose only occupation was to please their lords, the women of Turkey today

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Christoph Schumann (Leiden: Brill, 2008) on the solidification of the borders between the nation-state of Turkey and the Arab countries (colonies) to its south.

<sup>296</sup> Ussama Makdisi, “Ottoman Orientalism,” *American Historical Review* 107.3 (June 2002): 768.

enjoy equal civic rights with men.”<sup>297</sup> Turkish feminists may have questioned the article’s assertion that Turkish women were equal with men in civic affairs.



The commemorative stamps issued by the Turkish state for the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance. From bottom left Carrie Chapman Catt, Selma Lägerlöf, Bertha Von Suttner, Marie Curie, Atatürk, “Liberator of Turkish Women,” Sigrid Undset, Grazia Deladda, Jane Addams, *Yıldız Kiosk*. Source: *Illustration de Turquie*. 30-31 (1935): 10.



The commemorative stamp series included a series of stamps depicting women’s progress in Turkey. From left: voting, typing, teaching, flying, farming, and a stamp with the imprint of the IWSA. Source: *Illustration de Turquie*. 30-31 (1935): 10.

Turkish feminists, most famously among them Halide Edip (1884-1964), also welcomed the changes in practice of secluding women in the harem.<sup>298</sup> Importantly,

<sup>297</sup> J. W. Kernick, “Turkey Welcomes Women’s Congress.” *The New York Times* 14 April 1935: E5.

<sup>298</sup> For more information on the Turkish feminist movement during the republican era, see Jenny B. White, “State Feminism, Modernization, and the Turkish Republican Woman” *NWSA Journal* 15.3 (2003): 145-159; Deniz Kandiyoti, “End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism, and Women in Turkey” in *Women, Islam, and*

women's organizations had begun their attempts to reform the harem during the late Ottoman Empire.<sup>299</sup> Many feminists in the late Ottoman era believed eliminating the practice of secluding women to the harem was important for advancing the status of women in the empire; they welcomed the elimination of harem seclusion in the early republican moment. In addition to working to change the structure of the harem, feminists in the Ottoman era also worked through social service organizations, like those found in Greater Syria, to advance the status of women in other segments of Ottoman society.

Some members of Turkish society bemoaned the eradication of the harem system, however. Josephine Schain (1886-1972), an American women's rights activist who attended the conference, later recalled the consternation of a guard as he "complained bitterly" about "the evil days that have befallen Turkey." He did not approve of the rapid societal changes that made it possible for "the delegation to a feminist Congress to use the old harem for committee meetings."<sup>300</sup> Schain's account of women's progress clearly catered to the American public imagination. The majority of Turkish women were never

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*the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991); Hulya Adak, "National Myths and Self-Narrations: Mustafa Kemal's Nutuk and Halide Edib's Memoirs and The Turkish Ordeal," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102.2 (2003): 509-527; Ayşegül C. Baykan, "The Turkish Woman: An Adventure in Feminist Historiography," *Gender & History* 6.1 (1994): 101-116. On the effects the transition between the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic had on the women's movement, see Arzu Öztürkmen, "The Women's Movement Under Ottoman And Republican Rule," *Journal of Women's History* 25.4 (2013): 255-264.

<sup>299</sup> On reforming the harem system and on the Ottoman woman's movement more generally, see Nihan Altınbaş, "Marriage And Divorce In The Late Ottoman Empire: Social Upheaval, Women's Rights, and the Need For New Family Law," *Journal Of Family History* 39.2 (2014): 114-125; Başak Tuğ, "Gender And Ottoman Social History," *IJMES* 46.2 (2014): 379-381. On the history of the harem and Ottoman family structure see Leslie P. Peirce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) and Marilyn Booth, ed. *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). On family structure in Ottoman Greater Syria see Beshara Doumani, ed. *Family History in the Middle East: Household, Property, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

<sup>300</sup> Text of radio address, 3 July 1935, Josephine Schain Papers, Box 5 (SSC). Cited in Kathryn Libal, "Staging Turkish Women's Emancipation: Istanbul, 1935," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4.1 (Winter 2008), 42.

secluded by the walls of a harem at *Yıldız Kiosk* or elsewhere. Secluding women and preventing contact with unrelated men was a practice that was available only to the most affluent sector of society. Yet, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, harem seclusion, regardless of being a minoritarian, elite practice, had come to symbolize the status of women in the “East” to many observers from the West.

The delegates at the conference from Europe and the Americas were influenced by the prevailing stereotypes about the status of women in the “East” and praised the reforms made by Atatürk that imitated the Western model of empowering women through the franchise.<sup>301</sup> Many Arab delegates also praised his electoral reforms; some Turkish women also admired his efforts to improve the status of Turkish women, though perhaps not his authoritarian means of doing so. Atatürk’s reforms absorbed the notion that the veil was a backwards practice that should be discarded in favor of Western fashion.<sup>302</sup> Like mandate officials and the Shah, Atatürk was invested in using the progress of Turkey’s women as a way of projecting the nation’s progress vis-à-vis Europe and the United States. Atatürk did not attend the conference, but he invited the organizing committee to visit him in Ankara after the conference concluded. Many of the women, including Sha‘arawi, accepted the invitation for an audience with the Turkish president. Atatürk’s reforms projected a progressive mystique.

### **Pre-Conference Awareness-Raising**

Al-Hadi’s article exposing Western women’s connection to and implicit support of

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<sup>301</sup> Indeed, some Western nations had yet to grant women the right to vote. Women in France, for example, were not granted the right to vote until 1944. Italy and Switzerland conferred women the right to vote in federal elections in 1945 and 1971 respectively. And, all women in the United States were not enfranchised until 1965 (African Americans) and 1968 (Native Americans living on federal reservations).

<sup>302</sup> Ruth Frances Woodsmall, *Moslem Women Enter a New World* (New York: Round Table Press, Inc., 1936), 257.

colonialism was published in *al-Difā'* in February 1935 as a delegation of two IWSA executives embarked on a tour through the Arab Middle East to raise awareness about the conference. Germaine Malaterre-Sellier, a French delegate to the League of Nations and one of the conveners of the Mediterranean Women's Conferences, and Christine Bakker van Bosse (1884-1963), a Dutch women's activist, traveled to Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine to raise awareness about the conference and to invite Arab delegations to attend the conference.<sup>303</sup>

The IWSA delegates started their tour of the region in Egypt in late January. The local press dubbed the arrival of the IWSA the "week of women."<sup>304</sup> Huda Sha'arawi hosted a dinner for the IWSA delegation. Twenty ministers including the head of the Wafd party, the ruling Egyptian political party at the time, attended the gathering. After being feted in Cairo, the delegation moved on to Beirut, where the Arab Women's Union, which by 1935 had twenty-nine affiliated societies, hosted the Alliance women.<sup>305</sup> The long-time leaders of Lebanese women's charity and political organizations were all present: Salma Sayigh, Nazira Zayn al-Din, Fareedah el-Akle, Eveline Bustros, and Julia Tu'mi Dimashqiyya. The Beirut meeting drew an audience of one thousand "leading men, poets, professors, journalists, politicians, and young students from the University and girls' schools."<sup>306</sup> In addition to attracting such a large audience in an event arranged by the Arab Women's Union, the French High Commissioner in Beirut hosted Malaterre-Sellier and Bakker van Bosse. Malaterre-Sellier noted in her report to the IWSA

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<sup>303</sup> This pre-conference trip is chronicled in Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 58-60; Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 138-147.

<sup>304</sup> Letter from Christine Baker van Bosse to Josephine Schain, 16 January 1935, Box 4 cited in Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 212.

<sup>305</sup> Nazira Zayn al-Din, "Résumé d'un Rapport du Congrès de l'Union Féministe Arabe." *Jus Suffragii* 28.10 (July 1934): 78.

<sup>306</sup> Margery Corbett Ashby, "An International Pilgrimage." *Jus Suffragii* 29.6 (March 1935): 44.

leadership that the British High Commissioner in Jerusalem did not extend an invitation to the delegates while they were in Jerusalem.<sup>307</sup>

IWSA representatives, mandate officials, and Arab women used the way in which women's rights were structured in the West as the standard for measuring the status of women. The difference between colonial assessments of the status of Arab women and Arab women's self-assessment was that Arab women did not seek to import the Western model wholesale. Colonial and IWSA officials did not pay attention to how women measured their own status. In selecting what portions of the Western women's rights system to adopt, Arab women were articulating what portions of Western women's rights they sought to emulate and which not. The Arab women who interacted with the IWSA delegation supported IWSA programming to a point: they wanted the right to vote and they wanted increased access to education. They did not care for reforms that forced unveiling without their consent.

As an organization the IWSA attempted to be latitudinarian in its treatment of women's organizations, but the actions of its members did not always align with its credo. In 1923, the IWSA admitted the Palestinian Jewish women's organization, the Jewish Women's Equal Rights Association.<sup>308</sup> The members of the Equal Rights Association were Jewish women from Eastern Europe who had immigrated to Palestine. The organization did not include Arab Jewish members, nor Arab Christians nor Arab Muslims.<sup>309</sup> The IWSA did not recognize a Palestinian Arab women's organization until

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<sup>307</sup> Germaine Malatere-Sellier, "*Rapport de notre voyage en Proche-Orient (Egypte, Syrie, Palestine, du 10-janvier-18 février, 1935)*," 6, Box 4, Schain Papers, SSC, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

<sup>308</sup> Charlotte Weber addresses the integration of the Jewish Palestinian affiliate—the Palestine Jewish Women's Equal Rights Association—to the IWSA in 1920 in "Making Common Cause?: Western and Middle Eastern Feminists in the International Women's Movement, 1911-1948," 171-194.

<sup>309</sup> For example, Syrian-born pioneering Jewish women's rights advocate Esther Azhari-Moyal was not invited to participate. For more information on Moyal's life and her works see Lisa Lital Levy, "Jewish

the Istanbul conference in 1935. Palestinian Arab women's organizations had been operational since 1919 and had formally organized into a union in 1929. While in Jerusalem, the IWSA delegates met with both the Jewish and Arab women's organizations. The inability of these organizations to meet together was taken as a sign of the intransigence of the Palestinian Arab women who were "stubborn" in their pursuit of national independence.<sup>310</sup>

The Palestinian Arab women's movement did not fit Malaterre-Sellier's definition of a women's organization, which she thought should deal with feminist issues. Organizations that dealt with both women's issues and nationalist issues did not adhere to her idea of a woman's organization. She recalled "we had to insist many times on the indispensable separation between feminist work and nationalist political work."<sup>311</sup> In many countries in the Arab world, however, dividing feminist work and national political work was a forced and false boundary. Dividing feminism from national politics did not reflect how feminist issues, such as securing the rights of women, were necessarily connected to securing independence. The split between nationalism and women's activism was a Western demarcation that did not reflect the exigencies of the independence movements in the Middle East or in other "Eastern" countries, or more importantly, how women from the region saw the connections.

Leaders of the Arab women's movement in Palestine did not observe the fissure between women's rights and national rights. Mtiel Mogannam, a leader of the

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Writers in the Arab East: Literature, History, and the Politics of Enlightenment, 1863-1914." (Unpub. PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2007); Levy, "Partitioned Pasts: Arab Jewish Intellectuals and the Case of Esther Azharī Moyal (1873-1948)," in *The Making of the Arab Intellectual (1880-1960): Empire, Public Sphere, and the Colonial Coordinates of Selfhood*, ed. Dyala Hamzah (New York: Routledge, 2010). See also Baron, *The Women's Awakening in Egypt*, 20-21.

<sup>310</sup> Germaine Malaterre-Sellier, "*Rapport de notre voyage en Proche-Orient (Egypte, Syrie, Palestine, du 10- janvier-18 février, 1935)*," 6, Box 4, Schain Papers, SSC, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

<sup>311</sup> *ibid.*

Palestinian women's movement, delivered a fiery speech to the IWSA delegates.<sup>312</sup>

“[W]e know that the [IWSA] aims at strengthening the support of peace in the world and securing women's rights, but we ask you, what is this peace that you seek in this country, while colonialism and Zionism sink their claws in the body of this nation?”<sup>313</sup> Mogannam was versed in the IWSA's division of women's rights from political or national rights and questioned the distinction, which from the perspective of women in Palestine seemed arbitrary or at least imposed from a non-colonial environment and an area free from anti-colonial conflict. She continued, “[b]e assured there will be no rights for us ladies to seek as long as we do not see for ourselves security for our future and the future of our children.”<sup>314</sup> Until the IWSA representatives were able to persuade the “colonial government, which is of you and for you, to turn away from its offense and restore justice to oppressed people,” then the IWSA was not fully enacting its charter to support the rights of women around the world.<sup>315</sup> Mogannam's speech was met with boisterous applause from the assembled Palestinian women and men. The newspaper did not record how the IWSA representatives responded to the content of Mogannam's speech.<sup>316</sup>

For Palestinian women, attending the IWSA conference in Istanbul was an opportunity to raise awareness about the plight of Palestinians who were under the

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<sup>312</sup> Mogannam was born in Lebanon in 1900 but was raised in New York City and later moved to Palestine. In 1936, she wrote a chronicle in English of women's role in the Palestinian issue, *The Arab Woman and the Palestine Problem*. The publication of her account coincided with the outbreak of the Great Revolt. Hyperion Press reprinted her account of Arab women's engagement with the Palestine problem during the interwar years in 1976. Mogannam has also been transliterated Mughannam. She transliterated her name “Mogannam” on the cover page of the 1936 imprint, thus I have selected to use this transliteration.

<sup>313</sup> “Nadah al-mar'a al-'arabiyyat al-siyasiyya.” *al-Difā'* 12 February 1935.

<sup>314</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>315</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>316</sup> “Hafla jam'iyya al-sayyidāt al-'arabiyyat li wafd al-ittihād al-nisā'ī al-dawlī bil-Quds.” *Filistīn*, 12 February 1935. It is not clear what language Mogannam delivered her speech in. She wrote a book in English so it is possible she delivered her speech in English. Though, it is also possible she delivered her speech in Arabic, which was subsequently translated into English by Mogannam herself or a translator.



control of the British in a League of Nations imposed mandate. The influx of Eastern European Jews into the country was seen as a threat to the future national identity of Palestine. Some Palestinian organizers saw the IWSA conference in Istanbul as a potential space to raise awareness about the two-front assault on what they believed to be their right to national independence, which would bring with it the ability to control immigration into their country. Others viewed the conference as full of potential for conflict with delegates who supported Jewish immigration to Palestine. An editorial in *al-Difā'* criticized the women's choice to go because they might "hear a Jewish member ... offend the Arab issue or the Arab woman's reputation."<sup>317</sup> Male nationalists thought women could (inadvertently) undermine the larger pan-Arab cause.

Women published a retort in *al-Difā'* two days later claiming "we will not lack means for speaking and presenting our feelings and telling the assembly our grievance."<sup>318</sup> Palestinian women claimed their ability to speak on behalf of Arab independence. Despite fear that their attendance could threaten the Palestinian nationalist cause, a delegation of Palestinian women attended the conference. The delegates thought they could use their presence at the conference to raise awareness about Palestinian grievances against the British occupation and Jewish immigration, which were changing the nature of Palestinian society.<sup>319</sup> Such activism upheld the aims of the nationalist movement.

If the reception of the IWSA delegates in Palestine was contentious, in Damascus,

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<sup>317</sup> "A Word to the Arab Ladies: Your Travel to Istanbul Doesn't Make Any Sense." *al-Difā'* 1 April 1935.

<sup>318</sup> "Concerning the Women's Delegation's Trip to Turkey." *Filastin* 3 April 1935.

<sup>319</sup> On regional responses to Zionist immigration to Palestine see Jonathan Marc Gribetz, *Defining Neighbors: Religion, Race, and the Early Zionist-Arab Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Zachary Lockman, *Comrades and Enemies: Arab and Jewish Workers in Palestine, 1906-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), Chapter 6; Ellen Fleischmann, *The Nation and its "New" Women: The Palestinian Women's Movement, 1920-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), Chapter 6.

the IWSA delegates received an even more overtly hostile reception. The Great Hall at Syrian University in Damascus was packed with five hundred men and women who had gathered to hear the IWSA delegates speak about the association's objectives and aims. In the course of her speech to the assembled audience, Christine Bakker van Bosse lauded Huda Sha'arawi for rejecting the veil as a symbol of women's inferiority and subservience to men, after returning from the Ninth IWSA conference in Rome in 1923.<sup>320</sup> The implication of the comment was not lost on the audience: that they too should unveil. The listeners grew hostile toward Bakker van Bosse, leading the interpreter to ask her to revise her comment in order to restore order to the hall.

The icy reception that Bakker van Bosse's comment received was reported to the IWSA in the delegate's report. Instead of recording the nature of the comment, Malaterre-Sellier conveyed to the IWSA that "difficulties resulted from the use of the English language and from a translation we could not control."<sup>321</sup> The account in the Arabic press emphasized the nature of the comment and did not link the problem to the translation from English to Arabic, but rather to the content of the comment, which the audience took as insensitive to the traditions of the region.

Mary 'Ajamy, a pioneer in the Arabic women's press as publisher of *al-'Arūs* (The Bride), expressed her frustration with other instances of miscommunication and cultural mistranslation, some of which she contended were deliberately constructed by the West to present an inaccurate picture of the East. She wrote in *Les Echos*, a daily Francophone newspaper printed in Damascus, that "it is painful to the East to see itself misunderstood by the West, and to see itself described as stagnant and rebellious each

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<sup>320</sup> "La Journée du féminisme syrien." *Les Echos* 9 February 1935: 4. The exchange is also referenced in Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 138.

<sup>321</sup> Germaine Malaterre-Sellier, "Rapport de notre voyage en Proche-Orient (Egypte, Syrie, Palestine, du 10- janvier-18 février, 1935)," 2, Box 4, Schain Papers, SSC, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

time it tries to refute a new piece of propaganda. . . .”<sup>322</sup> ‘Ajamy like many of her peers in the Arab women’s movement, was fluent in French and Arabic; others were also fluent in English. Their language abilities, the consequence of missionary educations, made it possible for them to know exactly what was being said about their backwards status. Arab women were upset at the persistence of stereotypes despite plenty of examples—like their vibrant and active women’s movement—that challenged stereotypes about Arab women’s “backwardness.”

The irony that European colonizers blocked women’s access to rights in the Arab world was not lost on the activists who engaged the IWSA delegates on their regional tour. Women in Egypt, Palestine, and Syria were still interested in trying to participate in the international women’s movement because they thought access to the international women’s movement would help the activists secure an audience for their critique of European colonialism. They had also hoped the leaders of the international women’s movement would be their allies in their pursuit of independence and women’s rights. The IWSA representatives and the women’s organizations they encountered on their regional tour had differing notions of the purpose of the Istanbul conference. The women’s organizations from the Arab world wanted to use the conference as a platform to demonstrate their readiness for self-rule and to try to gain entry into discussions about women’s rights as equals.

In late February, after the IWSA delegates had left the region, the Women’s Committee for the Defense of Lebanese Women’s Rights petitioned the French mandate government to allow women to work as city mayors and judges.<sup>323</sup> The appeal was

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<sup>322</sup> Mary ‘Ajamy, “La femme orientale et occidentale.” *Les Echos* 8 February 1935.

<sup>323</sup> “Les Féministes libanaises veulent être juges et maires.” *Les Echos* 23 February 1935: 3 cited in Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 147.

rejected. The timing of the appeal, however, may have been a rejoinder to the meddling of the IWSA into the affairs of their movement on the grounds that Western women knew what Arab women needed. The Bakker van Bosse comment was in many ways a repeat of the dynamics of Hamada's exchange with Awrang at the Second Eastern Women's Conference. Both the Iranian governmental official and the IWSA executive advocated that the veil needed to be removed before other actions could be taken to improve the status of women. The leaders of the women's movement in Syria and Lebanon disagreed: the veil presented no impediment. In both instances, women's organizations resisted external encroachment on the core of their movement, which they felt they could negotiate themselves. Petitioning the government to allow women to become judges reasserted Syrian women's ability to define the issues they saw as most important in their daily lives, such as control over family law. Unhindered access to the judiciary was seen as more important by the educated elites in Syria and Lebanon than modeling Turkey's state-sanctioned anti-veiling legislation.

The visit from the IWSA executives had deleterious effects on the ability of Syrian women to attend the IWSA conference in Istanbul. Shaykh Taj, the President of Syria under the French mandate, refused to sponsor an official Syrian delegation to the IWSA conference. He cited the lack of Arabic language at the conference as his reason for rescinding governmental support.<sup>324</sup> In the face of state censure, Syrian women could only attend the conference if they had the means to do so independently. Given the relative proximity of Syria to Istanbul and the ability to reach Istanbul by train, many Syrian women attended the conference nonetheless.

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<sup>324</sup> Arabic was a working language of the conference. Many Arab women spoke through translators if they did not have French and English skills to communicate for themselves.

### **The Conference: Combining Eastern-Western Women's Rights Frameworks**

The Twelfth International Alliance for Women Conference opened in Istanbul with great fanfare. Delegations from twenty-eight nations gathered to discuss women's status.<sup>325</sup>

Istanbul straddles the European and Asian continents; the conference organizers were keen on using the geographic location of the conference to have women from the "East" and the "West" interact with each other. Three new "Eastern" organizations were admitted to the International Alliance for Women at the conference: the *Union Féministe Arabe* (Arab Feminist Union, Syria), the All-India Conference, and the Union of Patriotic Women of Persia (Iran). In the international arena, "Syria" referenced the boundaries of the mandate, thus while the *Union Féministe Arabe* was based in Beirut, it was "Syrian" and not Lebanese. The IWSA conference was structured much like the Arab and Eastern women's conferences—a large opening session open to all conference participants and the public, followed by smaller sessions closed to all but the conference participants.

To make sure that the "East" was not just a backdrop to the conference and that Eastern perspectives were represented in the conference proceedings, Turkey and Syria sent twelve delegates and twelve alternates—the maximum allowed any delegation at the conference. Accordingly, "Eastern" women were no longer occasional interlopers but a dominant presence at the conference. A Syrian delegation of twenty-four women went to Istanbul to advocate for Arab independence and women's rights. They saw the West as a model for women's rights, but not as the only arbiter of how women's rights should be defined. They proffered their own vision of women's rights at the conference—a fusion of Eastern and Western frameworks that did not lose sight of the family. For Arab

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<sup>325</sup> The assembled delegations were from Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Egypt, France, Great Britain, Greece, Holland, Hungary, India, Iran, Jamaica, New Zealand, Norway, Palestine, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Syria, Turkey, Ukraine, the United States, and Yugoslavia. Italy and Germany had recently withdrawn from the Alliance.

women's organizations from Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria, the IWSA conference was an important venue for them to articulate their notion of women's rights based on independent nationhood that gave women citizenship rights, including the right to vote.

In the plenary speech offered at the opening banquet of the conference, Ruth Frances Woodsmall, an American who was president of the Young Women's Christian Association's Near Eastern branch, addressed her vision for cooperation between East and West: "the gifts of the East and the experience of the West must be fused to solve the problems of the modern world."<sup>326</sup> Woodsmall emphasized that "[o]nly through such a fusion and cooperation of the Orient and Occident can a true solidarity be achieved so that women may move forward conscious not merely of their rights and privileges but of their power and responsibility to aid in the building of a new world order."<sup>327</sup>

Woodsmall's speech echoed the language used by many of the Arab women present at the conference who saw the 1930s as a moment of transition from an "old" world system wherein women were not granted full citizenship rights to a new world system where women's contributions to society, especially their contributions as mothers, were recognized with full citizenship and the right to vote.

Woodsmall pioneered social-scientific investigations into the status of women in the Middle East. Her 1936 book *Moslem Women Enter a New World* was a bestseller in *The New York Times*.<sup>328</sup> Woodsmall thought it was incumbent on women in the West to help raise the status of women in the East. She collected information about the status of

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<sup>326</sup> Ruth Frances Woodsmall, "Message from the U. S. of America at the Vali's Banquet," 18 April 1935, Box 1, IWSA Papers, SSC, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts. For more information about the life and work of Ruth Frances Woodsmall, see Nova Robinson, "Rapprochement, Research, and Reflections: Ruth Frances Woodsmall's Work with Middle Eastern Women," (Unpub. A.B. thesis, Dartmouth College, 2008).

<sup>327</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>328</sup> While the book was published in 1936, it was researched in 1928. Her research was funded by a grant from the Ford Foundation.

Muslim women through informational surveys and interviews with women's rights experts in the Middle East—these “experts” were often missionaries, but were also sometimes the indigenous leaders of women's social service organizations. Woodsmall's vision of raising the status of women in the Middle East with direct aid from Western women was different from the vision of the Arab women present at the IWSA conference. They wanted support from the international women's movement in their campaigns for rights without European and American women telling them how to obtain more rights and secure citizenship. Some IWSA officers and delegates were attuned to the importance of letting women in the East speak about their problems in their own terms.

A panel dedicated to “East-West Cooperation” featured speeches from some of the major leaders of the women's movement in the Middle East—including Huda Sha'arawi and Julia Dimashqiyya—as well as leaders of the women's movement in French Algeria and in India. Sazia Nabarawi, an Egyptian feminist and the editor of *L'Egyptienne*, wrote that “East-West” session was made most interesting by the “variety of opinions as well as the unity of aspirations.”<sup>329</sup> The panelists presented a united desire for women's advancement. Nabarawi noted there was no accord around the means for that advancement: some panelists thought that women could and should be advanced through colonial tutelage and Western aid and others condemned the system of colonialism.

Individuals connected to the colonial system spoke of the system's ability to aid women. The panelist from French Algeria, Lafuente said “[Algerian] Muslim men of good will, who with the collaboration of French women, will do for the Algerian Muslim

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<sup>329</sup> Sazia Nabarawi, “Letter au president du conseil,” reprinted as “Après le Congrès d'Istanbul.” *L'Egyptienne* (August/September, 1935): 30.

woman what your great Atatürk has done for you.”<sup>330</sup> Lafuente’s comment conveyed that she believed that the Algerian Muslim woman could not improve her station alone. Instead, French Algerian Muslim women, a category that presumably contained both Arabs and Berbers, needed to be helped in raising her social station by French Algerian Muslim men and French women. Like many of the other delegates present in Istanbul, Lafuente praised Atatürk’s state-imposed Westernization of Turkey’s legal and sartorial practices that aimed to improve the status of women.

Lafuente’s assessment of Atatürk’s role in advancing the status of women glossed over the presence of a Turkish women’s movement that had agitated for the rights of women prior to state-sanctioned enfranchisement was delivered by decree. Instead of citing women as the locus of change in Turkey, Lafuente gave all of the credit to a male leader. Women in Algeria, she seemed to argue, like women in Turkey, could not help themselves. They had to be helped by men and Western women who knew more about their status. No Algerian Muslim women were present at the Istanbul conference, therefore their experiences under the French colonial system in Algeria are not recorded in the conference proceedings. Yet an independent Algerian women’s movement was emerging. The Constantine conference in 1932 demonstrated there was a large gap between the French Algerian and French Muslim Algerian women’s organizations. Even though Algerian Muslim women had several francophone women’s journals that circulated in the early twentieth century, Algerian Muslim women were not recognized as women’s rights activists and organizers in their own right.<sup>331</sup>

Many of the panelists on the “East-West Cooperation” panel questioned

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<sup>330</sup> The program does not list the delegate’s first name. She is listed as Mademoiselle Lafuente.

<sup>331</sup> See Marina Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (New York: Routledge, 1994). The Alice Deyab Collection at Harvard has a few editions of women’s journals published in French in Algeria in the 1920s. Work remains to be done on Algerian Muslim women in the 1920s and 1930s.



Lafuente's faith in the West's superiority and inherent ability to raise the status of women. Iqbalunissa Hussein, a panelist from India, suggested that centuries of contact between East and West had contributed to the construction of "Western civilization"; that the West's successes could not be understood without giving credit to the contributions of the East in facilitating that success.<sup>332</sup> Shareefa Hamdi Ali, a Muslim delegate from India, condemned the colonial system through which the West had been able to diffuse its notions of women's rights. "May we hope to have you [our Western sisters] with us as friendly and not enforced guides—that we shall have from you cordiality and human fellowship, and not 'tutelage' and 'patronage'?"<sup>333</sup> Hamdi Ali did not foreclose the possibility that good could come from exchanges between East and West, but she did not agree with the Lafuente's conceit that all Western assistance was good for the target populations.

Hamdi Ali added that "any assumption of superiority or of patronage on the part of Europe or America," which she categorized as "any undue pressure of enforcement of religion or government or of trade or of economic 'spheres of influence' will alienate Asia and Africa and with it the womanhood of Asia and Africa."<sup>334</sup> Women in India, Hamdi Ali argued, would work alongside Western women to advance their status, but they would not import a foreign religion, government system, or economic structure without aligning the system with indigenous religious, governmental, and economic systems.<sup>335</sup> Western tradition had things to offer women, but as Hussein expressed, so too did Eastern traditions. The Indian delegates at the Istanbul conference made it clear that a

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<sup>332</sup> Sazia Nabarawi, "Letter au president du conseil," reprinted as "Après le Congrès d'Istanbul." *L'Egyptienne* (August/September, 1935): 30.

<sup>333</sup> "East and West in Cooperation," Box 1, IWSA Papers, SSC, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

<sup>334</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>335</sup> *ibid.*

symbiotic relationship between Eastern and Western systems had existed for centuries and there was no need to override Eastern traditions in favor of Western ones, especially with regard to women's rights.

The panelists from Egypt and Syria shared a similar assessment with the Indian panelists of how "East-West Cooperation" should function. The Egyptian and Syrian panelists articulated the desire to import the elements they revered from the West—such as enfranchisement and citizenship rights—and abandon some of the other traditions that governed the lives of women in the West. Huda Sha'arawi expressed that Egyptian women are "[f]ervent admirers of the movement of Western women for peace, and the equality of rights, for a long time these women of the East have wanted to join with you to put their good will in the service of this noble cause [of women's advancement]." <sup>336</sup> She emphasized that for quite some time women in the East had expressed their desire to participate in the international movement dedicated to advancing women's status. Sha'arawi noted subtly that their attempts to participate had not been successful; they were thwarted by the Euro- and US-centric membership and organizational structure. In addition, Sha'arawi held women with the franchise "a little responsible before the universe for the faults committed by your governments." <sup>337</sup> Sha'arawi looked to Western women to stand with colonized women against the colonial system.

Women in the colonized world believed the colonial system stood in direct opposition to peace: to impose colonization was an inherently unpeaceful act. Even as Sha'arawi condemned European women for their votes that upheld colonialism, she noted that they still had "an advantage vis-à-vis women who do not yet have the right to vote

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<sup>336</sup> Huda Sha'arawi, "Discourse de Mme. Charaoui Pacha," 19 April 1935, Box 1, IWSA Papers, SSC, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts. N.B. Charaoui is the French transliteration of Sha'arawi's name.

<sup>337</sup> *ibid.*

and to them you serve as an example.”<sup>338</sup> In this speech Sha’arawi subtly, and skillfully, called into question colonialism and at the same time lauded certain aspects of the West, especially the aspects that endowed women with electoral rights. If given the choice, Sha’arawi would have chosen to absorb the right to vote and the privileges and responsibilities accorded to a person with that right; she would have abandoned British control over Egypt. Sha’arawi’s relationship with colonialism was a complicated one: she was a critic of British colonialism in Egypt, but supported Egyptian colonization of Sudan.<sup>339</sup>

Julia Dimashqiyya also delivered a speech to the “East-West Cooperation” panel. Her thinking about the locus of women’s power in society had shifted since she delivered her first speeches in 1910. “Dear friends, you d[o] not know much about our existence but we have followed your footsteps, and we have worked in the guiding light of your noble spirit.”<sup>340</sup> From the outset of the speech Dimashqiyya spoke of the ways the Eastern women’s movement found inspiration in the Western one. Dimashqiyya listed the names of the leaders of the international women’s movement who served as models for “Eastern women.” She cited the work of Josephine Butler, a British women’s rights activist dedicated to the welfare of prostitutes and the deregulation of prostitution, whose work “has known no national or traditional boundaries, her light and her work have even reached the inner-walls of our Eastern homes.”<sup>341</sup> Dimashqiyya claimed that goals of the women’s movement in Europe were not exclusively European. She argued that the goal of Josephine Butler’s work should not be nationalized or contained within a single

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<sup>338</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>339</sup> Beth Baron, *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 171.

<sup>340</sup> Julia Dimashqiyya, “Delegates and Friends” Speech to the “East-West Cooperation” session, Twelfth IWSA Congress, Istanbul, 1935. Box 1, folder 8, IWSA Papers, SSC, Smith College, Northampton, MA.

<sup>341</sup> *ibid.*

nation-state, rather the spirit of improving the plight of prostitutes should be internationalized through the women's movement. Women in Syria had heard of Butler's work and had applied the work in their national context. The effects could be felt in the homes of Syrian women.

Butler was not the only woman to inspire women in the "East." Dimashqiyya also cites the work of "our modern leaders" before listing the names of Lady Astor, Jane Addams, Madame Malaterre-Sellier, Mrs. Corbett Ashby, "and many, many others [who] have inspired us to strive for what we thought impossible, but which we have now realized will be the salvation of our Eastern countries, the emancipation of the Eastern woman, and the establishment of a moral code which will put man and woman under the same obligation."<sup>342</sup> While women in the East were aware of the women's movement in the West, Dimashqiyya observed there was general ignorance in the West about the state of the women's movement in the East.

Dimashqiyya thought cooperating with the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, an organization that Dimashqiyya and those in her circle tracked with great interest, would help the women's movement in the "East." "We women in this part of the world used to applaud your deeds while working silently at our duties at home and for our country, and have always hoped that the day would come when we could lay before your leaders and sincere workers of the International Women's Alliance, the results of our cooperation with the West." The Indian delegates, Sha'arawi, and Dimashqiyya emphasized cooperation as the cornerstone of women's advancement in the East and West. The message of East-West cooperation on women's issues was well received by women's organizations in Greater Syria. When the Syrian delegates returned from

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<sup>342</sup> *ibid.*

Istanbul a group of university students opposed to Shaykh Taj hosted a reception for them.<sup>343</sup>

Yet, talking about cooperation was different than putting the principle into action. Dimashqiyya did not exculpate the West in contributing to the condition of women in the East. “I cannot hide from you the present depressing state of economic and political affairs in our country, for they too have played a great part in bringing us to this congress.” Women from Syria attended the conference with the hope of cooperating with Western women in addressing one of the greatest obstacles standing in the way of their advancement as women: the French mandate. Dimashqiyya plaintively expressed that “[t]he economic and political situation is so desperate that it is extremely difficult for us to give our wholehearted energies to the cause of feminism alone.”<sup>344</sup> Her speech observed that the division between feminism and politics was arbitrary in the colonies. At this juncture, women’s rights were given through the state and for a state to be free to endow its female citizens with rights, the members of the Syrian and Lebanese women’s movement believed the state needed to be independent.

State support for women’s rights came with its own problems. In the months following the Istanbul conference, Atatürk dissolved the *kadın birliği* (Women’s Party), stating that women had already achieved state-sanctioned equality in Turkey, rendering an independent women’s organization superfluous.<sup>345</sup> Women in Turkey did not support the move to abolish the organization. The international women’s community did not support the move either. Margery Corbett Ashby (1882-1981), President of the IWSA, expressed her dismay at the myopia of the decision: “[t]o those of us who know how

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<sup>343</sup> “Des Jeunes gens de Damas demandent l’abolition du voile.” *Les Echos* 27 April 1935: 3.

<sup>344</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>345</sup> Kathryn Libal, “Staging Turkish Women’s Emancipation: Istanbul, 1935,” *Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies* 4.1 (Winter 2008): 45.

much work is still left to be done after women have become free and equal citizens, this decision cannot meet with agreement.”<sup>346</sup>

The vacillation of the Turkish state between unabashed support of women's rights as seen in its hosting of the IWSA conference and its withdrawal of government sanction for an independent women's party demonstrates that women's rights had become a pawn for states to display their progress vis-à-vis each other. Turkey was eager to align itself with Europe and women's rights became a proving ground upon which Turkey could claim its place among Western nations. As nations took over discussions of women's rights, they proved that women's rights were not national, but rather international. Governmental co-optation of women's rights was not an exclusively Turkish affair. Turkey was enmeshed in a global system that was invested in using the status of women to rank nations against one another, a system which the League of Nations absorbed.

### **Eastern Women's Conference (for the Defense of Palestine), Cairo (1938)**

After the 1935 IWSA conference in Istanbul, full cooperation between Eastern and Western women's rights organizations was not fully achieved. The climate of East-West cooperation broke down in 1936 with the start of the Great Revolt in Palestine (1936-1938). The tension between the Arab women's movement and the international women's movement had to do with the relationship of nationalist politics to women's movement.<sup>347</sup> The international women's movement tried to avoid nationalist politics, while Arab women were not interested in abandoning this question and leaving the fate of their region up to colonial forces or to the male pan-Arab movement.

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<sup>346</sup> Margery Corbett Ashby, "Forward," "Report of the Twelfth Congress, Istanbul, 18-24 April 1935" (London, England: IWSA), 8.

<sup>347</sup> For more on the tension between Eastern and Western women's rights organizations around the question of Palestine see Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 183.

European forces had colonized most states in the former Ottoman territories of the Arab world. Yet, each Arab state faced a different series of obstacles before it could secure national independence. In this climate of a shared colonial reality, the dual forms of colonialism (Zionism and British occupation) operating in Palestine became a uniting force, a rallying cry in the pan-Arab women's movement. Al-Yaziji spoke of populations united by a shared history and a shared geography. The organizers of the Eastern Women's Conference in Cairo in 1938, which came to be known as the Eastern Women's Conference for the Defense of Palestine, reached out to women through the language of a shared history, a shared geography, and a shared colonial present.

Even before the Eastern Women's Conference for the Defense of Palestine, Syrian and Lebanese women lent their support to the Palestinian independence movement, which was linked to the larger cause of Arab independence, and used the opportunity to condemn colonialism in general. Regional sympathies for the Palestinian fight for independence surged during the Great Revolt. Syrian and Lebanese women sent protest telegrams and letters to foreign diplomats and foreign governments with the French and British colonial governments receiving many of their missives. Women also wrote to the League of Nations to argue for Palestinian independence.

In 1935 the Beirut Arab Women's Union wrote to the IWSA to highlight a discrepancy in how it supported its affiliated organizations. The IWSA sent out a call to its member states to boycott Japan and Japanese goods after the Japanese invasion of China. The members of the Beirut Arab Women's Union thought British colonialism in Palestine was analogous to the Japanese invading China and impinging on national sovereignty. The organization wrote to the IWSA that

[t]he eyes of the Arabs have been opened to the painful reality ... that the League of Nations and its numerous committees, and the Western countries and their committees

and conference held in the name of peace, disarmament and assistance to the helpless, are only dust stirred up in the eyes of the weak, and means by which to implement their imperialist plans under legal pretexts.<sup>348</sup>

The Beirut Arab Women's Union forcibly denounced what it saw as the practice of the nations of the League disguising colonial intrigue as actions taken in the name of peace and world stability. The Beirut Arab Women's Society called out the IWSA for its inconsistent application of its pledges to oppose colonialism and acts that threatened world peace.

The *Union Féministe Arabe* sent its critique of colonial policy directly to the High Commissioner for Palestine. On April 25, 1938 the *Union Féministe Arabe* expressed its "most vehement condemnations and protestations" against the "ruthless atrocities, ... merciless torture, deportations, exile, unwarranted arrests, and imprisonments" committed by the British authorities in Palestine.<sup>349</sup> "We note that the most prominent traits in British statesmanship have always been sobriety, farsightedness, and fairplay [*sic*] ... the contradiction of these principles ... is becoming seriously detrimental to British prestige and good name."<sup>350</sup> Ibtihaj Qaddura penned the letter condemning British policies that violently suppressed activism on behalf of the right to self-rule. Qaddura was smart about how she delivered her message; she concluded her letter with praise for the British.

Not all of women's organizing on behalf of Palestine addressed foreign targets. The Arabic press reported on Arab women's anti-mandate demonstrations and economic boycotts of foreign goods throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The Great Revolt in Palestine

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<sup>348</sup> Quoted in Akhram Zu'aytir, *Yawmīyāt Akram Zu'aytir: al-ḥaraka al-waṭaniyya al-Filasṭīniyya, 1935-1939* (Beirut: Palestine Studies Association, 1980), 394.

<sup>349</sup> PRO, CO 733 367/4. Letter sent by Ibtihaj Qaddura, President of the *Union Féministe Arabe* to the High Commissioner for Palestine, 25 April 1938. Quoted in Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its "New" Women*, 183 FN 39.

<sup>350</sup> *ibid.*



caused women's organizations to transition from letter-writing to a more overt form of activism about the plight of the Palestinians, who were being displaced from the land and impoverished as a result. To complement other campaigns, Arab women decided to convene a conference that would address the issue of Palestine and seek means of aiding the Palestinian movement. The conference targeted the mandate governments, the international community, and the male pan-Arab movement as its audiences. The goal was to seek a remedy for the situation in Palestine and to present Arab women as capable of joining the pan-Arab movement.

Where the idea for the 1938 conference came from is unclear, but is likely that it emerged from several directions at once. According to some sources, the officers of the Lebanese, Syrian, Palestinian, and Iraqi women's societies—Ibtihaj Qaddura, Buhayra al-‘Azm, Zlikha al-Shihabi, and Nazik Jawdat, respectively—conceived of the idea to hold an Arab women's conference to look into a just solution to the Palestine problem.<sup>351</sup> The Arab Women's Union in Jerusalem remembers the origin of the conference differently. The pamphlet for their golden jubilee states that the Palestinian Women's Executive Committee asked Sha'arawi to issue a call to hold a conference of Arab women "to expose the British mandate policies and its plot to threaten Palestine."<sup>352</sup> Per the account of the Arab Women's Union in Jerusalem, Sha'arawi complied with their request. Still others remember that the conference was the brain-child of Nabih Bey al-‘Azm, a Syrian nationalist leader. He "called for" the forming of a Syrian women's association to defend Palestine, and "entrusted" his wife Buhayra to head it.<sup>353</sup> Regardless of where the idea for the conference came from, the conference brought activist women together around the

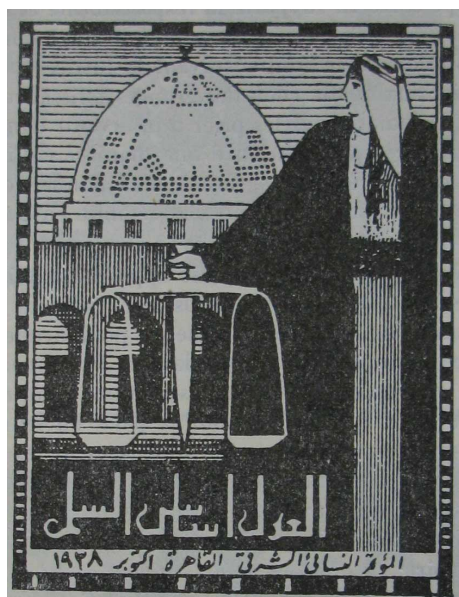
<sup>351</sup> *al-Mar'a*, 112. Cited in Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its "New" Women*, 184.

<sup>352</sup> *Al-ittihād al-nisā'ī bīl-Quds fī yūbīlī al-dhahabī* (Jerusalem: 1983), 23. Cited in Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its "New" Women*, 184.

<sup>353</sup> Akhram Zu'aytir, *Yawmiyyāt Akhram Zu'aytir*, 398.

question of Palestine.

The conference was originally scheduled to take place in Bloudan, Syria, where a



Conference seal for the “Eastern Women’s Conference, Cairo, October, 1938” it calls for justice and peace. Source: *L’Egyptienne* 14.148 (October 1938): 16.

pan-Arab conference had been hosted the year prior. No women had been invited to participate at the previous conference in Bloudan. Staging the women’s conference in Bloudan would have been a retort to their previous exclusion. However, the Syrian government forbade the conference from convening in Syria.<sup>354</sup> Given the long history of the mandate governments’ surveillance, it is no surprise that the British learned of the plans of Syrian women to host a conference. British

officials recorded in July that “discussions have been proceeding between the Moslem Women’s Societies in Egypt, Palestine and Syria for the holding of a Women’s Congress in Syria.”<sup>355</sup> With Syria no longer an option, Sha’arawi suggested the conference be held in Egypt instead.

The conference was scheduled for October 1938. Calls to participate went out to women around the “East,” including women from Iran and India, but the British authorities squashed the potential for nationalist cooperation between Indian and Arab women.<sup>356</sup> The conference was attended by delegations from Syria, Lebanon, Iraq,

<sup>354</sup> PRO, FO 371 21877. British Consulate in Damascus to Secretary of State for the Foreign Office, Viscount Halifax, 2 July 1938, no. 34; PRO, FO 371 21878/4049; British Consul to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, July 2, 1938. Cited in Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 228, FN 25,

<sup>355</sup> PRO, FO 371 21878 British Consul to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, 8 June, 1938; PRO, FO 371 21877 same to same, July 2, 1938 cited in Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its “New” Women*, 184.

<sup>356</sup> FO 371 E4049 (21877) from Consul MacKereth, Damascus, no. 31, 17 June 1938 to Halifax cited in Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 228.

Palestine, and a lone Iranian representative. According to the conference organizers, the women on the national delegations were “socially liberated and politically smart.”<sup>357</sup> The Conference for the Defense of Palestine focused much more on nationalist politics than its antecedents. The announcement for the conference read:

To fulfill the promise that we, the women of the East, have made to each other and to our Western sisters at various international congresses to cooperate in spreading harmony among peoples in our country and to struggle by all legitimate means to prevent war, and in order to assist the League of Nations, to strengthen international peace, and to resolve conflicts between countries by peaceful means, we will convene the Eastern Women's Conference to examine the painful conditions that have afflicted Palestine for many years.<sup>358</sup>

The fighting engulfing Palestine was of grave concern to the women who convened the conference. The conference itself served as a public plea for pacifism and peace as a means for resolving the Great Revolt. While not explicit, the conference program intimated the underlying causes of the violence: British policy and League inaction. In addition to pleading for a peaceful resolution to the situation in Palestine, the conference organizers positioned Palestine as an issue of concern to all women in the East because Palestine symbolized the shared colonial fate of Eastern women: colonialism was inimical to peace.

In the days before the conference was scheduled to begin, the headquarters of the Egyptian Feminist Union—Huda Sha'arawi's organization—bustled with pre-conference activities as delegates arrived in Cairo by plane and train. Then, as with all the conferences, the months of planning the program, corresponding with delegates and caterers, and scurrying around to find quick fixes to last-minute problems, came to an end. The delegates assembled and the conference began. The conference opened with the singing of nationalist hymns. The hymns were followed by a moment of silence for the

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<sup>357</sup> Ittihad al-Nisā' al-Miṣrī, *Mu'tamar al-nisā' al-sharqī; al-mar'a al-'arabiyya wa-qaḍīyat filasṭīn* (Cairo: al-Maṭba'a al-'Aṣriyya, 1938), 12.

<sup>358</sup> *ibid.*, 4.

martyrs who had given their lives for the cause of Palestinian independence. Then telegrams of support were read to the assembled audience. Only then did the major activity of the conference begin: the speechmaking.<sup>359</sup>

The speeches were the core of the conference proceedings. Zlikha al-Shihabi (a Palestinian) wrote:

[E]ach one of us is completely convinced that the Palestinian cause has become the subject of concern for all of the Eastern people; that the people of Palestine are not alone in the holy war to liberate our country; and that the Arab and Eastern ladies are behind their Palestinian sisters.<sup>360</sup>

Each delegate presented her observations in turn. The general consensus was that women were better suited to finding a peaceful resolution to the Palestinian conflict. The women of the Palestinian delegation prided themselves on transcending the factional divides that divided the male-led Palestinian independence movement or the male-led pan-Arab movements that supported Palestinian independence; Palestinian women thought they modeled the potential for unity in securing Palestinian independence.

The conference passed twenty-two resolutions. The first resolution stated that the Palestine problem was a creation of Europe for which the Europeans must take responsibility and find a just solution. The rest of the resolutions consisted primarily of proposals for action on the Palestine issue, for example the abolition of the mandate, abrogation of the Balfour Declaration, and prohibitions on Jewish immigration and land sales to Jewish immigrants. The conference attendees also condemned the recently proposed partition plan and protested against the violent response by the British government to the revolt. A resolution critiqued the foreign press for attacking the “righteous *mujahidīn*” (freedom fighters) as being unjust in their campaign for

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<sup>359</sup> *ibid.*, 12.

<sup>360</sup> Quoted in Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its “New” Women*, 184.

independence, while calling the Jews “noble ones for defending their country.”<sup>361</sup> Once the resolutions were registered, the people at the conference came up with proposals for ensuring the execution of their demands: sending telegrams and petitions to major world leaders protesting Great Britain’s tyranny in its rule over the mandate; boycotting foreign goods; and forming women’s committees in each Arab country to continue in their support of the Palestinian cause.<sup>362</sup> The conference declared it was the duty of every Arab woman and man to come to the aid to the Arabs of Palestine who were threatened by Britain’s inept leadership over its mandate and to condemn the British mandate’s inability to stem the violence besieging the country. The text of the resolutions and the tone of the speeches offers a window into the conference attendees’ hope that coordinated peaceful initiatives led by Arab women could secure Arab independence.

### **Implementing the Cairo Resolutions: The IWSA Conference in Copenhagen (1939)**

Egyptian delegates took the resolutions passed at the Conference for the Defense of Palestine to the next IWSA conference in Copenhagen in 1939. The other Arab states could not send representatives to the Copenhagen conference due to unrest in Greater Syria, which made travel difficult. The Great Revolt continued to embroil Palestine in 1939 as the Copenhagen conference convened. The unrest engendered by the conflict between Palestinians and the British and Zionist settlers prevented the Palestinian Arab IWSA affiliate from sending representatives to Copenhagen (IWSA’s separate Jewish Palestinian affiliate attended the conference). The Syrian IWSA affiliate was also unable to send a delegate to the conference; the tumult of the Great Revolt was not neatly

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<sup>361</sup> *Mu’tamar al-nisā’i al-sharqī; al-mar’a al-‘arabīyya wa-qaḍīyat filasṭīn*, 171.

<sup>362</sup> *ibid.*, 171-173.

contained within the borders of the Palestinian mandate.<sup>363</sup> On behalf of the other Arab states, which were unable to send delegates, the Egyptian delegation put a resolution about forced migration onto the docket of the Copenhagen congress. The resolution expressed that it opposed “immigration imposed on a country without the free consent of its population.”<sup>364</sup> Even though the opposition to forced immigration was grounded in the language of peace, it failed to gain international support at the IWSA congress in Copenhagen. The Egyptian-backed resolution reflected that Palestinian sovereignty had become integral to regional Arab aspirations for independence from Western imperialism.

The thirteenth IWSA conference in Copenhagen in 1939 highlights the contradictions embedded in the women’s international system with regards to “national” questions. When the Egyptian delegation put forth its resolution, the IWSA, which had pledged neutrality around questions that were purely national, claimed it could not support the intertwined projects of women’s rights and nationalism in Arab countries. When the Nazis annexed Czechoslovakia, the Czech affiliate wrote in *Jus Suffragii* “[t]he Alliance pledge to neutrality on all questions that are strictly national, but can it be claimed that the forcible taking over of one country by another, a country with a different race, culture and language, is purely a national question?”<sup>365</sup> Ultimately, the IWSA condemned Germany’s annexation of Czechoslovakia. However, the IWSA did not issue a similar statement regarding Zionist immigration to Palestine. The IWSA’s non-action on the issue of Palestine angered the Egyptian delegation to the point that the Egyptian

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<sup>363</sup> Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: 1936-1939 Rebellion in the Palestinian Past* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995), Chapter 3.

<sup>364</sup> Sazia Nabarawi, “La délégation Égyptienne au Congrès de Copenhague.” *L’Égyptienne* (July-August 1939): 6.

<sup>365</sup> “The Women of Czechoslovakia to the Women of the Entire World.” *Jus Suffragii* 33.2 (November 1938): 10.

Feminist Union, under the leadership of Huda Sha'arawi, withdrew from the Copenhagen congress.<sup>366</sup>

## Conclusion

The 1935 IWSA in Istanbul would be remembered as the apex of cooperation between Eastern and Western women's movements. In 1939, Sazia Nabarawi reflected on the earlier Istanbul conference,

In uniting the women of East and West ... the Istanbul congress has been a veritable zenith for Alliance. In the unforgettable sessions, where a noble spirit of comprehension and solidarity reigned, we applauded ... the triumph of the principles of equality over the prejudices of class, race, and religion. A sincere desire for peace animated the hearts of all the delegates, bringing the possibility of *entente* between the peoples.<sup>367</sup>

By the time the IWSA met in Copenhagen in 1939, the momentary rapprochement—as encapsulated in the “East-West” cooperation session—between Eastern and Western women's movements had faded.<sup>368</sup> If the 1935 conference in Istanbul exposed the possibilities of coordinated campaigns for women's rights that bridged East and West, the 1939 conference in Copenhagen revealed the limits of women's international cooperation.

The series of conferences hosted around the region between 1928 and 1938 demonstrate there was no singular definition of how women's rights should be defined in the “East.” Likewise, the range of women's organizations operating in Europe at the time did not share an understanding of what women's rights meant. The IWSA and WILPF differed in their conceptualizations of how to go about securing women's rights: one

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<sup>366</sup> Further details regarding Sha'arawi's withdrawal from the congress can be found in Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 232-236.

<sup>367</sup> Sazia Nabarawi, “La délégation Égyptienne au Congrès de Copenhague.” *L'Egyptienne* (July-August 1939): 2.

<sup>368</sup> For further information about the exchange between Eastern and Western delegations at the Copenhagen conference around the question or issue of Palestine, see Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 238-241 and Charlotte Weber, “Making Common Cause?: Western and Middle Eastern Feminists in the International Women's Movement, 1911-1948,” 169-218.

emphasized suffrage (IWSA) and the other emphasized women's potential to help forge a war-free world. To achieve this latter aim, WILPF advocated for more expansive political rights for women, not just the right to vote. Despite the lack of consensus in the "West" or the "East" about what should constitute international women's rights, there was a global push to define women's rights in an international framework. These conferences offer fruitful ground for investigating the range of conceptualizations of women's rights that circulated in the era. They help paint a picture of the varied, and sometimes interlocking, goals of local and international women's organizations and show their vitality.

External forces were intent on telling women in the "East" how to improve their status. An example is the discussion of the veil. Many activists did not think veiling impeded women's progress, nor did they think the tradition needed to be abandoned as a way of demonstrating their advancement. Time and time again, female activists claimed that the veil was a personal choice and that there were more pressing obstacles that Arab women needed to address through collective organizing. These activists were frustrated by the myopic emphasis on the practice from government officials and international interlocutors: a male Syrian government official raised the topic at the 1932 Damascus conference, a male Iranian delegate emphasized the veil as the major obstacle to women's empowerment, and the IWSA representatives raised it on their regional tour.

Arab women defined their status as women in their countries in comparison to women in other "Arab" or "Eastern" countries and in opposition to the West. Arab women developed a larger Eastern women's framework. The categories of "Arab" and "Eastern" were not mutually exclusive: they were "Arabs" and they were "Eastern." Ingrained in the "Arab" and "Eastern" labels women used at their conferences was the



choice to claim women's rights and stand against the colonial system. Syrian and Lebanese women distrusted the colonial state, which often engaged in programs and policies that projected a "progressive mystique" and broadcast empty promises regarding women's rights to the international community. The language of "Eastern" women's rights grounded in the family explicitly rejected individual women's rights as defined in the Europe and the United States. Women from Syria and Lebanon and the surrounding Arab states used "Arab" and "Eastern" identities to try to wrest control over the debates about women's rights affecting their lives and to undercut colonialism.

## CHAPTER THREE:

The 'Women's Question' Section:  
The League of Nations and the  
Internationalization of Women's Rights, 1920-1937



Female representatives to the Sixteenth Assembly of the League of Nations - 1935, Geneva.  
*Source: League of Nations Photo Archive Online, Indiana University.*

The Covenant of the League established it could only deal with issues that were truly international. When the League was incorporated on January 10, 1920, women's rights were categorized as "national" in nature. By the time the start of World War II disrupted the actions of the League, women's rights were categorized as "international."<sup>369</sup>

Women's rights were incorporated into the League's structure by way of an informal relay. "International" women's organizations helped lodge women's rights in the international sphere and then "small states" picked up the baton and used their position within the League's structure to finalize the process of incorporating women's rights into the League's governing purview. This relay helped move women from the stenographer's chair—that is, a sidelined position—to the center of a debate. The debate was first about whether women's rights were international, and then about which women's rights were international. This chapter exposes those women who were able to participate in debates about the women's question at the League and those who were excluded from the conversations about internationalizing an answer to the "women's question." It also explores the reasons for their exclusion.

By 1920, the "women's question" had come to mean many things.<sup>370</sup> On the national level, the question revolved around a woman's *access* to state services—that is,

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<sup>369</sup> The League of Nations was officially dissolved in 1946 when Lord Robert Cecil announced at the last Assembly of the League "the League is dead." However, it had ceased to be an effective international governing force when Hitler annexed Poland in 1939.

<sup>370</sup> The history of how the League of Nations treated the "women's question" has not been well chronicled; the existing article, dissertation and section of a book chapter present the history of of Anglo-American women's activism at the League. Four sources examine the history of women's engagement with the League of Nations: Carol Miller, "Lobbying the League: Women's International Organizations and the League of Nations," (Unpub. Ph.D. dissertation, Oxford University, 1992), which was later turned into an article Carol Miller, "Geneva – the Key to Equality: Inter-war Feminists and the League of Nations." *Women's History Review* 3:2 (1994): 219-245; Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 210-217; and Susan Zimmerman, "Liaison Committees of International Women's Organizations and the Changing Landscape of Women's Internationalism, 1920s to 1945" Alexander Street Press (Women's History), n.d. Web. A few other sources deal with the League in passing.

were female citizens entitled to certain protections and privileges from the state. Further in question was her ability to *affect* the state—that is, did women have the right to vote. At the League, the “women’s question” became whether women’s rights were international.<sup>371</sup> This chapter charts how women’s organizations from the Americas, in conjunction with, but not necessarily in collaboration with, women’s organizations in Europe established a position for the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women within the framework of the League’s legal section. Prior to the creation of this body, the “women’s question” had been cast as a domestic issue. The domestic categorization did not reflect the nature of women’s organizing, however.

Organizing for women’s rights was already international as the League convened its first council session. The League just lagged in acknowledging that the constituent parts of the “women’s question” were international, not just domestic issues. Beginning in 1920, when the League was incorporated, the story of how women’s rights came to be internationalized is a global one, with actors from many parts of the globe. However, the existing literature privileges a European perspective about the League’s potential to improve the status of women within European states and within Europe’s dominions abroad. Women from other parts of the world also engaged the League of Nations. This chapter uncovers how women from other parts of the world, with varying degrees of success, answered the question of women’s access to and affect on the state.

While Syrian and Lebanese women were not active in the early campaigns directed toward the League of Nations set on internationalizing the “women’s question,” changes in the categorization of the women’s question and who could answer it affected the

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<sup>371</sup> No existing literature explores the origin and evolution of the phrase, the “women’s question” in the realm of international governance. For a history of “woman question” in Egypt see Beth Baron, *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society and the Press* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), especially Chapter 5.

ability of Syrian and Lebanese women to advocate for themselves on the international level starting in the late 1930s.

The history of women's activism at the League of Nations can be broken down into a preparatory phase, which occurred during the time between the end of World War I and the League's inauguration (1919-1920), and three subsequent periods that occurred during the League's incorporation. In the period before the League was formally established, the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) and the International Council on Women (ICW), two well-established women's rights organizations headquartered in London, used connections with League officials to ensure that the Covenant of the League of Nations granted women official access to the League. Each phase, including the preparatory phase, shows how women in the mandated territories were viewed and how Syrian and Lebanese women's ability to engage the League was impeded by these views.

The first phase of activism, 1920-1929, attempted to ensure that the provision of equality enshrined in Article 7 of the League's Covenant was enforced. The phase targeted the gulf that women perceived between the League's promise of giving women access to the League and the enforcement of that promise. This phase came to an end in 1930 when the Hague Convention on the Codification of International Law raised the issue of women's right to nationality. South American women were key players in forcing the League to engage the question of nationality. The second phase of women's activism at the League, 1930-1936, sought to extend the right to nationality to all women, with a particular emphasis on married women. The third and final phase of women's activism at the League was between 1937-1940, when the League conceded to engage in an international study of the status of women. This study formalized the international

jurisdiction of the women's question. Throughout the different phases of activism the League, the actors who lobbied the League on behalf of women's rights raised two questions: *who* got to serve as representatives of the world's women and *what* parts of the "women's question" fit the League's international definition. Exploring "who" and "what" in relation to the League's internationalization of the "women's question" exposes exclusions and highlights absences.

### **As the Ink Dried—Early Negotiations for Women's Representation at the League of Nations (1919-1920)**

In 1919, as signatures were being appended to the Treaty of Versailles, which created the League of Nations, women were thinking about how to formalize their participation in all legislative and administrative sectors of the new international governing organization.<sup>372</sup> The core legislative bodies of the League of Nations were the Assembly and the Council. A nation's delegation to the Assembly had up to three representatives. Each national delegation received one vote. The Council had representatives of the principal allied and associated powers in addition to four (later, six, and then nine) other members of the League.<sup>373</sup> The Secretariat of the League set the agenda of the Assembly and Council and oversaw the publication of the minutes and reports of meetings. The League's six

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<sup>372</sup> Treaty of Versailles, which created the League of Nations, was signed on 28 June 1919 by Germany and the Allied powers. The treaty became effective on 10 January 1920. The Secretariat of the League began operations in mid-October 1919. Its Covenant came into effect on 10 January 1920. For a more detailed treatment of women's activism during the post-war negotiations and their presence at the 1919 Paris Peace conference see Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, Chapters 5 and 6. Margaret MacMillan's *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2003) is the most detailed account of the behind-the-scenes negotiating that took place in Paris. For an account of the legacy of the Paris peace conference see, Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (New York: Oxford, 2009).

<sup>373</sup> The original permanent council members were the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and Japan. They were joined in the first council session by Greece, China, Brazil, and Belgium. Germany and the USSR also served as permanent members of the Council at different points during the League's tenure as the world's international governing body. All of the permanent council members were colonial powers.

committees<sup>374</sup> and commissions<sup>375</sup> disseminated information to the Assembly and Council through the Secretariat. The Court of International Justice and the International Labor Organization were consultative bodies of the League that submitted material to the Secretariat. Thus, the Secretariat was the node through which all information and material presented at the League passed en route to the other legislative bodies and commissions. The members of the Secretariat exercised great sway in shaping how women's rights were understood and implemented at the League.<sup>376</sup>

British and French women situated close to the negotiations in Paris did not have faith that the League would include them if they did not obtain written obligations and protections in the Covenant itself. Sir James Eric Drummond, who became the first Secretary-General of the League of Nations (he served from 1920-1933), explored the question of women's representation at the League in consultation with representatives of women's organizations in Britain.<sup>377</sup> On June 21, 1919, seven days before the Versailles Treaty was signed, Drummond held an informal meeting with Maria Ogilvie Gordon (1864-1939), the President of the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland, Margaret Corbett Ashby (1882-1981) of the British Commonwealth League, and

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<sup>374</sup> The six committees were: Constitutional Questions, Technical Organizations, Permanent Court of International Justice, Organization of the Secretariat and the Finances of the League, Admission of New Members, and Mandate Questions, Armaments, and the Economic Weapon.

<sup>375</sup> Special Commissions were created to deal with these and other questions: mandates, disarmament, slavery, refugees, economics and finance, protection of women and children, drugs, health, leprosy, communications and transit, intellectual cooperation, military, naval, and air, and the legal status of women. The commissions were not fixed and changed over the history of the League.

<sup>376</sup> For more information on international civil servants see the work of X. U. Yi-Chong and Patrick Weller. "To Be, But not To Be Seen": Exploring the Impact of International Civil Servants." *Public Administration* 86.1 (2008): 35-51; Benjamin Auberer, "Opening Up New Opportunities? The Transgressive Career of Dorothea Weger" paper presented on the "From of the League of Nations to the UN-System" panel at the Fourth European Network in Universal and Global History Congress, *Ecolé Normale Supérieur*, Paris, France, September 4-7, 2014.

<sup>377</sup> Drummond served as Secretary-General of the League of Nations from its inception in 1920 until 1933. Before he was the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, he was the Principle Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary. After his stint as Secretary-General he served as the British Ambassador to Italy (1933-1939). In 1937, while he was the British Ambassador, he assumed the title of sixteenth Earl of Perth.

representatives of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship and the Women's International League, among other representatives. Ogilvie Gordon and Corbett Ashby were members of "international" women's organizations as well. Corbett Ashby was the president of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance.<sup>378</sup>

The women assembled in Drummond's office represented a variety of established "international" women's organizations. By the early 1920s, forty-five million women were members of "international" women's organizations—defined as crossing one international border, even a contiguous border.<sup>379</sup> These organizations were led by a cohort of middle and upper-class British, French, Scandinavian, and American women who hosted regular conferences to discuss issues and set institutional agendas. Starting in the mid-1920s, Arab women were invited to these conferences.<sup>380</sup> Ogilvie Gordon and Corbett Ashby were among the most prominent women in the "international" women's movement anchored in Europe. Ogilvie Gordon was very eager to ensure that women were included in the covenant. Their vision for including women mirrored the structure of their governing bodies wherein Western women had a privileged position as leaders to determine the organization's initiatives. Corbett Ashby advocated creating a women's bureau that would give women wide access to positions at the League.

Drummond began the session by stating quite frankly "I do not know the best means of securing the appointment of women."<sup>381</sup> He expressed that he was not

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<sup>378</sup> See Appendix 3 for biographical information on these women and the international organizations they led.

<sup>379</sup> Miller, "Lobbying the League: Women's International Organizations and the League of Nations," iii.

<sup>380</sup> Arab women, in particular representatives from Egypt, and to a lesser extent Syria, had been invited to participate at international women's conferences to discuss topics of interest to European feminists—polygamy, child marriage. The regional Arab women's conferences that were staged in response to their limited access to conferences are explored in the second chapter of this dissertation.

<sup>381</sup> LN R1356 23/99/86 Women's Questions, 1919. Informal interview with members of the National Council of Women with Sr. Eric Drummond, 21 June 1919, 2.



concerned that a woman would be appointed to the Assembly, but rather “how she is going to be chosen. Our main difficulty now is that we have not any Advisory Body who really represents the women of the world.”<sup>382</sup> Absent such a representative body of women, Drummond proposed that the council solicit suggestions of female nominees from the constitutive governments of the proposed, but not yet incorporated, League. Candidates would be selected from the list of nominees for admission to several of the League of Nations’ committees and commissions. Drummond thought that it would be especially important to have a woman on the Mandate Commission. The delegation of women shared with Drummond their hope that women would be represented on all the commissions.<sup>383</sup>

Drummond supported integrating women into the League, but he did not believe that women had a place on all of the commissions. He had reservations, for example, about women joining the Border Commission and “[a]nother commission on which I do not think you will want representation is a permanent commission of purely technical experts, soldiers, sailors, and airmen, to advise on military and naval questions generally. I do think that a claim to [representation on] all Commissions might do harm.”<sup>384</sup> The women listened to Drummond’s suggestion and modified their request so that they sought two women on each commission, “except the one dealing with purely military affairs.”<sup>385</sup> In fact, Ogilvie Gordon, who had a Doctor of Philosophy in geology, succeeded in

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<sup>382</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>383</sup> Though Sanwick noted that women’s organizations selectively supported the ventures of the commissions. Labor organizations, for example, were against the “formation of commissions with mandatory and colonial expansion powers.” LN R1356 23/99/86 Women’s Questions, 1919. Informal interview with members of the National Council of Women with Sr. Eric Drummond, 21 June 1919, 12.

<sup>384</sup> *ibid.*, 11. When the women mentioned how women had been integral to the war effort as W.A.A.Cs and W.R.N.S., Drummond noted that there had been no discussion of including representatives of those organizations.

<sup>385</sup> *ibid.*, 13.

changing Drummond's mind about excluding women from the Border Commission.

The Secretary-General-elect's meeting with a delegation of Britons established a pattern for how women's rights would be addressed at the League of Nations under Drummond's leadership. Drummond expressed his support for including women from all over the world in the League's various branches as experts and Assembly members, but in practice deferred to suggestions of nominees provided by women close to him, who had their own agendas and perspectives. Women with close access to the leaders of the League were more successful in integrating their views of women's rights into the League's structure: the internationalization of women's rights began over private conversations in tea parlors in Paris and London.

Through their activism in Paris during the peace negotiations at the close of World War I and in private conversations with the architects of the League, women secured a pledge for equal access to employment at the League. Ogilvie Gordon exclaimed at a conference "[w]e must make it our business to press for the actual appointment of women."<sup>386</sup> Ogilvie Gordon's comment conveyed an understanding of the real possibility of a gap between proclamations and implementation. These organizers did not consider the promise to include women in the League to be end, but rather, a beginning. Around the question of which women would be appointed, the answer was simple: themselves. When they secured the promise of representation of women at the League, the women who met with Drummond were not arguing that all of the world's women were ready to participate in discussions about the intersection of the "women's question" and international governance. An IWSA report expressed the feeling that "the unenfranchised countries need much help for some time to come," and were consequently

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<sup>386</sup> LN R1356 23/99/86 Women's Questions, 1919. Mrs. Maria Ogilvie Gordon's Presidential Address at the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland, 25 June 1919, 5.

not yet ready to represent themselves at the League.<sup>387</sup> Thus, women from nations that the leaders of international women's organizations deemed to be less advanced were not given the same access to the League. A hierarchy of women's access to the League took shape alongside the League's formal creation.

The informal meetings in England with Drummond were not the only means used by activists to ensure their inclusion. Some representatives of the international women's movement were on the scene in Paris, aiming to ensure that female representation was incorporated into the League. The *Union Française pour le Suffrage des Femmes* (French Union for Women's Suffrage, connected with the IWSA) invited its members to Paris to "bring feminist pressure" to bear on the men around the negotiating tables. The women who took to the picket lines and the women who arranged teas looked askance at the tactics of the other contingent of activists; but both veins of activism saw their tactics as effective in ensuring that a place for women was created at the League.<sup>388</sup>

President Wilson welcomed, "with great sympathy," a delegation of the women who had assembled in Paris.<sup>389</sup> The delegation advocated that a commission be created to report on women's issues at the League. They envisioned the commission would be comprised of women nominated by their governments for their work on advancing women's rights. Wilson reminded the delegation that only questions with "an international bearing" could be considered by the League, thus ruling out suffrage, which

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<sup>387</sup> LN R1356 23/5359/3554 Women's Questions, 1920. International Woman Suffrage Alliance Report.

<sup>388</sup> Some women's organizations rejected the call to participate in the protests surrounding the creation of the League because only the victors of the First World War were allowed to attend the meeting in Versailles. The French organization insisted that such a division was necessary to ensure they obtained their goal of securing women's representation at the League.

<sup>389</sup> LN R1356 23/259 Women's Questions, 1919. Women Delegates to Peace Conference. Article Clipping from "British Weekly." n.d. Women in the United States secured the right to vote during Wilson's presidency, though not because of his support. Wilson brought his lukewarm support for suffrage to the international level.

was purely a national issue.<sup>390</sup> The founding fathers of the League used the national status of many women's issues to justify excluding women's issues from the League altogether. Wilson proposed that they form a commission of women to advise and instruct "the men's commission," which would ultimately decide the League's position on the "women's question."

The women accepted Wilson's proposal to create a women's commission to advise the world leaders assembled in Paris at the close of World War I, but they embellished it a bit: they lobbied both the delegates at the Peace Conference and the delegates who were simultaneously laying the groundwork for the League of Nations.<sup>391</sup> Ultimately, an official hearing before the commission on the League of Nations was allowed. The female delegates called for the admission of women into all permanent bodies of the League, the granting of woman's suffrage "as soon as the civilization and democratic development of each country might permit," the suppression of the traffic in women and children, and the establishment of bureaus of education and hygiene.<sup>392</sup> The female delegates' petition highlighted two things: first, that they saw the status of women in other parts of the world as less developed, and second, what issues they saw as women's issues. Women's rights activists present in Paris saw trafficking in women and children, education, and hygiene issues as international issues that affected women's status—their conception of women's issues spread beyond suffrage.

### **Phase One: International Efforts to Enforce the Equality Clause (1920-1929)**

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<sup>390</sup> Oliver Strachey, "The Inter Allied Conference," n.d., and Millicent Garrett Fawcett, diary entry, February 7-15, 1919, Fawcett Papers, Box 90, Fawcett Library. Quoted in Rupp *Worlds of Women*, 211.

<sup>391</sup> Millicent Garrett Fawcett to Carrie Chapman Catt, 19 February 1919, Fawcett papers, Box 90, Fawcett Library. Quoted in *ibid*; Suzanne Grinberg, "Women at the Peace Congress." *Jus Suffragii* 13.6 (March 1919).

<sup>392</sup> "Women's Deputation Heard." *Evening Post* (New York) 11 April 1919; "Women's Petitions to League Framers." *The New York Times* 13 April 1919. Quoted in Rupp *Worlds of Women*, 211.

The preparatory phase secured employment channels for women. The Covenant of the League of Nations provided for equal opportunity for women in employment at the League. Paragraph 3 of Article 7 of the Covenant stated “all positions under or in connection with the League, including the Secretariat, shall be open equally to men and women.”<sup>393</sup> The last clause of the article—“equally to men and women”—was referred to as the equality clause. The equality clause was proposed by Lord Robert Cecil, one of the architects of the League of Nations, and was unanimously adopted by the League of Nations commission.<sup>394</sup> The paragraph was understood by women’s organizations “to distinctly mean that the feminine point of view was really to be brought into the realm of world government.”<sup>395</sup> A second line of interpretation emerged during the last public session of the Paris Peace Conference, when President Wilson read and interpreted the “woman’s clause as the following: ‘Paragraph 3 of Article 7 is new, establishing equality of employment of men and women by the League.’”<sup>396</sup> The American president interpreted the paragraph as meaning men and women should have equal access to employment at the League.

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<sup>393</sup> The Covenant of the League of Nations, including amendments adopted until December 1924. “The Avalon Project,” Yale Law School. Web. 27 January 2014. [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/leagcov.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/leagcov.asp) For further information on the debates surrounding drafting the League of Nations’ Covenant, see David Hunter Miller. *The Drafting of the Covenant. v. 1 History; v. 2 Documents* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1928) and Parker Thomas Moon. *Imperialism and World Politics* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929).

<sup>394</sup> Cecil, a British diplomat, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1937 for his work in establishing the League of Nations and his service to the organization. Women’s organizations lobbied Cecil heavily. When asked if he was on their side, he declared he was. The structure of the League of Nations was negotiated by an international committee over six months prior to the ratification of the Treaty of Versailles. Other clauses ensuring equality were not successful in finding their way into the Covenant of the League. A proposed racial equality treaty was eliminated from the Covenant after President Wilson, another one of the architects of the League objected—the League of Nations was among the “Fourteen Points” Wilson presented in January 1918. The experts articulating the framework of the League attempted to integrate the notion of religious equality into the Covenant, but were unsuccessful in doing so.

<sup>395</sup> LN R1356 23/289/289 Women’s Questions, 1919. Draft of an article written by Constance Drexel “Women’s Part in League of Nations, Article I” *London Times* n.d.

<sup>396</sup> *ibid.*

Did Paragraph 3 only give women an equal chance to compete with men for positions as clerks and typists in the League? Had women not actually succeeded in opening up new avenues of engagement—female representatives, for example? Could “open equally to men and women” be read as a mandate for exact parity in representation? Jane Addams (1860-1935), an American activist, and Chrystal Macmillan (1872-1937), a Scottish activist, queried “[j]ust what does that clause mean? Did you change the Covenant so that we could be sure of being stenographers and office assistants in the League or are women in reality to be called upon to play an important part in international politics?”<sup>397</sup>

Women did not wait to see if the League of Nations Committee at the Paris Peace Conference adopted Wilson’s interpretation of Paragraph 3, Article 7 of the Covenant: that women could type and copy and record the motions and minutes of the League but not have an active role in shaping the League’s campaigns and initiatives. Women’s organizations set about persuading the League of Nations that it needed women’s support and showing why that support was essential. Three general arguments pervaded the letters sent to Drummond by the IWSA, ICW, and WILPF and national women’s organizations in Britain and France. Consensus among the organizations, regardless of the line of argument they took, was that excluding women from the League’s structure was bad for the League. A sense of urgency pervaded their League-oriented activism. The organizations involved in convincing the League that women should be granted access to the League knew that if women’s right to equal access to the League was not enshrined in the Covenant itself, it would be much more challenging to secure the right later.

First, women’s organizations argued that ensuring women’s employment

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<sup>397</sup> *ibid.*

opportunities within the League would be good for all of the world's women, including less advanced women. In an event timed to coincide with the peace negotiations in Paris, the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland expressed "that it is the duty and privilege of the more enlightened nations to help forward the less advanced, and that only if they do so can any general progress be made."<sup>398</sup> Chrystal Macmillan also thought the inclusion of women in the League structure would serve as a good example for women and men in other parts of the world. "[T]he fact that the women's representatives will have the right to put forward their point of view will be very educative for the backward governments and their treatment of women will be open to public criticism."<sup>399</sup> Macmillan said that "[t]he prosperity of a country is to be measured by the position of those who are the lowest." She added, an "American sociologist said that in Europe the lowest are women." While women were in the lowest position in Europe, they still served as an example for men and women in less developed world regions.

Second, women's organizations argued that women were an important constituency to please because women were already organized and invested in securing a peaceful future, one of the professed purposes of convening the League. Ogilvie Gordon believed "every gentle-hearted woman in all continents, from Iceland to New Zealand, and from Japan to California, will bend herself to the welcome task of inculcating the noble ideals and principles of the Covenant."<sup>400</sup> The League's promise of peace was one of the ideals that appealed to women. The organizations argued it only seemed natural for the League to capitalize on the common goal that connected the League with many of the

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<sup>398</sup> LN R1356 23/117/84 Women's Questions, 1919. Ogilvie Gordon Speech from the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland. 25 June 1919, 5.

<sup>399</sup> LN R1356 23/2668/1042 Women's Questions, 1920. Miss Chrystal Macmillan to Drummond about a conference on women's organizations, 10 January 1920.

<sup>400</sup> LN R1356 23/117/84 Women's Questions, 1919. Ogilvie Gordon Speech from the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland. 25 June 1919, 1.

women's organizations. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) was one such example where the overlap around the issue of peace was evident. The International Council on Women had a "Committee for Peace." When the League emerged as an international force for peace, the committee's title became the "Committee for Peace and the League of Nations."<sup>401</sup>

IWSA support for the League also hinged on its promise of peace. The IWSA expressed its support for the League of Nations and called upon the women of the world to do the same.

The women of the thirty-one countries assembled in the Congress at Geneva [in 1920], convinced that in a strong Society of Nations, based on the principles of right and justice, lies the only hope of assuring the future peace of the world, call upon the women of the whole world to direct their will, their intelligence, and their influence towards the development and consolidation of the Society of Nations on such a basis, and to assist in every possible way in its work of securing peace and goodwill throughout the world.<sup>402</sup>

Individual national sections of the IWSA also expressed their support for the League. The French delegation observed, "The League of Nations is the one and magnificent hope of assuring the future peace of the world, the Alliance hails its creation with deep joy."<sup>403</sup> The Austrian delegation did not share the same optimism; the Austrians opposed "the greeting of the League of Nations as long as all nations do not have the same rights as members of the League."<sup>404</sup> The IWSA's optimism that the League could overcome the world's divisions was tested from the outset.

Third, the organizations argued that women were among the architects of the international community and should therefore be admitted to participate in the League—

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<sup>401</sup> LN R1356 23/6079/84 Women's Questions, 1920. Agenda of the quinquennial meeting of the International Council of Women, 1.

<sup>402</sup> LN R1356 23/5359/3554 Women's Questions, 1920. Council Document G2. Record of the Eighth Congress of the IWSA, Geneva, Switzerland, 6-12 June 1920, 8.

<sup>403</sup> LN R1356 23/5359/3554 Women's Questions, 1920. International Woman Suffrage Alliance Report, 16.

<sup>404</sup> *ibid.*, 17.



the fruit of their vision and labor. Ogilvie Gordon observed, “[w]omen have been among the first to organise themselves upon International lines.”<sup>405</sup> Gordon reminded the League that women’s organizations were the first to conduct studies of educational standards, health conditions, employment protections—questions that transcended national borders—before they were studied by any national organization and before they became topics of League studies.<sup>406</sup> If being pivotal actors in developing an international consciousness was not enough to prove women’s worth as equals in the League’s employment structure, women argued their wartime relief efforts proved their worth to the international community. Maria Ogilvie Gordon said

[m]ay the womanhood of the nations, that no less than the manhood, won its spurs before the world in the ordeal of war, be enabled now to assume with calm and dignity its due and proper share in the national and international counsels for the re-construction and betterment of humanity.<sup>407</sup>

Women’s war efforts should have secured them a place at the post-war negotiation table. Women were not welcomed to the negotiation rooms in Paris. In an effort to make sure their exclusion from League proceedings was not permanent, women’s organizations pressed the League to ensure women had equal access to jobs at the League of Nations.

The second and third arguments that women put forth in support of their interpretation of the equality clause were connected. To pursue peace, many women thought it was necessary to supplant nationalist identities, seen as a cause of the war, with international allegiances. Ogilvie Gordon believed “a good patriot soon becomes a good internationalist” and that “the old and narrow sense of patriotism is an anachronism in the

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<sup>405</sup> LN R1356 23/117/84 Women’s Questions, 1919. Ogilvie Gordon Speech from the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland. 25 June 1919, 4.

<sup>406</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>407</sup> LN R1356 23/5359/3554 Women’s Questions, 1920. Council Document G2. Record of the Eighth Congress of the IWSA, Geneva, Switzerland, 6-12 June 1920, 8.

world which women and men are striving to re-habilitate to-day.”<sup>408</sup> Ogilvie Gordon projected the “historian of the future will probably term [this] the Era of Internationalism.”<sup>409</sup> However, Ogilvie Gordon’s conceptualization of international was limited. The international organizations that lobbied the League of Nations on behalf of a woman’s right to participate were not truly representative of all the world’s women. In 1920, the IWSA boasted membership from Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, South Africa, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States; the ICW had branches in all of the aforementioned countries and Austria, Argentina, Yugoslavia, Uruguay, Ukraine, Mexico, and Estonia. The leadership ranks of both organizations in 1920 were exclusively European and American.

The international women’s organizations lobbying efforts succeeded. The “equality clause” was interpreted by the Secretariat to mean qualified women were entitled to equal employment in all of the League’s six bodies up to and including governmental representative and commission chair. Women’s organizations recorded their pleasure that women had secured employment access to the League. For example, the IWSA, after its Eighth Congress, held in Geneva in 1920,

desire[d] to place on record its profound gratification that since it last met in 1913 women in twenty-one countries of the world have been enfranchised; that women sit on many legislative bodies of the world, and that the Council, Assembly, Commissions and Secretariat of the League of Nations are open equally to women as to men.<sup>410</sup>

The congress’ location in Geneva was not coincidental. The IWSA advertised that the inclusion “for the first time the women of other races [in its conference program], will

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<sup>408</sup> LN R1356 23/117/84 Women’s Questions, 1919. Ogilvie Gordon Speech from the Annual Meeting of the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland. 25 June 1919, 6.

<sup>409</sup> *ibid.*, 1.

<sup>410</sup> LN R1356 23/5359/3554 Women’s Questions, 1920. Council Document G2. Record of the Eighth Congress of the IWSA, Geneva, Switzerland, 6-12 June 1920, 1.

give expression to the solidarity of the women's movement." The meeting was addressed by "women of the East, where the movement is rapidly spreading."<sup>411</sup> The inclusion of representatives from the "East"—India, Egypt, and Palestine—was also not a coincidence.<sup>412</sup> It corresponded with the organization's desire to position itself as internationally representative.

The relationship between the League of Nations and international women's organizations was symbiotic and motivated by political goals. Women pandered to the League to gain support for their causes, including the implementation of the equality clause. The League pandered to women to buoy itself. Women's organizations' interpretation of the equality clause won the support of the Secretary-General, but not out of pure altruism. As women had advocated, including women was politically advantageous to the League, which was struggling to gain international legitimacy. World War I took the lives of sixteen million soldiers and civilians. The war left more women than men in most European countries. One American journalist observed that the men orchestrating the construction of the League thought that if women's rights were protected in the League, women would embrace the League's potential for securing peace, which was considered women's natural inclination.<sup>413</sup> Women were happy to capitalize on this assignation, if it meant they could secure access to the League.

Formal and informal access avenues for women and women's organizations emerged during the first stage of women's organizing at the League. Formal access to the

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<sup>411</sup> LN R1356 23/4377/3554 Women's Questions, 1920. Eighth Congress of the IWSA, Geneva, Switzerland, 6-12 June 1920. "Information for Press Purposes."

<sup>412</sup> It is unclear whether the Egyptian delegation actually attended the conference. Jewish immigrants to Palestine sometimes attended international conferences as Palestinian women; this Palestinian delegation was made up of Eastern Europeans who had emigrated to Palestine, including Rosa Welt Strauss. Their organization, Palestine Jewish Women's Equal Rights Association, was the first organization in the Middle East to become affiliated with the IWSA. It was incorporated at the 1920 congress.

<sup>413</sup> LN R1356 23/289/289 Women's Questions, 1919. Draft of an article by Constance Drexel "Women's Part in League of Nations, Article II" *London Times* n.d.

League was available to the small group of women who were officially nominated by their nation-states to serve as delegates, substitute delegates, experts, or commission members. Women's organizations with international status were able to gain an audience with the League through informal channels. Marie Ogilvie Gordon, Margery Corbett Ashby, and other leaders of "international" women's organizations had connections with Drummond and were thereby able to advocate for their perspective regarding which women should be allowed to participate in the League. The women's organizations with access to informal channels were international women's organizations centered in Europe and the United States. The formal and informal channels revealed the imbalance in who had access to League conversations.

Privileging European-based international organizations was a tacit rather than explicit League policy that emerged with the League's creation. The policy was shaped by the location of the League's headquarters in Switzerland. During the second phase of women's organizing at the League, the pool of women's rights activists who addressed the League expanded to include actors from Central and South America. The direction the League took in the first phase of its engagement with the "women's question," however, was shaped by European activists, and as a consequence, focused on securing opportunities for female representation. A combination of political calculations and women's formal and informal lobbying ensured that the international women's organizations based in Paris and London interpretation of Paragraph 3, Article 7 of the League of Nations Covenant prevailed and was adopted. Women would have open access to all positions at the League, not just secretarial jobs.

### **Informal League Access for "International" Women's Organizations**

Not all of the international women's organizations that worked with the League were in

favor of the idea or structure of the League. Nor were they convinced that the League could enforce its goal of securing and preserving peace, but they worked with it nonetheless. International women's organizations came to the League from a variety of perspectives on women's role in society and accordingly their activism varied. Some women's organizations sought economic rights, some sought social rights, some peace, some equality. Ensuring women's representation at the League—and ensuring that the League lived up to its Article 7 promise—was one area where international groups overlapped and found a unified project. The unified project of securing representation faced two structural obstacles: the League only engaged international organizations and the League was powerless to enforce its suggestion that women serve as national representatives on the Assembly.

If an organization did not meet the League's international standard, they were sent a form letter from the Secretariat informing them that they did not meet the League's "international" requirement for participation. Some members of the Secretariat thought this demarcation was needlessly bureaucratic: "[a]ll the Secretariat does is send them letters saying that their statements cannot be taken account of because they have not tacked to their name the epithet 'international.'"<sup>414</sup> For the most part, representatives from one or more European nation, or the United States, constituted the membership of international organizations. Including members from different nations within the United Kingdom, for example, did not align with the League's notion of "international."<sup>415</sup>

In 1920, international women's organizations had representatives from most European nations, the United States, and some countries in Central and South America, but no "Eastern" representation. The letterhead of international women's organizations

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<sup>414</sup> LN R3755 3A/18611/13900 Legal, General. M. Pilotti to Gabrielle Radziwill, 22 July 1935.

<sup>415</sup> LN R3755 3A/18611/13900 Legal, General. Gabrielle Radziwill to M. Pilotti. Received 22 July 1935.

conveyed the leadership structure of the organization. At the top of the page the name and address of the organization were listed in a bold, clear typeface. London was the most common location for an organization's headquarters. In a slightly less dominant font came the leadership masthead: the names and nationalities of the organization's chief officers. Printed down the left edge of the page in diminutive font were the names of affiliated women's organizations in other countries. The layout of the letterhead demonstrates that affiliated international branches were not integrated as equals into the organizational hierarchy.

After the League was founded, some international organizations increased representation from the "East," a geographic category that encompassed women from the A Mandates ever eastward, toward India and Japan. A system of "token" representation emerged to fulfill the League's "international" requirement because, when admitted, representatives from "Eastern" nations did not serve in leadership positions in the international organizations. This sidelined status caused women to start their own women's organizations and "Eastern" alliances, as seen in the Eastern Women's Conferences. In the mid-1920s, to challenge the dominance of more conservative women's organizations at the League, the National Women's Party in the United States forged alliances with women's groups in Latin American countries. The international alliances between women's organizations in the Americas meant they could send representatives to the League because their organizations fit the League's conception of international.

Princess Gabrielle Radziwill of Lithuania, who served in the Secretariat, served as the *de facto* contact for organizations that were not truly "international" and had a more domestic jurisdiction, such as women's voluntary and philanthropic organizations.

Radziwill championed extending women's access to the League. She emphasized the advantages of the relationship: the "League needs the work of women, and we women need the League of Nations' help, because the work that we are doing can only bear fruit if it is really sanctioned by our Governments and we women must help this sanction to be given."<sup>416</sup> Furthermore, the League lacked the resources to enforce many of its provisions and found partnering with women's domestic and international organizations that shared an interest in eliminating the traffic in women, or the spread of venereal disease, for example, helped the League execute some of the programs it promised on paper.

From her position as the unofficial League member for women, Radziwill helped develop an informal system for women's organizations to access the League starting in the early 1920s. Article 7 did not address women's organizations; instead, Article 7 created a formal channel of access for women to be nominated by their national governments to serve as representatives on their national delegation to the Assembly of the League of Nations. The informal system used by Radziwill to give women's organizations a position at the League was known as the assessor system.

The assessor system gave women's organizations an informal position on the League's committees. Assessors could offer information during sessions, but they could not vote. The League eliminated the assessor system in 1936, much to the consternation of women's organizations. Women's organizations had benefitted from the informal access provided by the assessor system and lobbied aggressively to maintain this system that gave them back-door access to the committees. Access to committee meetings and, by extension, committee discussions was a way of circumventing the fact that women had been blocked from participating in the League's activities because their national

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<sup>416</sup> Gabrielle Radziwill, quoted in *Women in a Changing World: Dynamic History of the International Council of Women since 1888* (London: Routledge, 1966), 54.

governments had only nominated male delegates to Assembly. The assessor system gave access only to formal international women's organizations. Individual women could not access the League through this system, nor could organizations not categorized as "international" by the League.

The assessor system was one means of circumventing the biases of governments and of shaping the League's approach to the "women's question" and other issues of import to women. Another avenue open to women was old-fashioned lobbying in the original meaning of the word: cornering delegates in the League's cavernous hallways and lobbies. Women in the circles that intersected with the League of Nations quickly found that they could buttonhole delegates in the hallways of the *Palais des Nations*, in Geneva.<sup>417</sup> Emily Greene Balch (1867-1961), a member of the WILPF, believed that the "best chance of putting forward our ideas is generally in conversations with one or two people, the opportunity for which arises generally suddenly and unforeseen."<sup>418</sup> The assessor system developed for use by international women's organizations and lobbying were among the most effective means for women to shape the course of League action on women's issues—and on all issues of concern to the League.

### **Formal Channels of Access for Individual Women**

While much of women's engagement with the Assembly and the Council came through informal channels, a few women served as substitute delegates and delegates on national delegations to the Assembly. A woman did not serve as a full delegate to the Assembly of the League of Nations until 1929. Before then, women served as substitute delegates in

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<sup>417</sup> *ibid.*, 214.

<sup>418</sup> Emily Green Balch to Gabrielle Duchêne, 3 December 1920, Dossiers Duchêne, F Rés 296, BDIC. Quoted in *Women in a Changing World: Dynamic History of the International Council of Women since 1888* (London: Routledge, 1966), 214.



the first nine years of the Assembly. Of the five women appointed as substitute delegates to the first and second assemblies (1920, 1921), the majority were from Scandinavian or Nordic countries—Sweden, Denmark, Norway—the other two were from the Netherlands and Romania. Between 1929 and 1938, sixteen women served as delegates and ten times that number served as substitute delegates.<sup>419</sup> The number of female delegates on the Assembly never rose above three women serving simultaneously. Women also served as experts on delegations and in other positions; 37 countries nominated 371 women to a position on their delegation to the Assembly as a delegate, substitute delegate, expert, or through another position.<sup>420</sup> As a percentage of posts filled at the League, women never surpassed six percent of delegates to the Assembly and eight percent of top-level Secretariat posts.<sup>421</sup> No women ever served on the Council.<sup>422</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> LN R1356 23/21522/84 Women's Questions, 1921. Representation of women on various commissions.

<sup>420</sup> Twenty-six countries never had a female represented on the delegation. The support women's nationality rights received from countries in Central and South America did not translate into an appointment of a woman on their delegation to the League.

<sup>421</sup> Miller, "Lobbying the League: Women's International Organizations and the League of Nations," iv.

<sup>422</sup> For precise data on which women served on which committees throughout the course of the League of Nations, see Miller, "Lobbying the League: Women's International Organizations and the League of Nations," 127-133. Miller categorizes women based on nationality rather than by name, thus rendering women statistics.



Female Representatives to the Sixteenth Assembly (caption provided—no names or nationalities listed)  
Source: League of Nations Photo Archive Online, Indiana University.

The only women with access to positions as members of the Assembly or Council were from countries where women had the franchise. Even as women's organizations from the colonized world and other countries tried to offer alternative visions for how to internationalize women's rights, the emergent Western mode of defining women's rights around the right to vote was built into the League's structure. The right to vote became a metric for measuring women's relative advancement vis-à-vis countries that had not yet given the vote to women. Many Nordic states had given all women the right to vote by 1920.<sup>423</sup> The right to vote coupled with progressive marriage laws made many of the leaders of the international women's movement in Britain and France, where not all

<sup>423</sup> Women obtained the right to vote in Finland (1906), Norway (1913), Denmark (1915), and the Netherlands (1919). This list of countries corresponded with the first countries to have women as representatives on their delegations to the Assembly of the League of Nations.

women had the right to vote, eager to hold up women from Sweden, Norway, and Finland, as exemplars of women's potential. International women's organizations pressured governments where women had the franchise to appoint a woman as one of their three delegates on the Assembly.<sup>424</sup> Some states acquiesced and appointed women as substitute delegates.

Non-Scandinavian countries addressed the possibility of nominating a woman to their Assembly delegation. In 1920, Sir Eric Drummond discussed with David Lloyd George, Prime Minister of United Kingdom, the possibility of nominating a woman to the British Delegation, even though women did not yet have the right to vote. Drummond expressed that "[a]s the third delegate, I have always been in favour of a woman being selected, and I feel sure that the appointment by the Government would be both wise and popular."<sup>425</sup> The British National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship sent the British Prime Minister a list of possible candidates for the post and emphasized that putting women on the British delegation to the Assembly would send a positive message to British women.

Such an appointment would not only gratify the women electors of this country, but we consider that it would be specially appropriate and useful at the present time, in view of the great changes that have taken place and are taking place in all countries in the political, civil, and economic position of women, and in view especially of the need of safe-guarding the interests of women in the mandatory countries of the League.<sup>426</sup>

The National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship emphasized that putting a woman on the British delegation would send a clear message to British women over thirty, who had

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<sup>424</sup> LN R1356 23/5579/3554 Women's Questions, 1920. Report of a meeting between the Secretary-General and a deputation of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, 4.

<sup>425</sup> LN R1359 26/5836/5836 Assembly. 1920. Letter from Sir Eric Drummond to Elise Stevenson (the Prime Minister's Secretary), 19 August 1920.

<sup>426</sup> LN R1359 26/5840/5836 Assembly. 1920. National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship to Hon. David Lloyd George (British P.M.), 31 July 1920.

the right to vote, that the Lloyd George government was in favor of securing their rights.<sup>427</sup>

The women of the British National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship also viewed nominating a woman to the British Assembly delegation as a means of sending a signal to both its peers at the League and the peoples within its imperial realm about British investment in advancing the status of women—a phrase that meant helping backward women shed traditions perceived as inhibiting their participation in society as equal citizens. The British National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship members who wrote the petition explained that as a mandatory power Britain had the obligation to protect women's rights, defined mostly in British terms as suffrage and equality. None of the participating groups took into account indigenous conceptions of women's rights protections, nor the fact that there were active women's movements and independence movements in all of the countries subjected to the British and French mandates. In fact, the imposition of the mandates had served as the catalyst for regional anti-imperial solidarity and helped solidify an Arab identity that was utilized by Syrian and Lebanese women when they petitioned the League.

The debate about who should represent Britain's women did not, in the end, yield a British delegate on the first assembly, nor subsequent assemblies. The appointment of women to the League's committees and to national delegations was highly political in nature—allowing a government to present itself as favorable to women's rights on the global stage. It was not a strategy that was limited to the “big” states or colonial powers. “Small” states used the strategy as well.

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<sup>427</sup> The Representation of the People Act of 1918 gave the right to vote to British women over thirty who met certain property qualifications. In 1928, the right to vote was extended to all British women over the age of 21. See Sophia A. van Wingerden, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain, 1866-1928* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1999) and Martin Pugh, *Women and the Women's Movement in Britain, 1914-1959* (London: MacMillan, 1992) for more information on how women won the franchise in Britain.

### The “Commission Sentimentale”

The Fifth Committee, known as “La Commission Sentimentale,” which dealt with social questions, including the traffic in women and children received the most female appointees.<sup>428</sup> The commission became a *de facto* women’s bureau. Four times as many women served on it as served on all the other committees. Throughout its history, 203 women served on the Fifth Committee.<sup>429</sup> A few women served on committees other than “La Commission Sentimentale” that engaged legal, technical, reduction of arms, financial questions, social questions, and political questions.

Anna Bugge-Wicksell (1862-1928), of Sweden, secured a nomination to the Mandates Commission through the networking of British women’s organizations with Drummond. Her nomination was approved by the Council.<sup>430</sup> Dr. Josephine Baker, an American, was appointed to the Health Committee. Two women, including Marie Curie, were given positions on the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation. When they resigned from the intellectual cooperation committee, other women did not replace them, however. The Traffic in Women and Children Committee was the only committee to have a non-European female appointee: Dr. Paulina Luisi (1875-1949) of Uruguay. Dame Rachel Crowdy (1884-1964) of Great Britain was head of the Social Questions and Opium Traffic section. She was the only woman to serve as a head of section in the Secretariat.

Women’s organizations clung to whatever inroads they had made on other commissions or committees when a female representative resigned a post or passed away.

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<sup>428</sup> Miller, “Lobbying the League: Women's International Organizations and the League of Nations,” 153.

<sup>429</sup> For further information on the inclusion of women on the commissions, especially those concerned with health and social welfare see LN R1356 23/4533/84 Women’s Questions, 1919 and LN R1356 23/4533/84 Women’s Questions, 1919.

<sup>430</sup> All nominations the League’s committees had to be approved by the council of the League of Nations.

When Anna Bugge-Wicksell died in 1928 while serving on the Mandates Commission the Secretariat was deluged with letters from women's organizations suggesting female replacements.<sup>431</sup> Radziwill warned "if she is replaced by a man we shall have all the women organizations of the world on our back."<sup>432</sup> Women lobbied hard for their seat(s) at the table and were constantly fearful that the chair would be removed from underneath them and that they would be back in the hallways of the League working connections to try to regain access.

Women constituted a tiny minority of the membership of the League's other bodies and the Assembly, but they held the majority of the secretarial and clerical positions within the League Secretariat.<sup>433</sup> Women are visible in images of the proceedings of the Assembly and the Council, and in closed-room discussions of committees on arms reduction, the annexation of Alexandretta by Turkey, and stopping the opium trade, and in candid photographs of League proceedings. They were present, but they were infrequently formal representatives. In most of the images, women are not foregrounded. Rather, they can be seen lining the back walls of a conference room or in the typing circles of the League.<sup>434</sup> It is through women's contributions to the daily mechanics of the League that their presence was most visible. Women who served as delegates or were nominated as experts represented a minority of the women who contributed to the League's initiatives.

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<sup>431</sup> One woman who was nominated was Ruth Frances Woodsmall.

<sup>432</sup> Quoted in Miller, "Lobbying the League: Women's International Organizations and the League of Nations," 159.

<sup>433</sup> Miller, "Lobbying the League: Women's International Organizations and the League of Nations," 77-100.

<sup>434</sup> The League of Nations Secretariat fastidiously took photos of the League's proceedings. Many of these images have been digitized and are available through the League of Nations Photo Archive, which is housed at the University of Indiana. Access: <http://www.indiana.edu/~league/photos.htm>

### **Should There be a Women's Bureau?**

Women understood the gulf between language and implementation and determined not to leave it to the League to ensure equality, which the League's actions had not defined as equal representation on League committees and in the Assembly. Many women's organizations did not think that the meager representation of women on some of the League's commissions and the limited representation of women in the Assembly went far enough in enforcing Article 7. Thus, they sought alternative means of bringing women into the League's structure. Some women's organizations thought that the League should alter its administrative structure and create a new women's bureau. Mostly the consensus around how to ensure that women were integrated in the League's structure splintered between two opposing strategies: the first advocated for the creation of a women's bureau and the second simply opposed it. The opponents argued that siphoning women issues off into their own bureau would represent a regression for the women's movement, which was working to integrate women and their issues, not segregate them.

Those in favor of creating a bureau stressed the example of the International Labor Organization (ILO).<sup>435</sup> They argued that women's rights would not be prioritized if a body did not constantly advocate for the advancement of women's issues. The ILO's mandate was to protect worker's rights; workers and the working class were a population that was seen as unable to represent itself. Advocates of a women's bureau believed that many women were unable to represent their interests, much like the laborer. Thus, the difference versus equality debate that had affected the women's movement in the United

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<sup>435</sup> How the ILO's addressed "women's question" falls outside the purview of this dissertation; additional work is needed on the intersection of the ILO and the "women's question." See Eileen Boris and Jil Jensen, "The ILO: Women's Networks and the Making of the Woman Worker," in *Women and Social Movements International*, ed. T. Dublin and K. Sklar (Alexander Street Press, 2012) <http://wasi.alexanderstreet.com/View/1879476/> and Carol Riegelman Lubin and Anne Winslow, *Social justice for Women: the International Labor Organization and Women* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990).

States, Britain, and France, surfaced at the League of Nations.<sup>436</sup> As Constance Drexel (1894-1956), an American journalist, reported in an article, “[s]hould there or should there not be a Women’s Section in the League of Nations? That is the burning question.”<sup>437</sup>

In July 1920, Secretary-General Drummond, once again welcomed a deputation of British women representing the International Women’s Suffrage Alliance, all of them eager to discuss the status of women and the League’s ability to advance it. The deputation was lead by Dame Rachel Crowdy, head of the Social Questions and Opium Traffic Section of the League of Nations from 1919 to 1931. Several other well-known activists from Britain, France and the United States, joined Crowdy—among them, Eleanor Rathbone, Margaret Corbett Ashby, and Rachel (Ray) Oliver Strachey. The assembled IWSA representatives noted that women’s representation at the League was weak in its first year and suggested that a women’s conference—not a bureau—be created to remedy the problem of disproportionate representation. Drummond, who supported the appointment of women to commissions and national delegations, noted that the “constitution of such a conference consist[ing] purely of women delegates might not prejudice their cause with regard to getting women appointed as delegates to the Assembly.”<sup>438</sup> Drummond also emphasized the possibility that national representatives could argue that women were already represented and therefore no further action was needed to integrate women into the League. The IWSA was divided about whether or not

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<sup>436</sup> For more on the equality-difference paradox in feminism see Joan Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Estelle B. Freedman, “No Turning Back: The Historical Resilience of Feminism,” in *Feminism, Sexuality and Politics: Essays by Estelle B. Freedman* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006): 85-104; Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

<sup>437</sup> LN R1356 23/289/289 Women’s Questions, 1919. Draft of an article written by Constance Drexel “Women’s Part in League of Nations, Article II,” *London Times* n.d.

<sup>438</sup> *ibid.*



the League should have a Women's Bureau or a conference dedicated to women's issues, but ultimately advocated for the creation of an annual women's conference.<sup>439</sup>

On the question of creating a women's bureau, Chrystal Macmillan wrote to Drummond as an individual, despite her connections with many women's organizations, including the IWSA.<sup>440</sup> Macmillan advocated that "[m]en and women should work together and all the committees of the League should have women adequately represented."<sup>441</sup> For Macmillan a women's bureau did not preclude women from further integration into the League's other organs. She argued that equal representation would not be achieved without additional assistance from the League through the creation of an ILO-like organization.

Just as the lower status of the wage earner has made the international Labour Office necessary to give him the special machinery to vote his views with the intention of improving his status so a similar type of machinery is necessary to voice the views of women with the intention of improving her status. The very low status of women in many parts of the world reacts most unfavourably on their status in the most advanced countries and this machinery would cause the women and the government representatives from the backward countries to meet the more advanced.<sup>442</sup>

Macmillan thought that women representatives at the League could act as a model for governments in countries where women had "very low status"—presumably those in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Women's presence at the League would encourage governments of "backwards" countries to elevate the status of women and would demonstrate the potential of women.

Macmillan ended her letter to Drummond with a clear message: "[w]hat is wanted

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<sup>439</sup> When the organization put the question up to a vote at its Eighth Congress: forty-three delegations were for creating a women's bureau; fifty-one delegations were against the creation of a women's bureau. The IWSA ultimately supported the creation of a women's conference that would convene annually to ensure women's issues were brought before the League.

<sup>440</sup> Macmillan was on the Executive Committee of the National Council of Women and of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship. She was also secretary of the International Woman's Suffrage Alliance.

<sup>441</sup> LN R1356 23/2668/1042 Women's Questions, 1920. Miss Chrystal Macmillan to Drummond about a conference on women's organizations, 10 January 1920.

<sup>442</sup> *ibid.*

is machinery for raising the status of women”<sup>443</sup> Macmillan’s call for women’s integration into the League set forth a sequential structure. If women were given their own space to gestate campaigns and bring international attention to the issues that they thought were important, then the benefits would be two-fold. Women’s issues would gain international traction and women’s status at the League would be secured as the standard against which the status of women in other nations could be measured. The women in Macmillan’s activist cohort in Europe saw the status of women around the world as linked to their model: “justice or injustice in Europe had its repercussions on the status of daughters of ‘darkest Africa.’”<sup>444</sup> There was no unified vision of what a women’s bureau (or conference) should look like, or where it should be housed, but the organizations advocating for its creation believed it would help raise the status of women in Europe, and by extension, women everywhere. Alternative visions of how women’s rights might be structured did not register with these organizations.

In his formal role as General-Secretary and his informal role as a liaison for British organizations (including women’s organizations), Drummond received numerous communications from organizations trying to sway international action in their favor. Women representing a variety of perspectives on the merits of a women’s bureau lobbied Drummond, leaving him to proclaim that the women of England are divided—“I do not at present see how we are going to ascertain what the majority of women would wish.”<sup>445</sup> Drummond felt that an “international conference of women would be the best chance,” but conceded that it would be difficult to summon such a conference.<sup>446</sup> But, “[i]f a

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<sup>443</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>444</sup> LN R3755 3A/15980/13900 Legal, General. Liaison Committee of Women’s International Organisations. Resolutions passed at a Meeting of the Committee held on 30 April 1943, 5.

<sup>445</sup> LN R1356 23/192/192 Women’s Questions, 1919. Drummond to Fosdick. n.d.

<sup>446</sup> *ibid.*

Women's Bureau is established, I think it ought to follow very closely the general lines of the Labour Office and Conference," and emphasized that "its opponents are, I think, quite right in saying that it is bound to lead to a very considerable and unnecessary duplication of work."<sup>447</sup>

Opposition to a separate women's bureau varied. As Drummond noted, some of the opponents of the women's bureau thought that it would lead to a duplication of work—that women's issues were already implicitly addressed and did not need an explicit body to advocate for them. Other organizations and individuals felt that such a bureau would structurally marginalize women's issues at the League. The National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship, for example, was opposed to the establishment of a committee or body that would be "on what are sometimes called subjects concerning women, holding that women are as much concerned with men on the questions coming before the League."<sup>448</sup> The organization maintained that the proper way of ensuring that women's issues and women's questions came before the League was to "ensure that an adequate number of [women] be included on the various bodies set up in connection with the League and on the directing as well as on the lower branches of the secretariat."<sup>449</sup>

In 1920, Ishbel Hamilton-Gordon (1857-1939, also known as Lady Aberdeen), president of the International Council of Women, wrote to Drummond expressing her firm belief that "[t]he formation of any body exclusively composed of women within the League would be a mistake, seeing that it had been conceded that men and women were eligible on equal terms for all Commissions, etc."<sup>450</sup> The quinquennial meeting of the ICW in Kristiania "decided by a large majority to decline the invitation of the IWSA to

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<sup>447</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>448</sup> LN R1356 23/1310/259 Women's Questions, 1920. National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship.

<sup>449</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>450</sup> LN R1356 23/311/259 Women's Questions, 1920. Letter from Lady Aberdeen to Drummond, n.d.

support their proposal that an annual official Women's Conference should be held under the auspices of the League of Nations at their expense."<sup>451</sup> Thus, the major international women's organizations with European leadership were divided on whether it would be beneficial to women's international organizing to have a separate women's committee or conference or bureau.

A women's conference or bureau did not materialize during the first phase of the League of Nations' engagement with the "women's question." During this initial phase women secured employment access to the League through Article 7 of the Covenant. This foothold proved seminal. Women's representation continued to increase throughout the 1920s on commissions, on the committees, and in rare cases as official delegates. In 1927, after years of efforts to increase women's representation at the League, the ICW *Bulletin* stated that "[m]uch patient work will still have to be done by women before the much talked of 'equal rights,' guaranteed by the Covenant of the League ..., becomes a practical reality."<sup>452</sup> Despite the work needed to achieve the full promise of the equality clause, by the late 1920s, women's presence at the League was no longer a question, but a reality.

Formalized access for women at the League meant that more people and states could offer answers to the question of how women's rights could be internationalized. In time, a few women from Latin America joined European and American representatives, thus including new women's rights voices and altering the balance of power in discussions of women's rights at the League. With the right to employment and representation secured, though imperfectly implemented, women's organizing started to

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<sup>451</sup> LN R1356 23/7120/84 Women's Questions, 1920. International Council of Women Meeting Report from Quinquennial meeting Kristiania (now Oslo) Norway.

<sup>452</sup> Editorial Notes ICW *Bulletin* 5, no. 5 (January 1927). Quoted in Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 215.

target the intersection between women's issues and the concept at the core of the League: international governance. Women's activism directed toward the League was international (women's organizations organized across national borders in their League campaigns), yet the League did not categorize women's issues as international. Women's activism at the League to enforce Article 7 demonstrated the League's myopic interpretation of "international." Using the equality clause to integrate women into the League's structure was the first step in internationalizing women's rights, which meant categorizing women's rights as an international issue.

### Phase Two, Part One: Women's Rights by Treaty (1930-1936)

A chef in a *toque* stares at a balance. One side of the balance is labeled "men delegates," the other "women delegates." The side piled high with men drops far below the side

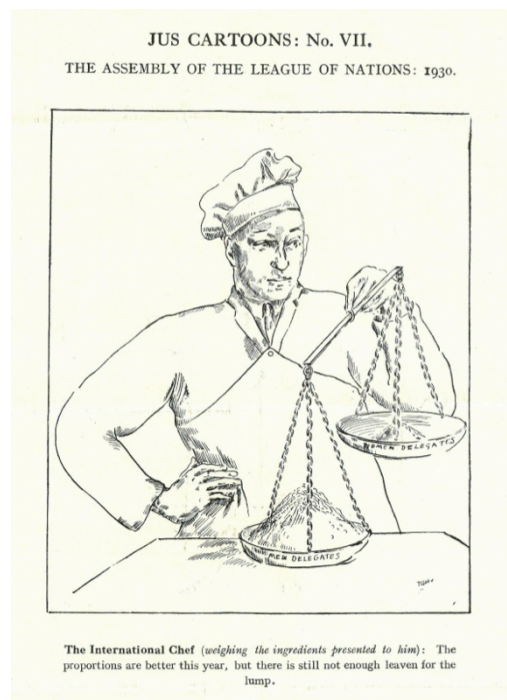
weighted with women; a visual reminder of persistent gender imbalances at the League.

The "International Chef" proclaims, while weighing the ingredients provided to him, "[t]he proportions are better this year, but there is still not enough to leaven the lump."<sup>453</sup> The

cartoon ran in *Jus Suffragii* under the header "The Assembly of the League of Nations: 1930." The image and text captured the

frustrations of the IWSA membership that

interacted with the League. After a decade of



<sup>453</sup> Cartoon no. VII, "The Assembly of the League of Nations: 1930, The International Chef." *Jus Suffragii* 24.12 (September 1930): 193.

witnessing the League's operations, activists who interacted with the League were aware that the League's opening promise for equality, as expressed in Article 7 of the Covenant, was still a long way from reality. The cartoon also reminded the League of its shortcomings in executing its promise of including women in positions at the League. Since the opening Assembly, women had steadily secured positions at the League, but male delegates still outnumbered female delegates.

In the 1930s women continued to focus on increasing their representation on the League's various institutional bodies. Edith Rogers, of Equal Rights International, wanted "more women in the delegations and as members of all the commissions," not just the ones deemed naturally "feminine."<sup>454</sup> In addition to the tired campaigns for increasing women's representation at the League, a new tactic emerged for forcing the League to move its response to the "women's question" beyond League employment options. Women's organizations started to collaborate with "small states"—those states with limited ability to affect the course of the League, which had concentrated power in the hands of the imperial states of Europe. The governments of small states, especially those in Central and South America picked up the mantle of the "women's question" and inserted it into the League's agenda. Without the joint activism from women's organizations and small states, the League would have been content to ignore other components of the "women's question." Moving beyond the mechanics of representation forced the League and its member states to have a nuanced conversation about what the "women's question" meant on the international level.

At the beginning of the League, the "women's question" had been classified as a national issue. Wilson and his cohort of international bureaucrats and diplomats, for

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<sup>454</sup> Edith Rodgers to Helen Archdale, 7 October 1931, Equal Rights International Papers, Box 333, Fawcett Library. Quoted in Rupp *Worlds of Women*, 216.

example, had refused to address women's issues, which were classed as domestic and therefore fell outside of the purview of the League. The shift from women's rights being categorized as a national issue to their classification as an issue of international legal importance at the League took place over the span of a decade, 1928 to 1938.<sup>455</sup> The recategorization of women's rights as an international issue began before the issue was formally placed on the League's radar. It started in 1922 in Baltimore, Maryland at a League of Women Voters of the United States conference. The conference brought together over 2,000 delegates from around the Americas to address questions about the status of women, about which they saw many similarities despite the hemispheric divide.<sup>456</sup> The conference led to the creation of the "Pan-American Association for the Advancement of Women (PAAAW).<sup>457</sup> PAAAW was the first intraregional organization to address the status of women. Other intraregional organizations would emerge in the Pacific and in the Arab world within a decade. The regionalization of discussions about women's rights was a stepping-stone toward the internationalization of women's rights.

### **Drafting and Distributing the Equal Rights Treaty, 1922-1933**

By the time the Baltimore conference convened, there was a regional women's consciousness in Central and South America. The leaders of the movement converged in

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<sup>455</sup> The following file numbers reflect the integration of the question of women's right to nationality into program of the Assembly (A) and Council (C) of the League of Nations: A19 1931; A41 1931; A84 1931; A15 1932; A23 1932; A33 1932; A61 1932; A18 1933; A48 1933; A48 1934; C342 M158 1934; C440 M190 1934; A7 1935; A8 1935; A19 1935; A53 1935; A60 1935; C310 M163 1935; A33 1936; A8 1937; A14 1937; A54 1937; C84 M38 1938; C59 M21 1939.

<sup>456</sup> For further information regarding the 1922 Baltimore conference see Katherine Marino "*La Vanguardia Feminista: Pan-American Feminism and the Rise of International Women's Rights, 1915-1946*," (Unpub. Ph.D. dissertation. Stanford University, 2013), Chapter 1; Francesca Miller, "The International Relations of Women of the Americas, 1890-1928," *The Americas* 43.2 (Oct., 1986): 171-182; Miller, "Latin American Feminism and the Transnational Arena," in *Globalizing Feminisms, 1789-1945*, ed. Karen Offen (New York: Routledge, 2009): 193-203; and Ann Towns, "The Inter-American Commission of Women and Women's Suffrage, 1920-1945," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 42 (2010): 779-807.

<sup>457</sup> The organization while Berta Lutz was president was renamed the Inter-American Union of Women in 1925. The organization was eclipsed by the Inter-American Commission on Women (1928).

Baltimore. The leadership and membership ranks of women's organizations in Central and South America were filled by many women whose charity work led them to questions of women's legal equality. Women's organized charity work began in earnest in Central and South American nations in the early 1900s; the first official women's organization in Brazil was founded in 1918. The first official women's organization in Uruguay followed in 1919. Organization on the local level evolved into a regional consciousness—as it had in the Arab world and in the Pacific. In the 1920s, local organizations began to find regional solidarity with women's organizations in other Central and South American countries. The links among these organizations provided the foundation for a pan-American women's movement, which later branched north to include women in the United States and Canada. Women in Argentina, Canada, Chile, Cuba, Brazil, Mexico, Uruguay, and the United States of America were trying to establish a regional identity grounded in a common “Americanness” that stretched from the Bay of Fundy to the Straights of Magellan. The pan-American unity that women's organizations tried to forge excluded native populations and recent non-European immigrants and was a decidedly class-based identity. The exclusion of Arab immigrants, especially Arab women, from participation in pan-American conferences demonstrates how questions of race, class, and citizenship status affected who had access to discussions of national rights in many South American countries.

The women who attended regional and international conferences from South American countries were the descendants of immigrants from European nations. The Uruguayan government, for example, actively solicited immigrants from European countries, in an effort to alter the balance of power between European transplants and



indigenous peoples.<sup>458</sup> The daughters of immigrants from Europe, many of whom settled down in Uruguay, Argentina, and Brazil became the leaders of the women's movements of their respective home countries. Paulina Luisi (1875-1949), who served on the anti-trafficking committee at the League, was born to a Polish mother and an Italian father. She was the first woman in Uruguay to obtain a medical degree. Her scientific research spurred her interest in questions of women's equality. Attending regional science conferences put Luisi into contact with other women pioneers in other South American countries. One woman that Luisi met at these scientific conferences was the Brazilian zoologist Berta Lutz (1894-1976). Lutz also shared Luisi's foreign roots. Lutz's father was Swiss and her mother was British.

The Baltimore conference raised the possibility of a hemisphere-wide conversation about women's rights in Central and South America. Next, the question of women's equality was introduced at the Pan-American Union's (PAU) Fifth International Conference of American States in Santiago, Chile in 1923.<sup>459</sup> At the meeting, the Guatemalan delegate Máximo Soto Hall introduced a proposal that advocated the PAU address women's rights as an intergovernmental issue. Soto Hall recalled, "[h]ad a bomb exploded in the meeting room, it would likely have caused less sensation than this simple document. A spectacular silence followed its reading. The person who presided over the meeting announced, with nervous curtness, that this question would be handled in due course."<sup>460</sup> A Cuban lawyer, Dr. Flora Parrado, heard about the Soto Hall resolution and

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<sup>458</sup> Christine Ehrick, *The Shield of the Weak: Feminism and the State in Uruguay, 1903-1933* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005).

<sup>459</sup> The Pan-American Union (PAU) was founded as a business league, but grew to be an intraregional, intragovernmental organization that hosted conferences every five years in different American capitals.

<sup>460</sup> Máximo Soto Hall, "Genesis de la Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres," *Boletín de la Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres*, 1.4 (1943): 17. Quoted in Towns "The Inter-American Commission of Women and Women's Suffrage, 1920-1945," 789.

pressed to make sure that the question of women's equality was addressed, as promised, at the next conference of American states, which was scheduled to take place in Cuba in 1928. The promise to investigate the question at the next PAU conference was the first of many governmental deflections and demurrals regarding the nationality sub-question of the larger, as-of-yet-unanswered "women's question."

Parrado utilized transnational channels to help place women's rights in the arena of international law. Parrado contacted Alice Paul of the National Women's Party (NWP) in the United States and asked that a delegate be sent to Havana. Paul dispatched Doris Stevens (1892-1963), who was the chairperson of the NWP's Committee on International Action. The Cuban feminists' choice to align themselves with the NWP was calculated. They believed they had a better chance of working with the leadership of the NWP as equals on the shared cause of making women's issues an international concern than with the National League of Women Voters. Carrie Chapman Catt (1859-1947), the President of the National League of Women Voters, the other major women's organization in the United States, commented on the "slowness" of Latin American women and culture and questioned Latin American women's readiness for political organization: "[t]his continent has the least modern women's organizations of any of the six."<sup>461</sup> Of course, Chapman Catt's assessment of the "slowness" of women's organizations in Latin was incorrect. The NWP seized the opportunity for intra-American organizing in part because of politicking between women's organizations in the United States.

Women's groups from the United States and Cuba, and many other American republics, were interested in utilizing international agreements as a way of affecting legislation at home. Cuban women used the regional conference in Havana as a platform

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<sup>461</sup> Cited in Marino, "*La Vanguardia Feminista*: Pan-American Feminism and the Rise of International Women's Rights, 1915-1946," 75.

for pressuring their government to give them the right to vote. Activists from the United States also saw regional alliances as an opportunity for national gain. The Equal Rights Treaty was the international version of the Equal Rights Amendment, which had been introduced to the Congress of the United States in 1923 shortly after women in the United States secured the right to vote with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. Stevens reflected that the creation of the Inter-American Commission on Women

was a round-about device for enabling the National Women's Party to have a new Amendment enacted. ... The United States would have to formulate an official position on Women's Rights. And, if by chance, I were to succeed in getting a fair number of the twenty-one Republics to adhere to the Equal Rights Treaty, it would put strong pressure on the United States Government to enact similar legislation, first by adhering to the treaty and then by making its Domestic Laws confirm.<sup>462</sup>

The United States government was not the only government that was lobbied by women's organizations to endorse the Equal Rights Treaty.

The treaty read: "[t]he contracting states agree that, upon ratification of this Treaty, men and women shall have equal rights throughout the territory subject to their respective jurisdictions."<sup>463</sup> The principle clause of the treaty was entered into the League's registry as early as 1928. The League of Nations received considerable pressure from representatives from Central and South America and from international women's organizations to enter the Equal Rights Treaty into the folds of international governance—governments from U.S.S.R., Czechoslovakia, Turkey, China, Siam, New Zealand, Latvia, and Yugoslavia also supported the principles enshrined in the Equal Rights Treaty.<sup>464</sup> The League did not broach the issue raised by the treaty—women's equality—until 1930, during the League's Conference on the Codification of

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<sup>462</sup> Doris Stevens Papers, *Stevens' Manuscript about the IACW*, Box 162, #5, 52. Cited in Towns, "The Inter-American Commission of Women and Women's Suffrage, 1920–1945," 791.

<sup>463</sup> LN A.7 (1935) Nationality of Women. Convention on the Nationality of Women concluded on December 26th 1933, at the Seventh International Conference of American States at Montevideo.

<sup>464</sup> The Central and South American governments that signed the agreement were Mexico, Chile, Columbia, Panama, Dominican Republic, Argentina, and Haiti.

International Law.

When women from the Americas were not invited to participate in the Sixth International Conference of American States that was hosted in Havana, Cuba in 1928, the representatives from the National Women's Party and Cuban women's organizations launched a campaign to force the issue of women's equality into the conference proceedings.<sup>465</sup> A series of coordinated events preceded and coincided with the conference: a petition in support of the Equal Rights Treaty, which garnered more than 5,000 signatures from Cuban women, circulated among the delegates; a protest was staged outside the Pan-American Union conference hall; and a separate women's conference was hosted at the University of Havana.

The coordinated efforts succeeded. The conference granted access to women at an extraordinary plenary session on February 7, 1928. Cuban women and the conference delegates, nearly all of whom attended the plenary session, crowded into the conference hall. The plenary committee agreed to discuss the Equal Rights Treaty at the subsequent conference of the Pan-American Union in Montevideo in 1933.<sup>466</sup> The session also sanctioned the creation of the Inter-American Commission on Women (IACW), which was loosely affiliated with the PAU, but was mostly an independent entity that brought activists from North, Central, and South America together around the cause of equality for women. This was the first intragovernmental decision that addressed the women's question. An intragovernmental agreement about women's rights—albeit an agreement

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<sup>465</sup> Máximo Soto Hall, "Genesis de la Comisión Interamericana de Mujeres," *Boletín de la Comisión de Mujeres*, 1.4 (1943), 17 cited in Towns, "The Inter-American Commission of Women and Women's Suffrage, 1920–1945," 779–807.

<sup>466</sup> The 1933 conference in Montevideo was an important turning point for the unity of the Pan-American women's movement. See chapter four, "The Great Feminist Battle of Montevideo, 1933" in Katherine Marino's dissertation for an in-depth exploration into how two visions of women's equality came to a head in the Uruguayan capital.

that deferred direct engagement with the question for another five years—was a start on the road toward inserting women’s rights into the collection of issues deemed “international.” In the intervening five years, the activists, who had a taste of victory, turned their attention to the world’s international governing body and tried their luck with getting a similar agreement on the international level.

After the victory in Havana in 1928, just as soon as a sense of pan-American solidarity was emerging, the movement began to splinter regarding the dominance of U.S. women in the newly formed IACW and the growing sense that U.S. women did not view women in Central and South America as equals and were using the Americas-wide movement for their own purposes. This was not a baseless allegation. In addition, the larger Pan-American promise was faltering. A woman from Cuba, in her response to a widely-publicized disparaging comment about the women of Central and South America being “a ‘menace’ to peaceful relations between [the United States] and the Latin republics,” said she hoped that women proved to be a “menace,” if the “friendly and peaceful relations of the United States with all the American Republics’ ... means the occupation of Nicaragua, the Panama canal ... Cuban sugar, Mexican oil, gold mines of Peru, Chilean salt mines, etc., etc.”<sup>467</sup> The tension about the perceived—and real—prejudice against the women’s movements in Central and South America and whether or not participation in the IACW was beneficial for all of the member states was quieted on the international level. This was possible because the representatives of the IACW at international forums were almost exclusively from the United States.

Doris Stevens traveled to Geneva in August 1928 to discuss strategies for the

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<sup>467</sup> Maria Sabas Alomá, “Efectivamente, Sra. Chapman Catt,” *Feminismo: Cuestiones Sociales, Critical Literaria* (La Habana: Editorial ‘Hermes,’ 1930), 165-170. Trans. and cited in Marino, “*La Vanguardia Feminista: Pan-American Feminism and the Rise of International Women’s Rights, 1915-1946*,” 90.

recently announced codification conference.<sup>468</sup> Alice Paul suggested that en route to Geneva, Stevens detour to France to attend the signing of the Kellogg-Briand pact, which renounced war “as an instrument of national policy.”<sup>469</sup> The pact, like many other international treaties and intuitions in the post-war era was created in an effort to change the ways that nations interfaced with one another. The ultimate goal of the pact was forestalling another global conflict. Stevens took Paul’s suggestion and arrived in Paris a few days before the pact was signed. Stevens made quick work of gathering a group of American and European feminists to lobby the U.S. Secretary of State Frank B. Kellogg and the French foreign minister Aristide Briand, of the eponymous pact, to grant a hearing about the Equal Rights Treaty. Stevens’ request for an audience was denied. Undeterred, Stevens organized a demonstration in front of the Chateau Rambouillet, in which the pact-signers were congregated. Once assembled, the demonstrators ignored police requests to leave the premises of the palace. Instead of leaving, the protestors charged the flank of guards in an attempt to gain access to the palace.

Their charge was unsuccessful. Instead, they were admitted to a local jailhouse. Their stint at the jailhouse was brief, a mere three hours. While in jail, the women dropped Equal Rights Treaty pamphlets from their cell windows. Their arrest made headlines across the world. The coverage of the event brought attention to the Equal Rights Treaty, to the IACW, and to Latin American progress toward equality for male and female citizens. Clara González, an activist from Panama, told the press “the arrests are unequivocal proof that the old world is behind the new in its attitude toward women and their rights. We Latin American women are proud to proclaim a splendid response by

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<sup>468</sup> The material about Doris Stevens’ advocacy in Paris comes from Katherine Marino, “*La Vanguardia Feminista*: Pan-American Feminism and the Rise of International Women’s Rights, 1915-1946,” 123-129.

<sup>469</sup> Kellogg-Briand Pact 1928. “The Avalon Project.” Yale Law School. Web. 10 August 2014. <http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/imt/kbpact.htm>.

Latin-America to a treaty for equal rights.”<sup>470</sup> Thus, on the international stage the regional friction about who was in control of the alliance (and to what end) was shunted to the background; the international forum served as a means for activists from Central and South America to highlight the relative advancement of national protections for women vis-à-vis European states. Central and South American nations incubated discussions about moving women’s rights discussions from the national frame to the regional one. The next extension was to advance the discussion to the “international” frame. The 1930 Hague Conference on the Codification of International Law offered the opportunity to do so.

**Phase Two, Part Two: Zeroing in on the Question of Married Women’s Nationality at The Hague Conference on the Codification of International Law, 1930**<sup>471</sup>

The professed goal of the League of Nations Conference on the Codification of International Law hosted at The Hague was to create worldwide legal standards in three areas: maritime law, nation-state responsibilities toward non-national aliens, and standards for nationality. The war complicated questions of nationality. Men and women who once had belonged to a certain nationality were assigned a new identity as their previous nations or empires and corresponding nationalities were eliminated by way of treaty. Migration—forced or voluntary—ejected millions of people from their homelands. The postwar environment highlighted women’s vulnerability in questions of nationality.

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<sup>470</sup> Clara González quoted in “Votes for Women, Paris Demonstration,” *The Argus* (Melbourne, Australia) 30 August 1928 and “Doris Stevens Jailed in France for Rights Protest,” *Washington Herald* 29 August 1928, 3 cited in Marino, “*La Vanguardia Feminista*: Pan-American Feminism and the Rise of International Women’s Rights, 1915-1946,” 126.

<sup>471</sup> The conference sought to codify international law; it was commonly called the Hague conference by contemporaries. However, this “Hague Convention” should not be confused with International Peace Conference held at The Hague, the Netherlands in 1899 and 1907. Nor should it be confused with 1915 International Peace Conference hosted by women’s organizations at The Hague. For a detailed account of this international peace conference, see Jane Addams and Emily G. Balch, Alice Hamilton. *Women at The Hague: The International Peace Congress of 1915* (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2003).

A small percentage of women worldwide entered marriages that crossed international borders. However, the inconsistent fate of these women's national status after entering these marriages was of concern to the international legal system, which was intent on standardizing legal norms. Activists seized upon the discrepancies in the legal treatment of married women in various member states to force the League to bring one part of the "women's question"—a women's right to nationality—in the international arena.

The small states from Central and South America that sent delegations to Hague Conference on the Codification of International Law used the conference's emphasis on nationality to bring attention to the varied national policies regarding a women's right to a nationality independent of her spouse. By the time the codification conference was convened in 1930, Russia and republics in Central and South America allowed a woman to maintain her original nationality despite marriage to a foreign national. These states granted women the right to nationality as a means of sending a signal to other states on the world stage about their progressive treatment of women. By the late 1920s, a married women's right to nationality was not just a game board for domestic political dynamics; a married woman's right to nationality became an arena in which international politics were played out. Many Latin American countries felt that by granting a woman the right to retain her nationality after marriage, they were sending an anti-imperial signal to the United States and the rest of the world.

Women's organizations present at the conference—the IWSA, ICW, WILPF, and new players such as the Inter-American Commission on Women—also raised awareness about the importance of standardizing international norms regarding a married woman's right to her own nationality in the event that her marriage to an alien dissolved. Women's groups cited cases of women being left without a nationality after they had been forced to



renounce their natal nationality when they married a non-national.<sup>472</sup> The debate about a woman's right to a nationality independent of her spouse divided women's groups—and the international community—about the best means of ensuring women's access to nationality. The national action camp (that women's rights were germane only to individual nation-states) stood in contrast to the international treaty camp (that an international treaty would be the only means of securing women's equality) at the conference. The debate between the two factions went a long way in catapulting women's rights into the international arena. The Hague conference spurred the League to take even further action on the "women's question."

In the 1920s, there were three dominant patterns for how to confer nationality rights to a woman who married a non-national.<sup>473</sup> The first scenario occurred when, upon marriage to a foreign national, a woman lost her natal nationality but was granted the nationality of her husband. This transferal of nationality from a husband to a wife was not problematic. When this transference of nationality did not occur problems arose. The second scenario happened when a woman lost her natal nationality upon marriage, but her husband's country would not grant her citizenship. This problematic practice rendered the married female nation-less. The third and final scenario occurred when a woman, upon marriage to a foreign national, would keep her natal nationality and also assume the nationality of her husband, resulting in her having two nationalities. The final two options—a nationless wife, or a wife with dual nationalities—were discussed at the League's codification conference at The Hague.

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<sup>472</sup> It is difficult to assess how many women were affected by the loss of nationality through divorce or other circumstances. Women's groups in this era were skilled at using precise examples to amplify their cause; the absence of precision makes me think that this issue not reached endemic levels.

<sup>473</sup> Waldo Emerson Waltz, *The Nationality of Married Women* (Urbana-Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1937).

A woman without a country was an international problem. As Waldo Emerson Waltz, one of the chroniclers of the codification conference, observed, “There is a romantic ring to the phrase ‘a man without a country,’ but there is stark realism in the situation of a woman without a country.”<sup>474</sup> The legal scholars assembled at The Hague felt that consensus regarding how states should deal with a married woman’s nationality was in the best interest of the international order, the maintenance of which depended on a clear system for identifying who was awarded which national rights. Once a national identity was established, then the individual man or woman was granted access to the rights and responsibilities connected with that nationality. A system that scholar Ellen Carol Dubois illustrates by way of analogy: “what citizenship—and its most important consequence, political enfranchisement—was to the nation-state, so the issue of a nationality was to the international order.”<sup>475</sup>

Before the League took up the question of married women’s nationality at the codification conference, many international women’s organizations started campaigns to address the issue of a married woman’s nationality being revoked with impunity or granted without regulation. Both the IWSA and the ICW supported domestic reforms to address the issue of nationality for women. At the 1923 IWSA meeting in Rome the organization passed a resolution that emphasized the importance of international law in helping shape and enforce a married women’s right to nationality. The IWSA resolution stated, the “question of a married women’s independent nationality could only be adequately dealt with by international agreement.”<sup>476</sup> The resolution passed. In addition,

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<sup>474</sup> *ibid.*, 13.

<sup>475</sup> Ellen Carol DuBois. “Internationalizing Married Women’s Nationality: The Hague Campaign of 1930” in *Globalizing Feminisms, 1789-1945*, ed. Karen Offen (New York: Routledge, 2009), 205.

<sup>476</sup> “Memorandum of the First Codification Conference of the League of Nations,” Chrystal Macmillan, *International Women’s News* 22.4 (January 1928), 57.

the delegates voted to form a Committee on the Nationality of Women. Chrystal Macmillan, Maria Vérone (1874-1938), a French lawyer who supported the cause of women's suffrage, and Betsy Bakker-Nort, a Dutch woman who wrote a doctoral dissertation that compared married women's legal status across national borders, all served on the committee.<sup>477</sup> Despite the formation of the committee, there were few openings for the IWSA to push the matter of women's nationality on the international stage. Letters were sent to various bodies within the League of Nations. But their letters and petitions did not progress very far within the League's bureaucratic structure.

The legal expertise of the women on the IWSA's nationality committee helped them craft their proposal on international legal standards for married women's independent nationality. The experience of IWSA activists with the structure of the League helped them deliver their proposal to the preparatory committee for the Hague Conference. The IWSA committee proposed that "the nationality of a woman should not be changed by reason only of Marriage" and that "the nationality of a married woman should not be changed without her consent."<sup>478</sup> These twinned principles, if adopted, would have given a woman control over her nationality in the event of marriage to a foreign national.

Independently of each other, the IWSA and Latin American countries chose to highlight the fate of married women's nationality to force League engagement with the "women's question." Had it not been for the issue of the inconsistent standards for determining married women's nationality, women's issues would otherwise have been ignored at the Hague codification conference because the "women's question" was cast

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<sup>477</sup> DuBois, "Internationalizing Married Women's Nationality: The Hague Campaign of 1930," 206.

<sup>478</sup> "Memorandum of the First Codification Conference of the League of Nations," Chrystal Macmillan, *International Women's News* 22.4 (January 1928), 57.

by many delegates as a domestic concern. The advent of international regulation regarding the national status of married women politicized the process of granting or revoking citizenship to married women.<sup>479</sup>

Two veins of feminist organizing overlapped at the codification conference at The Hague from mid-March to mid-April 1930. One mode of organizing utilized a system of advocacy that relied on formal meetings, measured diplomacy, and official invitations. The women who engaged in this method of advocacy were predominately women from the well-established, Anglo-European IWSA and ICW. Their mode of organizing had served them well as they pressed for women's integration into the League's Covenant. The second group of feminist activists who converged at the League's conference represented the regional coalition of women from the Americas that had emerged at the 1928 Havana conference. The majority of IACW advocates at The Hague were from the United States and had explicit connections to the National Women's Party, but the official governmental support they had amassed was from the smaller independent republics of Central and South America, not from the United States.

The IACW contingent utilized less formal modes of advocacy, such as arming themselves with pamphlets and brochures and staking out locations in the Peace Hall so they could forcibly lobby the delegates as they entered and exited subcommittee sessions. The IACW also relied on connections with South American delegations to press their cause. The Chilean delegates who introduced a resolution about the nationality of married women were an important force in helping lodge a women's right to nationality alongside

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<sup>479</sup> For example, when the United States granted suffrage to American female citizens with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, Congress followed-suit by passing the Cable Law, which prevented American women from giving citizenship to their spouses, especially if they were Asian immigrants whose "race" rendered them ineligible for citizenship. The law also targeted immigrant women who married native or naturalized American citizens. They were not granted citizenship through virtue of the marriage contract. Instead, these women had to apply for citizenship on their own through standard naturalization procedures.

the other issues that were classed by the League as being of “true” international import, such as the “responsibility of states” and their “maritime jurisdiction.”<sup>480</sup> Combined, the formal and informal forms of advocacy for a women’s right to independent nationality forced engagement with the question of women’s nationality.

Draped in their country’s flag, women’s rights activists wore dresses that were coded to symbolize their country’s nationality laws and how closely they aligned with the IWSA’s Committee on Nationality’s proposal for independent nationality for married women. The event was staged by the IWSA and ICW at the Twee Steden—a restaurant near The Hague. The event was a protest of sorts; it was staged to highlight that women had not been invited to the opening convocation of the conference. White was to signal complete equality. Only a few women from the Western hemisphere donned white. Pink, blue, or another “cheerful color” meant the woman’s country had made changes in the direction of equality in nationality for men and women. Black was worn by women from nations with nationality laws that forced a wife to forfeit her nationality upon marriage. The local paper, which covered the event, noted that the “Dutch dress was pitch black.” Bakker-Nort, a leader in the Dutch women’s movement and a member of the IWSA Committee on Nationality, observed that it was “a rather painful situation” for Dutch women to be hosting this event, because “the legal situation of women [here] is still based on the obsolete principle of subjection of women to men.”<sup>481</sup> Of course, the legal traditions represented at the Twee Stenden were Western legal traditions. Had the parade been truly globally representative, women from China, Russia, and some African and Middle Eastern nations might have worn one of the brighter shades.

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<sup>480</sup> James Brown Scott. *Observations on Nationality with Special Reference to the Hague Convention of April 12<sup>th</sup> 1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1931), 7.

<sup>481</sup> DuBois, “Internationalizing Married Women’s Nationality: The Hague Campaign of 1930,” 206.

The event's organizers expected their color-coded costumes to yield limited results, if any at all. They understood that many delegates believed that it was premature to insert the principle of women's equality into international law. An invitation to meet with the chairman of the codification conference, Theodorus Heemskerk, the former Prime Minister of Holland surprised the organizers of the demonstration. When a delegation of women arrived at the Peace Palace to meet with Heemskerk and their guarded optimism about their ability to affect conference proceedings proved correct. It turned out that the meeting Heemskerk promised was an empty gesture of support; there was no intention of truly listening to the women delegates. Another League representative at the meeting, Nicolas Politis, of Greece said,

I wish to make quite clear that, of course, the hearing of the ladies will make no difference to the opinion we may have or to the instructions we may have received from our governments. It is merely an act of courtesy on our part. Therefore, the decision which we shall make will not depend upon the hearing of the ladies.<sup>482</sup>

Politis resolutely rejected possibility that "hearing the ladies" would have any effect on the conference proceedings. Likewise, Heemskerk dismissed the women's desire for equality. The local papers quoted him as saying the women's proposals were an "unattainable dream."<sup>483</sup> Despite his prejudices against the women's cause, Heemskerk agreed to arrange a formal meeting with female delegates before the Codification Conference Subcommittee on Nationality two weeks later. The IWSA met with Heemskerk, got the meeting they wanted, and went home. A small contingent was scheduled to return before the meeting with the subcommittee. They did not have much business in the interim because the conference addressed each of its three core questions in turn—nationality was scheduled to be the last topic of discussion.

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<sup>482</sup> "The Hague—Dr. Wold's Account." *Equal Rights* 16.30 (2 August 1930): 204.

<sup>483</sup> DuBois, "Internationalizing Married Women's Nationality: The Hague Campaign of 1930," 206.

Heemskerk's and Pilotis' dismissal of women's claims for equality in questions of nationality was not unique. One women's rights activist from Chile noted the recurrent, knowing "smile of the Europeans." It was not a warm smile, she said, especially when accompanied by a comment like, "[w]e are much more Feminist than you are. We are Feminists with all of our hearts, and we only want to help you, but we face facts."<sup>484</sup> She observed the delegates often said, "[w]e know your problems better than you do,' ... 'Yes, you know them perfectly well,' we reply, 'since you yourselves created them. But you are not interested in solving them.'<sup>485</sup> The "facts" that prevented the delegates from acting, the author implied, were of their own making. Since they had made those "facts," they very well could undo them. They would not, however, undo them out of their own accord. They needed to be prodded into changing the system.

In the two-week interval before the formal meeting with the subcommittee, the IACW, in conjunction with the delegates from Chile, launched a separate offensive to force the committee to address the issue of married women's right to nationality. Chile in particular proved to be a powerful force in shaping the international conversation about the nationality status of married women. Chile was one of only five countries that had enacted nationality laws that did not discriminate against married women. The other four nations were Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina, and the Soviet Union. The two Chilean delegates, Miguel Cruchaga and Alejandro Alvarez, were strident supporters of women's rights. In order to forward their platform of addressing the rights of married women to defend and define their nationality after marriage to a foreign, they felt they needed a spokeswoman.

The delegates put out a call to the Chilean embassy in Paris for a Chileana with

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<sup>484</sup> Marta Vergara, "One Week at the Hague," *Equal Rights* 16.29 (26 July 1930), 196.

<sup>485</sup> *ibid.*

enough credentials and clout to speak about Chile's protections for women. They found Marta Vergara (1898-1995).<sup>486</sup> A woman from Chile could speak to concerns about the future of family life in a country that afforded women the right to retain their nationality in cases of marriage to a non-Chilean. Vergara claimed she was a "virgin" when it came to feminist matters and agreed to go because her passage to the Hague was paid for and she anticipated being able to sneak away from the conference proceedings to see the Rembrandts, the tulips, and the windmills. The choice to bring along a green member of the South American women's movement to The Hague meeting may have been a cost-saving measure. Vergara was already in Europe at the time of the conference and just had to travel from Paris to the meeting. It also could have been grounded in the desire of women from the United States to control the debate at The Hague. Despite her "green" status Vergara, who was trained as both an artist and journalist, turned into a sharp chronicler of the events at The Hague during the codification conference.

The Chilean delegates ensured Vergara's presence at the sub-committee meetings on nationality. Vergara gave testimony that assured the assembled members of the nationality subcommittee that a country with equal nationality laws had not devolved into chaos and that family life was still intact. "[Y]ou may be sure that [women's] natural devotion will not be affected by granting of that right [of nationality]."<sup>487</sup> The Chilean delegation, bolstered by Vergara's assurances that allowing married women to retain their nationality would not destroy the fabric of society, introduced "Recommendation VI." The recommendation argued for full legal equality between men and women and established that a woman's nationality should not be changed without the consent of both

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<sup>486</sup> The material about Marta Vergara's position as a representative of Chilean women, and by extension, many women of the Americas, comes from DuBois, "Internationalizing Married Women's Nationality: The Hague Campaign of 1930," 210.

<sup>487</sup> *ibid.*, 211.



the husband and wife.<sup>488</sup> The recommendation was not ratified by the conference.

Although the Chilean government thought it served as a global paragon for conveying the right to nationality to married women, Vergara noted that with regard to women's right to custody of their children or the "free administration of their property," Chilean law was not especially advanced.<sup>489</sup> Still, emphasizing the League's shortcomings concerning a woman's nationality gave Chile international leverage.

Vergara was not the only female delegate at the conference. Women served as delegates, or technical observers, or alternates on eight delegations.<sup>490</sup> The majority of the women at the codification conference spoke as one about giving women the right to voice her opinion about her national status after marriage. The sole dissenting voice was the representative from Holland who insisted that though a Dutch woman lost her citizenship if she married a non-Dutch man, "the difficulties involved by independence are more numerous."<sup>491</sup>

Women became a fixture in the halls of the Peace Palace at The Hague; the building's eclectic architectural aesthetic united European cultures to greater effect than the League proceedings it housed. During the conference, the halls of the Peace Palace were transformed into "a hive of indefatigable militants who go to and fro with their hands full of documents and papers."<sup>492</sup> As a local journalist noted, "the women stood at their posts in the marble corridors of the peace palace ... they seem to have become part

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<sup>488</sup> A.19 (1931) and United Nations Documents on the Development and Codification of International Law Supplement to *American Journal of International Law* 41.4 (1947).

<sup>489</sup> Marta Vergara, "One Week at the Hague." *Equal Rights* 16.29 (26 July 1930): 196.

<sup>490</sup> The delegations with female representatives were Belgium, Czechoslovakia, England, Germany, Holland, Ireland, United States, and Yugoslavia. Source: "The Hague—Dr. Wold's Account." *Equal Rights* 16.30 (2 August 1930): 204.

<sup>491</sup> DuBois, "Internationalizing Married Women's Nationality: The Hague Campaign of 1930," 212.

<sup>492</sup> Marta Vergara, "One Week at the Hague." *Equal Rights* 16.31 (9 August 1930): 211.

of the landscape.”<sup>493</sup> The female delegates at the conference directed their lobbying energies toward the nationality subcommittee.

The representatives of the IACW were such fixtures that the Heemskerk was afraid that they might actually succeed in persuading the delegates to support the cause of equality in nationality. He declared “it was impossible to allow ideas, such as equality of the sexes ... to be expounded within that hall.”<sup>494</sup> He followed up his statement with action. He barred women who were not delegates from entering the hall. The next morning when the women returned to The Hague to resume their positions along the corridors of the palace, they were greeted by a closed gate. It was the first time in memory that the entry gate of the Peace Palace was closed to visitors.

Deploying all the communication tools available to activists of the era, the newly barred feminist activists sent cables, made phone calls, and took up the pen to write notes to broadcast the situation. Half an hour after the incident, Vergara recalled, the press of the whole world was being informed of the incident. Women used yet another communication device to aid their campaign to highlight the paradox of women, the paragons of peace, being expelled from the Peace Palace: photographic evidence was conveyed to the nearest press syndicates for global dissemination.<sup>495</sup>

Vergara was thrilled to witness how Doris Stevens and the other IACW activists turned a setback into an awareness-raising event. “We have disturbed the quiet town of the Hague.”<sup>496</sup> IWSA women perceived Vergara’s victory as an annoyance. “[The IACW activists] worried the men morning, noon and night, until the president told the police that

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<sup>493</sup> Quoted in DuBois, “Internationalizing Married Women’s Nationality: The Hague Campaign of 1930,” 213.

<sup>494</sup> Marta Vergara, “One Week at the Hague.” *Equal Rights* 16.31 (9 August 1930): 211.

<sup>495</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>496</sup> Quoted in DuBois, “Internationalizing Married Women’s Nationality: The Hague Campaign of 1930,” 212.

no more women were allowed inside ... which is of course a very bad thing for the whole movement. But this is the way they always behave.”<sup>497</sup> Here, the different opinions about effective modes of activism emerged. What thrilled the IACW activists—the self-proclaimed militants—incensed the older guard activists from the IWSA who had returned for their formal meeting with the sub-committee.

The IACW and Chilean delegates’ campaign for equal national rights received external support from a surprising place: the United States Senate. Senator Simeon Fess of Ohio and Senator Caraway of Arkansas sent cablegrams stating “the United States will not ratify a convention in which there is any sex discrimination.”<sup>498</sup> A second round of cablegrams from American Senators followed the Fess and Caraway cablegrams. Twenty-five senators assured the delegates assembled in The Hague of the firm position of the U.S. senate: women had the right to vote and should be guaranteed the right to nationality.

At the last minute, in a move that surprised all of the women activists, the United States delegation at the conference withdrew its support of the convention. Stating, somewhat apolitically, and with no mention of women’s equal access to nationality, that the American delegation would refrain from signing nationality treaties until the world was more peaceful. Without American support, the proposed nationality convention did not pass. The United States’ ability to affect the passage of the convention demonstrated, once again, the outsized sway of the Americans at the League even though they were not a member nation. The United States’ not signing the treaty gave cover to other nations that did not want to become signatory states. China also declined to support the

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<sup>497</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>498</sup> Marta Vergara, “One Week at the Hague,” *Equal Rights* 16.29 (26 July 1930): 197. When Senator Thaddeus Caraway passed away in 1931, his wife Hattie Caraway became the first female senator by filling his vacancy.

convention. It noted that women in China already had more robust protections than proposed in the proposed nationality convention. Signing the convention, the Chinese delegate noted, would be a step backwards for Chinese women.

Vergara's chronicle of the conference proceedings recorded the excuses proffered by the delegates. "'What do you expect?' [the delegates] say to the Feminists. 'No legislation can be radically altered in twenty days. Be patient and content yourselves with having obtained the recommendation for equality in the future.'"<sup>499</sup> Doris Stevens challenged this excuse of there being too short a time schedule. She said, "[b]ut you *have* altered legislation. You have in twenty days written international law containing inequalities based on sex. That leaves us worse off than we were."<sup>500</sup> Vergara agreed. She concluded that a "nationality convention based on sex inequality was approved by the conference."<sup>501</sup> Not all conference observers and attendees shared Stevens and Vergara's pessimism at the decision to delay acting on creating international protections for married women's nationality. The only female American delegate, Emma Wold, noted in her report of the conference,

[t]he adoption of this recommendation does not seem like an immense achievement, but it was something to have got it adopted. If women are awake to its possibilities, they can use it to get their respective governments to work on the question of equal nationality laws in connection with further international conferences.<sup>502</sup>

Wold believed that the promise to address the question of women's access to nationality represented progress toward securing international protections for women's rights, including a woman's right to nationality. Wold encouraged women to seize upon this promise and use it in campaigns directed toward their national governments. International

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<sup>499</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>500</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>501</sup> Marta Vergara, "One Week at the Hague." *Equal Rights* 16.31 (9 August 1930): 211.

<sup>502</sup> "The Hague—Dr. Wold's Account." *Equal Rights* 16.30 (2 August 1930): 204.

progress, she believed, could be achieved through the efforts of national governments. Chile's actions at The Hague proved the truth in this sentiment.

When the Chilean nationality recommendation was defeated “[t]he Greeks, the Spaniards, the Hindus, sardonically smiled, and the Hungarian and Italian delegates even voted against expressing the desire that in the future, a nationality agreement may be reached on the basis of equality.”<sup>503</sup> The smiles on the faces of the female delegates and the feminist activists at the conference conveyed a different emotion: pleasure and anticipation. Despite their different organizing and advocacy tactics, the representatives of both the national-action and international-treaty camps had the same goal of transforming the classification of women's issues. While they were not awarded a wholesale victory at The Hague codification conference, the question of the nationality of women was seen as being of potential international concern—and, at least worthy of further investigation. This was considered a semi-victory for the campaign to internationalize the “women's question.” By agreeing to raise the issue of women's nationality in the future, the League implicitly agreed that the question of a married women's nationality was indeed an international issue. This inroad opened other aspects of the women's question to the international realm and to the lobbying of still other women.

In 1933 Chile, Cuba, and Uruguay introduced the Equal Rights Treaty to the League of Nations Assembly. The androcentric governmental systems in Latin America did not introduce the Equal Rights Treaty to the League or present an amendment about married women's nationality status at the Codification Conference on International Law voluntarily. Instead, the introduction of legislation to the League of Nations about the

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<sup>503</sup> Marta Vergara, “One Week at the Hague.” *Equal Rights* 16.31 (9 August 1930): 211.

status of women reflected years of organized and persistent activism from Central and South American women's organizations. Campaigns for women's rights on the home front in South American states enabled the activists to integrate the "women's question" into the international realm. The nations sponsoring the Equal Rights Treaty benefitted too. Introducing the Equal Rights Treaty to the League helped the signatory nations position themselves as the model of protections for women's rights against the backdrop of real or perceived threats to national independence. The cooperation between women's organizations and South American nation-states was instrumental in facilitating the national-to-international transformation in the classification of women's rights. Throughout the mid-1930s, states such as Cuba, Chile, and Uruguay, introduced resolutions to the League of Nations regarding women's rights.

## **Conclusion**

The short-term consequences of the Hague conference were limited. Women exited the conference with the promise that in the future the issue of women's nationality would be addressed on the international level; this promise was not fully actualized until 1957 when the United Nations issued a binding international treaty on the nationality of married women.<sup>504</sup> However, the long-term consequences of the Hague conference and the first and second phases of women's activism at the League initiated the process of altering how women's rights were classified. Classifying women's rights as an issue that could be standardized across borders gave women who were previously prevented from participating in conversations about women's rights an opening—one plied by activists living in Beirut and Damascus, and many other capital cities around the world.

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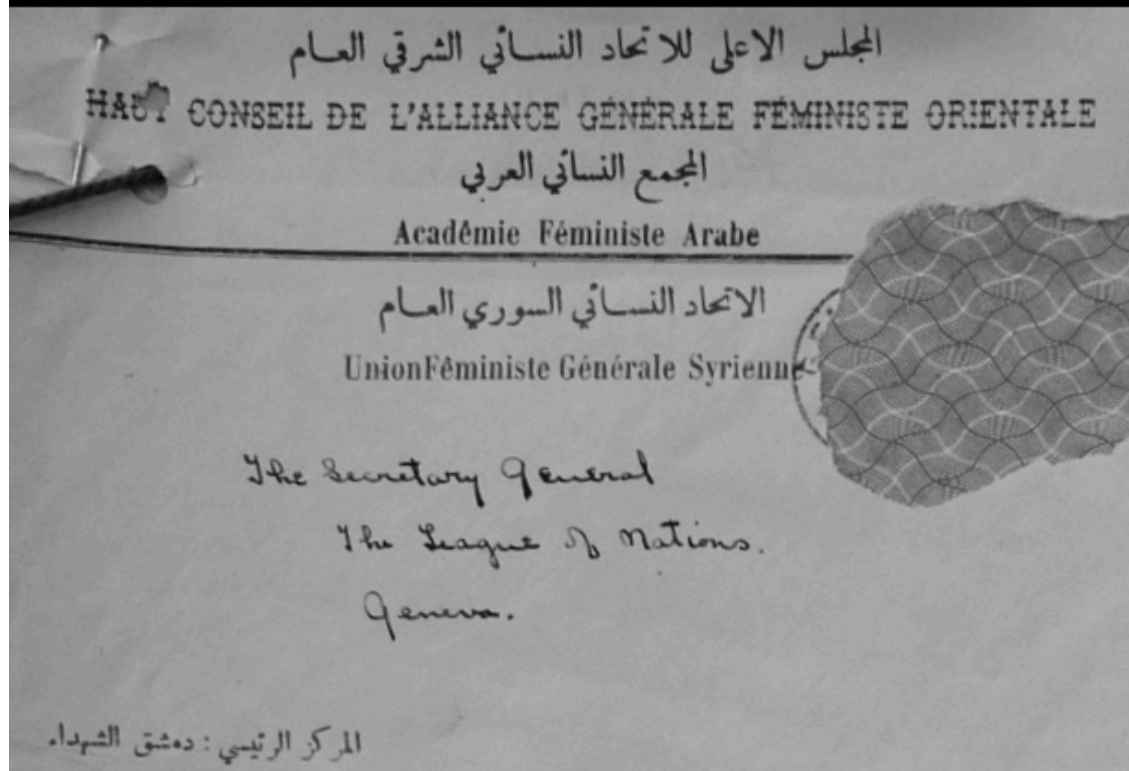
<sup>504</sup> UN Convention on the Nationality of Married Women. New York, 20 February 1957. Web. 10 August 2014. [https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1958/08/19580811%2001-34%20AM/Ch\\_XVI\\_2p.pdf](https://treaties.un.org/doc/Treaties/1958/08/19580811%2001-34%20AM/Ch_XVI_2p.pdf)

Furthermore, once women's right to nationality was deemed an issue of interest to international lawmakers, other women's issues slowly came to be classified as "international." Thus, the League became a site for contesting international women's rights.

Syrian and Lebanese women's rights activists were not included in early conversations about what constituted international women's rights and which rights should be enveloped in the category of "women's rights." Their absence in the early conversations about international women's rights is part of a larger story of who was empowered to speak for the world's women. Women's activism from South America shifted the concentration of power in women's rights discussions away from the trans-Atlantic elite who had dominated the conversation since the first "international" women's conference hosted in Paris in 1886. Women's rights were internationalized at the League not just by the old guard—Corbett Ashby, Ogilvie Gordon and their contemporaries—but also by the transnational women's campaigns launched by Doris Stevens, Alice Paul, Maria Vergara, Bertha Lutz, and Paulina Luisi. The debate about a married women's right to nationality at the League started the process of broadening the ranks of women privy to conversations about women's rights. Women in colonized countries in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia were still excluded, however. Once women's rights were internationalized, they became an anti-colonial platform for Syrian and Lebanese women. The platform of women's rights could be used against the French mandate and simultaneously be leveraged to support movements to change the status quo at home.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

Lobbying the League for  
Arab Independence and  
Women's Rights, 1936-1938



Letter sent to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations from the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Woman, the Arab Feminist Academy, and the General Syrian Feminist Union - January 1938, Damascus. Source: LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General



In late May 1936, Margery Corbett Ashby, the President of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance received a letter from the *al-ittihād al-nisā'ī al-arabī* (*Union Féministe Arabe*), a women's organization based in Beirut.<sup>505</sup> The letter began "we beg of you as President of the [International Woman Suffrage] Alliance to place our protest before the just British Nation and Government, the League of Nations, and wherever you deem [*sic*] it fit or necessary to do so."<sup>506</sup> The letter protested the Balfour Declaration and British policy in the British mandate for Palestine. The letter sent to Corbett Ashby protested the League's usurpation of the right of the Palestinian people to control immigration to their country. The *Union Féministe Arabe* was headquartered in Beirut, yet it addressed the IWSA, the British government, and the League on behalf of Palestinian independence. Palestinian independence had transformed into a rallying cry for Arab independence.

A year and a half later, in January 1938, another group of women from Greater Syria sent a coordinated petition campaign directly to the Secretariat of the League of Nations. The stamps on the letters had been cancelled in Beirut or Damascus or had been hand-delivered from Geneva. The 1938 campaign included letters from the *al-majlīs al-'alā lil-ittihād al-nisā'ī al-sharqī al-'ām* (Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women), the *Ligue Orient-Occident* (Orient-Occident League), *al-jam'iyya al-nisā'ī al-'arabī* (Arab Feminist Academy), *al-ittihād al-nisā'ī al-surī al-'ām* (Syrian Feminist Union), the *Comité des femmes Orientales* (Committee of Oriental

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<sup>505</sup> LN R4066 6A/3324/688 Letter to Margery Corbett Ashby, President of IWSA from A. Nucho, the President of the *al-ittihād al-nisā'ī al-'arabī* (*Union Féministe Arabe*), Beirut. 28 May 1936. Either a second copy was sent to the League or Corbett Ashby forwarded the copy to the League. It reached the League on 12 June 1936. Many thanks to Michael Provence for providing me with this citation and sharing the document images.

<sup>506</sup> *ibid.*

Women), and the League of All Mohammedan Women of the World.<sup>507</sup> The campaign questioned the League's mandate policy, which denied populations the right of self-rule, and the League's exclusion of "Eastern" women from the League's first committee dedicated to setting an international women's rights standard. In 1938, women from Greater Syria were able to address the League directly rather than go through an international women's organization because the Assembly had created the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women in 1937.

The Committee of Experts ushered in a new era of women's activism at the League. The committee was the result of eighteen years of activism from international women's organizations to classify women's rights as an international issue, rather than one confined to the national sphere. The transition from the League's classification of women's rights as "national" to its categorizing certain elements of the "women's question" as an "international" concern opened up pathways for Arab women's organizations to access the League without having to be represented by a mandate government or international women's organizations. As a more unified Arab women's identity was coalescing through their activism, women used that collective identity to gain access to the sphere of international governance, which had previously been closed to them.

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<sup>507</sup> The organization's name is listed in its original language with an English language translation in brackets. If the name of a women's organization was originally in Arabic or French, its English translation is used throughout this chapter. Arabic and French names come from the organizations' bilingual, French-Arabic, letterhead: *al-jam'iyya al-nisā'ī al-'arabī* / *Académie Féministe Arabe* (Arab Feminist Academy); *al-ittihād al-nisā'ī al-sūrī al-'ām* / *Union Féministe Générale Syrienne*; and *al-majlis al-a'lā lil-ittihād al-nisā'ī al-sharqī al-'ām* / *Le Conseil Supérieur de l'Alliance Générale Féministe Orientale* (The Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women). The name of the Superior Council was alternatively expressed as the *Haut Conseil de l'Alliance Générale Féministe Orientale*. The English translation—the "Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women"—was used by Nour Hamada in English-language communications with the League, which is why this translation is used. The exception to the rule of listing organization names in English is the *Union Féministe Arabe* (Arab Feminist Union), which was connected to the IWSA. The organization's name is not translated from the French to help disambiguate it from the *Académie Féministe Arabe* (Arab Feminist Academy). The Orient-Occident League's name later changed to the International Oriental-Occident League.

Women from Lebanon and Syria simultaneously claimed their status as “Arabs” (and as people from the “Orient” and the “East,” depending on the target audience) and as “women” in their petitions and correspondences with the League.<sup>508</sup> Their activism directed toward the League sought Arab independence and representation of women from the “Orient” or a “friend of the East” the League. Each letter in the 1938 campaign nominated Nour Hamada to the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women. The campaigns Arab women directed toward the League in 1936 and 1938 occurred during a moment when notions of international women’s rights were in flux. The campaigns offer a window into the diffusion and adoption of notions of international women’s rights during the second and third phases of the League of Nations’ engagement with the “women’s question.” In addition to revealing how Syrian and Lebanese women used and deployed a variety of identity categories—“Arab,” “Oriental,” “Eastern”—the campaign for Hamada reveals how “international” was understood by the Arab women petitioning the League. They assumed it meant representation from all nations. The League’s definition was different.

### **The ‘Great Revolt’ Abroad: Syrian Women Claim Arab Independence at the League**

The letter from the *Union Féministe Arabe* was sent after the organization met on May 23, 1936. At the meeting the members of the union voted on whether the organization should ask the International Woman Suffrage Alliance for support regarding the question of Palestine. The *Union Féministe Arabe* wrote the IWSA as a member organization; they had been admitted the year prior at the IWSA Conference in Istanbul. No mention was

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<sup>508</sup> The difference between “Orient” and “East” was not simply a matter of translation from Arabic into French or English. The League used “Orient” when describing the peoples of Asia. The women writing on Hamada’s behalf used “Orient” in their correspondences with the League even though the Arabic word *sharqī* more readily translates into “East” in English.

made of how close the vote was, but in the end, the “yeas” had it. A letter was sent less than a week after the meeting to the IWSA president chronicling the *Union Féministe Arabe*’s grievances with the policies of the British and the League of Nations. It presented three pieces of evidence to persuade the IWSA to take action to end the mandate and to stem Jewish immigration into the Palestinian mandate.

The first piece of evidence highlighted the perceived injustice of the Balfour Declaration (sometimes referred to as the Balfour Promise), which conveyed British support for creating a homeland for the Jews in Palestine.<sup>509</sup> The *Union Féministe Arabe* observed “[t]hat as a result of the application of the unjust Balfour Promise the inhabitants of Palestine are being treated as strangers in their homeland.” The Palestinians, it continued, “are overwhelmed by the ceaseless influx of Zionist immigrants who are gradually shouldering them out of their country by their numbers and their intrigue.”<sup>510</sup> “Intrigue” addressed the political maneuvering undertaken by supporters of the Zionist cause in Britain. The negotiations regarding British colonial policy that took place in the halls of Parliament rippled outward to Palestine and reshaped the lives of the Palestinians. The numbers referred to in the letter references the rapid increase in Zionist immigrants to Palestine. Between 1922 and 1936, 280,000 Zionist

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<sup>509</sup> For more information on the Balfour Declaration see Ibrahim Abu-Lughod, *The Transformation of Palestine: Essays on the Origin and Development of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1971); Leonard Stein, *The Balfour Declaration*. Magnes Press, 1961; Mayir Vereté, “The Balfour Declaration and its Makers,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 6.1 (1970): 48-76; Rashid Khalidi, *British Policy Towards Syria & Palestine, 1906-1914: A Study of the Antecedents of the Hussein[sic]- McMahon Correspondence, the Sykes-Picot Agreement, and the Balfour Declaration* (Oxford: Middle East Centre, St. Antony's College, 1980); Jonathan Schneer, *The Balfour Declaration: The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (New York: Random House, 2010).

<sup>510</sup> LN R4066 6A/3324/688 Letter to Margery Corbett Ashby, President of IWSA from A. Nucho, the President of the *al-ittiḥād al-nisā'ī al-'arabī* (*Union Féministe Arabe*), 28 May 1936.

immigrants entered Palestine, displacing local peasants from their land.<sup>511</sup> Without their land, the local Arab farmers were unable to sustain their livelihoods and many families became impoverished. Palestinians appealed to British mandate officials to change their immigration policies. The dire reality of the newly landless Palestinian peasants was cause for alarm among Arabs living in neighboring territories. The members of the *Union Féministe Arabe* added their voice in lobbying the IWSA. Thus, the Beirut women's organization tried to leverage its international connections to alter British colonial policies.

The second piece of evidence presented by the *Union Féministe Arabe* in an effort to sway the IWSA to support the Palestinian cause referred to the persistent, (somewhat) peaceful protests by Palestinians and other Arabs that were ignored by the British. The Syrian women's organization joined the fray and expressed its dismay at the British government's inaction in the face of regional disapproval of its actions, or more accurately inaction. The second bullet point read

[t]hat in spite of repeated protests against the said Balfour Promise, protests not only by Palestinians but by all the neighboring Arab nations, the stream of Jewish immigrants is actually continuing even while the country is in a state of general strike, unrest, and bloodshed, four thousand five hundred new entrance licences [licenses] for Jews have been issued.<sup>512</sup>

The second point references the long tradition of local Arab populations protesting the Balfour declaration; Arabs had regularly protested the Balfour Declaration since it was revealed in 1917. In 1929, the protests against the British colonial policy had tipped into a revolt. *Union Féministe Arabe* sent its letter to the IWSA in May 1936 during the initial phase of a general strike against the British and their Palestinian policies. The timing of

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<sup>511</sup> At the time of the Balfour Declaration the Arab population of Palestine was 600,000; the European Jewish population of Palestine was 56,000, or less than 10 percent. Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall: Israel and the Arab World* (New York: Norton, 2001), 7.

<sup>512</sup> LN R4066 6A/3324/688 Letter to Margery Corbett Ashby, President of IWSA from A. Nucho, the President of the *al-ittiḥād al-nisā'ī al-'arabī* (*Union Féministe Arabe*), 28 May 1936.

the letter may have sought to bring further attention to the nation-wide strike. The strike began in April 1936 and lasted until October. The striking parties demanded independence and an end to the removal of Palestinian workers from their land. The strike did not change the course of British colonial action in Palestine. Rather than putting a cap on immigration numbers to ease the pressure the immigrants placed on local society, the British did little to stop Zionist immigration, despite the protests—a fact cited by the *Union Féministe Arabe*. The general strike was the first phase of the Great Revolt. In later stages of the revolt, resistance fighters who attacked British forces replaced the peaceful strikers. The Great Revolt ended in 1939 with Palestinian defeat—the British remained in control of the mandate, though they agreed to set a cap on Zionist immigration to Palestine.<sup>513</sup>

The third piece of evidence presented by the *Union Féministe Arabe* to the IWSA also addressed the Balfour Declaration. The Balfour Declaration was almost twenty years old when the general strike was staged in Palestine. It was still cited by the Palestinians and other Arabs as the cause of the region's unrest. The Balfour Declaration was issued in concert with British pledges for Arab national independence given to King Husayn in the Husayn-McMahon correspondence. Husayn's family, the Hashemites, was the ruling family of Mecca and Medina. The duplicitous British actions were not lost on the president of the *Union Féministe Arabe*, who reminded Corbett Ashby of the promises given to the Arabs by the British during World War I. She wrote, "[t]hat the state actually present in the Holyland resulting from the Balfour Declaration does not conform to the promises dealt to the Arabs by Great Britain nor to the friendly intentions often expressed

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<sup>513</sup> The Great Revolt would last until 1939. The revolt abated in 1939 when the British issued the 1939 White Paper, which capped Zionist immigration at 75,000 immigrants a year. The 1939 White Paper also established that the total Jewish population should not exceed one third of the population of Palestine.

by her.”<sup>514</sup> The union was trying to remind the IWSA’s leadership that British colonial policy was often disingenuous, with disastrous consequences. The letter to the IWSA called upon its leadership as actors in the international community and as Britons to try to use their weight to change the course of colonial policy in Palestine.

After establishing its three grievances—the injustice of the Balfour Declaration, British consent to Zionist immigration in the face of local and regional protest, and the tradition of deceitful British policies toward the Arabs—the *Union Féministe Arabe* registered its protest with the IWSA. The union hoped that the IWSA would help convey the frustration of the Arabs to both the British government and to the League of Nations. The letter offers a window into how women in Syria perceived British colonial policy and the power they thought the international women’s movement could wield in changing that policy via advocacy in the British Parliament and at the League of Nations. The *Union Féministe Arabe* appealed to the IWSA membership, and especially its executive board, to use their connections to influence international policy. The *Union Féministe Arabe* members understood their position in the hierarchy of the IWSA. They were members of the organization, but not its leaders. The letter highlighted the obstacles facing advocates for Arab independence: out-of-touch colonial policy and international systems—the political one enshrined at the League and the gendered one entrenched in international women’s organizations—that buttressed the imperial world order.

The union hoped that a change in colonial policy would benefit the Palestinians, who were seen as having been cheated of their independence and right to self-representation by the British twice: first, at the end of the war, when the British interpreted the terms laid out in the Husayn-McMahon Correspondence in favor of their

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<sup>514</sup> LN R4066 6A/3324/688 Letter to Margery Corbett Ashby, President of IWSA from A. Nucho, the President of the *al-ittihād al-nisā’i al-‘arabī* (*Union Féministe Arabe*), 28 May 1936.

own imperial gains; and second, in the 1930s, when the British ignored protests against their immigration policies, which displaced upwards of twenty percent of the farmers in Palestine and disrupted the region's post-war equilibrium.

The letter of protest shows that the Great Revolt in Palestine was a galvanizing moment for women's participation in the Arab world. The revolt made people around the region aware of their similarities—all Arab states were subjugated by direct or indirect colonial rule (e.g. Iraq was “independent,” but King Faysal, by then King of Iraq, was still strongly guided by the British). The letter was a manifestation of pan-Arab women's solidarity and their decision to no longer be passive recipients of the colonial policies that corroded the region's stability. The union wrote to its international connections in the name of Arab women, even if it did not act in conjunction with other Arab women's organizations. Though pan-Arab activism was targeting collective independence, it did not need to be collective in practice.

The *cri de cœur* sent by the *Union Féministe Arabe* to the IWSA and through it the British government and the League of Nations was unsuccessful. The 1936 letter was one of many pro-Palestinian and pan-Arab actions taken by Arab women. These actions ranged in size and scope, from small messages of succor to large displays of support. Syrian women sent telegrams of support to the *mujahidat* (female fighters) in Palestine who were participating in the Great Revolt.<sup>515</sup> Women in Damascus, Beirut, and Irbid (Jordan) protested against British repression of the Great Revolt and against the

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<sup>515</sup> *Filastīn* 1 December 1933; *Al-Sirāt al-Mustaqīm*, 30 November 1933; *Mirāt al-Sharq*, 1 December 1933; *al-Difāʿ*, 13 June 1938 quoted in Ellen Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its “New” Women: The Palestinian Women's Movement, 1920-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 182. See also Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1987), 59.



Palestinian partition plan of 1937.<sup>516</sup> The most famous of the pan-Arab women's actions on behalf of Palestine was the 1938 Cairo Conference, which was a forceful representation of the pan-Arab women's movement disapproval of colonialism. Pan-Arab women's activism did not need to be undertaken by a large collective of Arab women. Arab women's campaigns that targeted the League of Nations in the name of Arab independence, like the 1936 letter, or women's rights, like the 1938 campaign to secure a seat for Hamada, were small-scale initiatives. These micro-campaigns show populations beholden to colonial authority trying to alter the system.

### **Phase Three: Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women (1937-1940)**

"Phase Two" of women's engagement with the League of Nations lasted from 1930-1936. That phase was dedicated to the internationalization of the "women's question" through activism dedicated to the question of women's nationality. During "Phase Two," the Great Depression exposed the economic vulnerability of women; additionally, many European governments put stringent restrictions on women's participation in the workforce and denied women the franchise. As the League slowly addressed the resolutions and recommendations from the Hague Codification Conference throughout the 1930s, an interim plan for integrating women into the League emerged. The "Radziwill Plan" expanded the assessor system and formalized the presence of international women's organizations at the League by creating consultative committees. "Phase Three" began with the creation of the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women, which the Assembly established in 1937. "Phase Three" was not a natural consequence of "Phase Two"—many governments would have been fine issuing the promise to engage women's questions without having to take any action on the issue.

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<sup>516</sup> *al-Difā'* 8 May 1938 quoted in Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its "New" Women*, 182.

For the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women to begin its global comparative study of the status of women in the various countries, colonies, and protectorates of the world—the first of its kind—the committee needed a staff of experts.<sup>517</sup> Before the committee convened for the first time, discussions orbited around two major topics: the membership of the committee and a definition of the “legal status of women.” Rather than relying on the League-sanctioned “experts,” women from Syria and Lebanon attempted to represent themselves on the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women and, in doing so, disrupted the League’s pattern of having others represent them. Their campaign also interrupted the practice of international women’s organizations speaking for the world’s women.

The League solicited nominations from governments and women’s organizations for the men and women who could staff the Committee of Experts. The Secretariat set a few loose parameters about who could serve on the League: no fascists, no “known feminist agitators.”<sup>518</sup> This meant that no Spaniards (Franco assumed power in 1939), no Italians (Mussolini had been in power since 1922 and had recently angered the League by invading Ethiopia in 1936), and no Germans (Hitler became Chancellor of Germany in 1933) could serve as experts. Besides the prohibition against fascists and feminist activists who had exasperated the League, the ranks of the committee was in theory open to men and women in the member states. Women from the mandated territories were not explicitly prohibited, but the structure of the League and the logic of the mandates did not accommodate their presence.

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<sup>517</sup> This was not the first transnational study on the legal status of women. It seems likely the structure of the study was inspired an intergovernmental study of the legal the status of women in the Americas that was commissioned by the Inter-American Women’s Commission in 1930.

<sup>518</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 McKinnon Wood to the Central Section, 5 January 1938. This commentary was a direct dig at Alice Paul.

Many of the women active in the international women's rights movement hoped they could shape the committee's structure and function to align with their organizations' campaigns for justice, peace, or equality. Besides women's organizations, civic and political organizations sent letters endorsing the creation of the Committee of Experts. The National Union of Teachers (Britain), for example, supported the committee and its proposed study:

[w]e welcome the appointment by the League of Nations Committee of Experts to determine the scope of the contemplated survey of the legal position of women. It trusts that women of all races will be included in this survey and that such factors as the influence of prevailing custom and the degree of enforcement of laws will not be overlooked.<sup>519</sup>

The National Union of Teachers wanted all "races"—and by extension their different legal systems—to be included in the League's study.

Other organizations saw the creation of the committee as an opportunity to remind the League of the Equal Rights Treaty, whose progress had stalled before the League's Assembly. Many women's organizations thought the committee should dedicate energy to ensuring that the treaty be endorsed by the League's member states. For example, the Industrial Council Number One of Baltimore City sent a letter to the League supporting the "Equal Rights Treaty and the proposed Equality Amendments to the League of Nations Covenant." It called "upon the League of Nations 'Committee of Experts on the Status of Women' to recommend favorable action on the Treaty and Amendments."<sup>520</sup> Women's organizations from Baltimore, Maryland wrote in support of the League's

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<sup>519</sup> LN R3757 3A/24637/13900 Legal, General. Letter from the National Union of Women Teachers (East Ham Branch) to the Secretary-General. 30 August 1938. The same text was used in a letter from the League of Nations Union to Professor H.G. Gutteridge, 4 July 1938 and from the Osteopathic Women's National Association of America.

<sup>520</sup> LN R3757 3A/24637/13900 Legal, General. Letter from the Industrial Council No. 1 of Baltimore City to the League of Nations Committee of Experts on the Status of Women, 3 May 1938.

committee in greater numbers than any other city around the world.<sup>521</sup> Individuals also wrote on behalf of the Equal Rights Treaty. Miss Anna Nilsson of Sweden sent a letter to the committee suggesting text that the League should use when exploring the question of the legal status of women.<sup>522</sup>

Going further, women from around the world nominated potential representatives to the committee. The goal of the nominations was to ensure that the committee was globally representative. Arab women proffered their own nominations, so too did the Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations.<sup>523</sup> The Liaison Committee was one of four cooperative women's organizations that emerged after The Hague Codification Conference on International law in 1930.<sup>524</sup> The other three organizations were the Joint Standing Committee of Women's International Organizations,<sup>525</sup> the Women's Consultative Committee,<sup>526</sup> and the Consultative Committee on Nationality.

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<sup>521</sup> Same letter was sent by the National Women's Party Maryland Branch on 30 April 1938; the Michigan Branch of the National Women's Party on 15 April 1938; the Rhode Island Branch of the National Women's party amended the text to convey a "warm endorsement" on 18 April 1938. The Business Women's Legislative Council sent a letter that conveyed the same message on 25 April 1938; as did the Fourteenth Ward Federation of Republican Women, 21 March 1938.

<sup>522</sup> LN R3757 3A/24637/13900 Legal, General. Letter from Anna T. Nilsson to the Expert Committee on the Status of Women, 8 April 1938.

<sup>523</sup> The Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations was founded in 1930. It consisted of members from Women's Christian Temperance Union, National Council of Women, Young Women's Christian Association, International Alliance for Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, International League for Peace and Freedom, World Union of Women for International Concord, International Federation of University Women, Equal Rights International, International Federation of Women Magistrates, Barristers and Other Branches of the Legal Profession, St. Joan's Social and Political Alliance.

<sup>524</sup> For information regarding the history of international liaison committees, see Susan Zimmerman, "Liaison Committees of International Women's Organizations and the Changing Landscape of Women's Internationalism, 1920s to 1945." Alexander Street Press (Women's History), n.d. Web. Zimmerman does not address the activities of the Women's Consultative Committee, which appears to have been established around the time that the Assembly approved the creation of the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women.

<sup>525</sup> The committee was composed of the following members: World's Women's Christian Temperance Union, International Council of Women, World's Young Women Christian Association, International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, World Union of Women for International Concord, International Federation of University Women, St. Joan's Social and Political Alliance, and Equal Rights International.

<sup>526</sup> The Women's Consultative Committee comprised of representatives from the All Asian Conference on Women, Equal Rights International, Pilot International, Superior Council of the Alliance for the General

The League created the latter as an advisory body in 1930.<sup>527</sup> These committees tried to pool resources and energies when lobbying the League of Nations to take action on issues ranging from women's equality in nationality, trafficking in women and children, access to education, refugees, health, peace, and representation on the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women. The Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women was an affiliate of the Women's Consultative Committee—it was the only cooperative women's organization to include an Arab women's organization in its membership ranks.<sup>528</sup> The Women's Consultative Committee's choice to welcome affiliations with Arab women's organizations and women's organizations from other world regions was calculated. Including women's organizations not based in Europe that did not align with the prevailing definition of “international” helped the Women's Consultative Committee, which was led by Alice Paul, position itself as more progressive than the Liaison Committee, which was the largest cooperative organization and had the largest presence at the League.

The Liaison Committee sent a letter to the Secretariat listing its nominees for the committee. Their list was broken down into three categories: women lawyers from other countries, experts from other countries, and “two outstanding men, who by their interest

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Oriental Women (listed members include Nour Hamada, Lebanon; Naimé Hanafy (Egypt), and Bedia Henkis (Syria)), Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Women's International Research Foundation, Women's Organization for World Order, Women's Party, International Committee (two of Hamada's allies were the League representatives of this Committee—Alice Paul and Emilie Graizier).

<sup>527</sup> The League-sanctioned Consultative Committee on Nationality was made up of members from the following organizations: International Council on Women, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Inter-American Commission on Women, Equal Rights International, and the All-Asian Conference on Women. The Consultative Committee claimed to represent more than forty-five million women worldwide. Given the overlap in organizations and membership it is possible that the Consultative Committee on Nationality changed its name to the Women's Consultative Committee by 1938.

<sup>528</sup> This “Women's Consultative Committee” was different than the “Consultative Committee of Women's Organizations,” which was created in 1919 and disbanded in 1928. The organization was founded by Lady Astor who, after being elected to the House of Commons in 1919, became concerned that women's groups were inefficient at putting pressure parliament. It served as a forum through which recommendations for joint action across women's groups to improve women's status in Britain could be made.

and work are specially qualified to be candidates for the League Committee.”<sup>529</sup> Women lawyers from all over Europe were nominated as well as women from India and Brazil. The Liaison Committee list merits mention because three of their nominees made it to the final list debated by the Secretariat. Two of the Liaison Committees nominees were appointed: Dorothy Kenyon, a young lawyer based in New York City, and Dr. Anka Godjevac, an expert government delegate from Yugoslavia at the codification conference and the only female member of the Yugoslav Society of International Law.<sup>530</sup> The success of the organization’s nominations demonstrates the continued privileged contact international women’s organizations had with League officials.

Representation on the Committee of Experts was decided in conversations between members of the Secretariat and governmental officials. For example the British government decided that its representative to the committee should be a man. A league official suggested H.C. Gutteridge, a professor of comparative law at Cambridge, to the post. The Home Office assented and Gutteridge was nominated.<sup>531</sup> With Gutteridge’s nomination the British government’s representative was decided, but that did not stop British women’s organizations from nominating their own candidates. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence (1867-1954)—a suffragist and women’s rights activist famous for a hunger strike while in jail—received the most nominations from British women’s organizations. A British official remarked “for once in a way the women were unanimous and that Mrs.

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<sup>529</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. Liaison Committee of Women’s International Organizations letter to the Secretary-General, 26 November 1937.

<sup>530</sup> Kenyon’s life as an activist has been well chronicled in various publications. Most recently in a PhD thesis: Carol Susan Linskey, “Invisible Politics: Dorothy Kenyon and Women’s Internationalism, 1930—1950,” (Unpub. Ph.D. dissertation. State University of New York at Binghamton, 2013) and Kate Weigand and Daniel Horowitz, “Dorothy Kenyon: Feminist Organizing, 1919-1963” *Journal of Women’s History* 14. 2 (Summer 2002): 126-131.

<sup>531</sup> McKinnon Wood noted that he had tried to get a male name from Mrs. Corbett Ashby “but this lady has disappeared without leaving any trace.” LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. McKinnon Wood to Podesta, 3 December 1937.

Pethick-Lawrence was approved by all and sundry, including various organisations in the Dominions.”<sup>532</sup> After receiving the news that the British slot was being reserved for a man, British women’s organizations demanded that the League, “remove the barrier of Mrs. Pethick-Lawrence’s nomination.”<sup>533</sup> While Pethick-Lawrence secured the unanimous support of British women’s organizations, she was not nominated by international women’s organizations. For example, the Liaison Committee did not support her nomination.

The British post on the committee went to a man. The French government decided its delegate to the committee would be a woman. A member of the Secretariat noted that France “wishes to be represented by a woman in order to destroy any feeling that they are anti-feminist which may result from their not having given votes to women.”<sup>534</sup> France nominated Suzanne Bastid, a law professor at the University of Lyon. A few women’s organizations, including the Committee of Women’s International Organizations, nominated Maria Vérone to the post. Vérone was among the first Frenchwomen to receive a law degree and she served as president of the *Ligue Française pour le Droit des Femmes* (French League for Women’s Rights). The French governmental appointee secured the spot on the committee after her nomination was approved. France continued this trend by nominating women to the Cabinet even as French women did not have the vote.

Having an American representative, despite the fact that the United States was not a member of the League of Nations, was declared sagacious. Alice Paul inadvertently (or

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<sup>532</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. Home office to McKinnon Wood, 12 January 1938.

<sup>533</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. National Union of Women Teachers, 16 February 1938. Pethick-Lawrence’s nomination was supported by Equal Rights International; National Woman’s Party, National Union of Women Teachers; National Association of Women Lawyers; British Commonwealth League (she was one of their VPs); Women’s Freedom League; Women’s Guild of Empire.

<sup>534</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. McKinnon Wood to Podesta, 3 December 1937.

subversively) circulated rumors about the League prohibiting American representatives on the committee. Perhaps in response to these rumors, which flew across the Atlantic and back, a Secretariat member expressed his feeling that it would be “both wise and fitting to secure American participation. I think there can be no doubt that the United States contains the largest and most liberal women’s population of any country in the world.”<sup>535</sup> He concluded that, “any committee not fully cognizant of the situation there would not be complete.”<sup>536</sup> Other members of the Secretariat agreed about the wisdom of including an American. One emphasized, however, that “we could not put on any of the known American feminist agitators”—a clear reference to Paul.<sup>537</sup>

A few nominations circulated in support of including First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt on the committee. Including “Roosevelt would be politically advantageous to the League,” a League official reflected.<sup>538</sup> Roosevelt was invited, but declined the position. The nomination then went to Dorothy Kenyon. The consensus to nominate an American woman expanded the ranks of the committee from its originally planned six members to seven members. But with three of the seats on the committee reserved for people from Great Britain, France, and the United States the committee could not truly represent the globe.

The final ranks of the committee included three men and four women. The campaign by European and American women’s organizations to secure positions for their preferred representatives to the League did not yield the desired results, but the committee’s composition reflected the campaigns for equal representation that began

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<sup>535</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. Sweester to McKinnon Wood, 5 January 1938. The Secretariat vehemently denied that there were any provisions barring the participation of American women.

<sup>536</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>537</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. McKinnon Wood to the Central Section, 5 January 1938.

<sup>538</sup> *ibid.*



with the League's birth. The four women on the committee were Suzanne Bastid (France), Dorothy Kenyon (United States of America), Anka Godjevac (Yugoslavia), and Kerstin Hesselgren (Sweden, Member of the Second Chamber of the Riksdag). The male delegates to the committee were Dr. de Ruelle (Belgium, legal adviser for the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and member of the Permanent Court of Arbitration), Paul Sebasteyan (Hungary, counselor and head of the Treatise Division the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), and H.C. Gutteridge (Great Britain). Gutteridge served as the chair of the committee. The rapporteur of the Committee of Experts was Hesselgren. Hugh McKinnon Wood, a Briton, served as the representative of the Secretariat on the committee; it was a non-voting position, but carried with it significant influence. He framed the language of the debate about the legal status of women and shaped the League's definition of international.



Committee for the Study of Legal Status of Women (caption provided – no indication of who was who).  
 Source: *League of Nations Photo Archive Online, University of Indiana.*

The League photographer captured the Committee of Experts for the Legal Status of Women at work one day. The photo caption did not provide “who’s who” labels. Yet, the photo displays the dynamics of the committee’s meetings. The members of the Secretariat sat at the center of the room with the experts and their support staffs assembled in a horseshoe around them. A giant neoclassical image hung above the proceedings. It served to remind the experts of the principles of equality and justice—principles the committee tried to uphold through its work chronicling the status of women around the world in an effort to create a global standard. In this room and in smaller meeting rooms in the Secretariat wing of the *Palais des Nations*, the Committee of Experts analyzed data on law affecting women, doing so in service of its charge: measuring the status of women around the world. Not all of the world’s women were pleased with the structure of committee, however.

### **Round One: The “Great Disappointment” of Arab Women**

While the intra-League conversation, guided by McKinnon Wood, about who should serve on the committee was progressing toward the final list, women’s organizations that were not represented took note of their absence and petitioned the League. Even before the final membership of the Committee of Experts was established on January 24, 1938, with Kenyon’s acceptance, which was expressed via telegram “glad to have my name included in the list of experts,” the first of nine letters arrived at the League’s Secretariat addressed to the Chairman of the Council of the League of Nations, the delegate from Iran.<sup>539</sup> A coordinated transnational campaign on behalf of securing a position on the committee for an “Eastern” woman began on January 17, 1938, though their letters did

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<sup>539</sup> LN R3771 3A/32619/31757 Legal, General. Dorothy Kenyon’s telegram capturing her acceptance to the post.

not arrive at the League headquarters in Geneva until the end of the month; a fairly speedy conveyance across the Mediterranean given the postal realities of the day. After the campaign did not yield changes in the membership of the committee, a follow-up petition querying the absence of women from the “East” arrived on February 1, 1938. In between the two stages of the epistolary campaign, Nour Hamada appealed to the League in person.

A small coalition of Arab women, mostly from Beirut and Damascus, were particularly vociferous in expressing their disappointment that the committee did not include a representative of women from the East, or any individual that they felt represented their interests. The petitions from other women’s organizations contesting the nomination process or questioning the selected representatives arrived at the League’s Secretariat before the committee’s membership was finalized. The correspondence from Syrian and Lebanese women’s organizations was unique because the letters were clearly a coordinated effort to remedy their exclusion. The established international women’s organizations and the Liaison Committee were quiet on the topic of the final constitution of the committee, perhaps because women and men representing their national and organizational interests had been nominated to the committee and they had no membership omissions to highlight. Surveying the list of nominated women and men, Arab women did not feel that the assembled committee members would take into consideration their status as women and how the status of “Oriental” and “Eastern” women—a category claimed by women in explicit contrast to the West—needed separate representation.

The organizations that nominated Hamada and the organizations that she represented—the Alliance for the General Oriental Women, Orient-Occident League,

Arab Feminist Academy, Committee of Oriental Women, the Syrian Feminist Union, and the League of All Mohammedan Women of the World—used “Orient” and “East” somewhat interchangeably in their letters to the League, but “Arab” had a particular geographic connection. Each term was bounded by geographic parameters and connoted a person, in this case, a woman, from a non-European background. “East,” which conjured a connected womanhood between Istanbul and Tokyo, was an identity framework that was used less frequently in correspondence perhaps because the League of Nations used “Orient” to describe the entire Asian Continent.<sup>540</sup> “Orient” conveyed the inverse of “Occident.”

“Arab” was used when expressing a connection with women within the contiguous Arab world—Egypt and North Africa at this time were not folded into this category. Rather “Arab,” as Hamada deployed it, meant the Arabic-speaking peoples in the Levant; she probably did not see much natural or cultural affinity with the Bedouin of Arabia. Hamada never referred to herself as Lebanese or Syrian in her correspondences with the League; instead, she expressed a more general conceptualization of her identity—Arab or “Oriental.” Likewise, the organizations she represented were “Arab” rather than Lebanese or Syrian, even if they were headquartered in the territories under the French Mandate for Syria. When the Syrian and Lebanese women made claims as Arab women in international forums, they were making claims for Arab independence.

The creation of the Committee of Experts marked the first opening that Arab women had for questioning their exclusion from the League’s discussion of the status of women. Prior to this moment Syrian and Lebanese women’s interactions with the League were mitigated by the mandates as their appeals for independence and rights were forced

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<sup>540</sup> Hamada’s petitions were filed in a folder labeled, “Representation of the Orient.” See LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient.

to travel down bureaucratic channels of the French mandate government before they were presented to the Permanent Mandates Commission. Or, they had to appeal to international women's organizations to press their case for them, as the *Union Féministe Arabe* had done with the IWSA in 1936. The Committee of Experts was a site disconnected from the mandates system where colonized women could independently direct their campaigns.

Syrian and Lebanese women responded to the finalized list of committee members by questioning their exclusion, nominating one of their own to fill the post, and suggesting two European women—Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and Maria Vérone—who they felt were more attuned to the station of women in the Middle East than the experts the League had assembled through a wholly undemocratic process. Nour Hamada's presence in Geneva made a precisely timed campaign possible: as the names of nominees were released, the letters from women's organizations in Greater Syria started to pour in. Hamada took up residency at the Hôtel de Russie along the quay of Lac Léman not far from the *Palais des Nations*. From this post, she was able to coordinate an international campaign on behalf of her nomination to the League and stay abreast of the League's engagement with the question of the status of women.

Petitions supporting her nomination to the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women arrived at the League Secretariat from Damascus, Beirut, New York (conveyed via a proxy in Geneva), and Geneva. Hamada had fostered connections with women's organizations in New York City while in the United States. The campaign positioned Hamada as the undisputed leader of "Oriental" women, many of whom lived in nations colonized by the French, British, Americans, and Dutch. The campaign to put Hamada on the Committee of Experts on the Status of Women did not take her status as a colonized woman from Beirut as a barrier to her nomination. Rather, their campaign

served as a means of protesting the categorization of Syrian and Lebanese women and other “Oriental” women as somehow inferior and unable to represent themselves. The campaign also highlighted the hypocrisies of the League, which classed itself as an international organization, despite not including representatives from all nations and populations in its definition of “international.”

The first two letters of the campaign arrived on January 31, 1938, the first from the Arab Feminist Academy and the second from the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women. The Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women was headquartered in the Shuhada neighborhood of Damascus. Mounira Mohairai, the organization’s secretary, expressed the purpose of the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women was “obtaining political and social rights for women.”<sup>541</sup> The letter continued, “the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women has the honor of kindly asking you, when you choose the candidates for the [Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women], that you take into consideration the names of the two women we mention below.” First, the organization nominated “Madame Nour Hamada Bey,” the organization’s president, to the Committee of Experts that was being formed in Geneva. The organization cited Hamada’s presidency of “two important Eastern women’s conferences, one at Damascus and the other at Tehran, whose resolutions were sent to the League of Nations secretariat” as a reason that she should be called upon to represent “Eastern” women.<sup>542</sup>

The Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women claimed

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<sup>541</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. Letter from the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women to the Chairman of the Council to the President of the Council of the League of Nations. 17 January 1938.

<sup>542</sup> *ibid.* The resolutions that were sent to the League by these conferences were not recorded within the registry of the League of Nations. These conferences are discussed at length in Chapter Two.

Hamada “is well known in the West and in the East.”<sup>543</sup> Hamada’s time in the United States of America, “where she held several conferences” was used as evidence to prove her international credentials. The emphasis placed on Hamada’s worldwide renown and her ability to bridge both East and West demonstrates that the nominating organization thought Hamada’s cosmopolitan credentials were proof of her ability to serve on the committee. Hamada was not a lawyer, but the women nominating her believed she could speak about the status of women in many countries across the East-West divide.

The second letter nominating Hamada to the committee also cited Hamada’s presidency of the two “Oriental” women’s conferences as evidence of her ability to represent “Oriental” women. The second letter was signed and sealed by the Arab Feminist Academy. The stamp of the second letter was cancelled on January 17, 1938 in Ras-el-Nabeh, a neighborhood in Beirut. The simultaneous dispatching of the letters captures a coordinated campaign between the two major cities in the French mandate.<sup>544</sup> The Arab Feminist Academy, like the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women also noted Hamada’s international renown as a reason that she should be granted a spot on the Committee of Experts, writing that Hamada “is known not just in the East, but also in Europe and America.”<sup>545</sup> Claudia Takit, the secretary of the organization, cited Hamada’s presidency over two Arab women’s congresses in Beirut and Baghdad as reasons for her to be given a position on the committee.<sup>546</sup> Takit noted

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<sup>543</sup> *ibid.* No records of these conferences hosted by Hamada in the United States have surfaced in research in domestic archives.

<sup>544</sup> The two cities were not yet part of independent nations so it would be erroneous to categorize these two letters as constituting a transnational campaign. The fact that these letters were accompanied by letters sent from Geneva transforms this campaign into an international one.

<sup>545</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. Letter from the Arab Feminist Academy to the President of the Council of the League of Nations. 17 January 1938.

<sup>546</sup> In total, Hamada served as president of four congresses, two for “Eastern” women, and two for “Arab” women (and perhaps some congresses in the United States).

that Hamada was the president of the Arab Feminist Academy and that her leadership and international presence merited her a spot for her on the committee. The Arab Feminist Academy's letter defined international as being both as a matter of mobility—Hamada was an international figure because she moved from city to city around the globe—and as a matter of representativeness, that the committee must have members from all parts of the globe, not just Europe and the United States. The Committee of Experts promised to probe the international status of women. The Arab Feminist Academy thought its membership should match the scope of the inquiry.

Hamada did not rely on the nominating letters alone to buttress her campaign for a seat for an “Eastern” woman on the Committee of Experts. She used her proximity to the seat of the League to schedule an appointment with the Secretariat members in charge of the nomination process. On January 17, the same day that the letters were sent from Beirut and Damascus, a handwritten letter in Arabic arrived at the Secretariat—it was delivered from Geneva. The letter conveyed Hamada's interest in the status of women and declared that she would go to the League on January 20 at 11 o'clock, unless she was instructed otherwise. Hamada requested an informational interview with a member of the Secretariat who was knowledgeable about the subject that interested her: the Committee of Experts.

The letter caused panic in the Secretariat because “[w]e have no one to translate it.”<sup>547</sup> An official in the Secretariat suggested that the original be returned to the sender, asking him or her to send it in French.<sup>548</sup> Aware of the limited language resources of the League, Hamada had chosen to write the League in Arabic when she appeared to have

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<sup>547</sup> LN R3757 3A/24637/13900 Legal, General. File note accompanying Hamada's letter from 17 January 1938.

<sup>548</sup> LN R3757 3A/24637/13900 Legal, General. Translation note from M. Hekimi to Legal Section of the Secretariat, 18 January 1938.



operational French and passable English, thus increasing her chances of securing a meeting with League officials. By the time an Iranian diplomat was able to translate the gist of the letter over the phone, it was too late for the members of the Secretariat to be in touch with Hamada to instruct her to delay her visit. So Hamada was welcomed to the Secretariat on January 20 as she planned.<sup>549</sup> During the course of the interview with the member of the Secretariat, Hamada made an in-person appeal for her merits as a representative of “Eastern” women at the League.

The campaign for an “Eastern” representative did not stop with Hamada’s in-person interview with the Secretariat. On January 25, 1938, the day after the ranks of the Committee of Experts were finalized, two more letters were sent to the President of the Council of the League of Nations. One letter, signed by B. Mouri, was sent on behalf of the secretariat of the Arab Feminist Academy.<sup>550</sup> The letter called upon the president to respect “our right for a representative on the Committee on the Status of Women.”<sup>551</sup> Mouri thought that representation on the committee was a “right” that women had Arab women had been denied. She wrote to the League in an effort to rectify their exclusion from the committee, which she thought should include representatives from all of the world’s regions, including the Orient.

Mouri also signed the second letter sent on January 25 to the President of the Council addressing the absence of an Arab woman on the Committee of Experts. The second letter was written in Mouri’s capacity as the secretary of the Committee of

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<sup>549</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>550</sup> No biographical information exists on B. Mouri.

<sup>551</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. Letter from the Arab Women’s Academy to the President of the Council of the League of Nations, 25 January 1938.

Oriental Women.<sup>552</sup> She called upon the president to consider the request of the Arab women's organizations.<sup>553</sup> Both of the letters that Mouri sent were on the letterhead of the Hôtel de Russie, where Hamada was in residency in late January and early February. The shared hotel address was hardly a coincidence.

Mouri and Hamada staged a coordinated campaign from the Hôtel de Russie. Women from Greater Syria stationed in Geneva acted in unison to try to have the greatest effect on the composition of the Committee of Experts. The membership of the women's committees in general, and in Geneva, overlapped. Hamada and Mouri represented a series of women's organizations concomitantly as they attempted to remedy what they saw as an absence of an Eastern representative on the Committee of Experts. The number of Syrian and Lebanese women in Geneva was small and they had a formidable task: persuading the League to let them enter the conversation about international women's rights.

A third letter reached the League of Nations Secretariat on January 25, 1938 also on the stationery of the Hôtel de Russie. This letter was signed by Emilie I. Graizier, the secretary of the Orient-Occident League. The organization's purpose was to "bring the East and West together and to increase understanding of their respective ideals."<sup>554</sup> The Orient-Occident League was based in New York City and claimed to represent forty different nations. The note directed towards the President of the Council emphasized that its Executive Committee was situated in Geneva at the Hôtel de Russie and that Nour

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<sup>552</sup> The *Comité des femmes orientales* / Committee of Oriental Woman was discrete from the Superior Council.

<sup>553</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. Letter from the Arab Women's Academy to the President of the Council of the League of Nations, 25 January 1938. The a secretary from the League's Secretariat left a note stating that they reached out to Mouri on 1 February 1938, but received no response.

<sup>554</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. Letter from secretary of the Orient-Occident League to the President of the Council of the League of Nations, 25 January 1938.

Hamada Bey of Beirut headed its mission to the League. Graizier noted that Hamada had come “from America to attend the present session of the League of Nations.”<sup>555</sup> Hamada had not left the United States voluntarily, she had overstayed her visa and was deported, a fact that Graizier did not bring up in her nomination.<sup>556</sup>

The Orient-Occident League “propose[d] the nomination of Nour Hamada Bey as a member of the League of Nations Committee for the Status of Women.”<sup>557</sup> Her presidencies of “the two famous Oriental women’s conferences held in Damascus (1930) and in Tehran (1932), in addition to the two Arab Women’s Conferences in Baghdad and Beirut” were given as reasons that she should be considered for a position representing the women of the “East” on the Committee of Experts.<sup>558</sup> Again, Hamada’s regional leadership positions and global connections were marshaled in support of the appeals on behalf of her nomination. Throughout the three letters sent to the Secretariat an ever-growing web of information about Hamada’s credentials as an activist emerged.

The letters nominating Hamada to the Committee of Experts also nominated two European representatives seen as friendly to women’s rights in the East. These secondary nominations were a tacit acknowledgement that the campaign for Eastern representation was not likely to succeed. The two women nominated by the “Eastern” and “Arab” women’s organizations that proffered Hamada’s name for consideration were Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence and Maria Vérone. The letters nominating Pethick-Lawrence described her as “well known by Oriental women, because she speaks of the rights of women in

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<sup>555</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>556</sup> USINS 1936d, John L. Kubrick, District Director, Detroit, INS to Commission of Immigration and Naturalization, Washington, DC, 9 March 1936; USINS 1937. Cunard White Star Limited to Commission of Immigration and Naturalization, Ellis Island, 28 July 1936.

<sup>557</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. Letter from secretary of the Orient-Occident League to the President of the Council of the League of Nations, 25 January 1938.

<sup>558</sup> *ibid.*

Oriental countries.”<sup>559</sup> The letters also claimed she was “well known for her good work for the feminist cause.”<sup>560</sup> It is unclear what Pethick-Lawrence did to earn the approbation of women’s organizations in the East. In her memoir *My Part in a Changing World* (1938) she does not address the status of women in the “East” to any great extent.<sup>561</sup> Syrian women’s organizations ceased to nominate Pethick-Lawrence after the January 17 round of nominations when it was clear she was not going to make the list of experts. The Arab Feminist Academy also put forth the name of Maria Vérone.<sup>562</sup> The Arab Feminist Academy supported her because she was “an eminent figure in her profession and thus in the French and international feminist movements.”<sup>563</sup>

This first round of letters accomplished two things: of: it advocated for the creation of a position for “Eastern” women on the committee and it nominated Hamada. The campaign for Hamada brought the League’s attention to the absence of a non-Anglo-European-American representative on the committee. After the first round of petitions advocating for including an “Eastern” woman on the committee failed, Hamada appealed to the League directly. She sent a follow-up note on behalf of Orient-Occident League, the Arab Feminist Academy, the Syrian Feminist Union, the League of all Mohammedan Women of the World, and the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental

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<sup>559</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. Letter from the Superior Council of the General Alliance of Oriental Women to the President of the Council of the League of Nations, 17 January 1938.

<sup>560</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. Letter from the Arab Feminist Academy to the President of the Council of the League of Nations, 17 January 1938.

<sup>561</sup> It is possible that during Pethick-Lawrence’s trip to the Near East she met with Hamada. It is more likely that Pethick-Lawrence was in Geneva at the time working to secure her own nomination to the Committee of Experts and encountered Hamada and persuaded her to support her nomination. This is all conjecture. What is interesting, however, is that Pethick-Lawrence was supported at the expense of the other British candidates. The support of Pethick-Lawrence seems to demonstrate some degree of interaction between Hamada and the international women’s organizations supporting Pethick-Lawrence or Pethick-Lawrence herself.

<sup>562</sup> Nominating Vérone was complicated by the fact that her nomination was not supported by the French government.

<sup>563</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. Letter from the Arab Feminist Academy to the President of the Council of the League of Nations, 17 January 1938.

Women to the Chairman of the Council of the League of Nations.<sup>564</sup>

Hamada's connection to each of these organizations remains unclear. She was president of the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women and may have had other membership connections. She founded *Al-Majma' al-Nisā'ī al-Adabī al-'Arabī* (Women's Arabic and Cultural Assembly) in Damascus in 1928. It is possible that by 1938 this organization had changed its name to the Arab Feminist Academy, or it could have been an entirely new organization. Regardless, she was its president. It seems likely that Hamada encountered or founded the Orient-Occident League while in the United States (most likely during her sojourn in New York City). She was listed as the representative of the organization in Geneva. It is hard to assess the true breadth of Arab women's support for Hamada's nomination. With the exception of the Orient-Occident League, which was based in New York City, Hamada submitted her appeal letter on behalf of organizations in Beirut or Damascus.

Hamada's appeal letter began, I am writing "on behalf of the organizations of Oriental Women to express to you their great disappointment that there is no member of the Committee on the Status of Women to represent them, although these organizations sent a request to that effect, together with the names of representative women"—

Hamada, Pethick-Lawrence, and Vérone.<sup>565</sup> This portion of the appeal captures the hope that the League could still be persuaded about the merits of including representatives from other organizations and geographic locations. Ego may have entered the equation, but her campaign was not grounded in ego alone—she did have an established track

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<sup>564</sup> This translation of the French "Conseil Supérieur de l'Alliance Générale Féministe Orientale" was one found on documents from the women's organizations at the League and is not my own. See LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General.

<sup>565</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. Letter from Nour Hamada to his Excellency, The Delegate of Iran, Chairman of the Council of the League of Nations, 1 February 1938.

record as a women's rights activist.

The final appeal for inclusion continued, “we do not feel that there is any outstanding and well-known friend of the East or of equality for women on the Committee recently appointed by the Council.”<sup>566</sup> Without one of their own on the committee, the organizations that Hamada spoke for were happy to have someone on the League that would pay attention to their needs as women in the mandates and as Arab women—a “friend of the East.”<sup>567</sup> It seems Hamada knew the track record of the representatives nominated to the committee and concluded that they were inimical to her cause of extending the power to shape international discourse about political and social rights to “Eastern” women.

Hamada's letter asked the Iranian delegate and chairman of the Council to bring the question of adding to “the Committee some member from the East, and one who is friendly to the equality of women” before the council. Hamada's invocation of the geographic category of “East” and her choice to target the appeal to the Iranian delegate, rather than the Secretary-General, could have been part of a larger plan to bring to the Iranian delegate's attention to the committee membership's Western European and American composition and to solicit governmental support from another “Eastern” nation. Hamada believed a female representative from the “East” would be best able to speak to the position of women in “Eastern” society. Hamada was interested securing legal equality for women; not just between women and men, but also among women themselves—to achieve this equality, an “Eastern” woman would need to serve on the Committee of Experts.

The emphasis on the equality of women highlights Hamada's perspective that the

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<sup>566</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>567</sup> *ibid.*

lawyers and jurisconsults nominated to the Committee of Experts may have been legal experts, but they were not necessarily invested in advancing women's equality through legal channels. Hamada did not see her activist background and lack of legal training as an impediment to participating in the committee. In fact, she thought she was better suited to address women's equality than the experts filling out the ranks of the committee. Hamada had championed family law reform since the first Arab women's conference in Beirut in 1928. She thought a standard international legal code protecting the rights of women would improve women's status in Greater Syria. Hamada's day-to-day life as a subject of the French Mandate for Syria was ruled by the fusion of two legal systems—French civil law and shari'a. The contact between the two systems had a disproportionate effect on women because women's rights were subsumed under the category of family law and became the domain of religious clerics. It seems Hamada thought her activist experience and her position as subject of the Mandate made her an expert on the legal status of women in the East.

In the conclusion of her note, Hamada emphasized that the committee had enough money to support another female delegate. "The money appropriated by the Assembly for the Committee would seem sufficient for the expenses of a few more members."

Hamada's guess that there was a surfeit of funds for the committee was correct. The committee had been given a budget of 40,000 Swiss Francs to conduct research and hold sessions. By the end of its third session in July 1939, it has a remaining balance of 10,570 Swiss Francs, which meant that in January 1938 it had enough funds to pay for the passage of a representative from somewhere in the East to join the committee.<sup>568</sup> The

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<sup>568</sup> LN R3772 3A/38771/31757 Legal, General. Budget of the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women. and LN R3772 3A/33633/31757 Legal, General. McKinnon Wood to Gutteridge, 15 May 1939.

emphasis Hamada placed on the financial resources available to the committee suggests an awareness that the League had used budgetary constraints as an excuse for not funding its obligations to women's issues in the past, which it had. Or, perhaps Hamada was simply anticipating that the committee might in this instance use a financial excuse to justify its refusal to include her or another representative from or of the East.

The initial transnational petition campaign followed by Hamada's written and in-person appeals did not secure a position for an "Oriental" woman or a "well known friend of the East" or anyone from east of the Urals.<sup>569</sup> Hamada was motivated by a combination of self-interest and a sincere desire to see an Eastern delegate nominated to the Committee of Experts. She had been working toward the cause of solidifying an Eastern women's identity and for Oriental representation in international women's organizations for almost a decade. The careful campaign directed toward the League of Nations expressed her drive and desire for truly "international" women's representation at the League of Nations. Hamada's campaign directed toward the League of Nations regarding the non-representative membership of the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women was unique.<sup>570</sup> However, many other women's organizations from other parts of the world also launched campaigns regarding League policies and women's place within the League's operational structure—women from Central and South America were

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The first meeting of the committee cost 9,870 Swiss Francs and the payment to the two recognized research institutes totaled 5,000 Swiss Francs.

<sup>569</sup> LN R3771 3A/31757/31757 Legal, General. Letter from Nour Hamada to his Excellency, The Delegate of Iran, Chairman of the Council of the League of Nations, 1 February 1938.

<sup>570</sup> The League archive does not chronicle any other campaigns launched by women or women's organizations in other countries regarding the make-up of the Committee of Experts. The other correspondences the League received about the committee were from national and international women's organizations nominating women to the committee—they did not seek to alter the make-up of the committee as the campaign launched by and for Hamada did.



especially active in this regard.<sup>571</sup>

### **A Surreptitious Background Check Hinders Hamada's Nomination**

The Committee of Experts did not ignore Hamada's campaign.<sup>572</sup> While Hamada was orchestrating the campaign on behalf of her own nomination to the Committee of Experts in Geneva, McKinnon Wood dispatched a covert investigation into Hamada's credentials as a representative of Eastern women. Was she as important and influential as the letters directed toward the committee claimed she was? Did she merit a position on the committee? Should the League open the Committee of Experts to include an "Eastern" woman? The investigation began in her home district in Lebanon and then traced her activist routes from Lebanon to Syria to Tehran and finally to the United States. Hamada claimed to be an active, well-respected participant of the various local and international registers of the women's movement; the investigation revealed a different narrative about Hamada's position within the Arab and international women's movements.

The diverging narratives about Hamada's qualifications for serving on the committee reveal the tenacity of one Lebanese women's rights activist. Her first appeal to the League was sent in January 1938; her final appeal for representation on the committee came a year later in January 1939. Throughout the year, appeals to represent "Eastern" womanhood fell away and her campaign for representation became increasingly self-serving. The campaign also demonstrates the complexities of the Syrian and Lebanese women's movement: different views existed about how to achieve the goal of legal and

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<sup>571</sup> More scholarship is needed on women's activism from other world regions directed toward the League of Nations in an effort to affect League policy.

<sup>572</sup> No formal "the League is pleased to receive your correspondence" letters were sent to Hamada—or, at least, no mimeographed record remains of such a letter. Several attempts to reach Hamada at her hotel to register the receipt of her petitions and the petitions made on her behalf were noted in League files, but no contact was made.

social protections for women in Syria and Lebanon. The debate about the core of the movement and who should serve as its leader spilled outside the contiguous border of Syria and Lebanon, beyond the Arab Middle East, and transformed into an international story. Finally, the campaign exposes the League's bureaucratic maneuvering, which had lasting effects on which organizations could access to the League. Hamada's campaign to nominate herself, or another Eastern woman, to the Committee of Experts reveals the far-reaching consequences of a local story about leadership of the Lebanese women's movement.

In response to Hamada's informational interview with League officials on January 20, 1938 a series of questions was sent to Ruth Frances Woodsmall, who had served as a representative of the Y.W.C.A. in the Near East in the late 1920s before becoming Secretary-General of the World's Y.W.C.A. While no longer stationed in the Levant in the late 1930s, she still had contacts with the Y.W.C.A. and the American University in Beirut, which had collaborated with Woodsmall to publish her book *Moslem Women Enter a New World* (1936). One of Woodsmall's connections in Lebanon, likely Charlotte Johnson, who served as Woodsmall's research assistant for *Moslem Women Enter a New World*, or Edna Bayouth who served on the board of the Y.W.C.A. in Beirut, was asked to conduct a survey to corroborate Hamada's claims. Princess Radziwill considered Woodsmall, "an absolutely reliable informant."<sup>573</sup> It seems, during her in-person interview in January, Hamada made three principal claims to strengthen the case for her nomination. First, she said was the leader of the Lebanese women's movement. Second, she said was a strong representative of the "Eastern" women's movements as evidenced by her presidency of the "Eastern" women's conferences hosted

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<sup>573</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Letter from Gabrielle Radziwill to McKinnon Wood, 15 March 1938.

in Beirut, Baghdad, and Tehran. Third, she said she had a law degree. The fact that she was the leader of the Lebanese women's movement and that she was a lawyer were new pieces of information that had not surfaced in the letters nominating Hamada or in her own written appeals to the League. The "Beirut report" submitted to the League challenged Hamada on all three of these claims.

The report began by debunking Hamada's claim that she was the leader of the Lebanese women's movement. One of the letters supporting Hamada's nomination to the Committee of Experts was sent by the Arab Feminist Academy. The nominating letter named Hamada as its president. Hamada had also listed the Arab Feminist Academy as one of her sponsoring organizations in her appeal letter. The person dispatched to investigate the veracity of Hamada's claims reported that the address of the Central Bureau of the Arab Feminist Academy was Hamada's brother's home address. Having an address that coincided with her brother's residence does not necessarily discredit the organization. But the compiler of the "Beirut report" also noted "no one [in Beirut] has ever heard of the Academy."<sup>574</sup> Including the evidence that no one knew about the organization in the report raised questions about whether Hamada was a charlatan. Had Hamada had fabricated the Arab Feminist Academy to support her nomination to the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women?

The letter from the Arab Feminist Academy sent to the League on behalf of Hamada's nomination to the committee was signed by "Claudia Takit."<sup>575</sup> The person investigating Hamada's background in Beirut thought "[t]his must be a misprint and

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<sup>574</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Extracts from a letter received from Beirut, Syria, 24 February 1938.

<sup>575</sup> The letter sent to the Secretariat contained a signature without an accompanying name in Latin script. The signature is difficult to decipher. The first name could be read "Claude" or "Claudia" and the last name, however, is clearly "Takit," not Tabet as the report suggested.

probably is Claudia Tabet as Madame Hamada sent the original [letter] to Mrs. Tabet asking her to sign it and send it to the League. Mrs. Tabet was very ill at the time and has since died, and her daughter Claudia signed it.”<sup>576</sup> The problem with Claudia’s signature endorsing Hamada’s campaign for a post on the committee was that Claudia was “a young woman of about twenty who has, as far as anyone knows, no connection whatsoever with any women’s organization here.”<sup>577</sup> Furthermore, Claudia, the rapporteur claimed, was of a “good family” but had a “somewhat unsavory reputation personally.”<sup>578</sup> This evidence suggests Hamada orchestrated her own nomination. However, there is nothing inherently nefarious or disingenuous in writing a nomination letter for someone else to sign—sending a drafted nomination letter does not compel a signature. Hamada had no control over who signed the letter. Still, the report recommended not assigning much weight to Claudia’s letter.

The report suggested that rather than being well-regarded by other women’s organizers in Beirut and Damascus, Hamada had only secured the support of a single young girl disassociated from the Lebanese women’s movement. The report’s evidence on the Arab Feminist Academy revealed the limited support that Hamada had in the Lebanese women’s movement; the report’s author did not recognize the other organizations endorsing Hamada and did not investigate them. The information the report provided on the Arab Feminist Academy overtly questioned Hamada’s claims to represent Lebanese women and Arab or “Eastern” women.

The League liaison’s next interviewee in Beirut was a Druze shaykh in the Druze quarter of Beirut. He said he knew Hamada. The report stated, “he simply laughed at the

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<sup>576</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Extracts from a letter received from Beirut, Syria, 24 February 1938.

<sup>577</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>578</sup> *ibid.*

idea of there being any such organization as she claims.”<sup>579</sup> The report did not acknowledge the possibility that the organization operated in a different neighborhood or was led by a coalition of women from diverse religious communities. He noted that Hamada “had been away from Beirut at least five years, that no one had heard of her at all in that time and that he would certainly know if there was any group of women under her leadership in Syria”—not just Beirut, but within the confines of Greater Syria.<sup>580</sup> The Druze leader, the report noted, “implied pretty plainly that she uses this imaginary organization as a means of raising money on which she lives and travels.”<sup>581</sup> However, no clear reference was made in the report about which people or organizations might donate money to her cause of advancing the status of Eastern women.

The section of the report dedicated to addressing Hamada’s claims about the Arab Feminist Academy concluded it was unlikely a Druze leader would have discredited her to such a degree “unless he was pretty sure of his ground” because Hamada was a Druze.<sup>582</sup> The author was referencing the fact that the Druze were a closed religious community not known for being open with outsiders about their traditions. There is no possibility of conversion in the Druze tradition. The evidence about Hamada’s solicitation of funds from donors for a fake cause called into question not only Hamada’s activist credentials, but also her integrity and honesty. Was Hamada embezzling funds and using front organizations to support her candidacy for the Committee of Experts? Was the campaign for a position on the Committee of Experts simultaneously an attempt to vie for an external validation for her position as a regional leader?

The report was researched in Beirut, so it only investigated Hamada’s connection

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<sup>579</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>580</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>581</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>582</sup> *ibid.*

with the Arab Feminist Academy. It did not delve into the history of the other organizations that supported Hamada's campaign, which were based in Damascus and New York City. Further, no research was conducted in Tehran. The report's emphasis on the Arab Feminist Academy, to the exclusion of the other nominating women's organizations, may have also been because the letter sent to Woodsmall requesting information about Hamada only asked about the Arab Feminist Academy. Or, the lack of information about the other organizations might be evidence that the person writing the report thought that one fake organization was proof enough that the other organizations were also products of Hamada's imagination. The Syrian Feminist Union, the League of all Mohammedan Women of the World, and the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women may have been similarly suspect as there is no mention of them or the organization supporting East-West cooperation in the Arabic-language women's press or the general Arabic press.

The report relayed the local historical context that may have compelled Hamada to fabricate the Arab Feminist Academy. Hamada had been part of the "local Federation of Women's Clubs"—the federation was not more precisely named, nor were the names of the federation's member organizations listed. By the late 1930s there were many women's unions in Beirut and Greater Syria. The turn toward creating women's unions was the byproduct of the politicization of the women's movement in the region immediately following the imposition of the mandate. Hamada campaigned to be president of the federation but was not elected. The report stated "[s]he became very angry when she was not elected president a number of years ago and withdrew declaring that she would organize a rival group."<sup>583</sup> The Arab Feminist Academy was perhaps the

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<sup>583</sup> *ibid.*

manifestation of this rival organization.

“The whole thing seems to have started as a quarrel—as so many things in the Near East do!” the report observed.<sup>584</sup> This remark that the Near East was mired in quarrels captures the bias of the person conducting the reconnaissance research on Hamada: the people of the region were irrational and emotional and in this regard Hamada was no different. The report implied that Hamada’s personal affront after not being elected president had lead to her deceitful campaign to be nominated to the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women or at least compelled her to forge a floundering feminist alliance.

The first part of the anonymous report summarily debunked Hamada’s claim that she was the leader of the Lebanese women’s movement. Instead, the report insinuated, Hamada was not recognized as a women’s leader by the male religious authorities in her community or by the established women’s organizations in Lebanon. Were the other claims she made to the Secretariat—that she was a legitimate representative of the “Eastern” women’s movement and that she was a lawyer—true? Could Hamada be a regional women’s leader if she was not recognized as one in Beirut? The report questioned Hamada’s other claims as well.

Four conferences were cited as evidence of her position as a leader of Eastern women: the 1928 women’s conference in Beirut, the 1930 conferences in Beirut and Damascus, the 1932 conference in Tehran. In the coordinated nomination campaign to the League, each letter sent to the League revealed a slightly different amount of information about Hamada, her conference organizing experience, and her ability to bring Eastern women together. Hamada referenced the conferences in her appeal letter and in

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<sup>584</sup> *ibid.*

her in-person interview with a member of the Secretariat. She was proud of her role in the conferences. The report contended the women's conferences were forgeries, fakes, and figments of Hamada's imagination. "The two conferences referred to in the letter which you sent did not take place simply because no one but Madame Hamada and two or three speakers whom she had invited attended."<sup>585</sup> The person writing the report added, "[a]t the time they were a great joke and people still remember them."<sup>586</sup> The report does not explicitly cite which conferences Hamada fabricated.

The report chronicles Hamada's regional conference trajectory: "[f]rom Beirut Madame Hamada went to Damascus where she was able to collect money to take her to Baghdad where she again organized an imaginary conference and secured, on the strength of what she was going to do, money to take her to Tehran."<sup>587</sup> The regional movements cited in the report mirror Hamada's movements: first she was in Beirut, then Damascus, then Baghdad, then Tehran—each movement coincided with a women's conference. The report was not just charting her activist itinerary, however. The report called into question what she was doing in each respective site. The report presents the conference in Baghdad as a complete fiction. The report continues the allegation lodged against Hamada by the Druze leader who said that she defrauded donors into giving money to her cause of women's rights. The report intimated that Hamada did not do what she said she was going to do with the funds she raised. Per the report, not only was Hamada mendacious, she also purloined donations for personal gain.

The report said she did not do what she promised to do with the funds she raised, but the historical record proves otherwise. At least some of the conferences happened;

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<sup>585</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>586</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>587</sup> *ibid.* Underline in the original.



others may have been fabricated or exaggerated to build a case in support of making Hamada a representative on the committee. The Beirut report challenged Hamada's role in the Arab women's conferences in Beirut and questioned whether the Eastern Women's Conferences in Damascus and Tehran happened. The record about the Arab women's conference hosted in Beirut in 1928 is weak. It may have been that a smaller Arab women's conference was called to rival that organized by the Lebanese Women's Union wherein Warda al-Yaziji was honored as the mother of Lebanon, or it may have been the same conference. Newspaper articles, reports to international women's organizations, and surviving post-event reports compiled by outside observers list Hamada as the president of the Eastern Women's Conferences.<sup>588</sup>

The Eastern Women's Conferences hosted in Beirut and Tehran in 1930 and 1932 respectively and tentatively scheduled for Istanbul in 1934 convened delegates from around the "East." An observer from the International Woman Suffrage Alliance attended the 1930 conference in Damascus and the conference made the local papers, albeit only in the form of short, half-column reports. The conference session hosted in Baghdad in 1932 also made local papers. The Eastern Women's Conference hosted in Tehran in 1932 was chronicled in the papers in Tehran and select speeches were printed. Whether the local leaders of the women's movement in Beirut dismissed the conferences as shams because Hamada chaired them is impossible to ascertain. But delegates gathered to discuss the status of women in their societies and how that status might be improved.

Perhaps, the women's organizations in Beirut that countered Hamada's claims to being a leader of the "Eastern" women's movement doubted the legitimacy of the

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<sup>588</sup> Three external citations exist, Avra Theodoropolous, "The Oriental Women's Congress in Damascus, Part II: The Alliance Delegate's Report," *Jus Suffragii* 24.12 (September 1930): 190; Henri Massé, *Le Deuxième congrès musulman général des femmes d'Orient à Téhéran* (Paris: *Revue des Etudes Islamiques*, 1933); and the cover of the July 1930 edition of *al-Nāqid* (see the cover image of Chapter Two).

conferences because Hamada ceded floor time to governmental representatives who bloviated about their commitment to women's rights—a commitment that went unsupported by legislative action. Or, perhaps the report controverted a series of conferences that Hamada did in fact convene in Beirut, but that had low attendance numbers. The imprecision of the report's material about the "imaginary conferences" makes it hard to determine which ones may have been fake and which ones were real. It is also challenging to verify whether Hamada was lying about the conferences, amplifying them, or whether the source mistakenly dismissed the conferences. Hamada was not the first person to partake in a little resume padding to secure a desired job or position.

First, the report discredited the Beirut roots of the Arab Feminist Academy. Second, the report questioned the veracity of the series of conferences that happened in Beirut between 1928 and 1930, after which point Hamada did not return to Beirut. The report draws upon interview and observational evidence to discredit Hamada's actions while in Beirut, but once she leaves the city, it details her actions or activities with less precision. The report correctly follows her travel trajectory to Damascus and then Baghdad and then Tehran, but the report loses track of her for a few years after Tehran. The incendiary "quarrel" may have been the reason that she chose to leave Beirut around 1930. More likely she left Syria to pursue employment and activist options in the United States, rather than to evade the fallout of a disagreement. While in the United States, Hamada forged allegiances with American women's organizations. Between the conferences and her appeal to the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women, Hamada was in the United States trying, unsuccessfully, to gain American citizenship.

While in the United States, Hamada learned English, taught Arabic, and—it seems—cast herself as a princess. That Hamada paraded as an Arabian princess was the final piece of unfavorable evidence that the report offered regarding Hamada’s candidacy for the Committee of Experts. A resident of Beirut ran into Hamada at the “Chicago Fair



“Princess of Peace” *The Evening News* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 7 December 1933: 5.

where, with two attendants, she was posing as an Arab princess, which of course she isn’t.”<sup>589</sup> Hamada declared that she was an Oriental princess, but she did not claim a specific royal lineage. The arrival of “Princess Nour Hamada” in the United States was announced in newspapers across the United States; the information may have been syndicated through a newswire. The announcement showed up in newspapers from Circleville, Ohio to San Bernardino, California, and in many states in between. The announcement, presumably written and distributed by Hamada herself, was accompanied by a headshot that featured Hamada in a headcovering that left her neck and face visible, looking at the camera with a composed smile.

The image was varyingly headlined “Princess of Peace,” and “The Princess Fights for Peace.”<sup>590</sup> The accompanying copy read

Princess Nour Hamada, leader of the Syrian, Arabian, and Oriental Women’s Alliance, who is in New York to co-operate with American women in a campaign for world peace.

<sup>589</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Extracts from a letter received from Beirut, Syria, 24 February 1938.

<sup>590</sup> The announcement was published in at least seven newspapers between December 7 and December 15, 1933 including the *Belvedere Daily Republican* (Belvedere, Illinois), *The Corsicana Daily Sun* (Corsicana, Texas), *The Circleville Herald* (Circleville, Ohio), *The Evening News* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), *The Lincoln Star* (Lincoln, Nebraska), *The San Bernardino County Sun* (San Bernardino, California).

The Princess is the first woman of the Orient to visit the United States on an official mission.<sup>591</sup>

Hamada's choice to declare herself a princess may have been an attempt to gain the attention of the American women's movement. Her professed reason for the trip was to conduct a study of the women's movement in the United States. It is possible that Hamada translated the Arabic language honorific "*emira*" into "princess." Hamada came from a well-established family of Druze religious elites; *emira* may have been a title that was used to describe her in Lebanon. What she hoped to gain by claiming the title of "princess" in the United States remains unclear.

Hamada did not claim the honorific "princess" when she lobbied the League of Nations to create a position for Eastern women on the new committee. The selective deployment in her usage of "princess" perhaps captures an awareness of her audience. Unlike the average American newspaper reader, League officials would have known that there was no kingdom in Syria or Lebanon in 1937 because Syria and Lebanon were still under the French mandate. Nonetheless, the portion of the report that reported on Hamada's declaration that she was a princess was true. The hearsay reported in the "Beirut report" made headlines in the United States.

What emerges from Hamada's American media crusade announcing her arrival in New York to work with American women as an official delegate and royal representative is a certain degree of media savvy, an awareness of the marketability of an "Oriental" feminist, and the fluidity of the terms used to convey her origins. She knew how to use the press to her advantage. She knew about the ignorance of the American public about the "Orient." And perhaps she was aware of American fascination with royalty and aristocracies. She understood that American audiences were interested in women's

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<sup>591</sup> "Princess of Peace." *The Evening News* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 7 December 1933: 5.

movements from other parts of the world. Furthermore, the campaign captures the ever-changing labels that she used to describe the constituency she claimed to represent depending on audience. In the newspaper article she claimed to be the leader of the “Syrian, Arabian, and Oriental Women’s Alliance.” She did not claim to represent this organization in any other venues and it is likely that the organization had a very limited corresponding membership body—it is not cited elsewhere. This is not to agree with the “Beirut report” that that all of the organizations Hamada claimed to represent were facades, just that the “Syrian, Arabian, and Oriental Women’s Alliance” lacks any corresponding evidence.

Unlike the names of the organizations she claimed to represent at the League of Nations, she used two regional terms in the organization’s name: “Syrian” and “Arabian.” Her use of “Syria” likely aligned with the contours of Greater Syria. The precise meaning of “Arabian” is harder to determine. Other Arab women used “Arabian” during this period when writing in English. The term translated to what would have been “Arab” in Arabic—that is, Arabian was linked to the peoples who spoke Arabic, and not just people from the Arabian Peninsula. Hamada’s fluid usage of terms like “Syrian,” “Arabian,” “Eastern,” and “Oriental” captures more than slippery creativity on her part; instead, it represents the general mutability of the terms during this era. There was no single label that women from Syria or Lebanon used on the international level. Hamada tried to manipulate this definitional gray area to her advantage when appealing to the American public and to the League.

The report concluded with a final invalidation of Hamada’s fitness for representation of Eastern women on the committee. Hamada was not a true princess and

the report said, “neither is she a lawyer, as she told you.”<sup>592</sup> The person investigating Hamada in Beirut explicitly asked the Druze leader about her *juris doctor* and “he was sure that she never studied law unless it had been in the States in the past five years and he doubted that. She does not even have a degree from a university.”<sup>593</sup> Hamada had attended Université Saint-Joseph in Beirut, but she may have not graduated. Hamada’s claim that she had earned a law degree was likely fabricated. Her lie was meant to enhance her credentials for membership on the League of Nation’s Committee of Experts, which was assembled to assess the legal status of women. However, this was a lie, not just an exaggeration. Legal training, unlike membership or leadership credentials, by this time required a concrete legal education. The other points of the report—whether or not the organizations existed, who constituted the membership, who organized and led the conferences—could have been biased depending on the source of the information. A law degree was incontrovertible. Either the degree was awarded or it was not. Existing evidence supports the claim that she lied about her legal credentials.

The person who asked the unnamed Druze leader about Hamada’s past—no other sources were explicitly cited—concluded the report by vouching for his or her research methods: “[w]e have checked these facts pretty carefully, so are sure of them as we can be without consulting anyone in Baghdad or Teheran.”<sup>594</sup> For further information about Hamada’s previous fraudulent attempts to pass herself off as a legitimate representative of the “Eastern women’s movement,” the report-creator suggested that the Secretariat contact Margery Corbett Ashby. Corbett Ashby had been contacted a few years prior by a women’s federation in Beirut contradicting Hamada’s claim that she was their

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<sup>592</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Extracts from a letter received from Beirut, Syria, 24 February 1938.

<sup>593</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>594</sup> *ibid.*

representative.<sup>595</sup> The women's federation told Corbett Ashby that Hamada had "no authority [to act as their representative] and was in no way connected with their group. At that time, I believe, that Madame Hamada was the 'leader of the Suffrage Movement in the East'!"<sup>596</sup> By the late 1930s, Hamada no longer emphasized her suffrage credentials when interacting with international women's organizations because the language used by those organizations had switched from "suffrage" to "women's rights" and "peace." Hamada's earlier claim that she was a leader of the suffrage movement represented another self-aggrandizing stretch of evidence and fit within a larger pattern of overstating her credentials; the lie was that she had law degree. The rapporteur concluded the report stating, "[o]bviously the woman is a fake from beginning to end."<sup>597</sup>

The confidential report provided enough evidence for the League to dismiss both Hamada's nomination for the position and Hamada's campaign for including an "Eastern" representative on the Committee of Experts—the latter was the greater tragedy. The report, however biased—or objective—its compiler and contents were, provides evidence about the context of Hamada's appeal to the League. Her life and her activism, or claims to activism, transcended international borders. The reports of her leadership claims exposed power-rivalries in the Lebanese women's movement. There were various visions for how to orchestrate the women's rights movement in Lebanon.

The report also gives evidence about the League's engagement with the question of including a representative or legal expert about the status of women in the Orient. It seems Hamada momentarily succeeded in persuading the Secretariat that the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women should be as global and representative as the

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<sup>595</sup> Efforts to locate this correspondence were unsuccessful.

<sup>596</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Extracts from a letter received from Beirut, Syria, 24 February 1938.

<sup>597</sup> *ibid.*

governing body it was connected to, which meant including a representative from the “Orient.” The investigation into Hamada’s background evinces that the Secretariat briefly considered Hamada’s nomination, but wanted to make sure the representative of the “East” was of good repute. Had the League been serious about including a representative from the “Orient,” they could have found many a qualified representative. Hamada’s campaign for “Eastern” representation was valid, even if she was not the best advocate for the cause.

The report defamed Hamada’s reputation and was thus filed away in a folder labeled “Representation of the Orient” that was stamped “strictly confidential.” But before the file was secreted to a vault, the report circulated among the Secretariat officials. Princess Radziwill wrote McKinnon Wood in mid-March. She said “[y]ou may be interested in the enclosed [report], especially if Miss Paul continues her campaign. I think it is useful to have authoritative information showing what credence can be given to [Hamada’s] statements.”<sup>598</sup> By March, Hamada had enlisted the support of Alice Paul in trying to secure representation from the East on the committee. However, since Paul had exasperated the League, she was not the most useful of allies for Hamada. Even with external support there was no chance of Hamada redeeming herself in the eyes of the Secretariat. McKinnon Wood jotted a handwritten response to Radziwill’s note sharing the report. He agreed that it “is very valuable information. I think it should be kept confidential.”<sup>599</sup> The legal section of the Secretariat did not have an existing system for keeping files secret, so McKinnon Wood did not have a clear recommendation for how to go about keeping the material confidential, but he did not want the damning report to go

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<sup>598</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Letter from Gabrielle Radziwill to Hugh McKinnon Wood, 15 March 1938.

<sup>599</sup> *ibid.*



public. He added, “if we have any trouble with Miss Paul we could at least ask her to provide confidence of the existence of the Hamada organizations.”<sup>600</sup> The question of Eastern representation was briefly placed on the Secretariat’s docket through Hamada’s pressure and the coalition she established with Paul, who as an experienced international advocate for women’s rights.

Hamada was not given a chance to challenge the content of the report and to clear her name—some of the contents of the report would have been hard to counter, such as her artificial legal degree and official mission to the United States as an Oriental Princess. Other allegations that were contained in the report, like the contention that the conferences she used as evidence of her leadership credentials, may have been easily explained or contextualized—as could the question of the existence of the nominating Lebanese and American women’s organizations. The members of the Secretariat privy to the report believed it rendered her an unfit candidate for collaboration with the League. However, Hamada’s *persona non grata* status was unbeknownst to her and over the course of the next year she continued to lobby the Secretariat on behalf of securing a position for “Eastern” women at the League.

For the remainder of 1938, Hamada’s correspondences with the League transformed from a campaign for Eastern representation into an increasingly thinly-guised appeal for Hamada herself to fill the post. Hamada’s campaign for representation, whether it was for herself or the larger collective of Eastern women, forced the League to engage questions of which organizations were granted access to the League’s discussions of the status of women. The League’s answer had lasting ramifications for local and regional women’s organizations ability to access the League.

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<sup>600</sup> *ibid.*

## Round Two: Proving “International” Connections

Hamada’s campaign to represent Oriental women picked up again on the eve of the first meeting of the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women. The meeting was scheduled for April 4, 1938. On April 1, Hamada sent a letter on the combined letterhead of Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women and the Arab Feminist Academy to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations. Hamada was still staying at the Hôtel de Russie and she listed the hotel as her return address. Hamada’s letter was frank: “I have the honor to request that you allow me to attend the meeting of the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women of the League of Nations.”<sup>601</sup> She expressed that her presence at the committee meeting would enable her “to present a report on the resolutions passed by the Oriental Women’s Congresses in Damascus, Beirut, Baghdad, and Tehran.”<sup>602</sup> Hamada wrote to the League on behalf of the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women—she noted she was president of the organization. Below her signature she claimed the title of “representative of Oriental women” (*Représentante des Femmes Orientales*).

After the Secretariat approved the members of the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women, they were invited to the inaugural meeting of the committee, albeit without an Eastern representative. The committee’s first session opened with the pomp and circumstance that aligned with the League’s institutional image of being on the vanguard of the “women’s question.” Joseph Avenol, who replaced Drummond as Secretary-General of the League of Nations in 1933, opened the first meeting claiming

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<sup>601</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Letter from Madame Nour Hamada-Bey to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, 1 April 1938.

<sup>602</sup> *ibid.*

that the Committee of Experts represented a great stride toward coming up with a solution to the question of women's legal status, one part of the larger "women's question" the League had been addressing since its founding in 1920.<sup>603</sup> Women's nationality was one part of women's legal status, but "legal status" meant more than just nationality. His speech chronicled the League's internal history of how it had addressed the question of women's status and its successes in responding to the request of small states and women's organizations for more rights and protections for women.

Avenol cited 1930 as the beginning of the League's engagement with questions on the legal status of women. He acknowledged that during The Hague conference the lack of international consensus regarding nationality laws garnered a lot of attention. The absence of an international norm regarding women's legal status sometimes rendered women nationless. Avenol observed that the conference was unable to agree to the general principle that men and women should have equal access to the right to nationality. Despite its lack of formal consensus, the conference "unanimously declare[d] that the individual governments should endeavor to make their law approximate to this principle [of equality] so far as possible."<sup>604</sup> Avenol praised the promise of legal equality with regards to national rights as progress. After The Hague Conference on Codification of International Law, the issue of women's status did not fade from international attention. Rather, Avenol emphasized, the issue steadily gained international support through the consistent engagement of Latin American nations and international women's organizations.

Avenol credited the Seventh International Conference of American States in

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<sup>603</sup> LN R3771 3A/33305/31757 Legal, General. Speech by the Secretary-General to the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women, 4 April 1938.

<sup>604</sup> *ibid.*

Montevideo, Uruguay in 1933 as the spark that created the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women. After the conference Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina registered the Montevideo resolutions at the Secretariat. In 1933, three nations brought the question of the status of women before the Assembly. The next year, in 1934, fifteen governments had seized the mantle of women's status under international law and asked the League to insert the question on the League's agenda in 1935.<sup>605</sup> The question of women's nationality was not formally inserted into the League's agenda until 1937. Avenol was excited about the possibility of even greater international support for the issue of women's legal status, but warned the committee members of some of the problems that casting the status of women as an issue of international importance might cause.

Agreeing on a definition of what the phrase "legal status of women" meant was the primary challenge that Avenol highlighted. The "'legal status of women' means for the governments not a single problem which can be solved by the application of a single principle," he remarked, "but a multiplicity of highly complex legal and social problems which assume very different aspects according to the social and legal habits and structure of different countries."<sup>606</sup> As a result, there was no singular, or universal, definition of what the legal status of women meant. This lack of consensus made it challenging to internationalize a commonly agreed upon idea of what legal protections and rights should be awarded to women regardless of their home nation. The member states of the League

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<sup>605</sup> The South American nations that put forth the proposal were later joined by the U.S.S.R., Czechoslovakia, Turkey, Mexico, Chile, Columbia, China, Panama, Siam, Dominican Republic, New Zealand, Latvia, Argentina, Haiti, and Yugoslavia in supporting the principle of women's equality in nationality. See A.7 (1935) V and V. Legal 1935. V. 1. Their appeal to the Secretary-General read: "In view of the worldwide restrictions upon the rights of women—the right to earn a living, the right to an education, to hold public office, to enter the professions—and in view of the interdependence of nationality and the right to work, the following delegations request that there be brought before the First Committee the Convention for Equality from Women in Nationality entered into at the recent Conference of American Republics at Montevideo [1933]."

<sup>606</sup> LN R3771 3A/33305/31757 Legal, General. Speech by the Secretary-General to the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women, 4 April 1938.

were divided about whether or not the status of women was an issue of domestic jurisdiction or one of international concern. Even the countries that supported casting the issue as international could not agree, as Avenol observed in his speech, about “whether any practical action can be taken by the League.”<sup>607</sup> Because the League acted on the consensus of its organizations, in the absence of consensus, no definitive commitment to action could be taken.

States were divided about what international women’s rights protections would look like and how they would be enforced. Likewise, women’s organizations were divided on how international women’s rights should be defined and furthermore how they should function. Even the women’s organizations that had championed increasing international protections for women for the better part of two decades had not united around a common idea of which legal protections should be enforced by the League. Despite the lack of a unified vision of what women’s rights on the international level would entail, enough women’s organizations and governments had lobbied the League to get the question of the legal status of women on the League’s agenda. Its inclusion was historic, as it was the first action taken by the League to internationalize women’s rights. Avenol was hopeful that the Committee of Experts had the potential to provide the data necessary to impel further progress on standardizing the rights and protections available to women in the member states of the League of Nations. The rationale for collating information on the spectrum of women’s rights protections in different countries seems to have been to establish a middle ground for women’s rights that could be registered at the League.

Avenol expressed his desire that the publication of the results of the committee’s

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<sup>607</sup> *ibid.*, 2.

inquiry would form a “comprehensive objective statement of what the legal status of women actually is in the different countries of the world.”<sup>608</sup> The League’s attempt to collect information about the legal status of women in different nations reflected a faith in data—numbers and comparative analysis revealed differences in how independent nation states conceptualized women’s right to legal protections. What the League would do with the data once it was collected was another question—a question that Avenol deflected.

Applause marked the end of Avenol’s inaugural speech. What Avenol and the assembled delegates, committee members, and representatives of women’s organizations celebrated was the fact that the League had created an infrastructure to study the legal status of women. However, the system resulted in some of the world’s women being excluded from participating in the study. The League was not naturally inclined to include a representative of Eastern women. Hamada’s dubious past, questionable integrity, and the eviscerating report did not aid the effort to include women and legal experts on the Committee of Experts who were not from Anglo-European countries. The committee’s membership entrenched the exclusionary dynamics of who could be part of the conversation about women’s rights and constituted one of the legacies of the committee. The other legacy was the internationalization of the question of the legal status of women. The fact that seven legal experts from European nations and the United States gathered in Geneva meant that the “women’s question” had become officially intertwined into notions of international governance. League promises were finally transformed into League action on the question of women’s status.

Integrating the “women’s question” into international governance was a success for the international women’s organizations and the small states who had championed the

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<sup>608</sup> *ibid.*, 3.

cause. The success did not translate into a personal triumph for Hamada. She continued to engage the League's Secretariat by attempting to gain entry into the Committee of Experts planning conversations about women's legal status. Hamada wrote the League on April 11, 1938 after the first session had ended. She had not been granted permission to present the resolutions of the Eastern Women's Conferences to the League's committee. The Committee of Experts' sessions were closed to the public. This second April missive responded to a letter sent by the League to Hamada that questioned the origins and membership of the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women. By this juncture, Hamada had already been thoroughly discredited by the secret investigation, but the League officials were not going to reveal the information they had received. Instead, they asked general bureaucratic questions to justify their exclusion of Hamada and the "Eastern" women's organizations she claimed to represent.

Hamada addressed her response to the "League of Nations' Committee of Experts for the Status of Women." She missed the "legal" part of the committee's title in her letter's addressee line. The omission of "legal" may have been an honest mistake because the committee's title was cumbersome. This omission also sends a subtle signal about how Hamada viewed the committee's purpose; she thought the Committee of Experts was supposed to address the entirety of the question of the status of women, not just a legal subset of the larger question. The content of her letter also did not reference the "legal" mandate of the committee, and instead proceeded to list the activist credentials of the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women and, by extension, herself.

The letter provides a brief history of the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women. Per Hamada's account, the council was born out of the first

congress of Oriental women hosted in Damascus in 1930 “in the presence of a delegation of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance.”<sup>609</sup> Hamada found great significance in the fact that an international observer connected to a European women’s organization observed the conference—this observer legitimized the conference proceedings. Hamada was aware of the League’s emphasis on international organizations, so she played up the international connections of the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women. Not only did an international representative attend and report on the congress, but also the membership of the organization was international. The Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women, Hamada noted, had “members from the Near and Far East,” which conveyed to the committee that this organization was not just a local organization, but one that represented women from throughout the Orient. Her emphasis on the pan-Oriental, or what she sometimes referred to as “Eastern,” connections of the congress hints at Hamada’s conceptualization of international—an organization that had representatives from more than one nation and more than one region of the world was “international.” In Hamada’s definition, the West need not be represented in an organization for it to be classed as international.

Hamada’s letter placed great import on the congress’ connection to international women’s organizations, its international membership, and its links to the international governing body, the League of Nations. Hamada’s letter contended that Emily Gourd, the General Secretary of the IWSA, conveyed the resolutions of the First Eastern Women’s Conference to the League of Nations.<sup>610</sup> Hamada emphasized “relations between the

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<sup>609</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Letter from Nour Hamada to the “League of Nations’ Committee of Experts on the Status of Women,” 11 April 1938.

<sup>610</sup> If this account is correct, no record of these resolutions were registered with the League of Nations Secretariat.



League of Nations and the Oriental Women's Organizations are in continual development."<sup>611</sup> This observation may have yielded a guffaw or two from the Secretariat members who read her letter because, from their perspective, there was no place for Hamada or her organization (which they believed to be a sham) at the League of Nations.

The letter not only communicates Hamada's understanding of what constituted "international" organizing and engagement, it also provides evidence about the issues that Hamada, and perhaps the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women thought were "international women's issues." Hamada remembers the

resolutions of the 1930 Damascus congress as containing the following postulates: equal rights for women and men in education, work, marriage and divorce; elevation of the age of marriage; more rights for the women in the heir; abolition of polygamy; reduction of the sum of the dot given to the wife either by her father or by her husband; vote for instructed women in all countries; organization of school film representations; and, comprehension and concord between West and East.<sup>612</sup>

Hamada's memory of the issues headlined at the 1930 Damascus conference were very similar to the issues that were raised at any number of international women's conferences hosted by the ICW and the IWSA: equality, suffrage, censorship of immoral content. Some of the resolutions were more region-specific, such as raising the marriage age, eliminating polygamy, and enhancing East-West relations. The major international women's organizations did not emphasize improving relations with the "East" as one of their major organizing principles. The resolutions from the 1930 conference were

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<sup>611</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Letter from Nour Hamada to the "League of Nations' Committee of Experts on the Status of Women," 11 April 1938.

<sup>612</sup> *ibid.* It is unclear what "dot" references in the third line. I am trying to investigate possible meanings. Hamada wrote this letter in English, or had someone else write it for her. Her communications with the league were in Arabic, French, English. The tone and style of the letters written in English and French varied wildly in tone and style, which suggests that she may have worked with a translator to prepare her letters for the League. Or, Hamada may have crafted the letters herself. Hamada learned English and French as second languages and this may have caused the heterodox (e.g. postulates), unclear, or uneven language choices throughout this letter and the other letters she sent to the League. The letter has been quoted so that the original syntax is preserved.

confirmed at the 1932 “congress of Oriental Women at Baghdad and Teheran.”<sup>613</sup>

Hamada’s letter communicated the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women’s legitimacy on international as well as regional levels. Hamada reported that Hamada organized the 1930 and 1932 conferences in conjunction with the “Majesties and Queens of Iraq and Iran.” The Queen of Iran accepted the honorary presidency of the congress hosted in her country. Not only did the queens bolster the cause of the conference, so too did the hosting governments. Hamada reported that the governments of Syria, Iraq, and Iran sent official delegates to the conferences to demonstrate their support of the initiatives. Hamada used the presence of governmental representatives in conjunction with the presence of royalty to prove the regional support of the organization. Hamada played up the support she received from the governments of member states of the League. Perhaps she thought their endorsement would improve her chances of being recognized as a legitimate representative of the region’s women.

The second April letter did not signal surrender. It was intent on proving the legitimacy of both the organization and its leader. The letter addressed the regional and international *bona fides* of Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women. In addition, the letter emphasized why Hamada was its legitimate representative in Geneva. At the first congress in Damascus, the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women “designated me as life president and representative of this Council.”<sup>614</sup> It is difficult to determine whether or not this title was actually conferred on Hamada at the conference by her peers. Hamada is not listed as the “life president” of the council in the program of the Second Eastern Women’s Conference in Tehran. However,

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<sup>613</sup> *ibid.* The title of this conference differs from previous citations used by Hamada to reference the 1932 conference, which she often referred to as the Second Eastern Women’s Conference.

<sup>614</sup> *ibid.*

she is listed as the president of that particular iteration of the conference. The exaggeration of her title, if it was indeed exaggerated, was meant to certify her position as the leader of the organization and thereby enhance her chances of landing a position on the committee. Instead of legitimizing her campaign for a position on the League committee, the titular white lie further discredited Hamada in the eyes of the Secretariat. Hamada, of course, was not aware of the fact that she had been secretly investigated in Beirut. She did not know she was fighting a losing battle against a damning report submitted by a source trusted by Secretariat officials to secure a post for herself, or another Eastern woman, on the Committee of Experts for the Legal Status of Women. Hamada's campaign continued. If Hamada was denied entry to the first session of the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women, she was intent on gaining entry to the second session. Her try-try-try-again ethos persisted.

Hamada may have recognized League officials might not trust the self-proclaimed title of "life president." A letter from the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women was received by the Secretariat in June. The letter was handwritten in French and signed by Madame Mounira Salih Bey. She said she was the secretary of the *L'Alliance Féministe* (Feminist Alliance), which claimed membership with the Alliance for the General Oriental Women. The letter was not dated; it may have been sent to the League in April or May to try and bolster Hamada's nomination campaign. Or, the letter may have been sent from Baakline, Lebanon in response to a second request from the League for verification of Hamada's credentials.<sup>615</sup> The letter supported Hamada's claim that she had been elected president for life at the First Eastern Women's Conference in Damascus in 1930.

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<sup>615</sup> Hamada was born in Baakline and had relatives in the town.

The letter from Mounira Salih Bey added that the executive office of the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women had been stationed in Beirut and then in Damascus. The executive office of the organization was now in Geneva because “it is located wherever its founder and president, Nour Hamada, considers it to be.”<sup>616</sup> In addition to deciding where the executive committee would be based, Salih claimed that Hamada was “qualified to conduct all of the affairs concerning this organization.”<sup>617</sup> Salih’s letter supported Hamada’s nomination to the Committee of Experts as a representative of the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women, an organization dedicated to improving the status of women; and, the letter also provided further fodder for the League’s rejection of Hamada’s nomination to the committee because of their suspicion that she was a fraud. The League officials might have queried, what sort of organization has a roving home office and directorate? What kind of association appoints a leader for life? Both of these were uncommon organizational structures. The mobile directorate and Hamada’s lifetime appointment as president may have been further evidence against Hamada’s nomination. The League’s response to Salih’s letter did not engage the points that Salih presented in favor of Hamada, but rather focused on the organization she claimed to represent and stipulated that the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women was not international enough to merit inclusion on the Committee of Experts.

Salih’s letter supporting Hamada conveys Salih’s uncertainty regarding what constituted “international.” Did a membership body comprising of women and men from

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<sup>616</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Letter from Madame Mounira Salih Bey to the Secretariat of the League of Nations, n.d. (received by Secretariat on 14 June 1938). The letter is written in French with Arabic syntax—French was probably a second language for Mounira Salih.

<sup>617</sup> *ibid.*

around the world make an organization international? Did support from different national governments make an organization international? Did the location of its conferences and meetings make an organization international? Did the seat of its executive branch make an organization international? She tried to prove the Superior Council of the Alliance of the General Oriental Woman was international by establishing that it had hosted conferences in Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. If the League defined international as the locations that it hosted its conferences, then the Superior Council would pass the League's criteria and be categorized as international. But, perhaps the League defined international in different ways. Salih also noted that the national governments of Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq supported the conferences. She "hoped the League of Nations would consider it as an international association, since it was officially recognized by these local governments when it was founded."<sup>618</sup> Salih went on to add that the organization had decided that its executive branch would be based in Damascus and Beirut. While both cities were part of the French mandate, a diffused executive branch might have signaled internationalness to the League.

Salih's letter asserted that the Superior Council had hosted meetings in more than one country, that it had the support of four national governments, and that its executive branch was split between two cities in two different cities—not to mention its representation at the League through Hamada. Salih's valiant attempts to prove the Superior Council's international status did not align with the League's definition of "international." In defining international, the League valued membership and message. In both regards, the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Woman did not pass muster as an international organization.

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<sup>618</sup> *ibid.*

Prior to rejecting Salih's explanation of the Superior Council's international connections and credentials, the League had an internal conversation about what organizations should be classified as international and therefore be given access to the League's proceedings as non-governmental actors. Hugh McKinnon Wood wrote to the Intellectual Cooperation Section and the Information Bureau to confirm the League's policy concerning its engagement with organizations that were not international.<sup>619</sup> McKinnon Wood observed that this was the "first occasion on which the Secretariat has informed an organization, claiming to be international, that it could not be as sufficiently representative to have relations with the League."<sup>620</sup> He cited Internal Circular 28 (1927) as the source for the League's rules for dealing with communications from organizations that did not fit the League's definition of international. He noted that "precedent may be important" in this instance.<sup>621</sup> The legal section responded that it was not the first time that an organization had been informed it was not "considered as sufficiently representative to be considered an international organization."<sup>622</sup> But it was the first time such a message had to be put in writing because in previous cases the message was delivered "by word of mouth that the rules laid down by the League of Nations do not allow of this. It has never been done before in writing as the people concerned accepted the Section's ruling without protest."<sup>623</sup>

Before the League dismissed the Superior Council as not fulfilling its international criteria, the League double-checked to make sure the organization did not

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<sup>619</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Memo from Hugh McKinnon Wood to the Intellectual Cooperation Section and Information Bureau, 20 June 1938.

<sup>620</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>621</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>622</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Memo from the Legal Section to Hugh McKinnon Wood, 23 June 1938.

<sup>623</sup> *ibid.*

adhere to international parameters established in Internal Circular 28. After receiving Salih's letter, the League was suspicious of Hamada's organization. An internal League correspondence stated, "[t]here is strong reason to suppose that the Alliance générale féministe orientale of which Madame Nour Hamada Bey is stated to be the présidente fondatrice, the présidente à vie and the représente officielle is not an organization which it is desirable for the League to recognize"<sup>624</sup> Even so, the Secretariat proceeded with verifying whether the organization was international, per the League's requirements.

The League's hesitation in recognizing Hamada's organization had to do with the heterodox structure of her organization and with Hamada herself. McKinnon Wood noted, "We know nothing whatever about the organisation but we do know something (not at all to her advantage) about Madame Hamada Bey." This was an explicit reference to the confidential report delivered to the League in February by Ruth Frances Woodsmall. Still, the League did not dismiss Hamada and the Superior Council out of hand. McKinnon Wood asked another League official in the Legal Section to seek further information about Hamada and the organizations supporting her "protest against the composition of the Committee."<sup>625</sup>

In February, the League had investigated Hamada. By June, the members of the Secretariat were no longer investigating Hamada, but the organizations that sent a "series of demands for her inclusion on the Committee for the study of the legal status of women."<sup>626</sup> The organizations under League inquiry were the Alliance for the General Oriental Women, Orient-Occident League Arab Feminist Academy, and the Committee

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<sup>624</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Memo from Hugh McKinnon Wood to the Intellectual Cooperation Section and Information Bureau, 20 June 1938. Underlined and untranslated French in the original.

<sup>625</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>626</sup> *ibid.*

of Oriental Women. McKinnon Wood noted that Hamada herself was President and representative of Alliance for the General Oriental Women and the Orient-Occident League. The League also recorded that Hamada wrote on behalf of the first three organizations in addition to the Syrian Feminist Union and the League of All Mohammedan Women of the World. Each organization that had written in support of Hamada, or that Hamada had referenced as an organization that supported her in her personal appeal to the League, was under investigation. The League was willing to investigate the organizations to make sure they were not dismissing the campaign without merit, but the League was not unbiased as it inquired into the credentials of Hamada's coterie of women's organizations. McKinnon Wood observed, "I think it is already clear that it would not be desirable for Mme Hamada's organization to be included among the women's organizations with which the above-mentioned Committee is collaborating."<sup>627</sup> Nonetheless, the call for more information went out and the members of the Secretariat returned with their findings.

Three days after the investigation into the internationality of Hamada's organizations was sanctioned, Hamada marched up the marble steps leading to the League of Nations headquarters. Her secretary—likely Mouri—and her lawyer flanked her as she marched into the main hall of the *Palais des Nations* and proceeded down the corridor toward the warren of Secretariat offices. She asked, the League official in the Intellectual Cooperation Section and International Bureau "that her organization should be listed amongst the International organizations on whose activities the International

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<sup>627</sup> *ibid.*



Organisations Bulletin reports.”<sup>628</sup> The League informed her that it would be impossible for her organization to be included on the bulletin, unless she could give the “Secretariat adequate printed proof of the composition and activities of the organizations she claims to represent.”<sup>629</sup> In response, Hamada claimed she had an office in New York. The League insisted that the proof of the international composition of her organization needed to be in writing. She left saying she would provide the League with the necessary information. When the League memo was written a few days later, the League had not heard back from her.

Gabrielle Radziwill headed the League’s investigation into the organizations. She contacted three different sources. The first was a member of an “oriental women’s organization, who was in constant contact with the East.”<sup>630</sup> Her informant told her that the organizations listed on Hamada’s card did not exist. The second informant was a member of the American Consulate in Switzerland. This informant told her that the International Orient-Occident League<sup>631</sup> was “not registered in any place in the United States, nor is it listed anywhere, nor has it any charter.”<sup>632</sup> Another unnamed informant, who was “an absolutely reliable authority,” told Radziwill that at the address listed for the New York headquarters of her organization, her organization was not known. The

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<sup>628</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Memo from the Intellectual Cooperation Section and the International Bureau to Hugh McKinnon Wood and the Legal Section, 23 June 1938.

<sup>629</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>630</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Letter from Gabrielle Radziwill to Hugh McKinnon Wood and Mr. Stencek (Legal Section), 30 June 1938.

<sup>631</sup> This *Ligue Internationale Orient-Occident* (International Orient-Occident League) organization appears to the same as the *Ligue Orient-Occident*, only with “international” appended to its name.

<sup>632</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Letter from Gabrielle Radziwill to Hugh McKinnon Wood and Mr. Stencek (Legal Section), 30 June 1938.

premises were let to a professor<sup>633</sup> who was “‘very temperamental’ and ‘full of fads’” and who “‘had a following of some 300 people, chiefly women.’”<sup>634</sup> At the time of the League inquiry, the premises were listed as an art gallery and were in “the hands of someone calling himself the Master of the Institute of the United Arts”—which was the artistic movement founded by the professor.<sup>635</sup> The information given to Radziwill by her New York City based informant was used as evidence that the address given by Hamada—319 West 107<sup>th</sup> Street, New York, New York—was yet another fabrication in a long line of lies served to the League by Hamada in an attempt to gain entry to the League’s proceedings concerning the status of women. It is possible that Hamada was actually affiliated with the professor and he had given her space in his arts center. But as far as the League was concerned, the New York address did not house the headquarters of the International Orient-Occident League and therefore the organization could be discounted as being truly international.

Once Radziwill’s report was submitted, Hugh McKinnon Wood dispatched the following letter to Hamada. “I have to inform you on behalf of the Secretary-General that it is not possible to comply with the request made in your letter.”<sup>636</sup> The letter continued,

[t]he League of Nations has found it necessary to restrict its relations with non-governmental organizations to organizations which are known to it as both international in composition and capable of voicing an important body of international opinion by

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<sup>633</sup> This professor was Professor Nicholas Roerich (1874-1947) who was an artist born in St. Petersburg. He later emigrated to the United States by way of London—he later moved to India. He was a Renaissance man: an archeologist, art historian, furniture designer, poet, peace, activist, botanist, spiritual philosopher, mentor to Marc Chagall, political adviser, costume designer (for Diaghilev’s “Ballets Russes” and Stravinsky’s “The Rite of Spring”), women’s rights advocate, and a founder of a yoga society. He was admired by Einstein, Gandhi, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, and it seems Nour Hamada. He wrote a series of accounts of his journeys through the Himalayas. For a gloss of his career and works see, Julie Besonen, “Visions of a Forgotten Utopia.” *The New York Times* 3 April 2014: MB2.

<sup>634</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Letter from Gabrielle Radziwill to Hugh McKinnon Wood and Mr. Stencek (Legal Section), 30 June 1938.

<sup>635</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>636</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Letter addressed to Madam [draft of a form letter], 20 June 1938.

reason of the size of their membership, the distribution of their members among a number of States and the provisions of their constitutions.<sup>637</sup>

Neither the International Orient-Occident League nor the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women aligned with the League's international definition. Hamada's attempts to be included in the proceedings of the Committee of Experts as a representative followed by her attempts gain access to the League's proceedings through the consultative channel created by the League for international women's organizations had vexed League officials. Her small-scale campaign that began by highlighting the committee's exclusion of "Eastern" representatives and trying to fix it by expanding the ranks of the Committee of Experts had grown into something more.

The League responded to the first round of Hamada's activism by inquiring into her credentials; during the second round of her League-oriented campaign, the members of the legal section of the Secretariat investigated the organizations she listed as supporting her nomination. The League did not justify its exclusion of Hamada in the first round. They just formalized the committee's ranks without her or another representative of the "East." The second round of Hamada's activism forced the League to formalize its definition of what constituted an international organization. Issuing a formal definition of "international" made it clear which types of organizations could have access to the League of Nations. The only organizations that had the international clout to interface with the League were those who had international membership and could prove they voiced a position that was held by the citizens of many nations. The only organizations that fit those criteria were international organizations connected to Europe or the United States. The League's definition of international kept League affairs internal to the members with a seat on the Council. Intraregional organizations, such as

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<sup>637</sup> *ibid.*

Hamada's pan-Arab organization that might have disrupted the League's order were not international and therefore were excluded from the League. Hamada's organizations were not verified by the League; that does not negate the fact that some women in the Arab world were appealing to the League of Nations on behalf of alternative conceptualizations of a gendered world order—one that originated away from and in opposition to European international women's rights norms.

The premise of Hamada's campaign for inclusion—that she was a voice of Arab women—was discredited by both rounds of the League's investigation. The League did not want to have any further actions with her because contact might have sullied the League's reputation. Princess Radziwill cautioned in a letter to other members of the Secretariat, “the members of the Secretariat who are in touch with Mrs. Hamada had better have no further dealings with her on the Secretariat premises.”<sup>638</sup> Hamada got word of the investigation into her international credentials and asked her lawyer to try and have the League release the file. A request from her lawyer was entered into the League registry on July 6, 1938. The request was denied. Many people would have given up at this point. Hamada persisted in her attempts to prove her international credentials.

After the League informed Hamada that her candidacy was under question because the constituencies of the organizations she claimed were not sufficiently international, Hamada set out to prove her international credentials so she could gain access to the sessions of the Committee of Experts. Only organizations with truly international membership were allowed to observe the committee's proceedings—the IWSA, ICW, WILPF, and the Liaison Committee were all granted access. In early August 1938, the Secretariat received an announcement of a forthcoming conference

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<sup>638</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Memo from Gabrielle Radziwill.

hosted by the International Orient-Occident League, which listed “Sitt Nour Hamada Bey, from Lebanon” as its president for life and representative to the League of Nations.<sup>639</sup> The Orient-Occident League had sent a letter nominating Hamada to the Committee of Experts in January. By the time the organization wrote the Secretariat to announce the forthcoming conference, the organization had inserted “international” into its title: *Ligue Internationale Orient-Occident* (International Orient-Occident League). The announcement invited international participation from “[a]ll friends of the East in the West and of the West in the East.”<sup>640</sup> Hamada operated with a binary worldview.

The invitation opened with a brief historical sketch of the International Orient-Occident League. It “was founded in New York in 1937 by ladies and gentlemen of about fifty different countries”—including the United States, the United Kingdom, Lebanon, Turkey, India, Afghanistan, Iran, France, Syria, Egypt, Japan, Greece, Germany, and Iraq.<sup>641</sup> The International Orient-Occident League established a “Permanent International Geneva Delegation” in Geneva in May 1938. The permanent delegation was created in Geneva just as the League was communicating with Hamada that she needed to represent a truly international organization to be considered for entry into sessions with the League.

A circular advertising the international membership of the organization followed the invitation to the conference. In the circular, Hamada’s identity was listed as “Arab.”<sup>642</sup> The fluidity of the labels Hamada used captured how identities were interchangeable. While Hamada was not explicitly listed as the author of the invitation or

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<sup>639</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Invitation to the first General Congress of the Orient-Occident League. July 1938. “Sitt” is a female honorific in Lebanon that translates to “Lady.”

<sup>640</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>641</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>642</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. *Ligue Internationale Orient-Occident* circular, n.d.

the circular, Hamada was clearly involved in its creation. The announcement conveyed Hamada's definition of "international" organizations, which were organizations that bridged the East-West divide. Hamada considered herself a good candidate for an investigation into the status of women around the world because she was "international"; she had international connections and she moved between borders, and border-crossing seemed to be integral to achieving international status, for Hamada anyway.

Earlier, during the conference stage of Hamada's activism in the early 1930s, her conceptualization of international organizing was created in opposition to the West and Western hegemony over the international women's movement. At the League, in the campaign for inclusion in the Committee of Experts, Hamada's definition of international had changed. She still challenged Western dominance over the women's movement when she queried the exclusion of Arab women and Eastern women at the League. But by late 1938, instead of spurning the West she began to forge alliances to demonstrate her ability to integrate with the system of international governance. Perhaps she thought she would get closer to achieving her professed goal of expanding the League's notion of women's rights for Eastern women if she collaborated with Western women's rights organizations. Hamada's definition of "international" had morphed to align with the League's definition of international: the West was positioned as the central node, with other world regions connecting to and through. Hamada's emphasis on East-West relationships was lateral. The "East" did not operate along the north-south axis. Sub-Saharan African organizations and those in the Caucuses, or further north, were not explicitly invited to join the International Orient-Occident League.

The invitation to the conference included a brief outline of the program of events. The conference events would begin with a reception for delegates, members, and

“sympathisers of our League” on September 4 at 8:30 p.m. in the *Foyer de la Femme*—a venue located near the *Palais des Nations*.<sup>643</sup> The next day’s events would include a welcome from Hamada, “[o]ne minute’s silence in honour of the victims of war and economic disorder [*sic*],” and speeches.<sup>644</sup> The provisional program left open the possibility of the event extending into the next few days. The invitation issued a call for speeches about how to “work against destruction by wars of all sort and economic calamities and, consequently, against relapse to barbarity, slavery, and extermination.”<sup>645</sup> Speeches that made “[o]bservations on the practical result of contacts between East and West” were also welcomed by the organizing committee.<sup>646</sup>

A person did not need to attend the conference in order to have a speech registered in the conference proceedings. People who could not attend the conference were invited to send in their suggestions and observations about the conference’s core question. However, the conference did not want to become a speech and comment repository. Instead the invitation to the Orient-Occident League conference expressed that in addition to providing a space for pontification, it also wanted to create proposals for “practical action to be undertaken.”<sup>647</sup> The invitation observed that “[t]he times are grave and call for action to develop friendship, cooperation, and solidarity between all the continents, nations, public and private organizations and individuals.”<sup>648</sup> The congress sought to improve dialogue between the nations in the Eastern Hemisphere and those in the Western Hemisphere. The only stipulation for participation was that the individual

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<sup>643</sup> *ibid.* The foyer was likely a women’s home provided by Catholic nuns.

<sup>644</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Ligue International Orient-Occident circular, n.d.

<sup>645</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>646</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>647</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>648</sup> *ibid.*

not have any political connections. The invitation baldly stated: “[w]e have no political connections.”<sup>649</sup> The prohibition against politics mimicked the structure of international women’s organizations. Hamada was using the same tools and language as international women’s organizations, but she was not achieving the same results.

Hamada’s attempts to prove the “internationalness” of the organizations that she led had a somewhat paradoxical effect. As Hamada emphasized how Orient-Occident League was international, she forgot her previous emphasis on the status of “Eastern” women. Hamada’s campaign for inclusion in the League was forked: she was able to provide sources to prove her international credentials and she could provide proof that she has worked to improve the status of women in the East, but she could not prove that she had worked for international women’s rights, or what aligned with the Committee of Experts’ definition of international women’s rights. Hamada’s campaign deployed the language of pan-Arabism and regional unity in an effort to align with the League’s notions of “international.” However, intraregional did not constitute “international” as far as the League’s bureaucracy was concerned. The League gave intergovernmental organizations like the Inter-American Commission on Women access to the League, but Hamada and other activists from the mandates were not able to initiate intergovernmental activism because their governments were under foreign rule.

### **Phase Three: Hamada’s Final Campaign for Inclusion**

With three days left in 1938, Hamada launched her final effort for including an Eastern woman in the League’s Committee of Experts; she convened a meeting of Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women under the direction of its president. The Swiss newspaper, *La Suisse*, published what seemed to be a press release

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<sup>649</sup> *ibid.*



of the event, which was held in Geneva on December 29, 30, and 31, 1938.<sup>650</sup> The article, which was published on January 3, 1939 recorded that the meeting happened. The article did not record the content of the speeches, or the names of the members of the council present in Geneva, except for the name of its president, “Madame Nour Hamada Bey (Lebanon).” The secretary of the meeting, who was from the “Indes orientales” was cited, but not named in the article.<sup>651</sup> The president welcomed the members of the Alliance present in Geneva and read a letter that she had received from the Her Majesty the Queen Aliya of Iraq. That Queen Aliya was a descendant of the Prophet Mohammed was registered in the article, but what the letter from the Queen conveyed to the assembled members of the executive council was not.

The press release also recorded that the president of the women’s council paid tribute to the memory of King Faysal. The president remembered with gratitude the late king’s “sympathy, favors and support, including the annual Eastern Women’s Congresses in Damascus, Baghdad, and Tehran in 1930 and 1932.”<sup>652</sup> The conference also honored the Shah Bahlawi (Pahlavi) of Iran and the governments of Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Iran. The president also thanked the King Ibn Saud of Hejaz and the late King Nadir Shah of Afghanistan “for their official authorization for women’s delegations to participate in these conferences”—presumably a reference to the conferences from 1930 and 1932. Once the Superior Council had recorded its thanks for the support of the foreign majesties and governments, the program began. The rest of the three-day event was filled with the secretary reading the “many letters from the members of the Superior Council that have

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<sup>650</sup> “Le trafic du Nouvel-an.” *La Suisse* (Geneva, Switzerland) January 3, 1939.

<sup>651</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>652</sup> *ibid.*

been prevented from coming to Geneva from various parts of the East.”<sup>653</sup> The brief four-paragraph article ended by stating that “the meeting decided to renew the previous resolutions and support the entire claims of the International Alliance for Women’s [*sic*] Suffrage, especially before the League of Nations for the status of women.”<sup>654</sup> Hamada’s support for the IWSA was one-sided. The IWSA organization did not express its support for any of Hamada’s organizations. The IWSA was affiliated with the *Union Féministe Arabe* in Syria and Lebanon at the time.<sup>655</sup>

The point of the press release-cum-article was to demonstrate that the Superior Council was still active and to inventory the deep support that the council received from Eastern governments, including the mandate-supported governments of Lebanon and Syria, and royal families. Hamada was able to use local governmental support for good on the international level. Hamada sent the article along with a final note to the League’s Secretariat on January 5. The letterhead of the Superior Council of the Alliance for the General Oriental Women had changed: its Damascus address had been scribbled out and the “Bureau Central” was now listed as the *Foyer de la Femme* in Geneva, where the September Orient-Occident League conference was held.

The letter that accompanied the newspaper clipping evoked the content of the letter Hamada sent the League on April 5, 1938. The January 1939 letter “informed [the League] about the various congresses of the Eastern Alliance of General Women in Damascus, Beirut, Baghdad, and Tehran in 1930, 1931, 1932 and Detroit (Michigan) in

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<sup>653</sup> The original French of the article recorded that the delegates were “empêchées” (pocketed) rather than “empêchées” (prevented) from attending the Geneva session. The translation uses the presumed intended meaning.

<sup>654</sup> “Le trafic du Nouvel-an.” *La Suisse* (Geneva, Switzerland) January 3, 1939.

<sup>655</sup> “Syria—Union Féministe Arabe, President: Mrs. Nucho, Rue G. Picot 155, Beirut.” International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (same organization as the IWSA), “Report of the Twelfth Congress, Istanbul, 18-24 April 1935” (London, England: IWSA), 6.

1935.”<sup>656</sup> This is the first message in any of Hamada’s communications with the League that listed there was a conference hosted in Detroit, Michigan in 1935. The reported names of the conferences hosted in Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad, and Tehran had changed. The changes in the conference names were likely the result of many translations from French into English or from Arabic into English and French and not an attempt to represent another series of conferences. The list of conferences in the press release provided a history of the Superior Councils activities and proved that it was an international organization—it had hosted conferences in the “East” and in the “West.” The article in *La Suisse* was supplied as evidence of the recent meeting of the Superior Council; it showed that the council was still active and that it had national and international support.

After providing proof that the organization was still active, Hamada made one final appeal for inclusion in the proceedings of the Committee of Experts. In April, Hamada had asked to join the session to share information. Now, she just wanted to observe the proceedings. She no longer asked to be included as a League-approved “expert,” but rather she was intent on gaining entry into the session itself: “I hoped to get the permission to participate in a public meeting of your committee, with representatives from other international women’s organizations.”<sup>657</sup> The letter emphasized that Margery Corbett Ashby, President of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance had agreed to support Hamada’s appeal to be given access to a public meeting.<sup>658</sup> Once again, Hamada

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<sup>656</sup> LN R6231 Secret 3A/33220/31757 Status of Women, Committee of Experts, Representation of the Orient. Letter from Nour Hamada to the President of the Committee of Experts of the League of Nations for the Status of Women, 5 January 1939.

<sup>657</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>658</sup> Hamada’s relationship to Corbett Ashby is unclear. The covert investigation into Hamada’s background claimed Hamada had been discredited in the eyes of Corbett Ashby because of her falsely claiming to be a representative of the Lebanese women’s movement.

used her connections with international organizations to justify her inclusion in the proceedings of the Committee of Experts. The record of Hamada's engagement with the League ends with the January 5, 1939 letter.

Hamada spent a full calendar year trying to prove the legitimacy of her nomination and to open the ranks of the committee to include an "Eastern" representative. Her campaign was tainted by allegations of fraud and self-aggrandizement. After damning evidence emerged from the League's investigation into her claims to represent Eastern women, the Secretariat decided to exclude her and organizations grounded in regional alliances in February 1938. Hamada was unaware that her reputation had been irreparably damaged (though she did know the League investigated her organizations) and thus continued to lobby the League for the better part of a year. Bound by bureaucratic protocols to respond to all letters, the League continued to respond to Hamada's correspondences. The written justification for excluding Hamada and her organizations because they were not "international" set a precedent that led to the exclusion of many other regional and intraregional organizations from discussions of international women's rights protections.

## **Conclusion**

Syrian and Lebanese women were boxed out of the international systems they hoped to lobby on behalf of Arab independence and women's rights. The letter penned by the *Union Féministe Arabe* to Margery Corbett Ashby of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance is a concession to an unequal international system. The Lebanese women's organization was unable to independently raise its issues in international forums. Therefore, the organization plied an international connection in an effort change British policies concerning Palestine and the League of Nations mandate system. The letter

captures the hope that the systems that had denied members of the union access to rights—the international women’s rights system and the League—could be changed for the better.

Syrian and Lebanese women were denied both national and international status by the League of Nations. With limited means at their disposal, the letters and petitions sent by Syrian and Lebanese women to the League were as much about articulating injustices in the colonial system as about entering conversations about women’s rights on the local and international levels. Members of the *Union Féministe Arabe* and the organizations connected to Nour Hamada attempted to participate in League conversations even though they lacked the credentials needed to lobby the League. There are holes and inconsistencies in Hamada’s correspondence with the League, but the course of her efforts to be recognized by the League exposes that it was seemingly impossible for non-Western organizations to be classified as “international” based on the League’s interpretation of “international.” Her campaign opened up questions of what “international” meant and forced the League to scramble to solidify and support its definition. The League’s emphasis on “international” was not forged as an exclusionary measure, but it became one at the hands of the League’s officials.

The *Union Féministe Arabe*’s efforts to overcome the fact that there were no channels of direct access for Syrian and Lebanese women’s rights activists demonstrates an awareness of and a desire to change the international system. The Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women represented a glimmer of possibility for self-representation; the committee offered the chance to rectify the exclusion of Syrian and Lebanese women from the international systems shaping their access to rights as women and as Arabs. Hamada’s carefully worded appeals to the Chairman of the Council did not

succeed in creating an additional seat on the Committee of Experts for a non-American or non-European.

Syrian and Lebanese women's campaigns for inclusion show how colonized women capitalized on the interplay between national and international governance. If something was unjust in the domestic realm, they turned to the international sphere to raise awareness of the harm done to Arabs and Palestinians by secret British treaties and League indifference. Syrian women's activism at the League flowed both ways: Hamada lobbied the League in an effort to open the ranks of the Committee of Experts. Even though the campaign was addressed to the Chairman of the Council of the League, the campaign also targeted the national government in Syria, which did not provide women rights. If Hamada had been able to join the committee as an expert, her success may have rippled back home and improved women's ability to speak for themselves on the domestic level.

Arab women's attempts to engage the international governmental system took on two distinct forms in the late 1930s: one means of activism was grounded in attempts to gain entry into the international women's rights system and thereby pressure change at home and to open up the international system of women's rights to include "Eastern" women's rights. A small minority of women used pan-Arab unity to try to open up the field of international women's rights to include an "Eastern" representative, one that represented their cultural and religious heritage. The other means of activism focused on altering the mandate system and achieving national independence. Once independence was secured, Syrian and Lebanese women believed their rights as women would soon follow. Even in their claims for national rights, the Syrian and Lebanese women's rights

actors trying to gain representation for “Eastern” women by lobbying the League and international women’s organizations were proving the equality of the world’s women.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

Women's Rights, War, and Independence  
in Greater Syria and Abroad,  
1939-1946



Members of the Social Democratic Women's League of Lebanon at the inauguration of a school canteen - 1944, Beirut. Source: *Al-rābita al-ijtimā'iyya al-dīmūqrāṭiyya al-nisā'iyya*.



In June 1938, banners carrying the messages “Pas de Separation,” “Vive la Syrie,” and “Our blood is sacrificed for the Syrian Arab Sanjak” streamed down a main thoroughfare in Damascus en route to the Syrian government offices. Elite Damascene women lifted the banners into the air. They were members of the Committee for the Defense of Palestine and Alexandretta. Their banners and their presence in the street in Damascus displayed the women’s support for keeping the Sanjak of Alexandretta as part of Syria. The protestors linked the cession of Alexandretta to Turkey with Palestinian independence because giving part of Syria to Turkey was seen as threatening Arab independence. The women who participated in the protest considered the Sanjak of Alexandretta to be part of Syria; Kemal Atatürk remembered Alexandretta as an Ottoman province and also laid claim to the territory as the Hatay Province of Turkey. (See Appendix 1, Map 2)

Turkey’s claim to Alexandretta was connected to the treaty of independence the French had recently negotiated with the Syrians. In 1936, after years of attempts to throw off French rule and claim independence, Syrian nationalists had finally convinced French authorities to negotiate independence. Syrians claimed that the independent state of Syria should conform to the borders of the mandate, that is, it should include the Sanjak of Alexandretta. Turkey insisted that the Sanjak belonged to Turkey because of the large Turkish-speaking population that lived within the territory. Turkey had just lost the Mosul province to Iraq and was intent on doing everything it could to absorb the Sanjak of Alexandretta within the borders of independent Turkey. French authorities turned to the League of Nations to adjudicate the debate over the fate of Alexandretta.<sup>659</sup> The

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<sup>659</sup> For more information on the debate over Alexandretta see Sarah D. Shields, *Fezzes in the River: Identity Politics and European Diplomacy in the Middle East on the Eve of World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), especially Chapters 2, 3, and 4.

League of Nations created a special commission to determine how many people in the Sanjak were Turkish and how many were Arab—a process complicated by the confluence of many ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities.

France promised independence, but they never ratified the independence treaty they had negotiated with the Syrians. A similar treaty was negotiated in Lebanon; it too was never ratified. The debate over the Sanjak of Alexandretta or the Hatay Province was a signal of the beginning of the end of the Syrian Mandate. Throughout the process of the French giving control of the mandate over to the Syrians, which coincided with World War II, French strategic needs won out, as in the case of Alexandretta. The French mandate government was convinced that Turkey's loyalty hinged on the Sanjak question and negotiated with the Turkish government to ensure Turks secured the territory by way of a rigged vote. The French government did not want a repeat of World War I, in which an enemy force controlled the Eastern Mediterranean. Therefore, the French collaborated with the government in Ankara to "create" a Turkish majority where none existed.<sup>660</sup> The broken promise of independence and the negotiations that aligned the French with the Turks rather than the population of its own mandate signaled that the evacuation of the French from Syria was going to be a slow and very messy process, complicated by a global war.

Women used the moment of transition toward independence in Syria to try and force the leaders of the French-backed governments in Beirut and Damascus to address women's rights. In Lebanon, Ibtihaj Qaddura used the language of the independence treaty with France to press for women's rights. Article 6 of the treaty guaranteed citizens' political and civil rights without discrimination. Qaddura petitioned the Lebanese

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<sup>660</sup> *ibid.*, 11.

president, Emile Eddé. She demanded equal rights between men and women. Eddé directed Qaddura to the Lebanese Constitution, which stipulated that suffrage was limited to men only. Eddé presumably considered the case closed. Qaddura persisted, undeterred. She approached parliament in 1937 with another petition that asked for equal rights for women. The petition observed that women were citizens of Lebanon. Furthermore, the petition noted women constituted half of the Lebanese population. Given both those facts, the petition argued that women should be given equal rights.<sup>661</sup> This petition was answered by silence.

The mandate system was beginning to splinter in Syria because the League, which buttressed the mandates, was hemorrhaging members. This fracturing forced the League to engage questions that it had otherwise ignored, such as the rights of women. Addressing the nationality rights of women was one way the League appealed to the small states that were still part of the League to stay on board. Using statistics and data to measure the status of women was one of the few avenues of action available to the Secretariat in response to the “women’s question,” which the League had finally decided to address. By 1937, the League had little capacity to do much more than collect and analyze data from its remaining member states.

Qaddura and other women’s rights activists in Syria and Lebanon were aware of the conversations about women’s rights happening in far away Geneva as the League set up the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women. Even without representation from the East, which Nour Hamada fought so hard to secure, the narrow and exclusionary conceptions of international women’s rights established in Geneva rippled outward and shaped women’s access to rights in Lebanon and Syria once independence was secured—

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<sup>661</sup> Hanifa Khatib, *Tārīkh taṭawwūr al-ḥaraka al-nisā’iyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Hadatha, 1984), 47; Imilie Faris Ibrahim, *al-Haraka al-nisā’iyya al-lubnāniyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqafa, 1965?), 94.

a process that took the better part of a decade.

### **Quantifying Legal Status: Establishing Western Legal Systems as a Metric and Its Effect on Arab Women's Activism**

Incorporating women's rights into an international framework was made possible by the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women's emphasis on the legal status of women, rather than the "whole status of women," as advocated by some international women's organizations and some individual women's rights activists. Zeroing in on "legal status" made it possible for the League to address the status of women without transgressing its governing imperative: the League only had jurisdiction over international issues. In the preparatory discussions defining the scope of the committee, Hugh McKinnon Wood, a technocrat in the legal section of the Secretariat, expressed that "the wise course for the Assembly is to follow the example of the Pan-American Conference and to declare that the question of the political and civil rights of women is unsuitable for international action."<sup>662</sup> But McKinnon Wood emphasized that if women's rights were classified as an issue of a legal nature, the question could be brought under the governing umbrella of the League.

When establishing the parameters of its study, the committee "excluded the subject of nationality, as such, and the question of the conditions of employment from [its] scope."<sup>663</sup> The Committee of Experts conceded that women's nationality was a matter internal to individual states. The International Labor Organization was dedicated to addressing workers' rights and economic equality, so those rights were precluded from

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<sup>662</sup> LN R3755 3A/18611/13900 Legal, General. Mr. McKinnon Wood to M. Pilotti. Received 17 September 1935.

<sup>663</sup> *ibid.*

the League of Nations' investigation into the legal sphere.<sup>664</sup> Thus, before the committee convened, it had already established it was not studying the political, civil, and economic rights of women, or questions of nationality. Defining the legal status of women as an issue germane to international governance made it possible for the League to address the question, but the question remained of what "legal status" meant and how to internationalize legal protections given the diversity of the world's legal systems.

The Secretariat of the League finalized the ranks of the Committee of Experts in January 1938 against the backdrop of petitions to expand the scope of the committee to include non-Western representatives. The campaign led by Syrian women in support of Nour Hamada did not expand the committee's ranks; in its finalized form, the committee had representatives from Belgium, France, Great Britain, Hungary, Sweden, the United States, and Yugoslavia. The committee convened for the first time in April 1938 in Geneva at the *Palais des Nations*. The first session of the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women discussed two issues: the scope of the committee and the committee's relationship with women's organizations. The latter question was resolved with ease; women's organizations were invited to continue to engage the League through the consultative model that was established after the 1930 Hague Convention. The Committee of Experts did not create a formal spot for a representative of women's organizations on the committee. What "legal status" entailed was not as easily delimited during the first session of Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women.

While not formally on the docket, the Committee of Experts used its first meeting to also establish protocols for the collection and presentation of legal data. Utility coupled

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<sup>664</sup> Arab women's labor activism at this time was much more localized. See Malek Abisaab, *Militant Women of a Fragile Nation* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2010) for an excellent study of Lebanese women's labor organizing.

with a desire for objectivity shaped the type of data that was collected in preparation for a massive comparative study of the status of women—“[n]othing of the kind had ever before been attempted on such a scale.”<sup>665</sup> The experts selected for the committee were to analyze data, not to gather it themselves. The committee subcontracted with a series of scientific institutes in Europe to gather the data that would serve as the baseline of their legal study. The committee decided that it was impossible to deal with the application of laws.<sup>666</sup> Thus, the scientific institutes were only commissioned to gather material on the content of the laws. The committee gave the scientific institutes two years to conduct their global survey, with a deadline for preliminary data submission set for January 1939.

The scientific institutes specialized in the three types of law seen as affecting the status of women: private, public, and penal law.<sup>667</sup> Once the data and info on which laws were on the books in any given country was collected and tabulated, the committee’s experts would evaluate it. A scheme of work was parceled out to each of the three different institutes: the International Institute at Rome for the Unification of Private Law was given, as its name suggests, jurisdiction over the unification of private law; the International Bureau of Public Law in Paris was ceded public law as its investigatory domain; and, the International Bureau for the Unification of Penal Law’s mandate was criminal law.

The committee acknowledged the enormity of the research task it handed over to the scientific institutes. Not only was the project large in its scope, but also there were many unknown variables in the process of conducting the first global survey of the legal

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<sup>665</sup> LN R3755 3A/19189/13900 Legal, General. Notes from a public meeting on 9 April 1938.

<sup>666</sup> LN R3772 3A/33633/31757 Legal, General. Letter from McKinnon Wood to Gutteridge, 15 May 1939.

<sup>667</sup> Private law deals with relationships between individuals and institutions; for the purposes of the Committee of Experts, religious law was defined as private law. Public law covers relationships between individuals and the government. Penal law delivers a penalty (a fine, imprisonment, a loss of civil rights) to individuals who do or forbear certain acts that transgress laws.

status of women. If the institutes encountered any problems the committee assured them “every effort will be made to facilitate their task.”<sup>668</sup> The first help that the institutes sought from the committee had nothing to do with the subject matter under study, but rather, it was about funding. With regards to money, the Secretariat was able to deliver on its promise of helping the scientific institutes secure research stipends to complete their respective studies.

The Rome Institute for the Unification of Private Law was a well-established research institution. It had its own research staff, a library, and a large income.<sup>669</sup> It did not ask for a subsidy to conduct its research imperative from the League. It had already gathered much of the information requested by the League and it just had to compile it in ways that answered the League’s questions about private law. The institutes dedicated to the study of public and penal law, were “institutes of entirely different character.”<sup>670</sup> The societies were membered by “learned men” as opposed to legal experts and lawyers.<sup>671</sup> The International Bureau of Public Law and the International Bureau for the Unification of Penal Law served as publishing clearing-houses for the research papers written by its members, research compiled by the labors of the Institute of Comparative Law, and research conducted by correspondents and affiliates in different countries. The institutes had systems in place to disseminate information, but not necessarily to collect and sort data for the type of study the League requested.

The Institutes of Public and Penal Law had no resources to “meet the cost of the

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<sup>668</sup> *ibid.*, 3.

<sup>669</sup> LN R3769 3A/33587/30999 Legal, General. Status of Women. Report on the Financing of Research by the Paris Scientific Institutes: Amounts and Methods. Confidential, 19 April 1939.

<sup>670</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>671</sup> *ibid.*

elaborate research now demanded by the League.”<sup>672</sup> The societies reached out to Hugh McKinnon Wood in search of financial support for their assigned segment of the legal status of women. They requested money to cover typing, postage, and payment of fees to their correspondents in different countries.<sup>673</sup> The Secretariat was unsure what budgetary limits would be fair for such a study, as it had never completed one before.

At the present stage no one can make an exact estimate as to what the research in question (covering the whole position of women under public law and criminal law and the application as well as the terms of the law) ought to cost, since the real possibilities of fruitful research and the ultimate requirements of the committee of experts are still unexplored.<sup>674</sup>

The report issued to the treasurer exposed the uncertainty regarding what topics fell into the categories under study.

McKinnon Wood observed in his request for financing of the study of legal traditions and their impact on women’s status that “the more money you spend, the quicker you can get results, the wider the field you can cover and the deeper you can dig into it.”<sup>675</sup> He had no interest in dragging out the study. He requested that the treasurer make available at least 10,000 Swiss Francs for the two institutes for the remainder of 1939. McKinnon Wood asked for the 10,000 Swiss Francs in addition to the 5,000 Swiss Francs already made available by the Assembly to the Committee of Experts. McKinnon Wood thought the cash installments would help get the research started. A seasoned technocrat, McKinnon Wood made no promises that the initial budget would cover all costs of the study; McKinnon Wood ended his funding request simply conceding “it is possible that the institutes may need more.”<sup>676</sup> The funds requested from the treasurer

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<sup>672</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>673</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>674</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>675</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>676</sup> *ibid.*



were for starting the process of research; the funds for continuing the research would be provided by the Committee of Experts general budget. The special funding request to start the research process was approved.

The Committee of Experts issued guidelines for conducting the study alongside the delivery of the research funds. The largest guideline issued by the Committee of Experts to its research contractors was that data collection should be limited to Western legal systems. The commission told the scientific institutes the survey was “not expressly subject to any geographical or cultural limits, but embraces the whole world ... in so far as their law belongs to what may be called the Western type.”<sup>677</sup> The rules of law that interested the committee were strictly those of the Western type: “it is the intention of the Committee that, at least for the present, the survey should not extend beyond the study of laws of the Western sense, using that term in its widest sense.”<sup>678</sup>

Two reasons were given for excluding “primitive” and “oriental” legal systems from the study: first, the committee said there were few experts on the topic, and second, the committee said it could not impinge upon the jurisdiction of other League bodies and implied that studying those types of law would transgress their research prerogative. The institutes did not have “adequate means at their disposal for studying other systems of law, with possibly the exception of such rules of Mohammedan law as may be enforced in Europe.”<sup>679</sup> This exception accommodated the French legal system in force in Algeria, which was considered territorially part of France and by extension Europe.<sup>680</sup>

The study was only globalized through European colonies where the laws in force

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<sup>677</sup> LN R3755 3A/19189/13900 Legal, General. Notes from a public meeting on 9 April 1938.

<sup>678</sup> LN R3769 3A/33587/30999 Legal, General. Status of Women. C.S.F./12(2). Aide-Memoire for the Scientific Institutes, 12 April 1938.

<sup>679</sup> *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>680</sup> For more information on how French laws operated in Algeria see Judith Surkis, “Sex, Sovereignty, and Transnational Intimacies,” *American Historical Review* 115.4 (2010): 1089-1096.

were European derivatives of the civil or common law system.<sup>681</sup> The Committee of Experts defined “Oriental law” as the laws operating in “British possessions other than India, Dutch Oriental possessions, French possessions in which Oriental law is in force, and finally, Oriental countries which have introduced Western codes”—Turkey, China, Japan, and Siam.<sup>682</sup> The committee did not have experts in its ranks to analyze data provided about “Oriental” and other non-Western legal traditions. The committee exempted legal systems split between two legal codes from the study. “There are countries particularly in the Near and Far East in which the law relating to women is in part of the Western and in part of the Oriental type. For the time being, for the reason given, the latter law cannot be dealt with.”<sup>683</sup> The committee noted that it was “exploring the possibility of organizing the study at a future date of the systems of law which at present have been reserved.”<sup>684</sup> The last line served as a promise to placate the member states excluded from the study.

McKinnon Wood justified the exclusion of other legal systems because it was difficult compare systems of law that did not easily align with the legal codes and systems pervasive throughout Europe “... any effort to deal with the primitive customs of uncivilized or only partially civilized peoples would create so many technical difficulties and cause such great delay that it would be unwise to attempt it.”<sup>685</sup> The perceived absence of standard legal codes served as an excuse to forego non-Western legal traditions. Of course, legal codes were not standardized throughout Europe at the time

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<sup>681</sup> The French legal code is categorized as a civil system and the British system, which was used in its colonies, including the United States, is a common law system.

<sup>682</sup> LN R3772 3A/33633/31757 Legal, General. Letter from McKinnon Wood to Gutteridge, 15 May 1939.

<sup>683</sup> *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>684</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>685</sup> LN R3773 3A/38305/36152 Legal, General. Letter to Van Kleffens (Netherlands, Minister of Foreign Affairs) from McKinnon Wood, 5 June 1938.

either, which was what, in part, necessitated the committee's work. Despite the lack of standardization in Europe, the legal codes of countries outside Europe were seen as too Byzantine—too foreign—to be included in the study.

McKinnon Wood and the Committee of Experts members acknowledged that different legal systems existed. The Committee of Experts split non-Western law into two categories: the law of primitive races and Oriental law. (Legal regimes split between the Western legal system and non-Western law were a separate legal category). The committee decided unanimously “it could not take responsibility for dealing with the position of women among primitive races.”<sup>686</sup> The committee also justified excluding the legal status of these “primitive” women from the study because they were controlled by colonial or mandate governments and engaging in their status would force the League of Nations to transgress its governing imperative: it was not allowed to engage in the internal matters of states.

Additional justifications for excluding non-Western law from the study ranged from complexities of the law to the lack of resources, adhering to League project parameters, and not impinging on the work of other League committees and organizations. After the first session of the Committee of Experts established the scope of the inquiry, McKinnon Wood wrote “... I shrink from the idea of a plunge into a detailed anthropology or a detailed study of oriental law. Moreover, I don't think the Assembly will find money for a thorough study.”<sup>687</sup> League officials were aware of the complexities of the world's legal systems, but used those complexities and a common excuse of scarce resources to justify zeroing in on the status of women in the countries whose laws

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<sup>686</sup> LN R3772 3A/36734/31757 Legal, General. Confidential report issued by McKinnon Wood to the Secretary-General and Mr. Lester, Treasurer, 18 January 1939.

<sup>687</sup> LN R3772 3A/33633/31757 Legal, General. Letter from McKinnon Wood to Gutteridge, 30 October 1938.

mirrored the European system.

McKinnon Wood also emphasized how inquiring into the legal status of women in certain parts of the world would transgress the boundaries the League had established between different commissions. He noted the “treatment of native women” brings up a series of practices “that are sometimes stigmatized as slavery.”<sup>688</sup> Thus, those questions should be addressed by the committee dedicated to that social problem. He added that questions of the status of “native women” in the mandated territories might “impinge on the province of the League’s Slavery Commissions and the League’s Mandate Commission.”<sup>689</sup> Thus, the bureaucratic structure of the League and its compartmentalization of issues served as a facile excuse for constricting the committee’s range of inquiry.

Mustering a rationale that included financial parameters, institutional decorum, and variety in non-Western legal traditions, the committee absolved itself of any obligation to assess legal systems that did not fit within the civil or common law systems. The committee made an effort to address the colonial legal systems that were a derivative of either the civil or common law systems because these systems shared a vocabulary with Western systems and were therefore easily integrated into the study. The move to narrow the framework of the investigation of women’s legal status was made possible by the absence of any representative of a non-Western legal system among the committee’s members. Such a member could have explained the legal system in force in their home country. Expertise was tethered to the West; legal codes of the Western tradition were now entrenched in the institutional structure of the League.

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<sup>688</sup> LN R3772 3A/33633/31757 Legal, General. Letter from McKinnon Wood to Gutteridge, 13 December 1938.

<sup>689</sup> LN R3769 3A/33587/30999 Legal, General. Status of Women. C.S.F./12(2). Aide-Memoire for the Scientific Institutes, 12 April 1938.

The pattern of using Western legal systems as a way to measure the progress of peoples in other parts of the world—including European colonies and the League-sanctioned dominions—predated the incorporation of the League, but in the conference halls of the League and at its international conferences, such as the Codification Conference held at the Hague in 1930, the use of a Western legal standard became normalized in the realm of international governance. By the time the committee was incorporated, all that was left to do was to formalize and internationalize the legal system. However, internationalizing Western legal norms about women's rights protections required information on how Western law operated in diverse nation-states: the Committee of Experts had a data collating and analyzing mission.

Despite the emphasis on Western traditions, the member states of the League and the technocrats in the legal section acknowledged that there were other legal systems even as the Committee of Experts attempted to ignore them. This move was not well received by international women's organizations. They forced the Committee of Experts to expand its study to encompass the full extent of its research mandate. The Assembly commissioned the Committee of Experts to study the legal status of women all around the world. The experts and the scientific community justified its limited collection of data because they claimed Western systems of law were more easily transcribed in terms of numbers and facts and data. In contrast, the status of "oriental" and "primitive" women in the mandated territories was not initially studied because the legal systems governing their lives were not as easily measured and could not be measured using the same standards operating in civil and common law contexts. Incorporating non-Western legal traditions would have complicated the Committee of Experts' desire to distill legal traditions into lists of codes for easy cross-national comparison about which nations

awarded women certain protections and which nations did not. It seems the lists of codes, once compiled, were supposed to help create a global standard for women's legal status.

To facilitate the study of Western legal traditions, the experts issued an aide-memoire to the scientific institutes.<sup>690</sup> The document listed the basic parameters of the research program the Committee of Experts wanted executed and repeated the research restrictions issued to the committee by the Assembly of the League of Nations: "The object of the proposed survey is to furnish an objective picture of the legal status of women at the present time."<sup>691</sup> As a consequence, the scientific institutes were strongly advised against drawing legal information from material "which savours of criticism or of direct or indirect propaganda."<sup>692</sup> Thus, no brochures espousing the status of women in Turkey, for example, could be entered into the record as evidence of the legal status of women. In an effort to ensure objectivity, the scientific organizations were limited to using government statistics or information supplied by women's organizations with official League sanction—both sources of information were seen as being devoid of bias.

The Assembly itself issued three research mandates to the Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women. Outside of the three research parameters issued by the Assembly, the committee had *carte blanche* to research what it felt was necessary. The Assembly excluded questions of nationality from the scope of the survey because questions of women's nationality had become politically charged at the League. Given the politicized climate surrounding women's nationality, the Assembly was not interested in having questions of whether or not a woman was granted a national identity independent of her husband derail the study. The Assembly offered one concession in this

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<sup>690</sup> LN R3769 3A/33587/30999 Legal, General. Status of Women. C.S.F./12(2). Aide-Memoire for the Scientific Institutes, 12 April 1938.

<sup>691</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>692</sup> *ibid.*

regard: “the law of nationality is to be dealt with to the extent necessary to complete the picture.”<sup>693</sup> This provision conceded the intersection between national and legal status and served as a subtle warning to the committee and to its contracted research institutes: tread cautiously with questions of nationality.

In addition, the Assembly expressly excluded questions of “conditions of employment” from the purview of the legal study. Questions of employment were the domain of the International Labor Organization. The committee wrote to the scientific institutes that “on certain matters of common interest, it is difficult to draw an exact line of demarcation between the respective spheres of the forthcoming survey and the International Labor Organization.”<sup>694</sup> The committee recognized that it might be necessary in some instances to give a general account of labor or employment laws and their bearing on women. As a compromise and warning not to blatantly ignore the Assembly’s admonishment against studying topics that were ceded to the ILO, the committee suggested that in those instances the scientific institutes should present a general account of the laws and the research institutes should refer readers to an ILO publication for further details.<sup>695</sup>

The final Assembly-issued guideline for the study: “The mandate conferred on the Committee by the Assembly speaks not only of the law as such but also of its application.”<sup>696</sup> The committee used “application” to encompass “lack of application” as well, “such cases [where the law is not applied] would seem to fall within the meaning of the term ‘application.’”<sup>697</sup> The committee noted “it may happen that a particular rule of

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<sup>693</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>694</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>695</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>696</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>697</sup> *ibid.*

law is inoperative because it is in conflict with another legal rule or for various reasons it is not applied.”<sup>698</sup> Internally, the Committee of Experts balked at studying “application” but could not ignore the Association’s directive and sent the scientific institutes out in search of data. McKinnon Wood declared that the application of laws was impossible to measure, but decided to wait until preliminary information had been provided by the scientific institutes to establish parameters for what components of “application” could realistically be measured by the survey’s questions. The committee’s initial thought was that most questions of application could be defined by looking at “case law (jurisprudence) or the opinions of textbook writers (doctrine).”<sup>699</sup> The possible limitations of relying on these sources for determining application were acknowledged.

In addition to the Assembly’s research recommendations, the Committee of Experts added further parameters to the instructions it issued to the scientific institutes about what information they thought would be needed to survey the status of the world’s women. The committee told the institutes that survey material it submitted should only contain “well-established rules of law, whether those rules result from statutes or judicial decisions” and that the sources of the information about the rules of law should be clearly established.<sup>700</sup> The aide memoire further stipulated that details about the legal context or the development of the legal traditions under study should not be “introduced except such as are absolutely necessary.”<sup>701</sup> The committee continued, “it will not be advisable as a rule to set out the text of the law or legal decision in full.”<sup>702</sup> For the most part, the committee believed that a “summary will be sufficient provided that the essential points

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<sup>698</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>699</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>700</sup> *ibid.*, 2.

<sup>701</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>702</sup> *ibid.*



appear clearly from it.”<sup>703</sup> This direction for the scientific institutes indicated that the committee was not interested in conducting a detailed comparative legal study, but rather was interested in understanding which laws were on the books in the different member nations of the League. There was no emphasis on the status of women in the mandated territories or colonies.

The committee’s directives to the institutes were clear: only study well-established rules of law—do not explore mere traditions—and do not waste time explaining where the law came from because that background information was not necessary given the global scope of the inquiry. The committee was most interested in knowing the legal statutes and laws in effect, not unearthing where the laws came from. The committee was looking for something slightly more than a disembodied list of laws affecting women. The experts on the committee understood that some laws not directly about women would have differential effects on women. The committee admonished the scientific committees to be careful in deciding the laws it labeled as affecting women. “In some cases, moreover, a law which *prima facie* affects both sexes equally is in reality of a nature to operate adversely to women.”<sup>704</sup> The committee noted “it will be necessary not merely to describe the position of women as such but also to deal with differentiations made among women themselves on the ground of marriage, age, education, number of children, etc.”<sup>705</sup> The committee was sensitive to the many factors that could affect a woman’s life and observed that not all women in a society had equal access to legal protections.

Concision and brevity were important to the committee. Once collected, the legal

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<sup>703</sup> *ibid.*, 3.

<sup>704</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>705</sup> *ibid.*

information would be distilled to the furthest point possible (e.g. a legal code). The committee thought it was important that the survey “should not include too much minute detail and ... that the references and sources should be clearly and fully indicated.”<sup>706</sup> For the committee, a summary of codes in effect supplemented by references would be useful to its projected readers: lawyers, legislators, and other specialists. The information in the survey was intended “to give a general picture to the reader of the survey.”<sup>707</sup> The Committee of Experts did not want extraneous material to cloud easy access to information.

The committee’s directive was clear that “the projected survey must not take the form of a statement of the legal ideas of the different countries taken separately.”<sup>708</sup> Instead of studying the legal ideas of different nations one by one, the institutes were instructed to summarize the diversity of existing legal structures. In special cases, the Committee of Experts acknowledged “diversity of legal systems” may make clustering nations with similar legal structures or systems the clearest way of delivering information about the range of laws in force around the world. The committee seemed to believe that synthesizing information to the barest of informational sketches—just a list of the legal codes that offered the protections under question—was more objective than relying on legal statements.

The institutes should synthesize, but not analyze the data they provided to the committee. They were to condense information, but not were not to provide “[s]tatistical summaries or comments as to political interference in the operation of the law” unless

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<sup>706</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>707</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>708</sup> *ibid.*, 2.

approved by the committee.<sup>709</sup> Statistical summaries or comments on political interference entered the realm of analysis, which the committee felt was its prerogative. The Committee of Experts' many directives for the institutes ranged from the micro—how to deliver and present the data—to the macro—to ensure the institutes addressed certain questions at the exclusion of other questions. The committee's vacillation between “be precise,” but not too precise, and “don't elide” evinces the committee's uncertainty regarding what exactly it needed in order to complete its survey. In the face of the uncertainty about what would ultimately be relevant, the Committee of Experts issued clear sets of questions to each of the commissioned scientific institutes.

The Committee of Experts issued the International Bureau of Public Law eight questions, with some sub-questions, to explore.<sup>710</sup> The first question centered around the franchise on national, regional or local levels, and other instances where citizens were given the right to vote. The second question addressed women's eligibility to vote in the national sphere, in regional, or local spheres, and in other cases. The third question explored educational facilities for women and the obstacles women faced in admission to schools and universities. The fourth question confronted admission to public functions and participation in public services. The fifth question raised the issue of whether or not women had the right to exercise a profession or independent occupation. Personal freedom and safety and freedom of speech and of assembly were the core of the sixth question. The seventh question under the scheme of study for public law addressed the “fiscal laws affecting women as such.”<sup>711</sup> The eighth and final question about public law the Committee of Experts was interested in exploring looked into certain benefits that

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<sup>709</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>710</sup> LN R3769 3A/33587/30999 Legal, General. Status of Women. Committee for the Study of the Legal Status of Women. Scheme of Work. Confidential, 12 April 1938.

<sup>711</sup> *ibid.*

were peculiar to women, such as allowances and pensions. The fourth, fifth, and eighth questions were flagged as potentially overlapping with the work of the ILO and the Committee of Experts noted in its directives that “a proper relationship must be maintained between the work of the Committee and the work of the International Labor Office.”<sup>712</sup>

The questions given to the International Bureau of Public Law demonstrate that the Committee of Experts did not define public law only as legal statutes; questions about admission to schools and universities, could, for example, be analyzed using information beyond the letter of the law. Despite the professed disinterest in legal traditions, there was a very fine line between studying the laws themselves and their application, or their origins. The committee was primarily interested in the laws themselves.

The questions given to the Rome Institute for the Unification of Private Law were divided into four sections: capacity, family law, law of succession and *donatio mortis causa*,<sup>713</sup> and the legal position of the widow. The capacity of women was explored through questions of age of majority, emancipation, and instances of deprivation of capacity—that is, when capacity was revoked. The committee also sought information on how marriage affected, modified, or suspended a woman’s capacity. The institute investigated the systems in place to authorize the performance of legal acts by women under conditions of capacity and incapacity. The experts on the committee were interested in exploring the capacity of women in the following contexts: right to enter contracts; right to represent the household; right of a married woman to carry on business or industry; right to acquire, hold, manage and dispose of property; right to institute or

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<sup>712</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>713</sup> “*Donatio mortis causa*” is the transfer of property in the completion or anticipation of the death of the owner.

defend legal proceedings, right to give evidence and to attest to documents; and finally the testamentary capacity of women.

Family law was categorized as private law for the purposes of the study. The committee sought data on the following aspects of family law: marriage, personal relations of the spouses, pecuniary and proprietary relationships between the spouses, relations between parents and children, law of adoption as it affected women, the effects of the prolonged absence of the husband, and finally irregular unions. The committee wanted the survey to include information about each of these categories during marriage and after its dissolution by divorce or judicial separation. The final two categories of private law that the committee wanted explored by the institute in charge of the study—law of succession (including *donatio mortis causa*) and the legal position of the widow—were not further broken down by the committee's aide memoire.

The Institute of Penal Law addressed questions of criminal law. The Committee of Experts sought the answers to eight questions.<sup>714</sup> The first question the committee was interested in was the criminal responsibility of women in regard to offenses generally and in regard to sexual offenses. The “detention pending trial, penalties and measures of security applicable to women” was the focus of the second question of the survey.<sup>715</sup> The third question probed the application of rules relating to the suspension of sentences, releases on probation or parole, and aftercare of prisoners. The fourth question explored the protections afforded to women by criminal law. The fifth question inquired into laws regulating prostitution and the traffic in women.<sup>716</sup> How laws of vagrancy affected

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<sup>714</sup> LN R3769 3A/33587/30999 Legal, General. Status of Women. Committee for the Study of the Legal Status of Women. Scheme of Work. Confidential, 12 April 1938, 4.

<sup>715</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>716</sup> No mention was made of collaborating with the League Committee dedicated to the issue of women's trafficking.

women was the basis of the sixth question. The seventh question sought information on special provisions of criminal procedure in relation to women. The eighth and final question examined the participation of women in police activities, in the administration of justice in the criminal courts, and in prison administration—highlighting the fine line between the codes and implementation.

The questions supplied by the Committee of Experts shaped the institutes' investigations into the systems of law under their study. At times, the precise nugget of information that the questions sought was not clear. For example, in relation to the eighth question in the penal law questionnaire, the Institute of Penal Law proposed studying the proportion of women in the police force of a country. Counting the number of women in a police force could have been interpreted as a sufficient answer the question, which asked about the participation of women in police activities. McKinnon Wood disagreed. He said "this would provide to my mind an immense mass of not very useful statistical information," even if the material was provided by every member state, which "which of course would not be the case."<sup>717</sup> Governmental non-cooperation with the League's inquiries into the status of women in its member states had been a perennial problem.

The noncompliance of governments was one of the justifications for contracting with the scientific institutes. The League had encountered significant problems in its attempts to gather information about member states' nationality laws during the previous three normal sessions of the Assembly. The Secretariat disseminated several reminders between 1935 and 1937 to the member states asking them to submit information regarding their nationality laws for women in their countries. Information trickled in. In the end, less than half of member states submitted information regarding the nationality

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<sup>717</sup> LN R3772 3A/33633/31757 Legal, General. Letter from McKinnon Wood to Gutteridge, 29 November 1938.

of women. Even when states supplied information, it was not complete. For example, Great Britain and France had only supplied information about the laws within their national borders, rather than describe the laws governing the lives of peoples in their mandates and overseas colonies. The data handed over to the scientific institutes from the national governments was inconsistent. The reporting governments self-selected whether to answer questions and often chose to present a progressive image with regards to women's rights. Still, the League decided that the holes and inconsistencies did not necessitate a *de novo* move to collect material.

The committee gave the institutes information useful to their project of collating, synthesizing and summarizing the status of women that had already been submitted to the League of Nations by governments and by women's international organizations. A system was also established to enable the women's international organizations to continue to submit information to the institutes, with the Secretariat acting as an intermediary in the exchange.<sup>718</sup> The scientific institutes were instructed to start working with the legal information transmitted to them from the member states of the League and women's organizations and then branch out and collect new information, or draw from their own data or information reserves.

All of the information that had been provided to the League by women's organizations in response to previous inquiries about the status of women was also handed over to the scientific institutes.<sup>719</sup> The women's organizations had been much more reliable than member states in submitting reports on the status of women. However, the information they provided reflected the objectives of the organizations. For example

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<sup>718</sup> LN R3769 3A/33587/30999 Legal, General. Status of Women. C.S.F./12(2). Aide-Memoire for the Scientific Institutes, 12 April 1938.

<sup>719</sup> *ibid.*

the St. Joan Political and Social Alliance was invested in eradicating the slave trade and provided information on the traffic in women and children. The Women's Christian Temperance Union provided information about laws pertaining to the eradication of alcohol consumption. The material from women's organizations that was channeled to the Committee of Experts additionally reflected the committee's Anglo-European biases. The committee welcomed information from the Liaison Committee but not from Superior Council of the General Alliance of Oriental Women, for example. The only women's organizations that were allowed to participate in delivering information were officially sanctioned "international" women's organizations.

The committee's aide-memoire was full of directives, suggestions, and guidelines about the information it wanted collected, but it was left up to the institutes themselves to establish what questions to ask to unearth information about the status of women in different states and nations. The committee gave the scientific institutes eight months to begin their research tasks on public, private, and penal legal structures that affected the lives of women around the world. At the close of the April 1938 meeting, the committee's next session was scheduled for January 4, 1939. The institutes were asked to compile preliminary data and distribute it ahead of the meeting so the committee could study the text and apply their expertise before they met. Understanding the short time between the meetings, the committee agreed to accept incomplete research findings ahead of the January meeting. Once the information was collected and reviewed, the committee would work to establish another set of guidelines for the scientific institutes to standardize research methods.

The information from the institutes started to roll in ahead of the January meeting and a pattern emerged in the data: none of the data that was presented to the Committee



of Experts for the second meeting focused on women in the colonized parts of the world, and none of the data explored the status of women in non-Western legal traditions. The exclusion of these legal systems followed the parameters set by the committee, but the international community did not quietly accept the League's exclusion of non-Western legal traditions. The Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations criticized the Committee of Experts for not studying women in the mandates. The Committee of Experts offered several interlocking reasons, most of them hinging on the immeasurability of non-Western law to justify the inquiry's focus on the status of women under Western law. Despite the justifications, many women's organizations emphasized the importance of including material that chronicled the status of women in the mandated territories. The Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations stated:

[t]he member organisations also feel strongly that the enquiry into the status of women should not be taken to mean only their status under the different European legal systems and systems based on them, but also the status of women under such systems as Muslim law and native or tribal law, which obtain over wide areas and are worthy of study.<sup>720</sup>

The Liaison Committee viewed its prerogative as improving the status of women in Europe. The organization viewed the status of women in other nations in relation to Europe. The rising status of European women would consequently raise the status of women around the world. The Liaison Committee's appeal to the Committee of Experts to expand the reach of its study did not mean it saw other forms of laws as advanced in the protective provisions awarded women.

The Liaison Committee's attempt to expand the scope of inquiry to include "Muslim law and native or tribal law" reflects a persistent trend wherein British women claimed that their position as women made them qualified to speak on behalf of women and men in the mandates and the colonies. A trend that was already manifest at the

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<sup>720</sup> LN R3755 3A/15980/13900 Legal, General. Letter from the Liaison Committee of Women's International Organisations to Member of the Committee of Experts for the Status of Women, 1 April 1938.

League of Nations in the teas hosted with the Secretary-General before the League was formally inaugurated persisted in the face of large and small-scale efforts to expand the scope of players able to discuss women's rights to include intergovernmental and regional organizations, small states, and individual actors like Nour Hamada. The Liaison Committee's appeal to expand the scope of the inquiry was issued in April 1938, which meant it happened concurrently with the second stage of the campaign to nominate Hamada to the Committee of Experts.

The Liaison Committee was not the only organization that lobbied the Committee of Experts to remedy its exclusion of non-Western legal systems. Margery Corbett Ashby communicated the resolution passed at the IWSA's most recent meeting to H.C. Gutteridge, a professor of comparative law at Cambridge and chair of the Committee of Experts. The organization had taken up the issue of the Committee of Experts decision to focus its study on just the legal status of women under Western legal codes and passed the following resolutions in protest of the Committee of Experts' exclusion of other legal traditions.

Whereas the League of Nations Assembly decided in September 1937 that a comprehensive survey be made of the legal status 'enjoyed by women in various countries of the world'; and whereas the Committee for the study of the legal Status of Women has decided that it is unable to take up responsibility for dealing with the Status of Women of Primitive Peoples in the survey at present being undertaken by them;

This Congress begs the Assembly to set up a Committee competent to deal with the Status of Women of Primitive Peoples, consisting not only of jurists, but of persons with special knowledge of the conditions of the populations concerned.<sup>721</sup>

The IWSA did not think the Committee of Experts' excuse that the scientific institutes did not "have adequate means at their disposal for studying other systems of law" absolved the committee from studying those legal systems.<sup>722</sup> The IWSA noted that there

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<sup>721</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>722</sup> LN R3755 3A/19189/13900 Legal, General. Notes from a public meeting on 9 April 1938.

were people capable of studying Oriental systems of law. Some of the existing experts may have very well been European or American, given the long tradition of Orientalist scholarship produced about Islam and the cultures of the Middle East and North Africa.<sup>723</sup> There was no need to turn to indigenous legal experts. Privileging European expertise raises the question of who could be an expert.

The IWSA pushed the Committee of Experts to commission experts in other legal systems to conduct a comparable study of other legal traditions so that the committee could fulfill its global research mandate. The IWSA overtly expressed its opinion that the “Status of Women of Primitive Peoples” merited study. However, the IWSA did not go so far as to suggest, as Hamada’s supporters had, that women from the East be represented on the Committee of Experts. The IWSA thought that the status of women in

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<sup>723</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) explored the power of “dangerous,” “backwards,” and “sensual” representations of the peoples and religions of “Orient” in colonial discourse. See also, Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993). *Orientalism* spawned a series of critiques, from a variety of angles. Scholars have gendered *Orientalism* from three perspectives: some have worked to integrate women into Orientalist discussion as actors; some have focused on how women from the United States and Europe represented their Middle Eastern counterparts in art and literature; some have analyzed how Orientalism can be used in feminist theory and practice. For the most part, the attempts to infuse *Orientalism* with gendered perspectives is Western-centric. For critiques, or extensions of the theory, that foreground the role of gender in Orientalist representations, see Lila Abu-Lughod, “‘Orientalism’ and Middle East Feminist Studies,” *Feminist Studies* 21.1 (2001): 101-113; Reina Lewis, *Gendering Orientalism: Race, Femininity and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Jill Beaulieu and Mary Roberts, *Orientalism’s Interlocutors: Painting, Architecture and Photography* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2002); Thomas Prasch, “Orientalism’s Other, Other Orientalisms: Women in the Scheme of Empire,” *Journal of Women’s History* 7.4. (Winter 1995): 174-188; Meyda Yegenoglu *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a Feminist Reading of Orientalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For an example of a Zionist critique of *Orientalism* see Fred Halliday, “‘Orientalism’ and Its Critics” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 20.2 (1993): 145-163. The Zionist critique of Said’s work comes from the fact that Said was a praxis person; his academic and activist interests in Palestinian independence merged. The book is also critiqued for simplifying the Occident. For a more nuanced discussion of critiques leveraged against Said with regards to his reverse Orientalizing of the West (i.e. Occidentalism) see Robert Irwin, *Dangerous Knowledge: Orientalism and Its Discontents* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2006) and Ibn Warraq, *Defending the West: A Critique of Edward Said’s Orientalism* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2007). For an example of a critique that foregrounds how the Orient responded to Western representations and was not a passive recipient of colonialism see Gyan Prakash, “Orientalism Now,” *History and Theory* 34.3 (1995): 199-212 and Nasrin Rahimieh, *Oriental Responses to the West: Comparative Essays in Select Writers from the Muslim World* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1990). Some cite *Orientalism* as sparking the post-colonial turn. The book’s major premise was inverted in a series of books that studied “Occidentalism.” See, for example, Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of its Enemies* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

other parts of the world should be the objects of study; they did not suggest that women in those parts of the world could participate in evaluating their own status. Although not explicit, it is likely that foreign experts would supplant the expertise of women from the mandates about their own condition and the legal obstacles they faced as they tried to secure rights under indigenous and colonial legal traditions.

The IWSA's appeal to the Committee of Experts not only tried to expand the scope of the inquiry, but its ranks as well. The IWSA wanted the committee to include people with special knowledge, "informal" experts. Emphasizing the potential contributions of non-jurists on the committee aligned with a long-standing IWSA campaign to gain recognition for the informal expertise that women could offer the League. From the very first meeting international women's organizations had with the Secretary-General of the League of Nations in 1920, the women encouraged the League not to rely too heavily on formal "experts," because very few women had acquired the status. Ogilvie Gordon said "[m]ight I point out that women cannot be expected to have had the same opportunities as men in acquiring this expert knowledge, and you could not look to recruit your women expert members from the same official classes. Women have been allocated to subordinate positions and precluded from becoming first-rate experts."<sup>724</sup> In the intervening eighteen years women activists had faced the same structural challenges to becoming formally sanctioned experts.

The Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations and the IWSA were united in their assessment that the status of women living under other legal systems could be measured by abridging the laws on the books to protect women in public, private, and penal legal sectors, tabulating the relevant laws, and then comparing them

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<sup>724</sup> LN R1356 23/99/86 Women's Questions, 1919. Informal interview with members of the National Council of Women with Sr. Eric Drummond, 21 June 1919, 4.

against the Western system of law. Expanding the study to look at women living under other laws did not change the underlying methodology wherein other legal systems would be measured against an international benchmark based on Western legal rights. The system that international women's organizations proposed to the League for measuring the status of women in the mandated territories mirrored international women's organizations, which positioned European women's organizations at the center with nominal links to affiliated organizations in other countries.

Others highlighted the bias against non-Western legal systems. Princess Gabrielle Radziwill of Lithuania, the League official responsible for relations with voluntary organizations and *de facto* contact for women's organizations, noted that, "[t]he people of India, and indeed of all Eastern countries, are very sensitive in regard to being segregated from the other peoples and are apt to think that Europe looms too large in international efforts."<sup>725</sup> Radziwill advocated using the All India Women's Conference to represent women's rights in India. Other members of the Secretariat and the Committee of Experts disagreed with her plan for expanding the investigatory scope of the survey, but an effort was made to undertake measuring the status of women under non-Western law.<sup>726</sup> Ultimately, the Committee of Experts asked the Indian government, a part of the British Empire, to supply information regarding the legal status of women under Hindu law. Importantly, the committee did not ask for information regarding the millions of Muslims living in British India. The Liaison Committee and the IWSA's campaigns coupled with Princess Radziwill's advocacy successfully expanded the Committee of Experts' project just enough to include another legal system the committee thought could be measured:

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<sup>725</sup> LN R3772 3A/33633/31757 Legal, General. Corbett Ashby to Gutteridge, 1 June 1938.

<sup>726</sup> LN R3773 3A/38305/36152 Legal, General. Letter to Van Kleffens (Netherlands, Minister of Foreign Affairs) from McKinnon Wood, 5 June 1938.

Hindu law in India. The committee did not present a clear plan for what it was going to do with the information on Hindu law it obtained from the British government.

Opening the inquiry to include Hindu law led the way for further expansions to the Committee of Experts' survey mission. At first, the Committee of Experts remained steadfast in its position that it was "clearly impossible to cover all systems and types of "Oriental" law." The Committee of Experts separated Hindu law from other forms of Oriental law; what was "measurable" about the Hindu legal system versus other "Oriental" legal systems was not evident. The League's definition of Oriental law—laws operating in French, Dutch, and British colonies, other than India, and in countries that had adopted Western codes—ignored the religious and legal traditions that operated in the "Orient," such as shari'a, Islamic law. By the 1930s, Shari'a no longer encompassed the entire Islamic legal tradition; it had been restricted to include jurisdiction over family law. Shari'a was thus the primary legal force that affected women's status. Many reforms advocated by Hamada, Dimashqiyya, and their activist peers at the Eastern women's conferences focused on shaping religious practice to improve the status of women.

The Committee of Experts acknowledged that many legal traditions operated at once in many "Oriental" contexts. However, the Committee of Experts was clear, "[n]o attempt would be made to examine the extent to which law and custom of Oriental origin may still affect the status of women in [those] countries."<sup>727</sup> As with other cases, there was a focus on the laws themselves, but not on application. In addition, it was challenging to convert enforcement into a measurable category. Such an assessment tacitly underscores the League officials' belief that non-Western legal systems could not be standardized and condensed in a way that would render them comparable against

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<sup>727</sup> *ibid.*

Western legal traditions, except for in a few cases. The measuring was left to Western experts, who were doing their best to expand the legal topics under study, but struggled to do so because Western legal experts staffed the committee.

The Committee of Experts established a system wherein the status of women could be measured in countries governed by Western legal systems, in countries that had converted to a Western legal framework, and in systems that had been shaped by contact with Western legal codes (as was the case with Hindu law in India, which was under British legal tutelage). The extension of the scope of the Committee of Experts' inquiry into the status of women in India did not really "expand" the inquiry across legal regimes, but rather reinforced the existing emphasis on the measurability of Western legal systems, even if it reached the diluted formats operating in the colonies or mandates.

The "Indian compromise" represented a politically expedient move that quieted both women's organizations and the populations of India that were clamoring for independent representation at the League (as were men and women from the French Mandate for Syria). In emphasizing Western legal practices, McKinnon Wood and the committee experts were not explicitly trying to create an iniquitous international legal system that privileged Western legal traditions at the expense of all other legal practices. The committee truly believed expanding the parameters of the study to include all legal systems was practically impossible. They felt including Hindu law in the study was best they could do to globalize the study. In time, the committee revised its assessment and further expanded the scope of the study.

At its third meeting in July 1939, the committee decided to expand its investigation into non-Western legal systems to include French Indo-China and the Near East, which the committee defined as Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and eventually, Iran.

The committee was interested in stretching the scope of the study to include the legal systems in French Indo-China and the Near East in addition to the arrangements for studying India, which had already been secured, because, “if the two new studies can be done, the three principal systems of Mohammedan law (the other being Java, which cannot be dealt with) and other important types of oriental law will be covered, and moreover the difficulty of leaving out of the survey, Egypt, Iraq, and Iran will be avoided.”<sup>728</sup> McKinnon Wood continued, “Turkey and the more important countries of the Far East which will not be specially dealt with consider themselves to have adopted occidental law and are unlikely to cause trouble.” The expansion of the study to include other forms of law seems to have been an attempt to address the fact that the League’s constituencies would not accept the committee’s myopic focus on Western legal systems. McKinnon Wood observed “the survey thus attains a qualified universality, or the appearance of universality, which seemed quite beyond hope when the Committee last met in January. The Committee itself is satisfied that it cannot go further.”<sup>729</sup>

To complete this synthetic study, which would be appended to the original survey of laws of the “Western type,” the committee reached out to the secretary of the Comparative Law Institute at the University of Lyon. As the committee had directed the other institutes that it worked with, the survey was not interested in conducting an exhaustive survey of the legal status of women in Indo-China and the Near East. Instead, the committee was interested in expanding its general tableau of women’s legal status. The committee collected information about “Oriental laws” from its members. The material was provided to the Comparative Law Institute to integrate into its findings. As

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<sup>728</sup> LN R3769 3A/38744/30999 Legal, General. Status of Women. Scheme of Work for Scientific Institutes. Letter from McKinnon Wood to Mr. Podestá Costa, Under Secretary-General and the Treasurer, 25 July 1939.

<sup>729</sup> *ibid.*



it did with other legal systems, the committee gave the Comparative Law Institute the freedom to alter the information *mutatis mutandis* and to add any additional evidence. The committee gave the Comparative Law Institute the latitude to conduct the survey as it saw fit.

The Institute agreed to conduct the study. The Institute already had connections with jurists in Egypt, Lebanon, and Indo-China—the latter two were French colonial holdings—and proposed that it could summarize the material from the questionnaires it would distribute its representatives in the countries under study by December, 1940. The Institute explained that it needed a year to complete the study in order to get information not only the personal status laws that affected women, but also so it could explore the practical application of the laws.<sup>730</sup> The Comparative Law Institute did not want to disassociate the laws from their application, despite the committee giving it the license to do so. The Comparative Law Institute offered to provide the information needed for the study for 3,000 Swiss Francs. McKinnon Wood justified this additional amount to the treasurer by stating that there were no further meetings of the Committee of Experts scheduled for 1939, and thus there would be no expense for a meeting. The committee had no expenses beyond bringing the committee members to Geneva and commissioning data collection. McKinnon Wood also explained that there were “no further calls upon its budget so far as can be foreseen, except possibly a small grant to enable a member of the Committee to have consultations with the women’s organizations.”<sup>731</sup> The committee had a remaining budget balance of 12,000 Swiss Francs.

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<sup>730</sup> LN R3769 3A/38744/30999 Legal, General. Status of Women. Scheme of Work for Scientific Institutes. Letter from the Director of the Comparative Law Institute, Lyon to the Secretary-General of the League of Nations, 21 July 1939.

<sup>731</sup> LN R3772 3A/36734/31757 Legal, General. Confidential report issued by McKinnon Wood to the Secretary-General and Mr. Lester, Treasurer, 18 January 1939.

By the time the Committee of Experts held its third meeting in July 1939, not much material had been brought before the committee from the “scientific organizations” it had commissioned to carry out the study of women’s legal status under Western legal jurisdictions. Indeed, it was still commissioning studies into the legal status of women at its third meeting. The study of the legal status of women continued to be carried out until France was occupied by the Nazis, after which concerted international work became impossible. The Nazi occupation of France had international ramifications because it spread through France’s colonies, including its mandate in Syria.

The Committee of Experts did not achieve its goal of having its first report out by the start of the 1941 Assembly. In fact, the committee never issued a report of its findings comparing the legal status of women, but the data was submitted to the Secretariat and recorded in the register of the League. When World War II interrupted the collection and analysis of data, the Liaison Committee of Women’s International Organisations expressed that “now one can only hope the threads may be picked up once again with the advent of peace.”<sup>732</sup> The Liaison Committee’s hope that the thrust of the inquiry would not be lost came true. The material that the committee amassed in its brief existence survived the war and was utilized by the United Nations when it established a Status of Women Commission in 1946.<sup>733</sup> The data collected by the Committee of Experts and the minute discussion of the legal status of women in Western, Oriental, and primitive legal

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<sup>732</sup> LN R3755 3A/15980/13900 Legal, General. Liaison Committee of Women’s International Organisations. Resolutions passed at a Meeting of the Committee held on 30 April 1943, 2.

<sup>733</sup> The material collected in the course the League of Nation’s inquiry into the legal status of women, provided the basis for the early activities of the UN Status of Women Commission founded in 1946. Carol Miller, “Geneva – the Key to Equality: Inter-war Feminists and the League of Nations,” *Women’s History Review* 3:2 (1994): 219-245 notes that there was even a continuity of membership between the League of Nations Committee and the United Nations Commission. UN Office of Public Information, *The United Nations and the Status of Women* (New York, 1961); UN, Commission on the Status of Women, Report of the Commission on the Status of Women to the Economic and Social Council, E/281/Rev.1, 25 February 1946.

traditions, did not change the day-to-day realities for women living under the French Mandate for Syria, especially when World War II began in the region.

### **World War II in Greater Syria: Women's Local and Regional Responses**

When news of war in Europe first hit the Lebanese airwaves, it “carried terror to our souls,” one schoolteacher later remembered.<sup>734</sup> Anyone older than twenty-five remembered the horror of the famine caused by French port blockades during World War I.<sup>735</sup> Syria was still under French rule. One woman recalled how “acute pain [rose] in the breasts of the generation that had lived through the catastrophe of the First War ... Work stopped and business dwindled as a wave of profound pessimism engulfed the country.”<sup>736</sup> Syrians were terrified that the French would induce another famine; famine fear incited anti-mandate riots in Beirut, Damascus, and other Syrian cities. While a few crops did not have bountiful yields, the famine never came. The war touched the region in other ways. Wartime shortages arrived before the battles themselves. Limited imports caused shortages in commodities ranging from paper—newspapers had to shrink their column inches—to clothing. The shortages early in the war did not alter day-to-day operations for many Beirutis. In May 1940, the Beirut women's union sent a petition to the city government calling for cleaner parks and bakeries.<sup>737</sup>

When France capitulated in June 1940, “its fall brought conflict to Syria and Lebanon. More battleships moved toward our coast, and planes buzzed in our skies,”

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<sup>734</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 225. The material in this section draws heavily from Thompson's treatment of women's organizing during World War II in Syria and Lebanon in “Section V, World War II and the Transformation of the Colonial Civic Order.”

<sup>735</sup> On the memory of the famine during World War I see Najwa al-Qattan, “When Mothers Ate Their Children: Wartime Memory and the Language of Food in Syria and Lebanon,” *IJMES*, Special Issue: World War I, 46.4 (2014): 719-736.

<sup>736</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>737</sup> “Sayyidāt al-ittiḥād al-nisā’ī ...” *Bayrut* 5 May 1940: 2. Cited in Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 229.

recalled one Beirut woman.<sup>738</sup> The Nazi army did not march on Beirut, but German and Italian secret servicemen infiltrated Beirut and contributed to a climate of uncertainty and fear. Vichy government reigned over the French Mandate for Syria for a year. Wartime shortages increased under the Vichy occupation because the British blocked all shipping, closed the pipeline to Tripoli, and stopped trade with its mandate in Palestine and with Iraq, which was independent, but still connected to Britain. Breadlines grew, gasoline was rationed, and unemployment spiked—50,000 workers were unemployed in Damascus, a city of 220,000 people.<sup>739</sup> The cost of living in Syria doubled from 1939 to 1941, despite government attempts to install price controls and instate rationing schemes. Anti-Vichy sentiment spiked under these circumstances: hunger marches filled streets in Aleppo and Damascus and a shopkeeper strike spread throughout Syria. Once again, working-class women in conjunction with the members of women's organizations staged bread riots. The popular protests worked and the Vichy government lowered the cost of bread.

In June 1941, women's organizations running schools throughout Syria and Lebanon got word that Free French Forces under General Charles de Gaulle were marching with the British army up from Palestine to occupy Lebanon and Syria.<sup>740</sup> The teachers closed their schools and sent their pupils home. Anyone who could leave left Beirut for the relative security of the mountains. Leaflets dropped from planes ahead of the invasion stated its goal, "is not to repress your freedom but to assure it, to chase

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<sup>738</sup> Wadad Makdisi Cortas, *A World I Loved: The Story of an Arab Woman* (New York: Nation Books, 2009), 94.

<sup>739</sup> "Rapport du HC (Gabriel Puaux) au Gouvernement de Vichy sur la situation au Levant," 8 November 1940. Quoted in Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 230.

<sup>740</sup> Cortas, *A World I Loved*, 94.

Hitler's forces from Syria and make your rights, and those of France, respected."<sup>741</sup> Most of the fighting between the Free French and Vichy forces took place along the Lebanese coast and in Beirut in June and July 1941. Strategic sites were bombed and there were nighttime raids into the villages surrounding the city. After two months of fighting, the Free French Forces took Beirut. De Gaulle's victory was celebrated. But the Free French victory did not signal the end of French colonial rule in Syria. As Syrians set into a new round of French military occupation, they listened to radio broadcasts of the battles of Tobruk and El Alamein as Hitler's troops moved across North Africa hoping for an Allied victory, hoping for post-war independence.

### **A Response to War in the Mandate: The Social Democratic Women's League**

During World War II, women's organizations in Syria and Lebanon returned their focus to the domestic sphere. The world war destroyed the international framework enshrined at the League and in international women's organizations. Syrian and Lebanese women's organizations sought alternative visions of how the world could be structured—some women's organizations turned to Marxism as a means of achieving the interconnected aims of the women's movement: independence and women's rights. The turn toward Marxism as a motivating ideology demonstrates that even as women's organizations engaged in wartime relief in the domestic sphere, they were still very influenced by the flow of ideas in the international sphere.

Victoria Khouzami was born in Aimoun in Northern Lebanon in the 1910s. Her goals as a reformer were linked to the women of the previous generation who founded schools and were invested in improving women's access to education; she was the prodigy of the earlier generation of women's activists in Lebanon. Khouzami taught at

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<sup>741</sup> Général Catroux, *Dans la Bataille de Méditerranée* (Paris: René Julliard, 1949), 137.

the French School for Young Girls. While teaching at the school she “stoked the dream of creating a Women’s Social Organization extending throughout the Near East.”<sup>742</sup>

Khouzami laid the foundation for creating a Social Democratic Women’s League in the summer of 1942 by applying for official authorization from the Lebanese government, which was under the guidance of the Free French. The authorization was “immediately granted” by the government and sub-committees were formed throughout Lebanon in the North (Amioun, Tripoli, Batroun, Zawie), in the Mount Lebanon region (Baabda, Hammana, Metn, Souk el Gharb, and Biskanta), South Lebanon (Merjayoun), and in the Bekaa (Zahle).<sup>743</sup> These sub-committees were filled with representatives who had “strong values and a proven social spirit.”<sup>744</sup> The women recruited into the sub-committees were educated women of the upper classes.

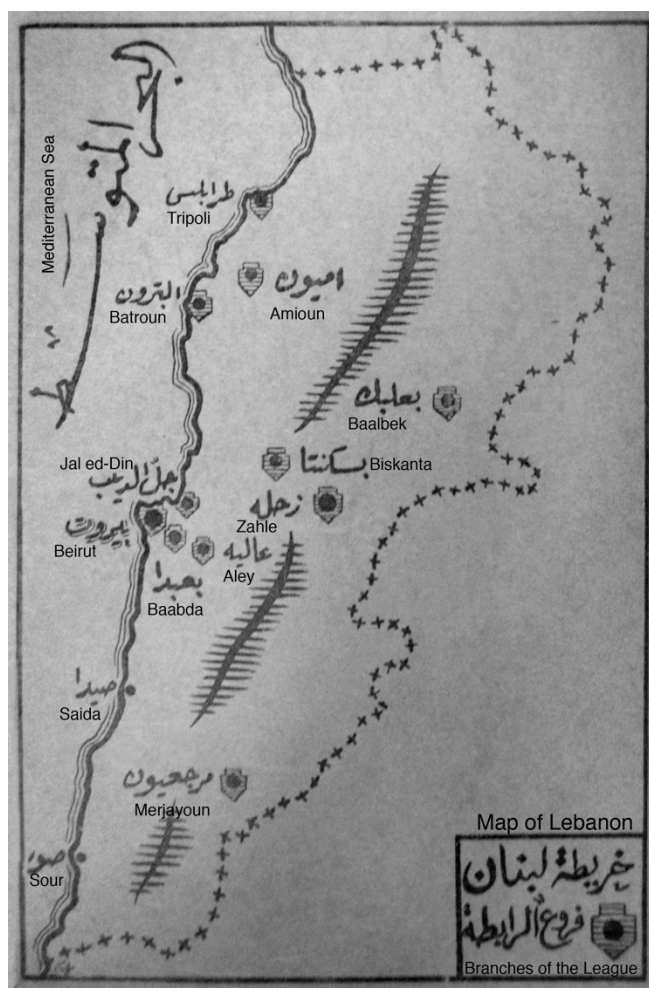
The sub-committees distributed throughout Lebanon’s mountains, valleys, plains, and coast were joined in the project of creating a social democratic women’s organization in Lebanon by additional sub-committees in different quarters of Beirut—there were twelve sub-committees distributed throughout Beirut’s neighborhoods and quarters. The Beirut sub-committees and the regional sub-committees gathered at the National Library on January 9, 1943. About a hundred young women gathered for the inaugural meeting of the Social Democratic Women’s League (SDWL). The first meeting was full of agenda setting.

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<sup>742</sup> *Al-rābita al-ijtimā’iyya al-dīmūqrāṭiyya al-nisā’iyya, t’assasat fī awwl sanat 1943, Beirut, Lebanon / La Ligue Sociale Démocratique Féminine, Fondée en 1943* (Beirut, 1944), 5.

<sup>743</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>744</sup> *ibid.*, 6.



Map of the branches of the Social Democratic Women's League in Lebanon. Source: Inside cover of *Al-rābita al-ijtimā'iyya al-dīmūqrāṭiyya al-nisā'iyya, t'assasat fī awwl sanat 1943, Beirut, Lebanon* (1943).

First, the members established a Steering Committee. The Steering Committee nominated women from both rural and urban sub-committees to serve on the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee was elected at the next meeting of the SDWL in April. Khouzami was unanimously elected for three years to serve as the General-Secretary. An Executive Committee, elected from the district representatives for three-year terms, advised Khouzami. She was joined on the Executive Committee by a president, an assistant, a secretary, a treasurer, a government delegate, and a liaison officer between the SDWL and the Lebanese government, which was still not granted the

independence that it was promised in 1936.

Next, the SDWL members formalized its goals and objectives. The members gathered at the library selected three over-arching goals, accompanied by a plan for action. The organization's first goal was to "put forth an immediate effort to remedy pressing social ills." The SDWL thought it could achieve this primary goal by establishing school cafeterias, organizing a summer camp, distributing clothes, shoes, and medication.<sup>745</sup> The second goal of the organization was to expand female access to education. To ensure more girls received an education, the organization proposed founding an Arts and Crafts school for young girls and forming intellectual teams for young girls to supplement school. These *equips intellectuelles* focused on providing educational experiences, such as field trips. The organization was not solely dedicated to improving the education standards for girls, it also targeted older educated women in Lebanon by proposing to "create a women's magazine, organizing conferences, creating a general library, and obtaining scholarships for gifted children."<sup>746</sup> These proposed activities were akin to the activities of women's organizations prior to the war.

The third plan was to bring the women's organizations in Lebanon together. The SDWL acknowledged that it was not the first organization to focus on improving girls' access to education, nor was the organization novel in proposing that women's rights would be better served by women's organizations coming together. It suggested greater emphasis be placed on "unifying and multiplying charity organizations in the country."<sup>747</sup> Each of its three goals forwarded the group's organizing mission: "To propagate the social spirit among women who, through their influence on the youth, will lead the

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<sup>745</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>746</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>747</sup> *ibid.*, 6.



country towards progress and a stronger community.”<sup>748</sup>

To enroll in the SDWL an applicant had to apply to a specific branch of the organization. They provided their first name and last name, date and location of birth, nationality, religion, address, and the date they applied for membership. They signed their name below the following pledge: “I ask the Secretary-General to register me as a member of the League and to subscribe me to its journal. I agree, also, to spread its principles selflessly and with integrity.”<sup>749</sup> Like the Syrian Women’s Awakening Society active in the 1920s and 1930s, the SDWL was interested in filing its ranks with respectable women.

At the first meeting of the Executive Committee of the SDWL, the organization’s leaders discussed Lebanon’s pressing social issues, per its first organizational objective. The Executive Committee decided that one of the most pressing problems facing Lebanon at the moment was the undernourishment of school children—a fact perhaps exacerbated by wartime conditions in the country. To address the fact that many of Lebanon’s school children were not getting enough to eat, the committee decided to establish school cafeterias. The women on the Executive Committee were well connected to the government and the military and were thus able to orchestrate opening its first cafeteria two weeks after announcing the plan (see Chapter Five cover image). The government had the resources the organization needed to achieve its goals, so it forged an alliance with the French mandate government to ensure that the nation’s children were fed.

Aligning with the mandate government did not necessarily mean supporting its presence in the country. After the war the SDWL developed connections with the

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<sup>748</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>749</sup> *ibid.*, 16.

Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) a newly created international alliance of women aligned with Marxism.<sup>750</sup> During the war their work was not overtly political; the SDWL was a charity organization invested in providing hot meals to hungry children and creating summer camps in the countryside so children could escape occupied Beirut.

### **Women in Wartime Nationalist Campaigns**

World War II in Greater Syria was not as deadly as the World War that preceded it. Most of the wartime civilian deaths in the region were the result of nationalist clashes with French mandate authorities. Yet World War II, like its predecessor, incited the women's movement to action. During the interwar period, the women's movement had gained members and momentum. Thus, women's response to the war was more organized than it had been during the First World War when the women's movement in the region was just taking shape. The women's movement was intent on securing independence from the French. In an effort to tip the balance toward independence, women participated in a series of public demonstrations against the French in Lebanon and Syria. Many of these demonstrations focused on bread shortages under the French. French police reports record ten women-led demonstrations in Beirut and Aleppo during the summer of 1942.<sup>751</sup>

Hundreds of women marched through Aleppo in June 1942 chanting, "we are hungry, we want bread!" and shut the city down. Their protest was a multi-day, multi-pronged affair. One day four veiled women carried a coffin through the city—the coffin

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<sup>750</sup> Women's International Democratic Federation Women's International Congress, Paris (1945), WIDF Records, Box 1, Folder 7, SSC, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

<sup>751</sup> CADN 1SL/1/V/20, Sûreté report, 7 June 1942; carton 70, dossier 3/"manifestations publiques," Sûreté reports, 2 June and 15 July 1942 and 21 May 1943.

carried the messaged: “Death to Governor Nabih Martini!” Another group of twenty women, connected to the same protest, marched through Aleppo’s marketplace and forced it to shut down. More than 300 women staged a rally in Damascus that had a dual message: more bread, and democracy and independence. Beirut had the largest demonstration of all: 2,000 women and children blocked traffic in Beirut to demand lower bread prices.<sup>752</sup> The bread riot campaigns in Aleppo, Damascus, and Beirut appear to have been coordinated.

Women taking to the streets and public squares to stage demonstrations for bread aligned with society’s expectations for women’s role in society—they were seeking bread and more flour so they could better feed and provide for their families. Women also used the war to push against social norms. The veil had been a taboo subject in Syria since the 1928 elections, but coordinated campaigns to secure government sanction for unveiling surfaced throughout Greater Syria in 1943. In June, Thuraya al-Hafiz led a march of 100 women to Marja Square in Damascus, where they collectively unveiled. Al-Hafiz extolled the crowd for their action. She gave a speech in which she “averred that the veil we wore was never mentioned in God’s holy book or by the Prophet Mohammed.” She continued, “so as our religion does not ask us to veil ourselves and expects us to show our faces and be men’s equals, we now take the veil off.”<sup>753</sup> Around the same time a group of women in Hama petitioned the government asking for government support for unveiling. Their campaign was met with popular backlash and received no government support.<sup>754</sup> The unveiling campaigns were just the start of women’s organizing in Syria and Lebanon

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<sup>752</sup> CADN 1SL/1/V/20, Sûreté report, 7 June 1942; carton 70, dossier 3/“manifestations publiques,” Sûreté reports, 2 June and 15 July 1942 and 21 May 1943; “fî dimashq al-‘arabiyya,” *al-Tariq* 1 (31 July 1942): 22.

<sup>753</sup> Thuraya al-Hafiz, *al-Hafiziyyat* (Damascus: Matba’at al-Thabit, n.d. (1980?), 86. Quoted in Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 242.

<sup>754</sup> “Pour et contre l’évolution féminine.” *Les Echos* 30 June 1943: 2.

in 1943.

On November 11, 1943, the French General in charge of the Free French Forces in Syria staged a coup that deposed the popularly elected President Bishara al-Khuri and replaced him with a puppet ruler, Emile Eddé, who had not run in the general election. Beirut exploded at the news. Crowds destroyed images of Charles de Gaulle, built barricades in the streets, and burned French property. French planes circled and French troops patrolled the city. The unrest was not contained to Beirut, it spilled into the surrounding countryside as well. At least twenty Lebanese citizens, including nine schoolboys, were killed in clashes with French troops. The anti-French unrest was contained to Lebanon, but many in Syria participated in sympathy demonstrations to demonstrate their support for the Lebanese cause. As in previous clashes with the French, the Lebanese quickly appealed to the international community to raise awareness about French abuses of power. They used the language of democracy and the newly ratified Atlantic Charter in their appeals. Students at the American Junior College for Women called for British intervention on the basis of the Atlantic Charter, which “affirmed the right of all peoples to choose their own form of government.”<sup>755</sup> Another petition was sent to the British Prime Minister, “[w]e Lebanese ladies of different creeds strongly protest against the hideous aggression and treachery committed against the officials of our independent government ... and regard this as an insult to our honor.”<sup>756</sup> The petition captures the sense that independence had already been promised and that its delivery had been yet again aborted yet again by another French transgression of the limits of their power.

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<sup>755</sup> FO 226-241-27-490, Letter to Spears, 13 November 1943. Quoted in Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 257.

<sup>756</sup> FO 226-241-27-422, Ladies of Lebanon to the prime minister, 12 November 1943. Quoted in Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 257.

Petitions were not the only form of protest that women used in response to the coup in Lebanon. Members of the Lebanese Women's Union, Ibtihaj Qaddura among them, organized a women's demonstration—Qaddura was joined by seasoned women's rights activists Eveline Bustros, Rose Shahfa, Imilie Faris Ibrahim, and Nazik 'Abid Bayhum, who had served in Faysal's army in 1920. The activists, many of whom had been active in trying to secure women's rights since the start of the mandate, used their networks to send information around the city when the protests that engulfed the city forced newspapers to stop publication, disrupted telephone and telegraph service, and stalled tram service.<sup>757</sup> The activists were busy: they met with the wives of the imprisoned officials, they distributed secret messages from their husbands, some of whom were nationalists who had been imprisoned by the French, they organized international petition campaigns, and they provided charity aid to displaced families and the wounded. The leaders of the Lebanese Women's Union also activated their network with women's leaders in other cities around Lebanon and in the larger Arab world. They also reached out to women who were not members of the movement to try to rally them to the cause of protesting French treachery.

The largest women's demonstration occurred on the morning of November 12, the day after the coup. Eveline Bustros gathered a group of women, many of them were Christian—Bustros was Greek Orthodox. The column of Christian women marched through downtown Beirut toward *Place des Canons*, or what the locals called Martyrs' Square (a reference to nationalists who had been killed during Arab nationalist clashes against Ottoman forces during World War I). The group of Christians was joined by another group of women, mostly Muslim who were dressed in black and veiled. The 200

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<sup>757</sup> Ibrahim, *al-Haraka al-nisā'īyya al-lubnāniyya*, 43, 149; Khatib, *Tārīkh taṭawwūr al-ḥaraka al-nisā'īyya fī lubnān*, 48.

women continued on their path toward the center of Beirut. As they progressed, young men linked arms and formed a human chain to protect the protestors as they moved through the street. While women were claiming their right to be independent actors in Lebanese society, they had not completely upended Lebanese social norms.

Once the protestors reached the square, the Muslim women collectively unveiled. A British official observed the protest and later wrote, “then an extraordinary thing happened. All the Moslem women together, with one gesture, as if obeying an unvoiced command, threw their veils back over their heads.” He interpreted this gesture as the women “saying that they were Lebanese women, women who loved their country just as much as their Christian sisters.”<sup>758</sup> As women had done when the promise of independence was first issued in 1936, they used the context of the war to try to alter social strictures.

Additional women-led protests followed on November 16 and 17. On November 16, the Lebanese Women’s Union in conjunction with one of the male-led nationalist groups staged a protest that brought almost 200 women into the streets—it was ultimately dispersed by French troops. On November 17, 100 women once again took to the streets. This time their protest targeted the Maronite patriarch to try to sway him to support the nationalist protests. Rose Shahfa stressed that the struggle against the French was one of justice and dignity and democracy: “These things have been done to Lebanon by the nation who was the first to raise the banner of freedom, and to recognize the Rights of Man ... Shall we continue to submit to their [French] despotic treatment, while it was

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<sup>758</sup> Edward Spears, *Fulfillment of a Mission: Syria and Lebanon, 1941-1944*, reprint (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1977), 236.

they who first taught us to demand our rights?”<sup>759</sup> In the end the protests—combined with Allied pressure for the French to relinquish power—yielded the desired result: independence on November 22, 1943. But the French did not vacate right away. French troops stayed in Lebanon until 1946.

Bishara al-Khouri, once he returned to power, praised women’s role in the independence struggle. He said “we will not find rest until the Lebanese woman occupies her place under the dome of parliament and attains her full, unconditional rights.”<sup>760</sup> Women were not contented by presidential promises. Women used their participation in the anti-French protests to open up their access to new rights and protections under the Lebanese state. Once parliament was reinstated, a women’s delegation visited and pushed the members of parliament to given women access to political participation in the country. Imilie Faris Ibrahim wrote an article that argued if Lebanon were to grant women suffrage, it would join the “advanced nations.” She equated the people opposed to women’s suffrage in Lebanon with the Nazis, in fact, she said they were “more Nazi than the Nazis themselves in their denial of us and their theft of our right to run for office.”<sup>761</sup> Independence was secured, but whether government officials in Syria and Lebanon would keep their promises to women’s organizations regarding their rights remained to be seen.

Women’s organizing did not end with independence, because securing independence had only been part of their goal. They wanted independent nations that protected women’s rights. The women’s movement worked along multiple avenues to try and shape the future of their independent nations. Some educators active in the women’s

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<sup>759</sup> FO 266-241-27-660 translated texts of the November 17 speeches provided by the women’s delegation. Quoted in Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 261.

<sup>760</sup> Hanifa Khatib, *Tārīkh taṭawwur al-ḥaraka al-nisā’iyya fī lubnān*, 50.

<sup>761</sup> “Haquq Jadīda,” *al-Tariq* 2 (29 December 1943): 16. Quoted in Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 259.

movement set their sights on creating an autonomous national university. They thought it was more important than having “an army, an air force, or any military organization.”<sup>762</sup> They said they were “grateful for the foreign universities on our soil but equally conscious of the necessity of having our own institutions.”<sup>763</sup> The need for having their own institutions stemmed from the fact that “[a]nything that inspired love of country or language or drew us nearer to other Arab countries, had been discouraged by our colonizers; any movement that bred self-respect was refuted and killed in its infancy.”<sup>764</sup> One educator recalled, “[i]n its search for an identity, Lebanon was awakened to the importance of liberal education in the hands of its own people.”<sup>765</sup> Many women were teachers; they saw a role for themselves in shaping a post-war national identity in Lebanon through the classroom.

During the war the national boundaries between Syria and Lebanon hardened. But what happened in Lebanon shaped what happened in Syria—for political and logistical reasons the French could not keep Syria under its control and give Lebanon independence. Thus, Syria emerged from the war as an independent republic (though, again, the French did not fully evacuate troops until 1946). On May 20, 1944, shortly after the January 1 date of independence going into effect, protests erupted in Damascus demonstrating that the transition from French rule to independence was hardly seamless. The protest started with the circulation of a flyer by a prominent shaykh who said that women’s unveiling was immoral and that the cinema was an evil influence. News that unveiled Muslim women might attend a charity ball scheduled to benefit the Drop of Milk Society (*Goutte de Lait*) prompted the circulation of the flyer.

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<sup>762</sup> Cortas, *A World I Loved*, 105.

<sup>763</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>764</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>765</sup> *ibid.*, 106.



The flyer was read at Friday prayers and a group of protestors gathered on Saturday morning to demand the government cancel the ball. The police chief who attended the protest said that the Drop of Milk Society was mainly a French-Christian society and that he would ask that Muslim women not be admitted. The promise of barring Muslim women did not appease the crowd. The crowd took to the streets and headed in the direction of the French Officer's Club, where the ball was scheduled to take place that evening. The crowd swelled to 500. Many of the protestors were armed with guns and knives. Across the street from the club, a cinema was having a ladies' matinee—another evil registered by the shaykh. The crowd turned on the cinema. Some police rushed to protect the women inside. Police claim the crowd was charging the cinema's doors and some in the crowd turned their guns on the police. Shots were fired. Accounts differ, but it seems likely the police shot first. At least two demonstrators were killed, including a twelve-year-old boy and a religious student. The police arrested the leaders of the revolt and turned to the leaders of the Drop of Milk Society and asked them to cancel the charity ball.<sup>766</sup>

The leaders of the Drop of Milk Society consented. Though, they did so with some reservations as the ball was an important event for the charity society—and for Damascene high society. The wife of the French General Catroux had hosted the ball the year prior.<sup>767</sup> They cancelled the ball but displayed their consternation by withholding the distribution of free milk to infants throughout the duration of the unrest. When mothers arrived at the society's headquarters on El-Nasser Street to collect milk, they turned the 250 poor mothers who received their aid away. It was the first time in the organization's history it had not provided milk. They told the mothers that they should “apply to the

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<sup>766</sup> CADN 1SL/1/V/70, “Damas,” Sûrete report, Homs, 22 May 1944.

<sup>767</sup> “Goutte de Lait.” *Les Echos* 15 January and 14 March 1943: 15.

shaykhs,” thus indicating where they placed the blame for the interruption in service.<sup>768</sup>

Unrest sieged Damascus for the better part of a week. Government officials, who still controlled the wartime rations of foodstuffs, threatened to stop the distribution of flour. It was under the threat of starvation that the protestors disbanded and the government was able to stop a full-scale rebellion like the one that transpired between 1925-1927. Again, the war provided an opening for women to claim political rights, but women’s social position in society was also under question.

If the events surrounding the First World War in Greater Syria sparked the interwar turn toward politics, the Second World War accelerated and completed the turn toward women’s political activism. Women had tepidly touched political issues prior to the war, but the events that transpired during the war, and especially the November 1943 coup and the May 1944 riots, were a turning point. Many women now claimed political rights and thought that their work to bolster the nationalist activities during the war secured their place as equal citizens after the war. The war was not just a turning point in the women’s movement in Syria and Lebanon, but in the larger region as well.

### **The 1944 Cairo Conference: The Pan-Arab Women’s Response to the War**

An Arab Feminist Conference convened in Cairo from December 12-16, 1944. It was the first Arab women’s conference since the start of the war. The end of the war was on the horizon and the women who organized the conference saw it as an opportunity to discuss how to position the women’s movement in Arab countries after the end of hostilities. Rose Shahfa, who led the Lebanese delegation, said at a press conference before the conference began that “[w]e plan to study women’s postwar situation. The war has, in effect, provoked a social evolution, and the social rights of women will be of high

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<sup>768</sup> Quoted in in Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 263.

importance after the war.”<sup>769</sup> The conference was meant to speak to local Arab governments about Arab women’s investment in the postwar future of the Arab world, one they hoped would be filled with peace, democracy, independence, and women’s active political participation. The conference was also supposed to send a signal to the international community about Arab women’s readiness to speak for themselves. Huda Sha’arawi’s dissatisfaction with the European-dominated International Woman Suffrage Alliance, which did not allow for criticism of Western governments and imperialism—as demonstrated at the IWSA’s conference in Copenhagen in 1939—inspired her to convene the conference.

The Egyptian King and Queen sponsored the conference. The opening ceremony was a grand and glitzy affair attended by Egyptian royalty and by members of the Egyptian Parliament. The conference served as an opportunity for the Egyptian government to demonstrate its support for women’s causes. After the lavish opening, the conference was structured around delegate speeches and a series of public addresses, such as the conference president, Sha’arawi’s keynote address, and a speech delivered by the Egyptian Education Minister, Muhammad Husayn Haykal.<sup>770</sup> At the end of the conference, a series of resolutions that contained concrete calls for legal and other changes were passed. The resolutions addressed women’s social, political, and civil rights. The resolutions pledged to work toward providing educational, literary, social, humanitarian, and economic services for women in Arab countries.

The call to participate circulated to states throughout the Arab world, from the states in the Eastern Mediterranean that were just starting the transition away from French and British colonial rule to the states of North Africa, such as Algeria, which was

<sup>769</sup> “Le Congrès féministe du Caire.” *Les Echos* 13 December 1944: 2.

<sup>770</sup> *Al-mu’tamar al-nisā’ al-‘arabi* (Cairo: Dār al-m’ārif, 1944), 20.

not an independent state. It does not appear that the call went out to women on the Arabian Peninsula, likely because there were no national women's organizations to invite to participate. The call yielded national delegations from Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Trans-Jordan. The Lebanese delegation, with twenty-seven representatives under the leadership of Shahfa, was the second largest after the Egyptian one. The Trans-Jordanian delegation was the smallest with two delegates. Approximately one-fifth of the women who attended the conference in Cairo in 1944 had attended the previous women's conference in Cairo in 1938. The women who attended the conference were socioeconomic or educational elites.

The conference sought Arab unity: unity among Arab nations, unity among Arab women, and unity between Arab women and men. In advance of the conference, both the Syrian Women's Union and the Lebanese Women's Union inserted "Arab" into the name of their organizations. Thus, the organizations became the Syrian-Arab Women's Union and the Lebanese-Arab Women's Union.<sup>771</sup> Syrian and Lebanese women's organizations attended the conference to enhance their Arab-nationalist credentials, which would play to domestic audiences where women were struggling to gain access to political rights in independent Syria and Lebanon. Social unrest in Syria and Lebanon in the months leading up to the conference signaled the difficult climate that women in those countries faced in trying to secure women's rights protections. On the eve of the conference, in September 1944, a suffrage proposal put forth by Lebanese women's organizations was defeated.

The leaders of the Syrian and Lebanese delegations took advantage of the press conference at the start of the conference to declare their intent to support national causes

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<sup>771</sup> "al-Ittiḥād al-nisā'ī al-'arabī fī dimashq." *al-Qabas* 4 July 1944: 1-2; CADN ISL/1/V/68, "L'Union féminine arabe," 25 February 1944.

before claiming women's rights. 'Adila Bayhum al-Jaza'iri, who led the Syrian delegation, claimed that in the context of the world war,

[t]he first goal of our conference is to reaffirm the cultural, social, and economic ties of Arab countries ... Our feminist cause comes next; it aims mainly to improve the family and to grant women their full rights ... the Syrian woman has general goals and particular goals. For now, she is more concerned with general goals, national goals, than with women's goals.<sup>772</sup>

Not only were women invested in the nation, they had proven that investment through their anti-French, pro-independence activism. Shahfa noted in Lebanon, women had helped secure independence through their protests and campaigns surrounding the November 1943 coup. She said "[t]he Lebanese Women's Union has taken an active part in the Lebanese political movement with excellent results. This proves that if women take an interest in political life, they can perform usefully."<sup>773</sup> Shahfa reminded the audience at the press conference that Lebanese women did not just espouse support for the nation, they acted on it.

Aware of the inhospitable climate back home, both the Syrian and Lebanese delegations were careful about what rights they claimed from their newly independent states. Jaza'iri said "[t]he Syrian woman demands, with reserve, for the educated woman to enter political life."<sup>774</sup> Shahfa was more forceful in her claim that women should be granted suffrage, saying, "[w]e believe that the educated woman has more right to political privileges than the ignorant man who enjoys these rights."<sup>775</sup> The rights Syrian and Lebanese women claimed at the conference were couched in service to the state. The

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<sup>772</sup> "Le Congrès féministe du Caire." *Les Echos* 13 December 1944: 2. The Syrian delegation was not the only delegation to prioritize women's rights before the nation or religious obligations. Zlikha al-Shihabi, leader of the Palestinian movement, said "women in Palestine and Trans-Jordan will not demand more rights than what is allowed under Islamic law and by the holy Qur'an. Demanding political rights for women is before its time." *Filistīn*, Dec. 13, 1944. Quoted in Ellen Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its "New" Women: The Palestinian Women's Movement, 1920-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 189.

<sup>773</sup> "Le Congrès féministe du Caire." *Les Echos* 13 December 1944: 2.

<sup>774</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>775</sup> *ibid.*

press conference was the venue where the Syrian and Lebanese (and Palestinian and Iraqi) nationalist campaigns were aired. The conference itself focused on issues that bridged the region's newly independent national boundaries, as evidenced by Sha'arawi's keynote.

In the keynote Sha'arawi forcefully claimed "[t]he Arab woman who is equal to the man in duties and obligations will not accept in the twentieth century distinctions between the sexes that advanced countries have discarded."<sup>776</sup> Thus a nation's progress was yoked to how it treated its women—advanced nations had discarded the principle of inequality between the sexes. She continued, "[t]he Arab woman does not agree to be chained in slavery and to pay for the consequences of men's mistakes concerning her country's rights and the future of her children. In her loudest voice, the woman demands to regain her political rights, which have been granted to her by the shari'a."<sup>777</sup> Sha'arawi claimed a place for women to participate in their nations because the choices made by male leaders affected the ability of women to contribute to the nation. Sha'arawi's keynote set the tone for the conference. Women claimed their right to participate in national conversations because of the integral role women played in shaping the nation through their position as mothers.

Many of the women who attended the conference as delegates were educators. The women viewed the classroom as a space where women could shape the nation. Qamar Qazun, a member of the Syrian delegation stressed the need for an educational system grounded in Arab culture to counter the influence of missionary and mandate

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<sup>776</sup> *Al-mu'tamar al-nisā'ī al-'arabi* (Cairo: Dār al-m'ārif, 1944), 77.

<sup>777</sup> *ibid.*, 78.

schools.<sup>778</sup> Zahiya Dughan from Lebanon recognized three educational systems operating in the Arab world: a reactionary indigenous system, a new nationalist program, and a Western system. Arab women “demand that education in every country must now have one character and this must be an Arab nationalist character.”<sup>779</sup> She based this claim off of the fact that “[i]n every Arab country, irrespective of the prevailing conditions and social and cultural variations, we have had two streams of intellectual life: the inherited Arab stream and the intruding western stream.”<sup>780</sup> She wanted to limit the flow of the western stream. To do so, she proposed turning the classroom into a nationalist space. She also suggested that Arab women dedicate energy to writing Arab women’s history—women must retrieve their own histories, preserve and interpret them, and pass them on. “I propose that the literary, political, and social history of the Arab woman and the current contributions and activities of the western woman be assembled in an Arab women’s encyclopedia produced by our intellectuals ... I invite all Arab universities to ... give the intellectual and literary tradition of the Arab woman the attention it deserves.”<sup>781</sup> The comparative encyclopedia of Arab and Western women’s histories would give women insight into their own pasts—and give them something to build their movement off of.

Other delegates raised questions of social and economic protections for workers and for mothers in their conference speeches. Syrian Falak Diyab exhorted women’s organizations to use their expertise as leaders of social service organizations to help

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<sup>778</sup> *ibid.*, 120-129. This speech and the ones that follow were translated and quoted by Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 243.

<sup>779</sup> *ibid.*, 153-160. An edited extract translated into English was published in Badran and cooke, eds. *Opening the Gates: An Anthology of Arab Feminist Writing* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 342.

<sup>780</sup> *Al-mu'tamar al-nisā'ī al-'arabi* (Cairo: Dār al-m'ārif, 1944), 153-160. Translated in Badran and cooke, *Opening the Gates*, 342.

<sup>781</sup> Badran and cooke, *Opening the Gates*, 342.

develop state agencies to provide social services for mothers and children.<sup>782</sup> A Lebanese doctor, Jamal Karam Harfush, suggested that state and municipal authorities provide public spaces—playgrounds, parks, and gardens—for poor children to play.<sup>783</sup> ‘Afīfa Ra’uf of Iraq recognized “the economic freedom of women is the basis of her other freedoms.”<sup>784</sup> She used the language of the social good to promote women’s employment. She noted that increased employment opportunities for women would have the added benefit of reducing the number of women forced into prostitution. The influx of foreign troops into the Arab world had driven up the numbers of prostitutes, something many women were concerned about.<sup>785</sup>

The conference passed fifty-one wide-ranging resolutions, which were directed at all Arab governments. A resolution claiming a women’s right to political participation topped the list—political equality entailed the right to vote and the right to run for and hold office. The resolution called for women to be granted political equality gradually, rather than right away. Another resolution at the top of the list called for Arab unity. As with many previous women’s conferences, many of the resolutions focused on altering family law. All of the following personal status demands were ratified: raising the minimum marriage age to sixteen; guaranteeing security for women as wives and mothers; ensuring that polygamous marriages needed to be approved by a judge; decreeing that divorce should be carried out in accordance with Islamic requirements and not as a weapon against women; and, safeguarding that a mother should obtain custody of children of both sexes until adolescence in the case of divorce. Additional resolutions grew out of women’s social and educational work. These resolutions called for Arab

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<sup>782</sup> *Al-mu’tamar al-nisā’ī al-‘arabi* (Cairo: Dār al-m’ārif, 1944), 184-188.

<sup>783</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>784</sup> *ibid.*, 268-271.

<sup>785</sup> *ibid.*



governments to support compulsory education and to provide basic medical services for the poor. Another resolution called for the elimination of feminine suffixes in Arabic words. Finally, a few of the resolutions grew out of the diplomatic work of their national representatives. For example, a resolution was passed supporting Palestinian independence. The conference did not ratify a proposal that a woman would be able to maintain her nationality upon marriage to a foreigner. Despite the issue of a women's right to nationality having been the gateway issue through which women's rights were internationalized, it garnered little attention or support in Cairo.

Arab governments were not the only targets of the conference resolutions. As in previous women's conferences hosted in Arab capitals, the conference organizers reached out to the international community to raise awareness about their conference and their claims. Eleanor Roosevelt had answered the invitation to attend with a plea that the Arab women's conference work for peace. Sha'arawi said, "I answer her from this podium that working to bring peace to the Arabs of Palestine is one of the strongest pillars of peace in the Arab East."<sup>786</sup> The 1938 conference had addressed Palestine as *the* issue. Six years later, Palestine was *an* issue that was categorized under the peace and democracy heading. The conference wrote to the British High Commissioner for Palestine in Jerusalem and to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill asking for peace for Palestine. The British were still in charge of Palestine; while the French Mandate for Syria was dissolved between 1944 and 1946, the British mandate for Palestine did not end until 1948. The conference delegates also wrote to American President Franklin Roosevelt,

The Arab Feminist Conference convening in Cairo and representing the women of Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and Trans-Jordan protests all American propaganda in favor of Zionism and any assistance to it to realize its illegitimate hopes in Palestine, which is indisputably the legitimate country of the Arabs. It is strange that America,

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<sup>786</sup> *ibid.*, 319-321.

which is now fighting all over the world in defense of democracy, is violating the sacredness of these noble principles in respect to Palestine, which is Arab. Arab women will not spare any sacrifice in defense of their noble cause.<sup>787</sup>

The women who wrote the telegram that was sent to the American president were strategic in the language they used. The paradox the letter highlighted with regards to the “defense of democracy” echoed the paradox highlighted with regards to “self-determination” in petitions and protest telegrams directed toward the League of Nations in the 1920s and 1930s.

The conference delegates created the *al-ittihād al-nisā’ī al-‘arabī* (Arab Feminist Union) to keep the conversations started at the conference going after the sessions ended.<sup>788</sup> The organizers observed, “it became necessary to create an Eastern feminist union as a structure within which to consolidate our forces and help us have an impact upon the women of the world.”<sup>789</sup> The target audience of the conference organizers was not just women in the Arab world, but the international women’s rights community. Huda Sha’arawi was its president. ‘Adila Bayhum al-Jaza’iri represented Syria. Rose Shahfa represented Lebanon.<sup>790</sup> It published the journal *al-Mar’a al-‘Arabiyya* (The Arab Woman) to circulate information about women’s organizations activities between states—women’s journals had helped spark a pan-Arab women’s sentiment twenty years prior and a women’s journal would keep those connections going. Times had changed and a pan-Arab women’s movement had developed; the technologies for keeping the women in contact remained the same.

The conference received significant press coverage in the Arabic press and in the

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<sup>787</sup> *ibid.*, 339. Translation from Margot Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 241.

<sup>788</sup> It later changed its name to the General Arab Women’s Union. This organization is different from the *Union Féministe Arabe*, which was affiliated with the IWSA in 1935.

<sup>789</sup> *Al-mu’tamar al-nisā’ī al-‘arabī* (Cairo: Dār al-m’ārif, 1944), 27.

<sup>790</sup> Other national representatives were Zulaykhah al-Shihabi and Sadiyah Nasser from Palestine; Emily Bisharat and Luli Abu al-Huda from Trans-Jordan; Nadhimah al-‘Askari and Sirriyah al-Khujah from Iraq.

English-language press in the region, though the coverage differed slightly between presses. The Arabic press chronicled the proposals and the language of Arab solidarity with Palestine. The English language press emphasized that women were claiming rights. For example, *Filistīn* ran the headline on December 13, 1944 of “The Arab Women’s Conference in Cairo—Five Minutes of Applause and Cheering for the Cause of Palestine—Palestine in the Introductory Researches of the Conference and Splendid Opening Party.” *Palestine Post*, an English language daily, ran a headline on December 12, 1944 that read “Arab Women Demand Rights.”<sup>791</sup> The majority of the press coverage during the event itself was favorable. After news of the resolutions spread throughout the region, local responses varied. In Syria and Lebanon, the conference resolutions were not well received by religious leaders and some nationalists.

In Lebanon, Laure al-Khuri, the wife of the Lebanese President, supported importing the Cairo resolutions and called for their immediate adoption, “Why not?” she asked a reporter. “There are already numerous female lawyers and doctors. Why not female politicians?”<sup>792</sup> Rose Shahfa presented the resolutions to the new Lebanese Prime Minister, who promised to set up a committee to study them. The promise did not translate into action. In Syria, the “Cairo Resolutions” did not receive the same show of support. A cleric declared the

rights demanded by women: divorce, suffrage, admission to state offices, abolition of polygamy etc. ... The realization of these women’s aspirations would lead to disastrous consequences for the Arab Muslim nation—corruption, loss of energy, and of patriotic spirit—and will provoke a dire reaction in Syrian circles.<sup>793</sup>

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<sup>791</sup> For further examples of how the conference was covered in the Arabic and English language presses in Palestine see Fleischmann, *The Nation and Its “New” Women: The Palestinian Women’s Movement, 1920-1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 187 FN 70.

<sup>792</sup> “Mme la Présidente El-Khoury.” *Les Echos* 25 January 1945: 1. Quoted in Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 274.

<sup>793</sup> CADN 1SL/1/V/39, “Congrès féminine arabe,” Sûreté reports, Damascus, 1 January and 12 January 1945.

Thus, Syrian women had to work to prove their essential role in the Syrian state. They seemed to believe if the state recognized women as an important block of nationalists, they would have to give them rights. To prove their loyalty to the Syrian state above all else, women participated in the latest fight against the French—trying to secure the full evacuation of French troops. Nearly 300 female high school students, many of them were from Jaza'iri's school, marched on parliament and the seat of the French mandate, the Serail, to demand the French troops vacate the country.<sup>794</sup>

The apex of Syrian and Lebanese women's anti-French protests coincided with the end of World War II in May 1945. In Syria, over 200 women from a variety of women's organizations took to the streets again, declaring "the intent of Syrian women to consecrate all their efforts to achieve national independence."<sup>795</sup> The May demonstrations in Syria devolved into one final violent confrontation with the French. Women hurried to join the fight against the French in Hama, Damascus, and elsewhere. Jaza'iri was forced to spend a night hiding in Damascene orchards when fighting blocked her path home from the front. The clashes resulted in Allied pressure on the French to complete the full transfer of control over the mandate to Special Troops by August 1945.

In Lebanon, the veterans behind the 1943 protests returned to their tired task of trying to oust the French for good. Ibtihaj Qaddura gave a speech proclaiming "[h]ere is the woman who walks in front of the man, devoting all of her energy to the service of the nation. Here she is, this revolutionary, who combats oppression and injustice. ... Woman is no longer made for the home, because the whole world can no longer do without her

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<sup>794</sup> CADN 1SL/1/V/70, "Manifestations publiques-I, Damas," Sûreté report, 24 May 1945.

<sup>795</sup> *ibid.* and "III-General," Sûreté reports, Latakia, 15 January 1945 and Damascus 30 January, 1 February, and 19 March 1945.

services.”<sup>796</sup> Qaddura laid bare women’s dedication to the Lebanese nation and hinted that in return for women’s full support of an independent Lebanon, the Lebanese state should support women by delivering them equal state protections and rights.

The Second World War changed the region. As the Arab states emerged from colonial rule, they banded together to form the Arab League.<sup>797</sup> The women who attended the Arab Feminist Conference in 1944 and established the Arab Feminist Union were disappointed that they were not welcome at the negotiations that created the Arab League in 1945. Huda Sha’arawi, who was president of the Arab Feminist Union, spoke on behalf of the organization. She observed, “[y]ou have widened the gap between yourselves and your women by deciding to build your new glory alone.”<sup>798</sup> Sha’arawi observed that leaving women outside the structure of the organization was foolish because

both men and women are working toward one goal, it is inevitable that we shall meet one day, brought together in harmony by the necessity of circumstances and events to work toward common goals. You will come to believe that it is imperative for the sexes to cooperate, and we shall enter a new era dominated by a genuinely cooperative spirit. Such an era will truly express the essence of the Arab League.<sup>799</sup>

Sha’arawi ended her appeal to the Arab League by stating “[t]he League whose pact you signed yesterday is but half a league, a league of half the Arab people. Our hope is that a league will be formed that comprises both sexes and all Arabic-speaking peoples.”<sup>800</sup>

Excluding women from national discussions was no longer acceptable in the international community. Sha’arawi noted that other states were sending women on their delegations

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<sup>796</sup> CADN 1SL/1/V/68, “La Ligue féminine libanaise,” Sûrete report 1994, 24 May 1945.

<sup>797</sup> The Arab League was created on 22 March 1945. Its original members were Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria. The membership structure of the Arab League mirrored the Arab Feminist Union that preceded it, though Palestine was not part of the Arab League and Saudi Arabia was not part of the Arab Feminist Union.

<sup>798</sup> *Al-mu’tamar al-nisā’ī al-‘arabi* (Cairo: Dār al-m’ārif, 1944), 342-343. Translated in Badran, *Feminists, Islam, and Nation*, 245-246.

<sup>799</sup> *Al-mu’tamar al-nisā’ī al-‘arabi* (Cairo: Dār al-m’ārif, 1944), 342.

<sup>800</sup> *ibid.*, 343.

to the meeting in San Francisco that was working to establish the United Nations.<sup>801</sup> The League of Nations had officially ceased to be in force in the international community in 1946 as the United Nations came into being.

The newly independent Arab states did not completely ignore the status of women within their borders. In fact, Arab states used the status of women in their nations to dispel notions of their backwardness. For example, Egypt and Iraq sent informational brochures to foreign legations in their countries, entitled “Women’s Education in Iraq” and “Egypt’s Women.”<sup>802</sup> One of the first acts of the independent state of Syria was to send Alice Kandaleft Cosma, an experienced women’s rights advocate, to the United States on a speaking tour. Cosma’s tour ended the silencing of Arab women and Arab states with regards to the status of women. Whether others would listen to Arab women’s self-representation was another story.

### **Alice Kandaleft Cosma: The Syrian Government’s Appointee to the UN Commission on the Status of Women**

Syria became fully independent from French control on April 17, 1946. Shortly after Syrian independence was secured, the United Nations gave Syria a seat on the UN Commission on the Status of Women, which was created in 1946. The UN Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSCW) picked up where the League of Nations’ Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women left off: the UN Commission’s major focus was on the legal and political status of women. Instead of limiting the scope of the inquiry to Western legal traditions and Western legal experts, the UN Committee allowed its membership to be comprised of women leaders, rather than just legal experts, from all

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<sup>801</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>802</sup> Countries Collection, Box 22: “Iraq”; Box 11: “Egypt,” SSC, Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts.

over the world: Nour Hamada's vision for the Committee of Experts was enacted by the subsequent international governing body.

The Syrian government nominated Alice Kandaleft Cosma to the post. Cosma accepted the nomination and she was approved by the United Nations to serve on the Committee. Cosma was well credentialed. She had studied in the United States and was conversant in English and French as well as her native Arabic. In addition, Cosma was a respected figure in the women's movement in Syria and a nationally recognized educational advocate and a champion of women's right to education. The newly independent nation's choice of Cosma conveyed Syria's support for women's progress through education and civic participation, even if this support did not translate into actual legislative change.

After completing her Master of Arts in Educational at Columbia University's Teachers College in the early 1920s, she returned to the Damascus. She gained a reputation as an educational expert after serving as the head of a series of girls schools in the region throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Her first teaching position after obtaining her degree was at the State Normal School in Baghdad, Iraq. She later served as principal of that school. Later still, she served as head of the Moslem College for Girls in Beirut. After her stint at the Moslem College for Girls, she transitioned to the Private National School for Girls, where she served as principal. She then moved back to her natal Damascus. In Damascus, she held two positions. The first position was as principal of the Secondary School of Arts and Crafts. The second position was as professor of education at the Teachers College in Damascus.

Cosma's activities were not confined to the classroom. She was a seasoned women's rights activist; the campaigns she was most invested in aligned with her

professional activities—the training of teachers.<sup>803</sup> Beyond those women’s organizations with a teacher-training focus, she was also immersed in the Syrian women’s movement and the regional Arab women’s movement. She co-founded the Arab Woman’s National League (c. 1945) and was its first president.<sup>804</sup> Cosma reported that the Arab Women’s National League asked Arab leaders not only for the right to vote but also for the “right to be voted for and elected to office.”<sup>805</sup> Prior to establishing the Arab Women’s National League, Cosma was active in the preparations for the Arab women’s Congress for the Defense of Palestine in 1938, serving as chair of the congress.<sup>806</sup> In 1946, she was the only woman to testify before the Anglo-American Committee on Palestine.<sup>807</sup>

In 1947, while in the United States, Cosma was given a teacher’s fellowship from the Institute for International Education (IIE in the field of Arab affairs). As an IIE-affiliated educator, Cosma was available to give talks around the country.<sup>808</sup> The IIE arranged three lectures for Cosma in 1947. In May she spoke at Meredith College in Raleigh, North Carolina, in July she spoke at the Kutztown State Teachers College in Kutztown, Pennsylvania, and in August, she spoke at Southern Illinois University in

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<sup>803</sup> “Arabian Women Look to Vote Rights Soon.” *The Bradford Era* (Bradford, PA) 13 August 1947: 4. (AP Story).

<sup>804</sup> “Syrian Women to Speak at SIU [Southern Illinois University] on Arab Problem.” *Carbondale Free Press* (Carbondale, IL) 16 July 1947: 9. This article was another announcement about the talk that evening. There was no follow-up article about the content of the talk on the 17 July. There are few references to this organization. It is possible it was connected to the Arab Feminist Union in some way; it may also have been a separate organization that pursued the same goals.

<sup>805</sup> “Hand to Arab Women—Feminine Leaders Eye Role in Political Field.” *The Kansas City Star* (Missouri) 5 August 1948.

<sup>806</sup> The date of this congress is listed as 1945 in the newspaper coverage. It is likely that she was referencing the 1944 Arab Women’s Conference hosted in Cairo, even though that conference did not have an explicitly pro-Palestinian objective. The article may have also cited her participation in the 1938 Conference for the Defense of Palestine in Cairo.

<sup>807</sup> “Hand to Arab Women—Feminine Leaders Eye Role in Political Field.” *The Kansas City Star* (Missouri) 5 August 1948.

<sup>808</sup> Institute of International Education. Twenty-eighth Annual Report of the Director (New York, N.Y., 1 October 1947), 29.



Carbondale, Illinois.<sup>809</sup> Cosma's talk on the "Current Problems in the Arab Middle East" fulfilled the parameters of her IIE grant in Arab Affairs. The Meredith College newspaper, *The Twig*, reported she "discussed the political and social divisions of the Arab world and placed particular emphasis on the Palestine problem from an Arab viewpoint."<sup>810</sup>

Church groups, women's clubs, and other women's organizations were invited to attend a lecture given by Cosma on July 16, 1947 at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois.<sup>811</sup> The lecture was free and open to the public as part of the university's summer cultural and entertainment program, but the newspaper made a special appeal to women to attend. Summer was sleepy in the small town of Carbondale—the front-page announcement about Cosma's speech shared the page with an article about how a Chevrolet pickup had knocked over a tree and how the nation's oldest surviving member of the Grand Army of the Republic had just turned 106 years old. Cosma's speech was a big event in the small college town. Her IIE lecture seems to have been delivered more or less unchanged from venue to venue. A press release issued in conjunction with the talk provided basic information about Cosma's life. The advanced press materials trying to summon an audience emphasized her credentials as an educator.

Even though her talk was about the political realities of the Arab world, her audience was most curious about the status of women in the Arab world. The news coverage of the speeches she delivered did not focus on the content of her talk—it was only referenced in passing—but rather on women's rights in the region. The questions on the status of women were not *non-sequiturs*. Cosma was, after all, the Syrian government

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<sup>809</sup> "Arab Educator Discusses near East Problem at Summer Session Luncheon." *The Keystone* (State Teachers College, Kutztown, PA) 9 July 1947: 1.

<sup>810</sup> "Mrs. Alice Cosma Speaks to Group." *The Twig* (Meredith College, Raleigh, NC) 23 May 1947: 6.

<sup>811</sup> "Syrian Will Speak Here." *Carbondale Free Press* (Carbondale, IL) 15 July 1947: 1.

appointee to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and its first female diplomat—one dedicated to the status of women. Cosma was happy to oblige the reporters who plied her with questions about the marriage traditions, educational possibilities, and career options of women in the Arab world. Cosma's conversations with reporters commonly addressed the rights that Arab women "enjoy" in Arab societies. Her comments clustered around three common themes: access to education, employment opportunities, and marital rights and privileges afforded by Islamic tradition—topics the League of Nations had not wanted dealt with in the Committee of Experts' research. Cosma declared, "[i]t is the duty of both the Arabians and the Americans to know each other better."<sup>812</sup> Cosma used the public lectures as her medium in helping Americans know more about Arabs and Arab women in particular.

Cosma provided a primer on the rights awarded to women in the Arab world by religious law and national governments. The information she shared reflects the expectations of her audience. The average reader of the local daily paper in post-war Kutztown, Pennsylvania or Carbondale, Illinois, knew very little about the Arab world. What they did know presented the status of women through a sensationalist, Orientalist lens: women confined to harems and denied the freedom of movement and choice. This image of Arab women repressed by Islamic tradition and men had gained traction through missionary reports. To counter this stereotype Cosma stated bluntly, "Arabian women aren't so badly off when it comes to their rights."<sup>813</sup> It seems she was comparing the legal status of Arab women to the legal status of women in Western legal traditions. "Women of Arabian lands do not have to put up a big fight to gain their objectives,"

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<sup>812</sup> "Arabian Feminist at K.S.T.C. Luncheon." *The Kutztown Patriot* (Kutztown, PA) 18 July 1947: 1.

<sup>813</sup> "Arabian Women Look to Vote Rights Soon." *The Bradford Era*, (Bradford, PA) 13 August 1947: 4. This article contained the same information as an article printed in the *Kansas City Star*. There must have been a press release that circulated to newspapers in advance of Cosma's speaking engagements.

because Cosma said, “they do not meet any masculine opposition.”<sup>814</sup>

“People have odd ideas about marriage customs in the East,” Cosma observed.

She asserted,

our women are well protected. A father who forces his daughter into marriage is considered a criminal. The marriage contract even insures the wife of financial support in the case of divorce. In fact, a man cannot die without leaving adequate provision for his wife and children because the law says that he may only dispose of one third of his property. The rest must go to his family.<sup>815</sup>

Cosma was invested in converting the stereotypes enmeshed in the American public imagination. Cosma was a Christian, but she understood that the majority of the stereotypes harbored by her audience understood the Arab world through Islam. She addressed the common misconceptions about Islam by providing examples of strong women throughout the history of Islam. Cosma evoked the names of Khadija and Nafisa as proof of a long history of women being liberated in the region. Khadija was the wife of the prophet Mohammed, but before she married him she ran a trade caravan between Mecca and Damascus, which was a grueling enterprise. Nafisa was an early learned scholar of Islam. These two examples proved Arab women had been leaders in economic and scholastic pursuits. With such strong, historical antecedents, Cosma emphasized, “Arab women of today are having little trouble in reminding men that they are equals.”<sup>816</sup> The Ottoman Empire had impinged on the strong history of Arab women being liberated actors in society. Cosma thought that Arab women had begun coming into their own after the close of the First World War, “following 500 years of foreign rule.”<sup>817</sup>

In addition to the right to marriage rights, Cosma mentioned women had other rights guaranteed by Islamic law. She said, “Islamic law gives women full independence

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<sup>814</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>815</sup> “Hand to Arab Women—Feminine Leaders Eye Role in Political Field.” *The Kansas City Star* (Missouri) 5 August 1948.

<sup>816</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>817</sup> *ibid.*

in disposing of their property—they can combine marriage with careers in the certainty that they and they alone are entitled to what they earn.” She noted that “[a]n Arab woman [was] free to choose her own husband and she [was] free to divorce him if such a provision is written into the marriage contract.”<sup>818</sup> Cosma continued her list of rights awarded to Arab women by religious legal precedents and traditions by adding that a woman kept her maiden name after marriage. At the UN, she noted that her name was Mrs. Cosma, but at home, she was Alice Kandaleft. Beyond the rights awarded to women by Islamic law and tradition, Arab women sought to expand the scope of their rights to include the ability to participate in public life.

Cosma told her audiences that a women’s “place in life was assured by Moslem religious law [and that] ‘education is the duty of every man and woman.’”<sup>819</sup> She observed that Arab universities were co-ed and that women were training for careers in medicine, law, and other professions. Increased access to education made many more women ready and able to enter the professions as “career women” and society as active citizens. Cosma reported that her countrywomen did not yet have the right to vote, but she was “hopeful that the condition will be rectified” after the crisis in the region abated and independence for all Arab states was secured. Cosma did not foresee any further obstacles to women’ obtaining rights once the Palestine problem was resolved. She noted that the independent “Arab countries had signed the UN agreement to recognize the legal and political status of women.”<sup>820</sup> She noted that the signatures were not a false promise to women, adding, “the opposite sex has not offered any objection to this plan so far.”<sup>821</sup>

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<sup>818</sup> “Arabian Women Look to Vote Rights Soon.” *The Bradford Era*, (Bradford, PA) 13 August 1947: 4.

<sup>819</sup> “Hand to Arab Women—Feminine Leaders Eye Role in Political Field.” *The Kansas City Star* (Missouri) 5 August 1948.

<sup>820</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>821</sup> *ibid.*

“In the meantime, [until independence was secured] the women of the Arab world are studying political and economic problems, so they’ll be better qualified to play a big part in civic life.”<sup>822</sup> Cosma was confident in the ability of independent Arab states to provide women with the rights they had been denied by the legal system in force under the mandate system.

Cosma expressed her bewilderment that women in other countries had to fight to secure the principle of “equal pay for equal work.” “This has always been taken for granted at home,” she said. “If you can do a job just as well as a man can, why should you earn less?” The region’s support of “equal pay for equal work,” may have come as a surprise to some of the men and women Cosma spoke with in Pennsylvania, Illinois, and North Carolina. Many people in the US were under the impression that Arab women were uneducated and confined to the house, not skilled professionals working for the same salary as their male counterparts. Women were eager to contribute to their country’s economy. Cosma mentioned that “[t]hey are anxious to show the men what they can do. Because of this they sometimes are more successful than men in business.”<sup>823</sup> Her account of the region’s employment equality did not acknowledge the tensions that women entering the workforce in greater numbers caused. Cosma’s task as the Syrian government’s women’s rights attaché was to counter some of the stereotypes about the status of women in her native Syria and the surrounding countries. One way Cosma challenged those stereotypes was in delivering a talk about political rights and aspirations, not just of Arab women, but of Arab states.

Cosma emphasized that “Arabian women not only want the right to vote, they also want the right to be elected to office.” Cosma was confident that once the “Middle-

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<sup>822</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>823</sup> *ibid.*

East crisis”—a reference to the simmering tension around Palestinian independence at the close of the British mandate—was resolved women’s demands would get a favorable reception. Women’s rights were not a primary concern to the newly independent national governments of Syria and Lebanon. The Arab states were trying to work in concert to ensure the whole region was liberated from colonial influence; in August 1947, as Cosma delivered her speech, Palestine had not yet been granted independence from the mandate. When the mandate expired in May 1948, the state of Israel was declared. Securing rights for women was not a secondary concern for the women of the region. Cosma reported that women were readying for the moment when their political rights would be recognized. Women were not sitting idly by waiting for that moment to arrive—they were shoring up the rights they already had, the right to education, the right to equal pay for equal work, and the family law rights assured by Islamic law before, during, and after marriage.

Women’s rights were not the sole focus of Cosma’s speaking tour. She spoke quite forcefully about Arab independence. “While Arabia wants to take her rightful place among the nations, yet she does not want to lose her identity. And she refuses to be the battleground for power politics, preferring international organization, and the use of reason rather than force.”<sup>824</sup> Cosma added that what the Arabs wanted was independence to choose their own course; “[w]hat we really want is a real, human, progressive society.”<sup>825</sup> Cosma’s speaking tour in the United States was a symbol of Syrian independence. No such emissary would have been allowed to tour college campuses speaking about women’s rights and Arab independence in the United States under the French mandate.

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<sup>824</sup> “Arabian Feminist at K.S.T.C. Luncheon.” *The Kutztown Patriot* (Kutztown, PA) 18 July 1947: 1.

<sup>825</sup> *ibid.*

## Conclusion

While not the stated intent of her speaking tour, Cosma used her audience's attention to champion the cause of Arab independence. Cosma's tour of universities in the United States demonstrates that women's rights became a medium through which recently independent nations were able to demonstrate their progressivity and manifest their readiness to be incorporated into the UN system. Women from Syria and Lebanon were ready to step up to the lectern and challenge the stereotypes that circulated about their limited rights as women and as Arabs and in doing so, claim a position for women in independent Syria and Lebanon. Cosma's speeches, the wartime anti-mandate protests staged by women, and the 1944 Arab women's conference in Cairo demonstrate the symbiotic relationship between women's rights and independence for Arab states—the two were linked. Campaigns for one morphed into campaigns for the other. It remained to be seen whether the Syrian or Lebanese states would actually support its women's rights pledges.

By the time Cosma spoke about women's rights in Syria in 1947, campaigns for women's rights in independent nations were not confined to the domestic sphere. The League of Nations' Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women changed the nature of the conversations about women's rights. Conversations were no longer internal to women's organizations, nor were the conversations among women's organizations in a particular nation state. Instead, conversations about women's rights were internationalized. The League of Nations compiled legal data on the laws in force in different countries as a means of creating an international standard to measure the status of women. The Committee of Experts' emphasis on listing compliance with certain legal

practices was meant to benefit women, yet it had the unfortunate consequence of stratifying conversations about women's rights and concentrating discussions of women's rights in the hands of an elite population of "experts" rather than opening up the conversation to representatives of legal traditions not grounded in the Western legal canon.

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the world was rushing to codify women's rights on the international level. The people in charge of the conversation—Americans and Europeans—used the Western rights framework as the international baseline. The move to codify women's rights along a Western rights framework disempowered women in Syria and Lebanon who offered an alternative international vision—"Eastern" women's rights. The legacy of League of Nations' Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women making Western legal rights the bedrock of the international women's rights system continues to affect who has access to conversations about women's rights on the international level—in international organizations and in international governance—and who is left on the defensive, trying to bridge alternative women's rights systems with the definition of women's rights absorbed into the League and its successor, the United Nations.



## CHAPTER SIX:

### Challenging National and 'International' Women's Rights Protections in Independent Syria and Lebanon, 1947-1949



United Nations Sub-Commission on the Status of Women – May 1946, New York City. From left to right: Hansa Mehta, India; W. S. New, China; Fryderyka Kalinowska, Poland; Angela Jurdak, Lebanon; Minerva Bernadino, Dominican Republic; Marie Helene Lefauchaux, France; Bodil Begtrup, Denmark, Chairman.

*Source: UN Photo Archive*

In late March and early April, 1949 a group of Lebanese Women's organizations circulated a petition at the Third Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW), which was hosted in Beirut. The petition proposed that the family was the fundamental unit of society and that women should be awarded rights within the structure of the family, rather than as individuals. The petition had two target audiences: the UN delegates assembled in Beirut and the Lebanese state. The petition challenged the definition of women's rights discussed and forged at the UN session. While they were proud members of newly independent Lebanon, the representatives of the Lebanese women's organizations used the international attention that accompanied the conference to claim women's rights from the Lebanese state.

Careful not to alienate the Lebanese government, they praised the state for the protections it had promised women and then questioned whether the rights would actually be delivered. As they had done prior to independence, women claimed their rights as women in the name of the Lebanese nation. The UN officials in Beirut for the conference dubbed the petition the "Lebanese Petition" and did not assign it much weight. However, delegates at the conference from the wider "East," Syria and Iraq and Egypt as well as women from Iran and Turkey, supported the petition. Women in the newly independent state of Lebanon used the meeting of the United Nations' body dedicated to advancing the status of women to offer an alternative vision for how women's rights could be delivered internationally. They seized the moment of international attention to try to demonstrate indigenous articulations of women's place in society.

The ten years between 1939 and 1949 transformed the nature of the women's movement in the Arab world, and in Syria and Lebanon in particular, as independent states responded to emergent discussions of international women's rights norms. The

Lebanese state used the third session of the UNCSW to display the Lebanese state's entry into the realm of international governance. Prior to the late 1930s, most Arab women's organizations operated independently of the state and independently of one another. When it behooved elected officials in the mandate-backed governments in Syria and Lebanon in the late 1920s and early 1930s, they professed their support for women's rights to the assembled delegates at women's conferences and espoused their support of women's education and their economic integration into society in newspaper editorials. Under the mandate, however, Syrian and Lebanese government officials did not act on their promises of support. At the end of World War II, as a consequence of the combination of the internationalization of women's rights and the rich tradition of local women's organizing, the Lebanese and Syrian states started to respond to women's claims for rights. State engagement intersected with women's rights in Lebanon and Syria and with the international women's rights protections that were disseminated by the United Nations.

Three interconnected modes of women's organizing emerged in Syria and Lebanon as the states became independent: activism independent of the state; activism in conjunction with the state; and activism directed by the state in the service of the state's objectives rather than those of women or women's organizations. Women's organizations used their connections to the state to try to achieve their ultimate objective of compelling states to actually protect women's rights rather than using lip-service to women's rights to gain international standing.

The Lebanese and Syrian states' embrace of international women's rights norms helped local women's organizations accomplish more than Arab women's organizations were able to do alone. Syrian women had tried independently to engage the League but

failed in their attempt to represent themselves in the Committee of Experts' conversations that conceptualized women's rights on the global stage. In the 1940s, women's organizations started to lose ground on the international level to government-selected representatives of the women's movement in Syria and Lebanon. In 1946, the Syrian government was given the opportunity to appoint a delegate to the UNCSW, which was created that year. It nominated Alice Kandaleft Cosma to the post. Kandaleft Cosma was sent to the United Nations to speak on behalf of the newly independent Syrian state and vouch for their women's rights protections. The Lebanese government was also given the opportunity to nominate a representative to the UN's committee dedicated to the status of women; Lebanon nominated Angela Jurdak to the sub-commission on the status of women, which convened in 1946 and led to the creation of the UNCSW. The first Arab women to secure a posts to a branch of an international governing body—Alice Kandaleft Cosma from Syria and Angela Jurdak from Lebanon—were government-nominated, rather than activist-nominated. Governments helped women secure the representation they had long sought and not obtained.

By 1949, women's rights had been globalized. This process of globalization was facilitated by an earlier reliance on the creation of legal statistics, which universalized and rendered the women visible on the "official" international level. This process of internationalization did two things with questionable effect on women's organizations. First, the internationalization of women's rights made states acknowledge women's rights because women's rights had become enmeshed with international governance. Second, a single definition of "women's rights"—a definition grounded in Western legal traditions at the expense of other legal traditions—emerged. The internationalization of women's rights quieted conversations women were having about women's rights outside Europe

and the United States and prioritized a single vision of how women's rights could be protected by international governance. The activists who discussed alternative means of integrating women's rights into the international system of governances did not object to fusing women's rights and international governance. Instead, they advocated for a truly representative system of dealing with women's rights—including "Eastern" conceptions of women's rights alongside "Western" ones.

### **The UNCSW Beirut Meeting Takes Shape**

In mid-January 1948, Charles Malik, Lebanese diplomat and UN representative, wrote to the UNCSW inviting the commission to hold its third session in Beirut. The idea of having Lebanon host the session was first broached by Queen Elizabeth of England. Malik wrote "you would be most welcome in Lebanon and that a session of the commission on the Status of Women held in my country will have far-reaching repercussions on the elevation of the status of women throughout the countries of the Middle East."<sup>826</sup> The letter of invitation conveys the regard that Lebanon had for its position vis-à-vis the status of women in other nations of the region. Malik sealed his letter "I am very much hoping your Commission will accept our invitation and we will have the great pleasure of receiving you in my country in 1949."<sup>827</sup> Charles Malik's invitation was accepted and the third session of the UNCSW was set for March of the following year, 1949.

Following the Malik's invitation, the Secretary of the Lebanese-Arab Women's Federation (*Union Feminine Libanaise Arabe*), Nadia Salman, wrote to the UNCSW. The Lebanese-Arab Women's Federation wanted all of the available information on the

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<sup>826</sup> UN 175/02 Part A. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Letter from Charles Malik to Mrs. Begtrup, Chairman, Commission on the Status of Women, 14 January 1948.

<sup>827</sup> *ibid.*

commission so the organization could make preparations for the possible meeting of the UNCSW in Lebanon. The UNCSW answered the Lebanese organization's request with the official records of the two previous sessions of the commission, a list of the present members of the commission and their terms in office, a list of the officers of the commission, the proposed agenda for the next meeting, and a list of projected problems for study. While Lebanese women's organizations would be part of the process of planning the third session of the UNCSW, there would be no official Lebanese delegates. Syria, however, was granted a representative at the third session.

The agenda of the meeting in Beirut covered some of the Committee's general bureaucracy: electing officers, adopting the formal agenda, and reading the report of the Secretary-General on the work of the United Nations relating to the status of women. The other topics on the provisional agenda of the Beirut meeting, were political rights for women, educational opportunities for women, "conflicts between national laws relating to nationality, domicile, marriage and divorce," and the "principle of equal pay for equal work for men and women workers"—questions with origins during the League of Nations era.<sup>828</sup> The meeting also planned to explore the relationship with the ILO and other specialized agencies within the United Nations system.<sup>829</sup> The agenda set forth the topic of establishing relations with regional inter-governmental organizations specializing in questions relating to women's rights. Finally, the provisional agenda listed the

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<sup>828</sup> E/CN.6/77 UN Economic and Social Council. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Provisional agenda, 15 December 1948.

<sup>829</sup> Mark Mazower, *Governing the World: The History of an Idea, 1815 to the Present* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013); Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Leland M. Goodrich, "From League of Nations to United Nations" *International Organization* 1.1 (1947): 3-21.

possibility of discussing “means of influencing public opinion.”<sup>830</sup> The provisional agenda projected the Beirut meeting would end with the reading of communications relating to the status of women and establishing a program of future work.

The third session of the commission comprised of delegates from around the world: Australia, China, Costa Rica, Denmark, France, Greece, Haiti, India, Mexico, Syria, Turkey, Venezuela, USSR, United Kingdom, United States. Each of the five UN Security Council members were represented on the commission. All of the delegates nominated by their home countries to serve as the official government representative of the status of women to the UN arrived at the Beirut session with the exception of the delegate from Costa Rica. Even without official representation Lebanese women found ways of accessing the commission’s proceedings through NGO channels and as the hosts of a regional women’s conference scheduled concurrently with the third session of the UNCSW.

Once the plan to have the meeting in Beirut was in place, the skeleton outline of what the meeting would address was drafted, and the list of national delegations was finalized, the remaining preparatory question was about funding. The Lebanese government promised to supply help in securing hotel reservations, rental and maintenance of conference and office areas, office equipment, and heat, light, and power.<sup>831</sup> The United Nations budgeted \$42,488 (1948 USD)<sup>832</sup> for the conference, over half of which (\$34,621) was dedicated to travel. The travel of the delegates from their home countries and the travel of staff from Lake Success, New York to Lebanon and

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<sup>830</sup> E/CN.6/77 UN Economic and Social Council. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Provisional agenda, 15 December 1948.

<sup>831</sup> UN 175/02 Part A. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Physical arrangements for the Commission on the Status of Women, 12 November 1948.

<sup>832</sup> The value in 2015 USD is approximately ten times the 1948 USD value or \$420,000.

back: two interpreters, one English-Russian-French and one English-French-Spanish, the director, the chief of section, the administrative officer, four senior or junior officials, and two secretaries. Other aspects of the budget covered the cost of a reception for the commission and its guests, the cost of postal, telephone, and telegraph services, the cost of printing, and the hiring of local temporary assistance. The majority of the temporary laborers would serve as translators for the documents produced by the session: four translators and five typists were needed for on-site translation and another small group of secretaries was needed to prepare the documents for the conference. It was with some relief that the UN reported that Lebanese contacts insisted that it was “not necessary to use Arabic at the commission because French is so widely used in this area.”<sup>833</sup> Thus, no Arabic translators were hired. The absence of Arabic translators presented a problem when the Syrian delegation sent representatives who were not fluent in French or English.

As the conference agenda was finalized and the physical and administrative arrangements for the meeting came together, women’s organizations in Beirut prepared for a regional conference on the status of women that would coincided with the Beirut meeting of the UNCSW. The plans for the regional women’s conference started to take shape through the organizing efforts of Edna Bayouth, the Executive Secretary for Industrial and Social Questions at the Young Women’s Christian Association’s Near East office in Beirut and Mrs. Saad, the Vice President of the Arab Women’s Federation.<sup>834</sup> They planned and financed the parallel women’s conference without any UN support. Bayouth and Saad envisioned a small conference of leaders from women’s organizations in Arab countries that would happen around the same time as the UN commission

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<sup>833</sup> UN 175/02 Part A. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. UN Memorandum to Dr. John Humphrey, Director, Human Rights Division, Department of Social Affairs from Julia Henderson, 16 December 1948, 4.

<sup>834</sup> No first name was given for Mrs. Saad.



meeting. At first it was scheduled to precede the conference, and then it was scheduled to follow the larger, international gathering. The conference was held on April 6 after the formal conclusion of the UN meeting, which wrapped up early. The session took a week and a half, less time than projected, to accomplish all of the tasks on the agenda. The early conclusion of the session made it possible for the delegates from the UN Commission session to attend the regional conference.

The UN sent a person to Beirut to scout out conference venues and ensure that the country was able to fulfill the commission's needs. The UN advance person made it very clear to the representatives of women's organizations that their conference was separate from that of the UNCSW. The women organizing the conference did not challenge this segregation. However, they expressed concern that the Lebanese government was not sure of its responsibilities in organizing the UN Commission meeting. The women feared "the lines of responsibility might not be clear" because the UN had reached out to both the government and the women's organizations operating in Beirut.<sup>835</sup> The UN official doing pre-meeting research scheduled a meeting with the Lebanese Foreign Office. Bayouth and Saad accompanied her to the meeting. The meeting clarified the government's line of duty and also established that women's organizations were organizing a separate regional women's conference and were not responsible for planning the UNCSW session in Beirut. The Foreign Office was excited about the supplemental women's conference because it fit in with the Lebanese national vision of being a beacon of women's advancement. The government pledged to support the conference and said it might be possible for the wife of the President of the Republic, Laure Khouri, to sponsor

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<sup>835</sup> UN 175/02 Part A. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. UN Memorandum to Dr. John Humphrey, Director, Human Rights Division, Department of Social Affairs from Julia Henderson, 16 December 1948, 3.

the regional conference.<sup>836</sup>

The Lebanese government offered its financial support to the regional women's conference. The UN did not offer any funds to help bring women of the region together around the question of the status of women. It made it very clear that "official agencies, non-governmental organizations and others in the region develop a conference on the status of women to be held at the same time, the promotion, direction and expense of which will be the responsibility of the local agencies and not of the United Nations."<sup>837</sup> However, delegates to the UNCSW meeting were welcomed to attend the conference dedicated to the status of women in Arab world. Offering no financial support was a means of ensuring that whatever happened at the regional conference did not reflect on the United Nations. The UN did not have a stellar reputation in the region after 1948; it was interested in not sully it any further.

Even though the UN did not supply funds to cover the cost of the conference, it felt it had the clout to impress upon the conference organizers "the necessity for making the conference truly regional in character, for avoiding political propaganda and for integrating the work of the conference with that of the Commission."<sup>838</sup> The organizers of the conference were not free to organize the regional conference on their own terms, if they wanted to gain access to the proceedings of the third session. The UN suggested that several of the commission's meetings would be open to the public—something that greatly interested the women organizing the regional conference. The UN wanted to

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<sup>836</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>837</sup> UN 175/02 Part A. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. UN Memorandum to Dr. Leon Steinig. Note to the Government of Lebanon concerning arrangements for the Third Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, n.d. Underlining original.

<sup>838</sup> UN 175/02 Part A. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. UN Memorandum to Dr. John Humphrey, Director, Human Rights Division, Department of Social Affairs from Julia Henderson, 16 December 1948, 3.

divorce women's rights from nationalist politics.

The person who compiled the advance report stated “there will be problems excluding politics from this regional conference and from the Commission.”<sup>839</sup> The UN official observed that “[t]he Lebanese women are almost entirely absorbed in the Palestine question and there is a considerable resistance to the UN and a feeling that the world organization has failed the Arab countries.”<sup>840</sup> Some of the women involved in the women's movement in Lebanon at the time actively questioned whether or not it was an advisable time to host the conference in Beirut because the presence of a conference dedicated to raising awareness about the status of women might not be effective in 1949, so soon after the Arab-Israeli war and, in its wake, the displacement of hundreds of thousands Palestinian refugees.<sup>841</sup> The conference hotel, The Normandy, that the Lebanese government originally secured for the conference delegates was the same hotel that was occupied by UN Truce Observers and UN Disaster Relief Project for Palestine Refugees.<sup>842</sup> The UN wanted to mute the politics of Palestine at the conference, even though they were in minds of most Arab delegates.

Despite the reservations of some of the women organizers, they told the UN official that they felt that the “advantages still outweighed the disadvantages” of a conference in Beirut.<sup>843</sup> The person writing the report about the preparations for the

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<sup>839</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>840</sup> *ibid.*, 4.

<sup>841</sup> There is no universally agreed upon number of Palestinian refugees. However, consensus holds that between 700,000-726,000 Palestinians fled the war—the latter figure was provided by the UN Conciliation Commission in 1949. For more information on the war and the refugees who fled the war see Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); see also Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Avi Shlaim, “The debate about 1948,” *IJMES* 27.3 (1995): 287-304.

<sup>842</sup> UN 175/02 Part A. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. UN Memorandum to Dr. John Humphrey, Director, Human Rights Division, Department of Social Affairs from Julia Henderson, 16 December 1948, 2.

<sup>843</sup> *ibid.*, 4.

conference agreed. She felt that “there is no doubt that the Lebanese women have reached a stage of political consciousness and may be helped materially to produce results by an outside meeting.”<sup>844</sup> She added that the women of Lebanon were considerably more advanced than the women in the neighboring countries. The author provided the evidence that 200,000 of the 250,000 women of Damascus were still veiled to prove her point of relative Lebanese advancement.<sup>845</sup> The account reveals that Syrian women’s progress was still measured by the number of veiled women. The author nonetheless noted that the other neighboring nations were not hopelessly behind, citing the presence of the Arab Women’s Alliance and the YWCA in all of the countries that shared a border with Lebanon.<sup>846</sup>

The UN was concerned that representatives from all of Lebanon’s neighbors would not be equally welcomed to the conference. The person reporting to the UN observed that

a third problem will certainly be the representation of women from Palestine. There is no doubt in my mind, after the UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization] experience, that neither the Government nor the women’s organizations would welcome any representation from Palestine. This must be worked out in connection with the invitations to non-governmental agencies if serious embarrassment is to be avoided.<sup>847</sup>

Presumably the problematic representation from Palestine would have been people from the newly formed nation-state of Israel. The UN was interested in ensuring that the “issue of Palestine” and Palestinian independence did not spill over and contaminate the conference’s focus on improving the status of women. This concern reflects the belief that

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<sup>844</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>845</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>846</sup> The Arab Women’s Alliance was not referenced as such in any other sources. It is unclear what this alliance may have been.

<sup>847</sup> UN 175/02 Part A. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. UN Memorandum to Dr. John Humphrey, Director, Human Rights Division, Department of Social Affairs from Julia Henderson, 16 December 1948, 4.

women's rights could be disconnected from their surrounding context and were somehow apolitical. The origins of the belief that women's rights could be unhinged from nationalist politics had been established and globally disseminated by the leaders of the international women's movement in the 1930s. The UN did not come up with a distinct plan of how to address imposing a firewall between Palestine and questions of the status of women; it just raised the issue as something to think about during the conference preparation process.

Once the basics of the conference were finalized—location, dates, taboo subjects, etc.—discussions about the conference were quiet from March until December 1948. As the start-date of the conference neared conversations were renewed. The provisional agenda was finalized. There were no significant changes to the program, but the background logistics changed in the weeks leading up to the conference. The largest change was the conference hotel. The fifty commission guests could no longer be accommodated at the original seaside hotel and the rest of the hotels in Beirut were too small or too full to accommodate the crowd because a conference of Arab states was scheduled to take place at the same time. The Lebanese government convinced an hotelier in Aley, a small city on the mountains overlooking the port of Beirut, to open up his summer resort, Hotel Tanios, early to accommodate the conference delegates and support staff. The hotel was fifteen miles outside of the city, which meant that local transportation had to be arranged to ferry the guests from the hotel to the conference venue and back.

Amanda Labarca (1886-1975), the Chilean chief of the UNCSW, optimistically noted that the 25 to 45 minute drive to Hotel Tanios from the UNESCO House provided the delegates the opportunity to “have as many informal discussions as were necessary for the progress of the work, and even to prepare recommendations and policies

beforehand.”<sup>848</sup> The opportunity to talk about commission matters in the back of a bus was a silver lining of an inconvenient lodging location.

Several women’s organizations operating in Beirut had contacted the UN concerning their participation in the conference: “the League of Lebanese Women (*Sout al-Maraat*), the Lebanese-Arab Women’s Union (Rose Shahfa, president), the Union of Lebanese Women (Heneni Tarche, president), and the Young Women’s Christian Association.”<sup>849</sup> As the conference date loomed, the question arose of how to integrate these organizations into the conference proceedings. Labarca observed that the interest of these women’s organizations in attending the sessions being hosted in their nation’s capital “was quite obvious.” To accommodate their interest, a special meeting was held to hear their views. “Lebanese and Syrian women were very anxious to show the women of the West their progress, achievements, and handicaps.”<sup>850</sup> Their handicaps ranged from the Westernized definition of women’s rights to local government policies and practices.

The UN decided it would use the NGO channel to integrate Lebanese women into conference proceedings, a channel newly created by the United Nations to facilitate the international governing body’s work with non-governmental organizations. The League of Nations did not have a formal system for interacting with non-governmental organizations, which had made it challenging for the League to have ties with non-governmental organizations. However, not all organizations were welcomed to interact with the UN as NGOs.

Organizations that could be accorded NGO status were “organizations

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<sup>848</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Comments on the work of the Commission in Beirut submitted by Amanda Labarca to John Humphrey, 18 April 1949.

<sup>849</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Interoffice Memorandum from Section for Non-Governmental Organizations to Edward Lawson, 4 March 1949. See Enclosures.

<sup>850</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Comments on the work of the Commission in Beirut submitted by Amanda Labarca to John Humphrey, 18 April 1949.

representing large interests groups (education, labor, religion, women's interests, etc.)” and organizations that were “primarily interested in international affairs and the United Nations in general.”<sup>851</sup> Many of the organizations that were accredited as NGOs also had to conform with the “spirit, purposes, and principles of the Charter of the United Nations,” and to be able to serve as a “clearing house for information” to help develop the public's understanding of the UN.<sup>852</sup> The UN NGO policies harkened back to the League of Nations' “sufficiently international” requirement for dealing with international organizations.

The above women's organizations, in addition to organizations that were not focused on women's issues, such as the Lebanese Association for the UN, the Syrian Workers Congress, the Lebanese Red Cross, the Muslim Youth Club, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Doctors and Pharmacist Association, and several Lebanese governmental organizations were admitted to the conference proceedings as NGOs. In addition to Lebanese women's organizations, the following international non-governmental organizations participated in the commission meeting: The World Federation of Trade Unions, Women's International Democratic Federation, International Federation of Business and Professional Women, World Alliance of the YWCA, ICW, IWSA, International Union of Catholic Associations, World Women's Christian Temperance Union, and the World Federation of United Nations Associations.<sup>853</sup>

### **The Third Session**

The first members of the UN commission on Women arrived in Beirut on March 10,

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<sup>851</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Accreditations Policy.

<sup>852</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>853</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. NGOs participating in the Third Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, 11 August 1949.

1949. The conference was scheduled to begin two weeks later. Amanda Labarca was among the first people on the ground. She wrote to the Chief of the Human Rights Section, John Humphrey, that

nearly all the women's organizations in Lebanon have come to greet me and express their appreciation of the fact that the Commission is going to meet in this country, thus giving a great deal of encouragement to the work to which they are devoted.<sup>854</sup>

Women's organizations in Lebanon thought the conference would legitimize their campaigns for women's rights in Lebanon. The Lebanese government also saw potential in the conference. It felt that it could convey its relative advancement compared with other Arab nations in awarding women certain rights and protections. At the time, there was tension between the government and women's organizations: the government thought it was supporting women's rights and women's organizations wanted real support rather than promises to build more schools and ensure equal pay for equal work.

The lecture hall of the UNESCO building in Beirut was at capacity for the opening ceremony of the UN meeting. The UNESCO building was south of the city center, on a rocky bluff overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. All of the major Lebanese officials attended the opening ceremony including Riad Solh, the Lebanese Prime Minister, as well as members of the consular and diplomatic corps. The newspapers noted that the "female element" dominated the audience.<sup>855</sup> The Foreign Minister, Hamid Frangieh, addressed the audience of dignitaries and delegates to Lebanon and the women and men from the general Lebanese public. Frangieh welcomed the assembled guests to Lebanon, a country he described as ready to collaborate with the delegates and international organizations to help realize their noble mission and to "restore Lebanon to

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<sup>854</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Letter from Amanda Labarca to John Humphrey, 18 March 1949.

<sup>855</sup> "Au Palais de l'UNESCO, La Commission de la Condition de la Femme a inauguré ses travaux." *Le Jour* (Beirut) 29 March 1949: 2.



its natural function as a meeting place for major currents of thought and universal progress.”<sup>856</sup>



Audience at the Opening Session of the Third Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.  
Source: *Le Jour* (Beirut).

Frangieh noted that the delegates had come to “a part of the world where since Antiquity women have always tried to reconcile and realize their autonomy and the fundamental role they play in society.”<sup>857</sup> He conceded that during certain historical junctures “vicissitudes” had interceded on the constant progress of women’s social protections. But he was pleased to announce that in Lebanon, in 1949, great progress had been made toward empowering women with rights. Lebanese women had already achieved a large part of their “fundamental rights”: legal rights, free access to the schools, universities, and various professions, equal pay for equal work, and they were welcome to participate in public life. He declared “practically and legally, in all fields of social

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<sup>856</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>857</sup> *ibid.*

activity, the Lebanese woman is regarded as the equal of the Lebanese man.”<sup>858</sup> He assured his audience that when they traveled around Lebanon, they would be sure to see for themselves the role that women were playing in the “creation of a healthy, moral, and free home and a society founded on a love of progress, beauty and of justice.”<sup>859</sup> Frangieh’s comments captures his vision for women’s place in society—through the home, women could influence society. Many women in Lebanon shared his vision.

Frangieh believed that the third session of the UNCSW was a glimmer of hope amidst the “turmoil in the world today, torn everywhere by rivalries and political conflicts, threatening to sink again into hatred and despair.” He thought that women had the potential to contribute to peace and the march of progress, not just in Lebanon but also in the wider world. He said, “you, *mesdames*, bear the task of revealing to the world, in conjunction with the other bodies of the United Nations, the means of achieving the ideals of harmony and justice the organization aims to realize.”<sup>860</sup> Frangieh believed women were bastions of peace in a recovering world.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, Trygve Lie, echoed Frangieh. A proxy conveyed Lie’s remarks to the opening session. Lie said “the world is waiting for you to guide it toward the realization of the principles contained in the Charter of the United Nations, the principle of equal rights and of equal opportunity for women and men.”<sup>861</sup> He said the United Nations was leading the way in showing how it was possible to adhere to the Charter’s principles of equality; the UN had placed women in the highest positions in the organization based on their merits. He noted that the UN recommended that its member states ensure that all public positions were open equally to men and

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<sup>858</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>859</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>860</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>861</sup> *ibid.*

women—a principle the General Council of the United Nations hoped would prevail in the make-up of national delegations to the United Nations in Lake Success. He emphasized, however, that the UN alone could not change public opinion. He called upon “the press, the radio, the cinema to help eliminate all of the prejudice that exists in the world concerning the equality of men and women.”<sup>862</sup> Lie believed women’s status could be advanced through cooperation at the UN.

The Session leadership was elected immediately following the opening speeches. Marie Hélène Lefauchaux (France) was elected President, Amalia de Castillo Ledon (Mexico) was elected Vice President, and Dorothy Kenyon (United States of America) and Mihri Pektas (Turkey) were delegated as the rapporteurs. Kenyon was one of the few human links between the League of Nations Committee of Experts and the UNCSW. Sub-committees for communications, resolutions, and non-governmental organizations were established. Once the leadership was in place, the agenda of the session was adopted. The first item on the agenda was women’s political rights—a broad category that contained the right to citizenship, the right to vote, and the right to run for office, among other issues.

With the convocation done and elections settled, work was all set to begin. Before the Committee broke into its working sessions, Labarca relayed to the delegates that a plan was in place to conduct a global survey of the political rights of women. The UN allotted the commission ten thousand dollars to create and distribute a brochure containing the results.<sup>863</sup> The League of Nations had endeavored to conduct a global survey on the legal status of women; now the United Nations picked up where the League had left off. The UN learned from the League and set its sights on measuring political

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<sup>862</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>863</sup> *ibid.*

status, which was something that was more easily compared across international boundaries and member states than legal rights.

The Women's Committee of Lebanon, which worked with the government to coordinate events connected to the conference program, organized an afternoon tea to follow the opening of the session of the commission. The session brought out all of the major political figures in Lebanon—Riad Solh, the Prime Minister, Philippe Takia, the Finance Minister, and Hamid Frangieh, the Foreign Minister—as well as the French, British, Iranian, Transjordanian diplomats. In addition to the national and international dignitaries, the papers reported that all of the “elite women of Beirut” were in attendance. A series of short speeches followed Ibtihaj Qaddura's opening remarks welcoming the guests to the tea. Saima Haffar Kouzbary from Syria “insisted on the importance and utility of being in contact with women from other countries.”<sup>864</sup> Many of the national delegates to the conference spoke briefly and offered some combination of “thank you Lebanon for hosting this important session” and “greetings on behalf of my country” and “it is wonderful to see the advanced status of women in Lebanon.” The Chinese delegate broke this pattern and offered a Chinese poem about Lebanon.<sup>865</sup> The Indian delegate also broke the formula and commented on Beirut's modernity.

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<sup>864</sup> “Au Normandy, Le thé de l'Union féministe libanaise.” *Beyrouth* 30 March 1949.

<sup>865</sup> *ibid.*



Opening speeches of the tea hosted by the Women's Committee of Lebanon at the Hotel Normandy on March 29, 1949. Ibtihaj Qaddura at center (fourth from right) surrounded by delegates to the third session. Source: *Le Jour* (Beirut).

The tea offered an opportunity for women's leaders in Lebanon to demonstrate engagement with the conversations at the core of the UN conference. The tea also gave women's organizations the chance to seize onto the Lebanese government's attention to women's rights in the presence of international delegates. It was the only event sponsored by Lebanese women in conjunction with the UN conference. The event allowed them to air their perspectives regarding the international women's rights system being forged by the UNCSW and to bring attention to what they perceived as insufficient action by the Lebanese government in protecting the rights of women.

As the conference proceeded, it ran into a range of issues from the small matter of a few reams of missing documents, to miscommunications with the Syrian government about its delegates, to limited coverage of the conference by the regional Arabic and French press. The Syrian government caused controversy at the conference headquarters in Beirut when it nominated three people to represent Syria on the commission: 'Adila

Beyhum al-Jaza'iri, Salma Kuzbari, and Marcelle Absi. The problem with the nomination was that each government was allowed a single representative on the commission, not three. The UN thought the root of the confusion was either “the fact that the Syrian government is ... under the impression that the Commission representation is like the General Assembly ... or that it does not want to make up its mind at present as to who will be the representative.”<sup>866</sup> The commission officials in Beirut pushed the Syrian government to nominate one person to the Committee. The Syrian government responded to the request to nominate one person, with two more nominations to the Syrian delegation.

Flabbergasted, the UN pressed again for a single name and the Syrian government returned with a letter that nominated Jaza'iri as the president of the delegation.<sup>867</sup> The matter was further complicated, from the perspective of the UN officials negotiating the delegation down to one representative, by the fact that Jaza'iri only spoke Arabic. The UN did not have official Arabic-English or Arabic-French interpreters, thus one of the other Syrian representatives would translate what Jaza'iri said. However, the UN interpreted this as a way of circumventing the delegate cap: “in order to give the others a chance to talk she speaks in Arabic and then asks one or another of her associates to ‘interpret.’”<sup>868</sup> The UN felt that each of the Syrian delegates wanted to be called representatives with an opportunity to make official speeches.

The second issue the UN commission encountered was a regional press that was uninterested in reporting the conference proceedings. The surplus Syrian delegation

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<sup>866</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Representation of Syria on the Commission on the Status of Women. n.d.

<sup>867</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Letter to the Secretary-General from Khaled El-Azem, the Syrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, 21 March 1949.

<sup>868</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Letter to John Humphrey from Ed Lawson, 26 March 1949.

situation was mildly vexing compared with the larger issue of publicity for the event. The press officer, Mr. Fisher, noted at a UNCSW progress meeting during conference that publicity for the work of the commission was below expectation.<sup>869</sup> He said “people and press correspondents are under the impression that the Commission is trying to impose Anglo-American ideas on women in the Middle East.”<sup>870</sup> In response to this impression, many of the press correspondents were sending “unfavorable reports” of the conference proceedings back home, which the press office described as stating “in Arab countries women belong to the kitchen and to the children, and that this Conference will not change this.”<sup>871</sup> The press officer had only heard rumor of these articles and was trying to get his hands on some of the articles that lambasted the UN conference as a guise for proselytizing a Western vision of women’s place in society.<sup>872</sup> This allegation was not wholly misplaced.

To combat the bad press and the general lack of interest in the conference, the press office arranged for some of the delegates to speak on the Beirut radio.<sup>873</sup> The Lebanese government did not censor the content of radio broadcasts. Commission officers thought the radio would be a good medium for delivering a counter message to

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<sup>869</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Commission on the Status of Women Interoffice Memorandum, 30 March 1949.

<sup>870</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>871</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>872</sup> The UNCSW did not have any Arabic speakers among its staff, so it is unclear how they gained access to the local press coverage. Some of the daily papers in the region published in English and French and perhaps those were the source of the press officer’s analysis of the reception of the conference in the larger Arab world. It is possible that the conference’s Press Officer had Arabic language skills because he served as the Press Officer for the Palestine Commission. The press agencies granted access to the third session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women were the following foreign papers: Arab News Agency, *Agence France-Presse*, *Images* (Cairo), *The News* (Baghdad), *Tasvir and Vatan* (Turkey), *Tass* (USSR), *London Daily Express*, *London Times*, *Reuters* (London), *Al-Hoda* (New York), *Christian Science Monitor*, *Women’s National News Service* (USA), *The New York Times*, *Time*, *United Press*, *USA Information Service*. In addition to the following Lebanese papers: *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Berak*, *Al-Dyar*, *Al-Hayyat*, *Al-Nahar*, *Beyrouth*, *Le Jour*, *Le Soir*, *Revue du Liban*, *Telegraph*.

<sup>873</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Commission on the Status of Women Interoffice Memorandum, 30 March 1949.

the printed articles. The UN officers decided the delegates selected for the broadcasts should be people “belonging to this area”—presumably because they could connect the conference objectives to local norms.<sup>874</sup> The conference put the Greek and Turkish delegates on the radio as well as “the Egyptian lady”—no name given—who was attending the conference as an observer.

Allegations of Western meddling in regional women’s affairs were compounded by a simultaneous conference focused on Palestine. The radio broadcasts did not transform interest in the women’s conference, which had to compete against “important international conferences on regional political problems”—i.e. Palestine—held at the same time.<sup>875</sup> The other conference captured the region’s attention and “put the Commission’s news in a position of secondary interest.”<sup>876</sup> As the press office observed, “it has to be remembered that the question of Palestine, at present, takes precedence over other subjects.”<sup>877</sup> The press office was right that the question of the status of women seemed secondary to questions of national independence for the Palestinians, but the issue of Palestinian independence did not completely occlude regional interest in the status of women and the status of Palestinian women in particular. The issue of Palestine was not divorced from women’s rights in the minds of many of the region’s seasoned women’s rights activists. At earlier women’s conferences, they had focused on Palestine to demonstrate their commitment to the Arab cause and to raise awareness about the status of women.

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<sup>874</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Letter to John Humphrey from Kamleshwar Das, 2 April 1949.

<sup>875</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Comments on the work of the Commission in Beirut submitted by Amanda Labarca to John Humphrey, 18 April 1949, 8.

<sup>876</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>877</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Letter to John Humphrey from Kamleshwar Das, 2 April 1949.



The press office mistakenly attributed the lack of interest in the conference to a less-than-vibrant women's movement in Lebanon: "until very recently, and even now, people in this area have not taken the question of the status of women seriously. The reasons are many and varied, not the least being the tenets of Muslim law."<sup>878</sup> The women's movement in Lebanon was hardly nascent in 1949. It had been active for four decades. The fact that the women active in the movement were a minority of the Lebanese population did not mean they were unsuccessful in achieving their aims: they had secured government proclamations in support of women's rights and some laws to back up the words too. The women in the movement's multiple organizations were very well connected to centers of power in Beirut and leveraged those connections to ensure their quest for rights achieved its aims. The UN representative's assertion about the immaturity of the women's movement in Lebanon was countered by his own observation that the local "consultative organizations sent quite a number of consultants ... these consultants have been taking an active part in the meetings of the Commission."<sup>879</sup> The local organizations granted access to the commission took advantage of the conference's location in Beirut to learn and to bring pressure on their home government.

The conference was not front-page news, but press coverage was on par with what might be expected for a multi-week conference: articles recorded the promises made by government officials about the impact that the congress would have on the status of women. A lull followed the articles and photo spreads covering the opening. There was limited press coverage as the delegates met in closed sessions. A spike in articles followed the weak mid-conference press engagement. The final articles featured pleased delegates talking about the progress they had made. The Chief of the UN Commission on

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<sup>878</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>879</sup> *ibid.*

the Status of Women perceived a shift in interest in the local press as the conference proceeded. “The Arabic press, which at the beginning of the conference showed a certain disdain for the work, little by little, became interested in it and at the end both the Arabic and French written papers gave news of the progress of the Commission.”<sup>880</sup> An occasional article surfaced about the decisions taken by the commission during its closed-door deliberations. The majority of the features in the local press covered public interest stories about what issues women in other parts of the world were addressing at home and what the international representatives thought of the Lebanese women’s movement. The majority of the articles focused on the Lebanese women’s movement and their actions and activities during the conference.

The delegates were undeterred by the missing documents or the issues surrounding Syrian representation and were likely unaware that the Arabic press was not covering the conference to the degree that the UN officials felt the session deserved. So they picked up their agendas and the accompanying materials and got to the real work of the conference: establishing international standards for women’s rights across all aspects of women’s lives. The agenda provided a general guideline for what issues should be addressed by the delegates in their meetings, but as the meetings progressed additional topics surfaced. For example, “[a]ttention was called to the fact that expert assistance in advancing the status of women was advisable not only in the so-called under-developed countries, but also in those in which women had not shown a great interest in accepting the responsibilities put upon them by their new rights.”<sup>881</sup> Some questions formally lodged on the agenda were more easily resolved than others, such as establishing protocols for how

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<sup>880</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Comments on the work of the Commission in Beirut submitted by Amanda Labarca to John Humphrey, 18 April 1949.

<sup>881</sup> *ibid.*

to integrate women into national political structures. By the end of its first week of breakout sessions and deliberations, the items remaining on its docket were the big-ticket, politically-charged questions of women's nationality and equal pay for equal work.

The delegates were busy during the weekdays with deliberations about conference resolutions. Their weekends were busy too. Each of the three Sundays the delegates were in Lebanon, they left Beirut and toured the Lebanese countryside. The trips were planned by Lebanese women's organizations. Labarca reported "the Lebanese women's committee had prepared a vast program of excursions, trips, receptions and visits and teas for the members of the Commission to become acquainted with the people and the country."<sup>882</sup> One trip took the delegates to the Roman Ruins in Ba'albeck. Amalia de Castillo Ledon of Mexico recalled "[t]he ruins of Ba'albeck are impressive and spectacular."<sup>883</sup>



The UNSCW representatives visited Ba'albeck on March 29, 1949 on a trip organized by women's organizations with the support of the Lebanese government. Source: *Le Jour* (Beirut).

<sup>882</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>883</sup> "'Nos Enquetes' Les Delegates a la Commisison de la Condition de la Femme Nous Parlent: I. De la condition de la femme dans le monde, II. De l'ordre du jour de la 3ème session, III. La Femme Libanaise vue par les intellectuelles de l'étranger." *Le Jour* (Beirut) 4 April 1949: 5.

One commission member remembered that the buses ferrying the members of the commission on their excursions stopped “for receptions or teas at each crossroads.”<sup>884</sup>

The women’s organizations were not the only people showering the commission with hospitality, however. The Lebanese government also feted the delegations and commission members. The Minister of Foreign Affairs hosted a large banquet dinner, which was attended by all the people connected to the conference.



The Lebanese government hosted an official dinner to honor the delegates of the UNCSW Session hosted in Beirut. Pictured in the image are the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Public Works, and the President of the Council, and several delegates. Source: *Le Jour* (Beirut).

The UN staff appreciated the sentiment behind the hospitality, but found it to be a nuisance. In an interoffice conversation about how the conference was proceeding, they observed that the many conference activities were a distraction: “nearly every evening we have had some social function to attend, but that of course, has taken a great deal of the time of the delegates who otherwise would have studied the subjects on the Agenda.”<sup>885</sup>

<sup>884</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Letter to John Humphrey from Ed Lawson, 26 March 1949.

<sup>885</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Commission on the Status of Women Interoffice Memorandum, 30 March 1949.

Labarca noted that the sheer number of events threatened to interfere with the conference proceedings and that the UN officers had to “manage them in a way that would not interfere with the daily work, but did not attempt to discard them.”<sup>886</sup> Labarca knew they could not cancel the events “partly because of courtesy, and partly because we understood that the Lebanese government and the women’s organizations wanted the women of the Commission to receive a first-hand impression of their progress and problems.”<sup>887</sup> Labarca and her UN colleagues felt a sense of duty to the cause of the Women’s Committee of Lebanon. The Lebanese women who organized the events understood the great opportunity to bring attention to their cause of forwarding women’s rights in Lebanon.

At the close of the meetings of the third session, *Le Jour* (The Day), a Francophone daily newspaper printed in Beirut, distributed a questionnaire to the delegates.<sup>888</sup> It asked the delegates three questions: their opinion about the status of women around the world, their view on the most important issue facing women, and their impression of the status of women in Lebanon. The delegates conveyed varying degrees of support to the Lebanese women’s organizations. Ranging from the reserved, diplomatic comments from Marie Hélène Lefauchaux, the French delegate and president of the session, to exuberant support from the Mexican delegate. Lefauchaux replied she was very pleased with her contacts with Lebanese women. Lefauchaux supposed that the Lebanese public was wondering why the commission was not discussing the status of women in the Middle East; she explained that the organization had a global project and

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<sup>886</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>887</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Comments on the work of the Commission in Beirut submitted by Amanda Labarca to John Humphrey, 18 April 1949.

<sup>888</sup> “‘Nos Enquetes’ Les Delegates a la Commisison de la Condition de la Femme Nous Parlent: I. De la condition de la femme dans le monde, II. De l’ordre du jour de la 3ème session, III. La Femme Libanaise vue par les intellectuelles de l’étranger.” *Le Jour* (Beirut) 4 April 1949: 5.

therefore could not focus on the condition of women in Lebanon at the expense of other more international issues. Other delegates were more vociferous in their support of the work of Lebanese women's organizations to secure more protections from national and international organizations.

Mexican representative and vice-president of the session, Amalia de Castillo Ledon, was pleased Lebanese women had been so active in the session hosted in their country. The "constant interventions of Lebanese women, clearly revealed their desire to obtain a legal equality for women that would provide them with a more dignified position, rather than just the most elementary justice."<sup>889</sup> She declined to rank the issues facing women, but rather noted that the issues affecting the political and cultural condition of women were "numerous." The Danish representative, Bodil Begtrup, agreed that there were numerous issues facing women and refused to rank a primary concern. Begtrup felt that the political rights of women, the civic rights of women, and the access to education were of equal importance. She also emphasized that the eleventh point on the agenda merited more attention: changing public opinion about the status of women. She felt that Lebanon was poised to have a bright future because it was full of "intelligent and charming" women and men. Tsolidaris of Greece also felt all of the points on the agenda were important and "merited detailed study."<sup>890</sup>

The Haitian delegate, Andree Fortuna Guery, believed that women's access to education was the most important item on the agenda of the commission. She said she hoped that she would not be seen as "naïve, but I was struck by the beauty of Lebanese women. All of the women I met in Beirut seemed to me very intelligent and

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<sup>889</sup> *ibid.*  
<sup>890</sup> *ibid.*

perceptive.”<sup>891</sup> Elise Frances Byth, who represented the Australian government, agreed that the fifth item on the agenda: women’s access to education, was the most important issue that the delegates discussed during the Beirut meeting. She was also “struck” by the interest of young Lebanese women in the work of the commission. “It is true,” she said “that a country needs the wisdom of mature women, but it is no less true that the future is in the hands of the youth.”<sup>892</sup>

Political rights for women ranked at the top of the “issue list” for many of the delegates assembled in Beirut for the third session. The Turkish delegate, Mihri Pektas, thought that women’s political rights were the most important issue on the commission’s agenda. Pektas found Lebanese women to be educated and thought they should be extended all rights. Isabel Urdaneta, the Venezuelan delegate agreed with the Turkish delegate about the importance of reinforcing a women’s right to political enfranchisement. Urdaneta confessed that the Lebanese women she met made the best impression on her. She thought “women here were mature enough to exercise the same political rights as men.” She added “[w]e, the delegates of the Commission, wish with all our heart that Lebanese women acquire in the very near future the total equality they claim. We came to give moral support in the realization of this just ideal.”<sup>893</sup> The Soviet delegate, Elisabeth Popova, agreed with the Turkish and Venezuelan delegates that the political rights of women were among the most important on the docket.<sup>894</sup> The British delegate, Mary Sutherland, agreed about the importance of women’s political rights. She thought that Lebanese women were very “mature” and understanding and that Lebanese

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<sup>891</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>892</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>893</sup> “‘Nos Enquetes’ Les Delegates a la Commisison de la Condition de la Femme Nous Parlent.” *Le Jour* (Beirut) 5 April 1949: 6.

<sup>894</sup> *ibid.*

women “fully deserved the political and civil rights she claimed.” She hoped the Lebanese women’s movement achieved its aims in the very near future.”<sup>895</sup> The foreign delegates constantly emphasized their surprise at the maturity of the Lebanese women’s movement. Their lack of knowledge of Lebanese women’s activism the byproduct of Lebanese women’s failed attempts to gain entry into international conversations before the war.

Some of the delegates expressed their feelings about the status of women in Lebanon: some thought the women were inexperienced activists, others mourned the loss of traditions, still others wished certain local traditions were no longer practiced. Dorothy Kenyon noted that the principle of equal pay for equal work was the most important issue facing women. In second place, Kenyon placed the question of the nationality of married women. She thought that Lebanese women were “absolutely charming, but inexperienced from a political point of view.”<sup>896</sup> Kenyon was likely unaware of the campaigns launched by Syrian and Lebanese women secure “Eastern” representation on the League of Nations’ Committee of Experts—Kenyon was one of the seven Western experts on the committee.

The Indian delegate on the commission, Lakhsmi Menon, thought that the fourth item on the agenda was the most important: the political rights of women. She said she found Lebanese women intelligent, charming, and very sociable. She noted that she was sad to see the Lebanese capital lose its “Oriental appearance.” Menon was a self-described “determined conservationist” when it came to architectural traditions. Yet, when asked if the women of Lebanon should adopt European fashions, she responded “forcibly: never!” The Chinese delegate, Cecilia Sieu-Ling Zung, shared Menon’s

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<sup>895</sup> *ibid.*, 5.

<sup>896</sup> *ibid.*



preference for adopting Western fashion at the expense of preserving local sartorial traditions, which she felt inhibited women's progress. Zung thought Lebanese women were very sociable and kind. She "regretted, however, to see that so many women were veiled."<sup>897</sup> Again, as in the mid-1930s, there was external emphasis on the veil as a regressive social tradition. The veil was not addressed at all in the regional women's conference, which began as soon as the third session of the UNCSW closed.

### **The Petition and Regional Arab Women's Conference**

The regional conference held its opening session at the UNESCO building in Beirut. All of the delegates to the Third Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women were invited to attend and many did. In fact, most gave small speeches on behalf of their countries. The content of the speeches echoed the speeches delivered at the opening tea sponsored by Lebanese women's organizations. The Chief of the UN Commission on the Status of Women gave a small speech at the end of the regional conference.<sup>898</sup> Despite her public speech, Labarca noted privately in her final report on the conference proceedings that "the regional conference which was to be held in connection with the session of the Commission was made difficult by the prevailing political animosity and uncertainty."<sup>899</sup> The Lebanese women's organizations that convened the regional conference used the opportunity to raise awareness about the situation in Palestine, much to the chagrin of the UN organizers who had hoped to denude the conference of any regional politics, or politics at all.

Eveline Bustros, past president of the Lebanese-Arab Women's Federation and

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<sup>897</sup> *ibid.*, 5.

<sup>898</sup> "'Nos Enquetes' Les Delegates a la Commisison de la Condition de la Femme Nous Parlent." *Le Jour* (Beirut) 6 April 1949: 8.

<sup>899</sup> *ibid.*, 9.

the current president of the General Arab Women's Federation, opened the public session of the regional women's conference by expressing the gratitude of the Women's Committee of Lebanon (WCL) toward the Lebanese government, which thanks to its initiative, Lebanon had the honor of welcoming the women leaders from many of the world's nations.<sup>900</sup> She said that Lebanese women loved "la mode," but today women's discussions in Lebanon were not limited to clothing and touched on larger topics. She connected the struggle for women's rights in Lebanon to women around the Mediterranean, and emphasized that the struggle for women's rights was not a new one. Bustros then spoke of the "women's crusade for equal rights between the sexes" before introducing the Lebanese Foreign Minister, Hamid Frangieh.<sup>901</sup>

The Foreign Minister began by praising the WCL for the work it had accomplished in a "relatively short about of time" regarding some of the "big political, economic, social, and cultural problems that affect the status of women in the contemporary world."<sup>902</sup> Frangieh transitioned from a discussion about women's rights to a discussion about the principles of equality and justice, which had traveled to "all of the latitudes and all of the climates" since the French and American Revolutions and had been adopted by the United Nations in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Equality and justice are the "base of modern civilization," he observed. He praised Lebanese women for desiring equality and justice to be delivered to them in the same manner as men. He added, that the delegate's desire for rights "gives us a very strong sense of moral consolation—that despite all the vicissitudes of time, despite the many

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<sup>900</sup> The Women's Committee of Lebanon appears to have been connected to the Lebanese Women's Union. Perhaps it was a special committee created to plan the events surrounding the UNCSW session in Beirut.

<sup>901</sup> "Au Palais de l'UNESCO, Congres des organisations féminines, Séance publique." *Beyrouth* 5 April 1949.

<sup>902</sup> *ibid.*

difficulties we are facing, despite the crises, insecurity and wars, the same noble and generous idea [of equality and justice] continues its march and will always continue to generate new ideas that require the heart and spirit of man.”<sup>903</sup> He considered women’s rights to be a new extension of the long tradition of delivering equality and justice to mankind.

He acknowledged that between men and women in Lebanon, there was “some discrimination, and some inequality.”<sup>904</sup> He added that in the Middle East many of the problems the commission had brought to light were social realities. Frangieh’s speech emphasized that Lebanon was

open to all currents of thought and progress. In the future, despite all the obstacles that exist or may arise, the representative bodies of Lebanon, particularly the Lebanese women’s associations, shall develop and strengthen, to the extent possible cooperative relationships with [the Commission on the Status of Women] and the feminine organizations in other countries and movements— governmental or non-governmental—who propose to improve the status of women and help them acquire the plenitude of their rights [as women].<sup>905</sup>

Frangieh lauded women’s organizations for the efforts they had initiated. However, his comments hinted that for women to alter their access to rights, women’s organizations in Lebanon had to initiate the process. The Lebanese government supported the women’s movement, but it was not about to independently take charge of increasing women’s access to rights.

He added that the Lebanese government “ardently desired that Lebanese women obtain their complete rights.” Not

because we consider the equality as being an end in itself, but because we know and feel deep within ourselves that no progress and no national social, cultural, or spiritual recovery can be realized, whatever the means used to accomplish it, without giving women the opportunity to participate and develop in the same conditions as men.<sup>906</sup>

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<sup>903</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>904</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>905</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>906</sup> *ibid.*

Frangieh emphasized that the Lebanese government had already taken actions to preserve women's rights, however, the reforms he noted and the promises he made were vague. His speech ended with a call for a better future wherein governments could dedicate themselves to social issues rather than war.

May the near future bring us an era of stability and peace that displaces the concerns about the consequences of the war and its aftermath that have consumed the attention of governments and allow us to more fully devote ourselves to important problems such as studying and implementing the best ways to raise the status of women and enable social progress in our country.<sup>907</sup>

He thanked the delegates for creating a “moral atmosphere” in the UNESCO meeting rooms that was “imbued with grandeur and generosity of heart and soul.”<sup>908</sup> He was confident that the regional women's association would continue their heart-felt activism and that the Lebanese government would continue their heart-felt support of their activism. The impetus for change in the legal status of women in Lebanon had to come from the women themselves. The Lebanese government would not be the vanguard of change.

Short speeches followed the Foreign Minister's speech about the Lebanese government's support vis-à-vis “women's questions.” Labarca delivered one speech about the work of the commission. Jamal Karam Harfush, a pediatrician and a member of the WCL, gave the final speech about the resolutions adopted by the committee concerning political, social, economic, and cultural rights.<sup>909</sup> Once the speeches were delivered, the thanks began. The Greek representative, Lina Tsalidaris, thanked the government and strongly supported the WCL resolutions. She was honored to represent her country at the Commission and to have contact with “women from all nationalities.”

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<sup>907</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>908</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>909</sup> *ibid.*

She was “very interested to see Lebanese women work to better the fate of the country and the family, as we all do elsewhere. Because we do not only ask for rights, we are fully aware of our duties as women and as citizens.”<sup>910</sup> The Iranian representative also thanked the government and supported the women’s committee’s resolutions. The representatives and delegates from Iraq, Syria, and Turkey also expressed their gratitude toward the government and supported the WCL’s search for rights.

The opening session of the regional conference ended with the presentation of a petition directed toward the United Nations and the Lebanese government, two rights-bearing bodies Lebanese women’s organizations identified as affecting their access to rights in Lebanon. The petition, which was circulated by the “Women’s Committee of Lebanon to the Commission on the Status of Women,” made two major suggestions that pushed both international and national institutions to expand how they delivered rights to women.<sup>911</sup> The Lebanese petition received support from the UNCSW delegates from Greece, Turkey, Syria, and Iran.<sup>912</sup>

The petition was split into four sections: social rights, political rights, cultural and educational rights, and economic rights. The petition started by emphasizing the rights they had already been awarded, such as the right to education, and issued suggestions for how those rights could be improved or actuated. The WCL sought wholesale change to their status, not just incremental changes to rights. Each rights category—social, political, cultural, educational, and economic—connected to the rights demanded in the previous sections. The document presented its approach to how women’s rights should be

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<sup>910</sup> “‘Nos Enquetes’ Les Delegates a la Commisison de la Condition de la Femme Nous Parlent.” *Le Jour* (Beirut) 4 April 1949: 5.

<sup>911</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Resolutions adopted by the Women’s Committee of Lebanon addressed to the Commission on the Status of Women, 31 March 1939.

<sup>912</sup> *ibid.*

delivered on the international level under the “social rights” header; the petition’s suggestions to the Lebanese government about how to implement more protections for women were categorized as “political” and the means for enacting those protections came under the “cultural and educational rights” header. The recommendations about how to ensure the government’s promise of equal pay for equal work came under the document’s “economic rights” header. The women who drafted the petition layered further suggestions about how to improve women’s status in the educational attainment section.

The WCL represented the “authorized women’s organizations in Lebanon.”<sup>913</sup> The organizations placed under the umbrella of the WCL were mainstream women’s societies.<sup>914</sup> The WCL offered an alternative vision of how women’s rights could be interpreted and structured on the international level. Whereas the UN Commission on the Status of women positioned individuals as the basic unit of society, the WCL “consider[ed] the family the basic unit of society.”<sup>915</sup> The organization’s suggestion that the family be considered the foundational element of society challenged the foundation of the entire system of international women’s rights. Basing women’s rights on the family offered another means of structuring society and the allocation of women’s rights.

The committee turned to the United Nations to try to get the organization to intercede on behalf of restoring the family to what they believed to be its rightful place at the core of societal structures. The organization

further considers that this fundamental unit is being put to a serious test, by reason of the phase it is now going through, as a result of the new industrial era; an era which has imposed itself on society before man—either individually or collectively—could adequately prepare himself for, or adapt himself to the new situation, in a manner compatible with his interests and the well-being of society as a whole.<sup>916</sup>

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<sup>913</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>914</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>915</sup> *ibid.* “Consider[ed]” underlined in the original

<sup>916</sup> *ibid.* Emphasis original.

The members of the organization felt that the rapid industrialization of the global system led to the devastation of the war, which destroyed the social fabric of societies and the families that constituted them. The WCL felt that returning to more traditional family structures would help prevent a return to a violent future and would help ensure the well being of society. The Women's Committee of Lebanon thought the family was key to society and thought one way of remedying the family crisis was to empower women.

After proposing to anchor women's claims for rights in the family, the WCL proposed a plan of action to the United Nations. The Lebanese committee recommended that the Commission on the Status of Women request the General-Secretary

- (a) to submit a questionnaire to member states with a view to the ascertainment of the benefits accruing to, and harm caused to the family and the home as a result of the effects of the changes referred to above.
- (b) to draft a study thereon in the light of the replies to by furnished by the member states.<sup>917</sup>

The WCL absorbed the idea that the status of something could be measured on a global scale by way of survey. The Lebanese women who drafted the petition advocated for the global, UN-level survey on the status of family and its adverse effects of the family's diminished place in society and the alterations in the structure of society affected women's access to social protections.

The UN General-Secretary was not the only target of the WCL's plan of action. The committee also proposed action that could be taken by the Commission on the Status of Women. The resolutions suggested that the Fourth Session of the UNCSW "lay down, a directive policy on a world scale in the interest of the family and the home, and with the object of safeguarding their existence and well-being."<sup>918</sup> The Lebanese women's organizations that drafted the resolutions felt a global policy that preserved the family

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<sup>917</sup> *ibid.* List formatting original.

<sup>918</sup> *ibid.*

was the best means of delivering protections to women. The Lebanese committee thought reorienting the origins of women's rights in the family would help women "avail themselves of all the opportunities and new openings resulting from the attainment of equal status in the political, economic, social and cultural fields, in fulfillment of their basic mission."<sup>919</sup>

A woman's "basic mission" was not clearly defined, but it was understood as connecting women to the home in roles as mothers and wives. This "basic mission" did not preclude women from working outside the home and laying claim to equal status protections promised by the state and the United Nations as demonstrated by the subsequent political and economic sections of the petition. The petition centered the home as the locus of women's power and political, social, educational, and economic rights.

The "political rights" section of the petition highlighted inconsistencies among the rights promised by the United Nations Charter, the recommendations issued by the UN Economic and Social Council, and Lebanese law. The Lebanese women cited the UN Charter, "which affirms faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in equal rights of men and women."<sup>920</sup> The organization coupled that citation with one from the UN Economic and Social Council that suggested member states give married and unmarried women the same political rights as men. The external citations from the UN bodies were contrasted with the Lebanese Constitution. The petition noted Article 7 provided that "[a]ll Lebanese are equal before the law. They

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<sup>919</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>920</sup> *ibid.* On women's role in shaping the UN Charter and on integrating women's rights into the UN see Felice Gaer, "Women, international law and international institutions: The Case of the United Nations," *Women's Studies International Forum* 32.1 (2009): 60-66; Rebecca Cook, ed. *Human Rights of Women: National and International Perspectives* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Laura Reanda, "Human Rights and Women's Rights: The United Nations Approach" *Human Rights Quarterly* 3.2 (1981): 11-31; Ellen DuBois and Lauren Derby, "The Strange Case of Minerva Bernardino: Pan American and United Nations Women's Right Activist," *Women's Studies International Forum* 32 (2009): 43-50.



enjoy, equally civil and political rights, and are equally subject to public liabilities and obligations, without any distinction.”<sup>921</sup> The WCL observed that Article 7 “contain[ed] no restrictive provisions so far as women are concerned.”<sup>922</sup> Yet, it was not the only law on the books. The Lebanese Law of Elections contradicted the tenets of Article 7. The Law of Elections disqualified women from voting and from running for office. Women could not run for office on any level because the right to vote was one of the conditions for election to the Lebanese Chamber of Deputies, the Municipalities, and local *mukhtarships* (local government).

The WCL cited international protections they thought they should be awarded: equal rights of men and women and unmitigated access to the same political rights as men. This bundle of rights was compared to the constitutional amendments and the laws in force Lebanon. The constitution presented the discourse of equality between Lebanese men and women—a discourse that had saturated the Foreign Minister’s speeches at the conference—but the electoral law did not execute this promise of equality. The petition highlighted the gulf between the laws on the books and the implementation of the laws because of other statutes and laws that canceled out the rights. Lebanese women’s organizations requested that the Lebanese government introduce an amendment to the constitution that would alter the first line of Article 7 to read “[a]ll Lebanese, without distinction as to their sex, are equal before the law.”<sup>923</sup> Inserting “without distinction as to their sex” into the article served as a baseline fix that would help the women’s activists open channels of access to the Lebanese government and positions within it.

The recommendations from the WCL did not end with the Article 7 edit. Two

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<sup>921</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Resolutions adopted by the Women’s Committee of Lebanon addressed to the Commission on the Status of Women, 31 March 1939.

<sup>922</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>923</sup> *ibid.*

additional suggestions followed the recommendation to amend the constitution to explicitly remove sex barriers. The organizations zeroed in on how the laws were used. Once Article 7 was amended, the WCL suggested that the election laws be amended so they did not contradict the constitution. The election law should be changed with the “object of ensuring that men and women shall be considered as citizens enjoying equal status in all respects in matters of voting and eligibility for election.”<sup>924</sup>

Changing the election law was the first order of business put before the Lebanese government by the WCL. Once the election laws were changed, the

Committee calls upon the Government of the Lebanese Republic to ensure that the provisions of Art. 12 of the Lebanese Constitution, hereafter set out, are applied and observed to the letter and their entirety:

All Lebanese citizens shall be equally admissible to all public offices without preference save on the ground of merit and qualifications, and in conformity with the conditions laid down by law.<sup>925</sup>

The committee presented its case that in order for Lebanese women to make full use of their rights as citizens of the republic, they need governmental assistance in “attaining the status of equality of political rights.”<sup>926</sup> Equality was a precursor to full and equal citizenship. Endowed with equal political rights, the WCL thought “women will be in a position to explore and avail themselves to new opportunities and possibilities with a view to improving their status and to advance and strengthen the cause of the family and the Home in the highest interests of the Lebanese community.”<sup>927</sup> Endowing women with rights was good for the family—the unit the committee had established as the building block of society—and good for the nation. A nation was only as strong as its women.

The changes to Article 7 and Article 12 of the Lebanese Constitution that

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<sup>924</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>925</sup> *ibid.* Formatting original.

<sup>926</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>927</sup> *ibid.*

requested by the WCL needed to be supported by additional government action. The committee prescribed increased access to education as another way the Lebanese state could ensure that its women were vibrant contributors to the nation. The committee expressed its view that “education constitutes the effective and real instrument whereby women are enabled to attain equal rights in the political, economic, and social fields, and fully enjoy such rights.”<sup>928</sup> All of the other rights demanded the WCL could not be attained if women were not educated. Thus, the committee emphasized the importance of ensuring women’s access to education in the Lebanon as a way of ensuring they were active agents in advancing the nation. The committee observed the “value of the efforts clearly exerted by the Lebanese authorities in the field of national education.”<sup>929</sup> The committee lauded the Lebanese state for its efforts to improve women’s access to education: more funding had been appropriated to girls’ education and more girls’ schools had been built. The committee liked the trend of funneling funds into women’s education and urged the government to continue to do so.

In addition to recommending that the government continue its funding of girls’ education, the WCL had six other recommendations for improving the quality of education in Lebanon. It suggested that the government introduce free and compulsory education for both sexes until the age of twelve. The committee recommended standardizing the educational program in the primary grades. It also thought a national review of the educational programs at public and private schools would ensure educational quality. The drafters of the petition also suggested creating technical and civic training programs to ensure that “individual aptitudes [met] the needs of the

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<sup>928</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>929</sup> *ibid.*

country.”<sup>930</sup> The WCL also endorsed facilitating access of women to “tutorial staff”—that is, supplementary education. The committee additionally advocated “reserve[ing for] women a place equivalent to that reserved to men in study missions abroad.”<sup>931</sup> The WCL called for equal access to quality education at all levels from preschool through higher education. Education was only one sector that affected women, but the WCL identified it as a crucial one.

In 1943 the Lebanese government had adopted the principle of equal pay for equal work by virtue of national Decree No. 29. The Lebanese women’s organization approved of this action. The decree provided the following:

Women employed in duties or works of the same kind as those performed by male employees and workers, are entitled to the same basic pay as that allowed to workers, as well as to the allowances provided for in Art. 1.<sup>932</sup>

The committee noted, however, that the decree was only enforced in branches of public administration and “has not yet been applied to private enterprise”<sup>933</sup> The WCL requested that the Government of the Lebanese Republic introduce an “effective control and constant supervision” to ensure that the principle of equal pay for equal work was “strictly adhered to in all fields of economic enterprise.”<sup>934</sup>

Together, the educational and employment requests and suggestions proffered in the WCL’s petition offer a window into the gap between the promises the international community and the state had made regarding women’s rights and the delivery of the rights promised. The petition’s points capture the faith that the committee had in the state to improve the status of women. The organization was connected to the Lebanese state,

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<sup>930</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>931</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>932</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>933</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>934</sup> *ibid.*

but it was not muzzled by its sponsorship. It engaged in an informed dialogue with the state in an effort to improve women's status through the mechanisms of the state. The committee hoped that presenting the petition in front of an international audience would bring attention to its cause and perhaps increase the delivery of the rights the petition requested.

The Lebanese press published the text of the petition directed toward the UNCSW that put forward the idea that the family should be incorporated into the framework of the UN's conceptualization of how women's rights are awarded.<sup>935</sup> The recommendations that the women made to the Lebanese government about how to go about delivering the women's rights it promised were not published in the local press. Little is known about the content of the closed-door proceedings of the regional conference. There was no news coverage of the issues the regional conference addressed, but the petition that circulated during the opening session of the conference gives an idea of the issues that the delegates may have discussed: legal protections, access to education, and political and economic rights.

The WCL did two things when they had the attention of the delegates of the conference at their separate regional conference. First, they raised awareness about the situation in Palestine. Second, they offered suggestions for international and national action regarding women's rights. Their claims against the Lebanese state rebuked the state for not enforcing the protections it proudly claimed it had awarded Lebanese women in the press and in the Foreign Minister's speeches. The petition also suggested an alternative vision of how international women's rights could be structured. On the latter point, Labarca observed that the petition "has been greatly influenced by the

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<sup>935</sup> "Commission de la Condition de la Femme. Résolution adoptée par le Comité Féminin Libanais." *Le Jour* (Beirut) 1 April 1949.

recommendations of the Commission. In fact, it appears to be the Near-East approach to these subjects.”<sup>936</sup> No attempt to integrate or incorporate the ideas proffered by Lebanese women was made by the United Nations and there was no promise of future engagement with the Lebanese women’s proposal.

The regional conference ended without any promises for action on the points raised by the petition. Despite the lack of concrete plans for action from either the UNCSW or the Lebanese government, the regional conference concluded with a round of thanks and praise. Amanda Labarca started off the thank yous, which were returned by the Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs and Lebanese Abroad. The minister wished Labarca and her commission complete success in achieving their goal of establishing protocols for protecting the status of women. He hoped that the “recommendations from the commission, inspired by the ideals of justice and liberty, are adopted and applied in all of the member states of the United Nations.”<sup>937</sup> He noted it had been a great pleasure to welcome the UNCSW to Lebanon—he had enjoyed following the debates and hoped to realize the goals of the commission in Lebanon.

The UN was pleased with how the Third Session of the Commission on the Status of Women had proceeded. The choice to host the conference in Lebanon was lauded as a success because of the country’s beauty—“Lebanon is an extremely beautiful country, the temperature here is just right”—and because of the support the commission received from the Lebanese government.<sup>938</sup> Labarca observed “[t]here has been no interference with the work of the Commission, its members, consultative organizations, the press or

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<sup>936</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>937</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Letter to Amanda Labarca from the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Lebanese Abroad, n.d.

<sup>938</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Letter to John Humphrey from Ed Lawson, 26 March 1949.

censorship matters.”<sup>939</sup> A report back to the UN headquarters in Lake Success stated “this one has so far been the best.”<sup>940</sup> Despite the success of hosting the session abroad, it was decided to host the next session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women in Lake Success, New York. Hosting the event close to home would eliminate some of the administrative hassles hosting the conference abroad had created. A Lebanese woman, Angela Jurdak, was nominated to serve on the Fourth Session of the Commission—she had already served as a Lebanese delegate to the UN Sub-Commission on the Status of Women that predated the UNCSW and advocated for the creation of the commission.<sup>941</sup>

More thanks and praise circled when the report of the Third Session of the Commission on the Status of Women was released on May 9, 1949. Laure Tabet, the president of the Women’s Federation of Lebanon thanked the Secretariat for the copies of the report that were distributed to the organization and requested an additional copy in French. She welcomed the Commission members back to Lebanon at any time, fearing that their time in the country was too short to truly enjoy all that Lebanon had to offer.<sup>942</sup> Marcelle ‘Absi, who was nominated by the Syrian government to attend the third session wrote from Damascus requesting a copy of the Session report in French.<sup>943</sup> She noted the importance of the conference proceedings and extended a heartfelt invite to the delegates to come to Syria in the future. She wanted to attend the next session of the Commission, which was scheduled to take place in Lake Success the following year. For all the

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<sup>939</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Letter to John Humphrey from Kamleshwar Das, 2 April 1949.

<sup>940</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Commission on the Status of Women Interoffice Memorandum. 30 March 1949.

<sup>941</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Fourth Session. Letter to Lakshmi Menon from Angela Jurdak Khoury, 24 April 1950.

<sup>942</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Letter from Laure Tabet, President of the Women’s Federation of Lebanon (*Federation Feminine du Liban*) to Lakshmi Menon, 12 June 1949.

<sup>943</sup> UN 175/02 Part B. Commission on the Status of Women, Third Session. Letter from Marcelle ‘Absi to Lakshmi Menon, 1 June 1949.

challenges of being heard in international forums, Syrian and Lebanese women's rights activists continued to reach out the international sphere in hopes of gaining access to conversations about how women's rights were structured on the international level.

## **Conclusion**

The Third Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women provided a venue for the Lebanese women active in the women's movement to promote their vision of women's rights. Prior to the meeting in Beirut, Lebanese women's organizations had not been able to express their views regarding the status of women in the world's governing bodies, the League or the UN. Their petition directed toward the UN and toward the Lebanese government highlighted a woman's role in the family as her entryway to securing rights from the state. What the WCL called for in its petition was the most recent incarnation of an "Eastern" vision of women's rights.

Syrian and Lebanese actors had discussed "Eastern" women's rights since they first formally interacted with the international women's rights sphere in the 1920s. In the 1930s, conferences emerged throughout the Arab world that discussed "Eastern" womanhood. Constructing an "Eastern" women's rights framework wherein women's rights were awarded through the family rather than to individual women helped Syrian and Lebanese women lay claim to women's rights in such a way that they were not abandoning their cultural heritage in favor of foreign conceptions of women's rights. Ensuring that women claiming social protections and political rights did not appear to stand against the goals of nationalist movements was especially important during the period of the French mandate.

Syrian and Lebanese women were keen on aligning themselves with the Syrian,



Lebanese, and Arab nationalist movements to make certain that when independence was won, the leaders of the independent states would recognize women's contributions to independence and endow them with social, political, and economic rights. Thus, "Eastern" women's rights were a platform upon which Syrian and Lebanese were able to display their loyalty to their nations and to Arab independence. They were also a platform for the women using the language of "Eastern" women's rights to oppose the dominant conceptions of women's rights that operated at the League of Nations and then the United Nations.

The exact definition of what "Eastern" women's rights is hard to decipher because the dividing line between "Eastern" women's rights and the women's rights system they were interested in modeling, but not adopting wholesale—the Western system of women's rights—is hard to determine. Both women's rights systems wanted women to have access to education, to social protections, to health benefits, to legal rights, to political rights, and economic benefits. Women's leaders in the "East" wanted to have a say in how the rights affecting their lives were defined. Formulating an alternative women's rights system based in the language of the family was intended to help the members of the WCL and other women's organizations in Syria and Lebanon control the language of women's rights. Controlling the rights vocabularies used meant women's organizations could disassociate themselves from the taint of foreign influence.

The WCL's choice to ground the request for rights from the Lebanese state in the language of the family was an attempt to equate women's rights with service to the state. After decades of colonial rule, Lebanese and Syrian women were interested in controlling the conversations about the rights that affected their lives. As in the period before independence, Syrian and Lebanese women's organizations continued to play "Eastern"

and “Western” rights off of each other in domestic and international forums in an attempt to secure the maximum rights from their newly independent nations. It seems that even as the WCL used the UNCSW session to advocate for expanding women’s rights on the international level to include “Eastern” conceptions of women’s rights that emphasized the family, the Lebanese government was its target audience. Even as women’s rights were internationalized, states controlled women’s access to rights. The language of “Eastern” women’s rights was summarily dismissed by UN operatives, but women’s activism linking women’s rights to the family and to the nation eventually won the support the Syrian and Lebanese states, which granted women the right to vote in 1949 and 1952 respectively.<sup>944</sup> Rather than viewing the right to vote as a final victory, women’s organizations from Syria and Lebanon used franchise to press for increased women’s rights protections at home, in the larger Arab world, and abroad.

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<sup>944</sup> At first there was an educational requirement for women to vote in Lebanon. The educational requirement was dropped in 1957.

## CONCLUSION

Just as the international women's movement was taking shape, a pioneering group of "sisters of men" formed social service organizations to address the needs of women and girls in Ottoman Syria. A robust Arabic women's press soon followed; it linked women together across political and cultural boundaries, it reported on the development of ideas about women's rights abroad, and it gave rise to an intellectual community of its own.

The trauma of World War I and the imposition of the mandates forced Syrian and Lebanese women to find a collective political voice. Local women's organizations in Greater Syria started to pool their energies to address their status as women under the French Mandate for Syria. The establishment of women's unions led to women's conferences, which led in turn to regional organizing for Arab independence and women's rights. Starting in the 1920s, women from Syria, Lebanon, and the larger Arab world, began to formulate an idea of women's rights that was distinctly and deliberately "Eastern." The "Eastern" women's rights framework reflected their awareness of the emerging discourse on women's rights and represented an effort to control the terms of the debate. Rather than accepting the notion of women's rights that circulated in international women's organizations, which prioritized the individual, "Eastern" women's rights were conceptualized around the family. This definition was shaped by Arab women's political condition under the mandates and their cultural context.

Syrian and Lebanese women's campaigns for rights addressed internal and external targets: local governments, international governing institutions, and international women's organizations. As the women's movement in Greater Syria was taking shape, Syrian and Lebanese women tried to join the conversation about international women's

rights happening within international women's organizations, but found they were shut out. For the first four decades of the twentieth century, international women's organizations based in Europe and the United States spoke amongst themselves about the status of women around the world. At times, delegates from other parts of the world were invited to participate in their meetings and congresses, but not as equals. The members of international organizations, such as IWSA, ICW, WILPF, harbored prejudices regarding the ability of women in colonized territories in Africa, Asia, and in the Arab world to articulate their need for rights, let alone establish a countervailing conception of women's rights. Despite their exclusion from the conversation about women's rights happening on the international level, Syrian and Lebanese women persevered in their attempts to shape the debate and integrate "Eastern" women's rights into the emergent category of international women's rights.

All women had to fight to be heard at the League of Nations. A WILPF executive reflected that women's voices rose to "no more than a whisper in the assembly of nations."<sup>945</sup> Whispers from women with European surnames and passports may have been heard in the halls of the League of Nations. But the voices of women in the mandates were silenced. At first, League officials deemed the "women's question" to be outside the organization's governing purview. In response, international women's organizations, with limited representation from Arab women, lobbied the League to categorize women's rights as an international issue. It was not until the late 1930s that the League relented and set about gathering data to establish an international women's rights standard. League officials turned to data and information to quantify the legal status of women. The Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women, which was created by the

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<sup>945</sup> Gertrude Bussey and Margaret Tims, *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1965* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1965), 73.

League of Nations in 1937, established women's status under Western law as the metric by which women's status would be measured, and in doing so, sanctioned the Western conception of women's rights as the globe's gold standard, which has repercussions that shape our world today.

Keenly aware of their differing needs and circumstances as Arab women, Syrian and Lebanese women's organizations set out to challenge how international women's rights were defined at the League of Nations. They proffered an "Eastern" alternative for how women's rights could be internationalized. However, "Eastern" women's rights were not integrated into the League of Nations' definition of international women's rights. In spite of the narrow definition of women's rights in force at the League, several Syrian and Lebanese women's organizations used international women's rights to question the hierarchies ingrained in the structure of the League of Nations—and later the United Nations. They also used the language of international women's rights to try to leverage the governments of the French mandate and the independent republics of Syria and Lebanon to deliver increased protections and rights for women, including increased access to education and the right to vote.

The three international women's conferences hosted during the UN Decade for Women, 1975-1985, in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), and Nairobi (1985) are widely considered the first moment that women from all around the world engaged each other as women.<sup>946</sup> The conventional narrative ignores the contributions of women from countries under colonial domination and those that had gained independence in shaping ideas about women's rights through their presence in early international forums on the status of women. For example, Nour Hamada's campaign for "Eastern" representation on

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<sup>946</sup> *Journal of Women's History*, Special Issue: Human Rights, Global Conferences, and the Making of Postwar Transnational Feminisms, 24.4 (Winter 2013).

the Committee of Experts demonstrates that women in the French Mandate for Syria saw the potential of international women's rights for improving their status as women. The campaign to nominate Hamada to the Committee of Experts brazenly questioned the exclusion of "Eastern" women from discussions about international women's rights. The anti-mandate, pro-independence, and pro-women's rights campaigns Syrian and Lebanese women directed towards the League and towards their local governments demonstrate that women in the colonial and post-colonial world agitated for international women's rights well before the 1970s.

From its inception, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women appropriated the notion of women's rights as defined by the League's Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women. The exclusion of alternative conceptualizations and constructions of women's rights and the emphasis on a Western legal tradition at the expense of other legal traditions survived the League and continues to affect how women's rights operate on the international level. Like the League of Nations campaigns that preceded it, the petition circulated by the Women's Committee of Lebanon at the third session of the UNCSW represented an attempt to offer an alternative international vision of women's rights that emphasized delivering women's rights through the family. The petition was ignored. The League of Nations' experts who set the course for how women's rights were internationalized were embedded in a colonial system that did not view all parts of the world as equally advanced with regards to emancipating women, and did not view all women as equally capable of representing themselves. The Committee of Experts devised a system to quantify the differences in the status of the world's women; the United Nations absorbed this framework and has operated within it since 1946.

## APPENDICES:



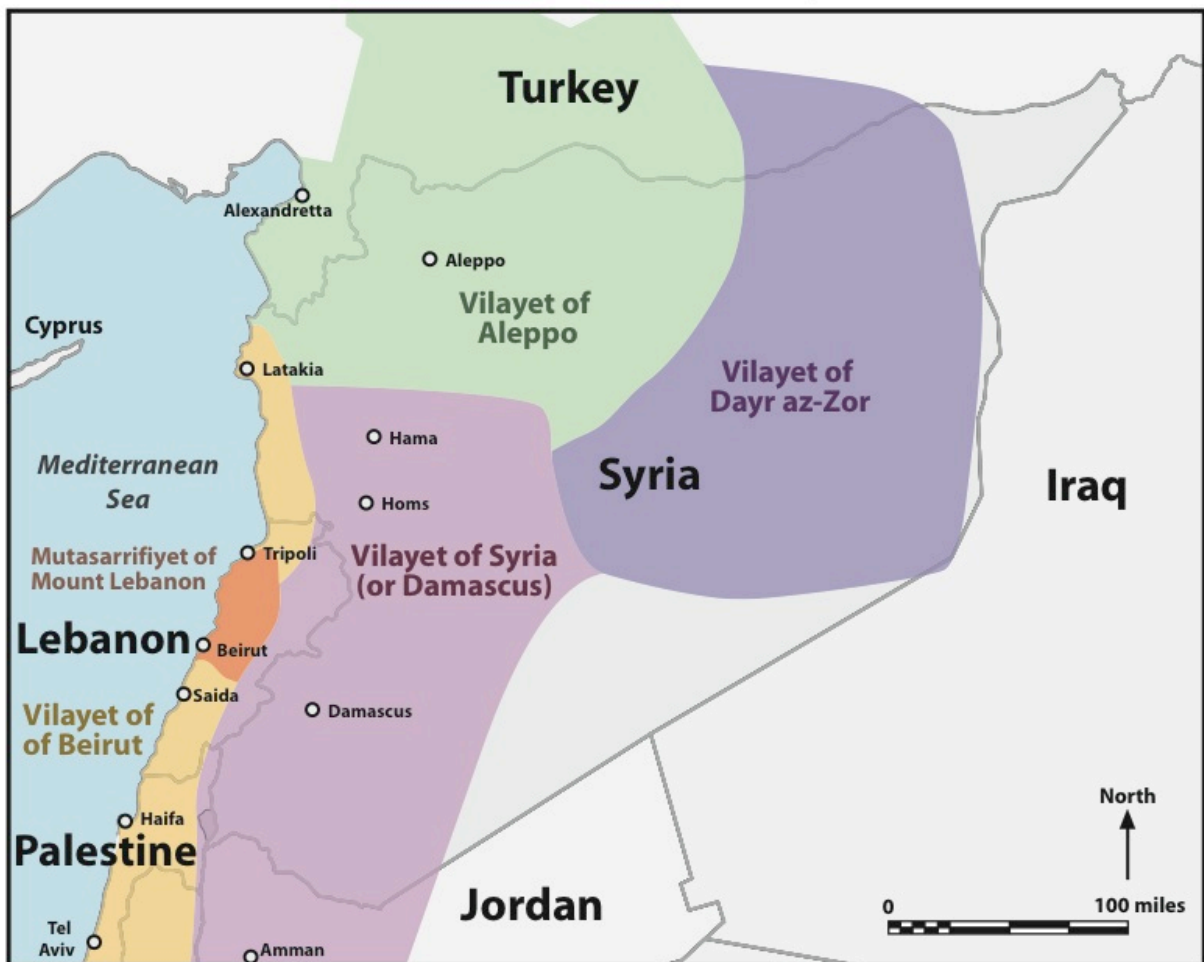
Woman holding a magazine – n.d.

*Source: Box 9, Alice Deyab Collection, Widener Library, Harvard*

## Appendix 1: Maps

Map 1

### Administrative Divisions of Ottoman Syria



Map of the Administrative Divisions of Ottoman Syria. The gray lines represent modern political borders.



Map 2

## French Mandate for Syria



Map of the French administrative districts in the French Mandate for Syria. The gray lines within the borders of the mandate represent the separate governing territories of Lebanon and Alexandretta.

**Map 3****Independent Syria and Lebanon**

Map of the independent borders of Syria and Lebanon in 1946.



Map 4

### Modern Political Boundaries of the Middle



## East and North Africa (2015)



Thank you to Andy Townshend for his assistance in preparing these maps.

## Appendix 2: Biographical Information on Syrian and Lebanese Women's Rights Activists



Row 1, L-R: Najla Abillama Ma'luf, Salwa Atlas, Jirji Niqula Baz, Julia Dimashqiyya  
 Row 2, L-R: Rose Haddad, Nour Hamada, Labiba Madi Hashim, Imilie Faris Ibrahim  
 Row 3, L-R: 'Afifa Karam, Anbara Salam Khalidi, Hind Nawfal, Mary Yanni

Sources: All images except Hamada and Khalidi, Box 9, Alice Deyab Collection, Widener Library, Harvard.  
 Hamada: "Princess of Peace" *The Evening News* (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania), 7 December 1933. Page 5.  
 Khalidi: *Memoirs of an Early Arab Feminist: The Life and Activism of Anbara Salam Khalidi*. Translated by  
 Tarif Khalidi. (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 80. Original Caption: "Anbara at age 23, Beirut 1920.".

Sulaymā **Abī Rashīd** — (1887, Wadi Shahrour, Lebanon - 1919, Egypt)

Sulayma started her studies at the Italian School in Beirut. She continued her studies at the Shimlan Institute, where she learned English. She returned to her natal village to start a school with her brother, ‘Abbud. She studied law and became the first woman to stand before the Baabda courts. She also forayed as a journalist. She wrote for her brother’s newspaper *al-Naṣīr al-Bayrūtī* (The Beirut Advocate) before she started *Fatāt Lubnān* (Daughter of Lebanon) in 1914. It was a short-lived literary-scientific journal. The journal folded with the start of World War I. Sulayma moved with her husband and three children to Egypt at the start of the war, where she started to study archaeology. She passed away shortly after the family relocated in Cairo.

Mārī **‘Ajamī** (Mary **‘Ajamy**) — (1888, Damascus - 1965)

Mary was educated at the Russian and Irish schools in Damascus. She started her career as a writer by way of English-Arabic translation and later became a writer in her own right. Mary founded *al-‘Arūs* (The Bride) in 1910 in Damascus despite Ottoman repression of local publishing. The journal suspended publication during World War I, but resumed publication thereafter (it printed its last issue in 1926). She used the journal to raise awareness about women’s issues in Syria. She also wrote articles chronicling the dire conditions found in local prisons and tried to better the situation through advocacy that complemented her journalism. She requested a meeting with Jamal Pasha, the Ottoman ruler of Syria, to discuss the conditions of prisoners and Ottoman policy of detaining nationalists. When he refused to meet with her, she launched a vitriolic campaign in *al-‘Arūs* that attacked Pasha and the Ottoman government—she was spared the fate of being martyred for her support of Syrian independence. In 1920, ‘Ajamy petitioned the Syrian National Congress to grant suffrage to women. She established the



Literary League in Damascus in 1921. She taught in Lebanon, Egypt, and Iraq.

Salwá Salāma **Atlas** — (1883, Homs - 1949, São Paulo, Brazil) **Pictured above**

Salwa emigrated from Syria to Brazil with her husband in 1913. She started a vibrant bilingual (Arabic and Portuguese) journal, *Al-Karma / A Vinha* (The Grapevine) that catered to the Maronite Christian population in Brazil. She published the journal from 1913 until her death in 1949.

Alexandra **de Avierino** — (1872, Beirut - 1927, Alexandria)

Alexandra was born in Beirut. She started her studies at the Sisters of Charity School and continued them at the American Mission School. Her family emigrated from Beirut to Alexandria when she was fourteen. She continued her education in Egypt adding Italian and French her studies. She married Prince Miltiade de Avierino—a family of Greek origin. In 1898 she founded *Anīs al-Jalīs* (The Confidant), which defended the cause of women's rights. Her journal was well regarded. *Al-Muqtaṭaf* said Avierino “chooses her subjects carefully, and researches them painstakingly. Well-known writers contribute to this periodical.”<sup>947</sup> She is said to have met and been decorated or commended by members of the Egyptian khedival family, Pope Pius X, the Sultan of Zanzibar, Ottoman Sultan ‘Abd al-Hamid, Muzaffer Khan, the Shah of Persia, and French President Emile Loubel, whom she met while in Paris attending a women's congress associated with the Paris Word Fair in 1903. After returning from the congress in Paris, she founded the French-language journal *Lutèce* (Lotus) to introduce foreign readers to the Egyptian women's movement. The Francophone journal does not appear to have lasted long.

Nāzik ‘Abid **Bayhum** — (1887, Damascus - 1959) **Pictured above**

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<sup>947</sup> *Al-Muqtaṭaf* 22 (1898): 305.



Nazik was an active Syrian nationalist and women's rights activist. In 1919, Nazik founded *Nūr al-Fayha'* (Light of Damascus), the city's first women's organization. The organization published a journal with the same name. She worked against Ottoman and French colonialism through her charity work and on the frontlines of battle. She took part in the famous battle of Maysalun. King Faysal decorated her for her service in the battle. She participated in a delegation of Syrian women who appeared before the American King-Crane Commission. After the war, in 1922, she helped establish the Red Star Association, which was a predecessor of the Red Crescent. She also founded a nationalist school for girls—the French authorities shut it down. In 1928 she founded the *Yaqzat al-Mar'a al-Shāmiyya* (Syrian Women's Awakening Society) with 'Adila Bayhum (they were related by marriage). The organization was dedicated to training displaced and widowed women in various crafts. In the late 1930s, Nazik moved to Lebanon, where she founded the Association for Working Women, which lobbied for maternity leave and for equal pay for women. After the 1948 war with Israel, she established the Association for the Employment of Palestinian Refugees.

Eveline **Bustros** — (1878, Beirut - 1971)

Eveline was the daughter of a very wealthy, Francophone family in Beirut. She studied at the Sisters of Nazareth, but did not attend mission schools. In 1904, she married Gabriel Bustros, the scion of another well-known Beiruti family. During the war the family went into voluntary exile in Egypt. Next, the family moved to Paris. While in Paris, she met with pan-Arab leaders who passed through the French capital to advocate for Lebanese independence; these conversations exposed her to the pan-Arab cause. The family returned to Beirut in 1930. Eveline started to write while in exile and continued to do so

after she returned to Lebanon. She created a literary salon in Beirut; her salon brought together politically active Beirutis to discuss the future of Lebanon, while negotiations about the fate of Lebanon proceeded in Paris. She was active in both literary and women's rights circles in Lebanon. She founded the Literary Society of Beirut and the Lebanese Pen Club. She led the Lebanese delegation to the Conference for the Defense of Palestine in Cairo in 1938. She became president of the Lebanese-Arab Women's Federation in 1942. She became president of the General Federation of Arab Women in 1948. During World War II, she was active in anti-French demonstrations and organized many women's marches. She continued to write throughout her life; one of her pieces, *Mission aux Indes* describes her trip to Hyderabad, India to attend the International Congress of Women's Leagues. She received the Lebanese Order of Merit a few months before she died.

Jirjī Niqūlā **Bāz** — (1881, Beirut - 1951) **Pictured above**

He was a pioneering supporter of the liberation of women in Syria. He published his own women's journal *al-Ḥasnā'* (The Beauty) from 1909-1912. After his own journal closed, he contributed to other women's periodicals and the general Arabic press about women's advancement.

Alice Kandaleft **Kūzma (Cosma)** — (1902, Damascus - ?)

In 1922, Alice left Damascus to study education in the United States at the Teachers College, Columbia University. Her studies were supported by a scholarship from the United States government, which was arranged by Dr. Shahbandar (a Syrian nationalist), whose wife ran an influential women's salon in Damascus during the Syrian Revolt. Alice returned to Syria after completing her studies. She served as the principal at several

institutions in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon. She was an ardent advocate of creating educational opportunities for girls. She received a second scholarship from the United States government in 1946 and toured the US giving talks about women's status in the Arab world and Arab politics. She served as the first Syrian representative to the UNCSW. She gave up the post but remained in the US as a UN employee until at least 1951. She founded a literary salon with Madani al-Khiyyami. The salon was a gathering place for Syrian intellectuals to debate politics and philosophy—and a site to air grievances about Syria's troubled domestic affairs in the 1940s and 1950s. Michel Aflaq, founder of the Ba'ath Party, was one of the members of the salon.

**Julia Ṭu'mi Dimashqiyya** — (1884, Moukhtara - 1954, Beirut) **Pictured above**

Julia was born in Moukhtara. She went to the American mission school in Saida and then attended the American mission school in Shwayfat—she received a teaching diploma from the latter institution. She taught first at Shefa-‘Amr in Palestine and then in Beirut at the *Maqāṣid* Girls' College. She married Badr Dimashqiyya; their inter-religious marriage shocked Beirut society. She was active in women's organizations and founded her own—the Lebanese Women's Association—in 1917. She was also at the center of a vibrant women's literary salon. She started *al-Mar'a al-Jadīda* in 1921; a children's periodical, *Nadīm al-Ṣighār* (named after her son), followed in 1925. In 1933 after *al-Mar'a al-Jadīda* folded, she established a newspaper *Nadīm*. She fell ill in 1943, but continued to receive people to her literary salon. In 1947, the Lebanese government presented her with the Golden Order of Merit. It is said she asked her daughter to give the medal to the first woman in parliament.

**Ḥabūba Ḥaddād** — (1897, Barouk - 1957, Lebanon)

She was educated in the British mission school in her village and then at the British mission school at Shimlan. She married and then divorced. After her divorce she traveled first to Paris and then to New York where she met Jibran Khalil Jibran, who encouraged her to write. She started *Ḥayāt al-Jadīda* (The New Life) in 1921 in Paris and brought it back to Beirut with her—it remained in publication until 1926. She was the leader of an active literary society and was a member of several women's organizations. Later in her life she produced a popular children's radio program on Radio Lebanon. The Lebanese government decorated her with the Order of the Cedars shortly before her death.

Rose (Rūz) Anṭūn **Ḥaddād** — (1882, Tripoli, Lebanon - 1955, Egypt) **Pictured above**

Rose was born in Tripoli. She studied at the American Mission School at al-Mina. She emigrated from Syria to Egypt with her brother Farah in 1897. She taught at the American School in Alexandria before starting her monthly periodical *Al-Sayyidāt wal Banāt* (Women and Girls) in 1903—it remained in publication until 1906. Its publication was stopped because she moved to New York City to join her brother, who as the editor of *al-Jāmi'a* (The League). She contributed to the journal and helped edit it. She met her husband, a sociologist, Nicolas Haddad, in New York. They returned to Egypt after their marriage in 1909. Her journal was revived in 1925 as the *Majallat al-Sayyidāt wal Banāt wal Rijāl* (Magazine for Women, Girls, and Men).

Nazīra Zayn al-Dīn **Ḥalabi** — (1908, Istanbul - 1976, Ayn Qani/Baakline)

Nazira was born in Istanbul where her father, a judge in the Ottoman High Court of Appeals, was stationed. Her father was an advocate of Nazira's early education—her education started at home and then continued at the Sisters of Nazareth Convent School (she was the first Druze woman to be educated at the school). Nazira's father coupled her

French Catholic missionary training with a classical Islamic education. Nazira's knowledge of shari'a influenced her writing. She wrote her first book *Al-Sufūr wal hijāb* (Veiling and Unveiling) in 1928. The book was a response to a 1927 Syrian law that forbade women to be unveiled in public. A second book, *Al-Fatah wa al-Shuyukh* (The Young Woman and the Shaykhs), was published shortly after the first in 1929; it chronicled the exchange she had with the religious leaders following the publication of *Veiling and Unveiling*. In it she negated claims that she had not written the book and that it was a guise for missionary efforts to curtail the presence of the veil. Despite opposition, the opening text of her first book was distributed in excerpts in the pages of women's magazines, such as *l'Egyptienne*. After her works received significant opposition, she retired to family life in Baakline. She married and had three children. She was an intellectual engine behind the women's movement in Lebanon, but not an active participant in the later stages of the movement.

**Nour (Nūr) Ḥamāda — (1897, Baakline – 1960) Pictured above**

Nour was born into a prominent Druze intellectual family in Baakline, Lebanon. Her father and brothers were leaders in the Druze community. Her family encouraged her to pursue her education. She started her schooling at home and later attended local mission schools. She was an early participant in the women's movement in Greater Syria. She founded *Al-Majma' al-Nisā'ī al-Adabī al-'Arabī* (The Women's Arabic and Cultural Assembly) in 1928. She later participated in a series of women's organizations in Lebanon and Syria. In the 1930s, Hamada was the president of two Eastern Women's Conferences, hosted in stages in Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad, and Tehran, in 1930 and 1932. She also participated in Arab women's conferences hosted in the capitals of the Arab world between 1928 and 1938. Nour tried to emigrate from Syria to the United

States in 1936; she received a tourist visa to conduct research on the women's movement in the United States and write a book about its successes and failures in Arabic. She overstayed her visa and was deported, after an appeal, by the United States Immigration and Naturalization Services in 1938. Nour actively tried to cultivate connections between women's organizations in the Arab world and the international women's rights community. She led a campaign to include an "Eastern" representative on the League of Nations' Committee of Experts on the Legal Status of Women. She retired to Lebanon after the conclusion of her women's rights activism in Geneva.

**Jamāl Karam Harfūsh — (1882, Lebanon)**

Jamal was a pediatrician—one of the first female pediatricians in Lebanon. She was a stringent advocate of children and women's health in Lebanon and the larger Arab world. She was a member of the Lebanese delegation to the 1944 Arab Feminist Conference, where she advocated creating public spaces for children to play and increased social hygiene programs in all Arab states. She helped organize the regional Arab women's conference associated with the Third Session of the UNCSW in Beirut in 1949. Later in her life she published two books on children's welfare in Lebanon.

**Labība Māḍī Hāshim — (1882, Beirut – 1952, Egypt) Pictured above**

Labiba was born in Beirut. She studied at the Sisters of Charity School and later at American and British mission schools. She moved to Egypt with her family in 1900. She took classes at the Egyptian University. She met her husband at one of Cairo's literary salons. She published a novel in 1904, *Qalb al-Rajul* (Heart of Man). She also contributed to several periodicals, including Avierino's, *Anīs al-Jalīs*, before starting her own, *Fatāt al-Sharq* (Daughter of the East) in 1906. *Fatāt al-Sharq* addressed family,

social, and educational issues—a combination which reflected her areas of expertise. She gave a series of lectures at the Egyptian University on raising healthy generations through moral and physical education at school and at home. The lectures were published as *Kitāb fil-Tarbiyya* (Book on Education) in 1912. She returned to Lebanon after World War I and served as the inspector of schools during King Faysal's brief reign over independent Syria. She left Lebanon after the Arab forces were defeated. She was briefly in Egypt before migrating to Chile. She brought her editing prowess with her. She started *al-Sharq wal-Gharb* (East and West) in Chile. She returned to Egypt in 1923 and continued to write on women's issues.

Imīlī (Imilie) Fāris **Ibrāhīm** — (Lebanon) **Pictured above**

Imilie was a member of various women's organizations in Beirut. She criticized the French mandate government in her articles and speeches; she participated in women's anti-French protests. She participated in the women's conferences hosted in Syria and Lebanon in the 1920s and 1930s. She was an active chronicler of the history of the early Arab women's movement. She wrote *Adībāt al-Lubnāniyyāt* (Lebanese Women Writers) in 1964 and *al-Ḥaraka al-nisā'iyya al-lubnāniyya* (The Lebanese Women's Movement) in 1966.

'Adila Bayhum **al-Jazā'iri** — (1900, Beirut - 1975, Damascus)

'Adila's family was wealthy and well connected. Her education was conducted mostly at home. She started writing for Arabic language periodicals before World War I. She wrote under the pen name *al-Fatāt al-'Arabiyya* (The Female Arab Youth). Her articles lambasted the Ottoman Empire for its involvement in the war. Using statistics to underscore her critique, she noted that Beirut's population had decreased from 180,000 to

75,000 between 1914 and 1916. She also emphasized that 240,000 Ottoman soldiers had died of disease, 250,000 were missing, and 325,000 had been killed in combat. During the war she founded the Muslim Girls Club, which provided free education to Muslim girls in Beirut. In 1922, she married into the Jaza'iri family in Damascus and moved to Syria. In Damascus she was involved in many women's organizations. In 1927, she founded the Women's Union in Syria. She was its first president—she retained the title until she retired from the post forty years later in 1967. In 1928, she founded the Syrian Women's Awakening Society; the same year she established the *Dawhat al-Adab* (Tree of Culture Society) in Damascus, which later established a girls' school of the same name. She was a member of the Drop of Milk Society and orchestrated stoppage of milk distribution services in 1943 in response to protests targeting women's claims to rights. She led the Syrian delegation to the 1938 Conference for the Defense of Palestine in Cairo and to the UNCSW conference in Beirut in 1949. 'Adila led a women's anti-French protest in 1945; it brought together over 500 women to protest the French mandate government's refusal to discuss independence. For her efforts in organizing the march, 'Adila was awarded the Medal of the Syrian Republic, Excellence Class in 1946, once independence was secured. Gamal Abdel Nasser appointed 'Adila the chairman of the African-Asian-Arab Women's Association in 1960. 'Adila took a break from humanitarian activism in the late 1960s, but the Arab-Israeli war in 1973 returned her to the humanitarian front.

**'Afīfa Karam — (1883, Amsheet – 1924, Shreveport, Louisiana) Pictured above**

'Afifa was born in Amsheet. She received her education in her hometown and then transferred to a missionary school in Jubayl (Biblos). She emigrated from Lebanon to the United States after marrying Karam Yusuf Karam in 1896. They settled in Louisiana. She



wrote a column from abroad for *al-Mar'a al-Jadīda* (The New Woman). She also contributed to a series Arabic-language periodicals in the United States. She tried to start her own women's magazine in the United States *Majallat al-'aālam al-jadīd al-nisā'iyya* (The New World, A Ladies Monthly Arabic Magazine), but it lasted for only a few issues. She also wrote three Arabic language novels: *Badi'a wa Fu'ad* ("Badi'a and Fu'ad") in 1906, *Fatima al-badawiyya* (Fatima the Bedouin) in 1908, *Ghādat 'Amsḥīt* (The Beauty of 'Amsheet) in 1910—the latter two were published in the United States.

'Anbara Salām **Khālidiī** — (1897, Beirut - 1986) **Pictured above**

Anbara was born to a well-connected Muslim family in Beirut. She started her studies at home an early age. She studied at the Sisters of St. Joseph and later at the *Maqāṣid*—Julia Tum'i Dimashqiyya was her teacher. She started to write for Arabic language journals and women's periodicals when she was sixteen; she wrote about women's liberation and national independence. She founded *Jam'iyyat Yaḡẓat al-Fatāt al-'Arabiyya* (Association for the Awakening of Young Arab Women) in 1914. After the war she traveled to England with her family, where, she writes in her memoir (*Jawla fīl dhikrayāt bayna Lubnān wa filisṭīn*), she got a taste of freedom. When she returned to Lebanon, she removed her veil at a public event—an action that caused quite a stir in Beiruti society. The public unveiling happened around the time of the publication of Nazira Zayn al-Din's *al-Sufūr wal ḥijāb*. In 1929, she married the director of education in Palestine and the principal of the Arab College in Jerusalem. The family lived in Jerusalem until 1948, when they returned to Lebanon.

Laure **Khūrī (Khouri)** — (Lebanon)

Laure was the wife of the first president of Lebanon. Her husband was a career politician. In addition to being the first president of the independent state of Lebanon, he had been the second and the fourth prime minister of the French Mandate (1927-1928, 1929) and the sixth president of the Mandate (1943). She was the First Lady of Lebanon from 1943 to 1952, when her husband was forced to resign. She was an advocate of women's rights and encouraged her husband to support reforms to women's rights.

Victoria **Khūzamī (Khouzami)** — (1918?, Aimoun - 2004)

Victoria founded the Social Democratic Women's League in Lebanon in 1943. Victoria was the first Lebanese student to earn a doctoral degree from the Sorbonne; she was awarded her PhD in Literature in 1952. In 1948, while studying in France, she started the Franco-Lebanese Cultural Association. The organization's major goal was to construct a building to house the hundred Lebanese graduate students studying in Paris. The Lebanese government backed the project and the cornerstone of the "Lebanon House" was laid in 1961. In 1997, she was awarded the "Cèdre du Liban" from the French-Lebanese Medical Association for her work encouraging cross-cultural dialogue between Lebanon and France.

Najlā Abīllama' **Ma'lūf** — (1895, Broumana - 1967, New York?) **Pictured above**

Najla founded *al-Fajr* (The Dawn) in 1920. It was published until she emigrated from Lebanon to the United States. In the United States she married fellow-journalist and writer, Yusuf Ma'luf who was the publisher and owner of *al-Ayyām* (The Days). She tried to start her own periodical but it failed to take off. Instead, she wrote for her husband's journal as well as *al-Huda* (The Guidance).

Matiel **Moghannem** — (1900, Beirut - ?)

Matiel was born in Lebanon in 1900 but was raised in New York City and later moved to Palestine. Matiel helped organize the 1929 Arab Women's Conference in Jerusalem. In addition to being an active participant, Matiel was an early chronicler of the women's movement in the Arab world. In 1936, she wrote an account in English of women's role in the Palestinian issue, *The Arab Woman and the Palestine Problem*. The publication of her account coincided with the outbreak of the Great Revolt.

Ester **Moyal** – (1873, Beiruth – 1948, Jaffa)

Moyal was a prominent Jewish women's rights activist born in 1873 in Beirut to a Sephardi Jewish family. She graduated from the American College for Girls. She taught at Christian and Jewish schools in Beirut. While teaching, she acted in concert with Muslim and Christian women in the three prongs of women's organizing in the era: participating in women's societies, founding and writing for a women's journal, and representing Syria at international women's conferences—she was nominated to go to the women's congress hosted in conjunction with the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago. She joined *Bakurat Suriyya* (The Dawn of Syria) in 1891. Five years later she co-founded *Nahḍa al-Nisā'ī* (The Women's Awakening). She wrote for a series of women's journals including *al-Fatāt*, *Anīs al-Jalīs*, *al-Ḥasnā'*. She also wrote for the general Arabic-language press in Beirut as well as the Arabic-language Jewish newspaper. In 1899, she founded *al-'A'ila* (The Family) in Cairo, where she had moved with her husband. The journal stopped publication in 1902. The journal ran material on its namesake, the family and women's role in the family, as well as features on regional and world affairs. The Moyals moved to Jaffa from Cairo after the Young Turk revolt and were active in Ottomanism and "Sephardi Zionism," which promoted a shared homeland

for Arabs and Jews. She later emigrated to France and returned to Jaffa in the 1940s. She died in 1948.

Hind **Nawfal** — (1875, Tripoli -1957, Lebanon) **Pictured above**

Hind was the daughter of two writers. Her mother published a biographical essay on famous women in the East and West. She was educated in mission schools in Beirut until the family emigrated from Lebanon to Egypt. Hind started a monthly periodical *al-Fatāt* (The Young Woman) in 1893—her father was the editor. The journal discussed political and religious subjects and addressed women's rights. She returned to Lebanon at the end of her life.

Ibtihāj **Qaddūra** — (1893, Beirut - 1967)

Ibtihaj was educated first at home—her father was a physician—and then at American mission schools. In 1930, Ibtihaj was elected dean of *Dār al-Aytām al-Islāmiyya* (Islamic Orphanage). She held the position for twenty-two years. Her position did not preclude her from activism for women's rights. She was active in many women's associations in the Lebanon and attended many regional and international women's conferences. She founded *Jam'iyyat Yaḡẓat al-Fatāt al-'Arabiyya* (Association for the Awakening of Young Arab Women) with Anbara Salam Khalidi in 1914. It seems she also held leadership positions within the Lebanese Women's Union. She campaigned for suffrage in the 1920s and 1940s and again in the early 1950s—the final campaign was successful (Lebanese women secured the right to vote in 1952). In 1952, she was one of the first three women to be elected to the council of the municipality of Beirut. She was awarded the Lebanese Order of Merit shortly before her death in 1967.

'Afīfa **Ṣa'ab** — (1900, Shwayfat - 1989, Lebanon)

‘Afifa started her education at the British School in Beirut and then at Miss Proctor’s School in her hometown. She started *al-Khidr* (The Boudoir) a monthly literary and scientific journal. She is said to have left behind several unpublished manuscripts including one entitled *Ḥatimiyyāt al-Taṭawwur* (The Inevitability of Progress). She started a primary school, *Ṣirāt* (The Path), in Aley with her sisters. In 1958 the Lebanese government decorated her with an Order of Merit for her dedication to improving educational standards in Lebanon.

**Hudá Sha‘rāwī (Sha‘arawi) — (1879, Cairo - 1947) Egyptian**

Huda had a political family and this influenced her own entry into politics—her father was the first president of the Egyptian Representative Council; her husband was also politically active. Huda was educated at home in Arabic and Turkish. As was the case for many elite Egyptian women, Huda’s early life was restricted to the harem. Huda wrote about her experiences in the harem in her memoir *Harem Years: The Memoirs of an Egyptian Feminist, 1879-1924*. She did not appreciate the limitations placed on her movements and her frustrations led her to create educational opportunities for girls in the 1910s. In 1909, she established a philanthropic society dedicated to providing social services to poor women and children. During World War I, she participated in relief efforts. After the war, she helped organize women’s participation in the 1919 Egyptian revolution against British rule. Huda attended the IWSA congress in Rome in 1923. After returning from the congress she founded the Egyptian Feminist Union. She was president of the union until her death. She also served as the publisher of the union’s journals *l’Egyptienne* and *Al-Masriyya* (The Egyptian Woman). She represented Egyptian and Arab women in many international women’s congresses—most of them connected to the

IWSA. She was frustrated by the place of non-European women in the structure of international women's organizations, which led her to found the Arab Feminist Union after the 1944 Arab Feminist Conference in Cairo.

Rūz (Rose) **Shahfa** — (Lebanon)

Rose emerged as a leader in the women's movement in Lebanon in the late 1920s and early 1930s. She was an active commentator on women's role in Lebanese society—she contributed to a series of periodicals, including the women's press. She led the Lebanese delegation to the 1944 Arab Feminist Conference in Cairo.

Mayy **Ziyāda** — (1886, Nazareth, Palestine - 1941, Cairo) *Palestinian*

Mayy was born in Palestine to a Lebanese father and a Palestinian mother. She later reflected, "I was born in one country, my father in another, my mother in a third, and I lived in another. My ghost wanders from country to country. To which do I belong. On which do I depend."<sup>948</sup> Mayy was educated at the Sisters of St. Joseph in Nazareth and later in Ayn Tura. While in school she took up the pen name Aida and started to write poetry. Writing remained a constant for the rest of her life. Ziyada finished her education at the Egyptian University. Her multiple language abilities—she could read and write in Arabic, German, Italian, French, English, modern Greek, and Latin—opened the pages of many regional periodicals to her. Her path to journalism was smoothed by her father's purchase of *al-Mahrūsa* (The Protected) when the family moved to Cairo. Originally Mayy wrote under the *nom de plume* *Bāḥitat al-Bādiya* (seeker in the desert). In Cairo, Mayy started a literary salon, which was attended by leading Cairene intellectual figures. She wrote nine original books, translated several other titles, and exchanged spirited

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<sup>948</sup> Ziyada, *Zumulāt wa Ashi'a*, 107. Quoted in Shereen Khairallah, *The Sisters of Men: Lebanese Women in History* (Beirut: The Institute for Women Studies in the Arab World, 1996), 216.

letters with many of the leading figures in the Arabic-language literary world including Khalil Jibran.

**Mary Yannī — (1895, Beirut - 1967, Santiago, Chile/Lebanon?) Pictured above**

Mary was a polyglot. She began her education at the British mission school in Rmayla; she transferred to a school in Zahrat al-Ishan where her education was in English, French, and Russian. Her father, who was Greek, taught her Greek at home. She taught French at the Russian school in Homs and later was principle of the School of the Holy Savior in Beirut. In addition to teaching, she wrote for a series of women's periodicals. In 1917, she started her own journal, *Minerva*, with her sister Alexandra. The journal had a scientific and literary focus. She emigrated with her husband from Lebanon to Santiago, Chile in 1926 and left the publication of the journal in the hands of her brother. She continued to write in Chile.

**Warda al-Yāzījī — (1838 - 1924, Shouf District, Lebanon)**

She was educated at American missionary schools in Beirut. Her teacher was Rahil 'Ata, the first pupil to graduate from a missionary institution. She started writing poetry at a young age and continued the practice into adulthood. She is considered the first female poet in Lebanon. She also contributed articles about social issues to Lebanese newspapers such as *Lisān al-Hāl*. She married Francis Sham'un, who was a teacher at Broumana High School. Warda also taught at the school. They had four children, whom Warda educated. She did not participate in the women's movement in Lebanon.<sup>949</sup>

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<sup>949</sup> The material in this section came from a variety of sources, but especially Shereen Khairallah, *The Sisters of Men: Lebanese Women in History* (Beirut: The Institute for Women Studies in the Arab World, 1996); Radwa Shur, et. al., *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, 1873-1999* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2008); Imilie Faris Ibrahim, *al-Haraka al-nisā'iyya al-lubnāniyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqafa, 196?), Hanifa Khatib, *Tārīkh taṭawwur al-ḥaraka al-nisā'iyya fī lubnān 1800-1975* (Beirut: Dār al-Hadatha, 1984).

### **Appendix 3:** Background Information of International Women's Organizations and Biographical Information on International Women's Rights Activists

#### **Organizations**

##### **Consultative Committee on Nationality**

The League of Nations sanctioned the creation of the Consultative Committee on Nationality after the Conference on the Codification of International Law at The Hague in 1930. The original members of the committee were the International Council on Women, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Inter-American Commission on Women, Equal Rights International, and the All-Asian Conference on Women. The committee claimed to represent forty-five million women worldwide. The committee's primary function was to issue reports to the Secretariat of the League regarding nationality laws.

##### **Inter-American Commission on Women (IACW)**

The commission was established at the Sixth Conference of American States in Havana, Cuba in 1928. It was the first intra-governmental organization to address the status of women. The commission had representatives of the twenty-one member states of the Pan-American Union. The organization conducted a regional study of the legal status of women, the first of its kind, in 1930. The commission's campaign for the international ratification of the Equal Rights Treaty contributed to the passage of the Convention on the Nationality of Women. The commission was integrated into the Organization of American States as a specialized agency in 1948. It continues to operate.

##### **International Council on Women (ICW)**

The ICW was the first women's organization to work across national boundaries to



secure women's rights. The ICW was dedicated to women's social equality and elevating the status of women around the world. The ICW was founded in 1888 in Washington, D.C. Its first meeting brought together delegates from Canada, the United States, Ireland, India, England, Finland, Denmark, France, and Norway. National councils are affiliated with the ICW and through the organization operate on the international levels. The American affiliate, the National Council of Women of the United States, was created at the first ICW meeting; the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland, the ICW affiliate in Britain, was founded in 1895. Lady Aberdeen, Ishbel Hamilton-Gordon, served as the organization's president for most of the time between 1893 and 1936. The organization continues to operate and consults with many of the UN's affiliate organizations, including the Economic and Social Council. Today, the organization boasts membership in 70 countries around the world.

### **International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA)**

The IWSA sought the vote for women around the world. The IWSA was an offshoot of the ICW. Carrie Chapman Catt and Millicent Fawcett created the organization at the ICW Congress in Berlin in 1904 to accommodate the suffrage efforts of many of the ICW national affiliates (ICW did not want to take up the issue of suffrage). After Chapman Catt stepped down in 1923, Margery Corbett Ashby served as the organization's second president (she served until 1946). The organization's membership is broken into two tiers: affiliates (full members) and associate members. The organization was the first international organization to accept membership from the Arab world. From 1906 to 1924, the IWSA published *Jus Suffragii* (The Right of Suffrage), a monthly publication, which chronicled the progress of women's suffrage around the world; "International Woman Suffrage News" was later added to the periodical's title. The organization

changed its name twice: in the 1920s the name was changed to the International Association for Woman Suffrage and Equal Citizenship and in 1946 to the International Alliance of Women (IAW). The final name change reflects the organization's decision to decrease its emphasis on suffrage. The organization worked closely with the League of Nations and later the United Nations, where it has consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council. Today, the IAW represents over 50 organizations and works to promote women's human rights and development issues that affect the status of women.

### **Joint Standing Committee of Women's International Organisations**

Members of the ICW created the Joint Standing Committee of Women's International Organizations in 1925 to lobby for the enforcement of the "equality clause" and for the appointment of women to the League. The committee included representatives from the World's Women's Christian Temperance Union, International Council of Women, World's Young Women Christian Association, International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, World Union of Women for International Concord, International Federation of University Women, St. Joan's Social and Political Alliance, and Equal Rights International.

### **Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations (Liaison Committee)**

The Liaison Committee of Women's International Organizations consisted of members from Women's Christian Temperance Union, National Council of Women, Young Women's Christian Association, International Alliance for Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship, International League for Peace and Freedom, World Union of Women for International Concord, International Federation of University Women, Equal Rights

International, International Federation of Women Magistrates, Barristers and Other Branches of the Legal Profession, St. Joan's Social and Political Alliance. It was affiliated with the League of Nations and later received consultative NGO status at the United Nations.

### **Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)**

WILPF emerged out of the International Women's Congress that took place at The Hague in 1915; the congress brought together 1,200 delegates from 12 nations to discuss ending the war through negotiation. Jane Addams served as the organization's first president. The organization dedicated its energies to making "known the causes of war and work for a permanent peace." The organization accepted a Lebanese affiliate in the late 1940s. The Lebanese affiliate continues to operate; it is joined by 36 other national sections. Today, WILPF has consultative status with the UN Economic and Social Council and special consultative relations with UNESCO.

### **Individuals**

Lady **Aberdeen** see Ishbel Hamilton-Gordon

Jane **Addams** — (1860 - 1935) *United States*

Addams was a pioneer in the American settlement movement. She founded Hull House in 1889, which provided social services, including health and education, to the poor in Chicago, many of whom were immigrants. Addams used Hull House as a site for research about social illnesses and child welfare. The information collected about prostitution and other social problems at Hull House turned her into an international voice for social reform. For example, she helped pass the first tenement codes and factory laws in the United States and she helped found the Playground Association of America.

She published a series of books including *The Spirit of the Youth and the City Streets* (1909) and *A New Conscience and Ancient Evil* (1912). She was active in both the suffrage and peace movements in the United States and abroad. She was the first American woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

Margery Corbett **Ashby** — (1882 - 1981) *Great Britain*

In 190, Corbett Ashby she founded Younger Suffragists to combat the exclusion of younger women from the suffrage movement. Corbett Ashby pursued a degree in Classics at Newnham College, Cambridge University. Starting in 1907, she served as Secretary of National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, which was affiliated with the IWSA. She was a member of the IWSA delegation to the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. She served as president of IWSA from 1923-1946. She also held additional leadership positions outside of her position within the IWSA. She was the British delegate to the Disarmament Conference 1932 and was Chairman of the British Commonwealth League.

Christine **Bakker van Bosse** — (1884 - 1963) *Netherlands*

Bakker van Bosse was born in Batavia (Jakarta). She co-founded the Netherlands Antiwar League in 1914. She led the Dutch affiliate of the IWSA. She served on the IWSA's mission to Palestine, Syria, and Egypt in advance of the Twelfth IWSA Congress in Istanbul in 1935. She published a book on minorities in Europe. She continued her work in women's international organizing during the United Nations era; she participated in the founding of the World Federation of UN Associations in 1946.

Emily Greene **Balch** — (1867 - 1961) *United States*

Green Balch was an economist. She taught economics and sociology at Wellesley

College. She combined her teaching with social activism on a range of issues such as poverty, child labor, and immigration. She became involved in the peace movement in 1914; her refusal to support the American involvement in World War I caused her to lose her professorship. She helped found the International Congress of Women in 1919, which later changed its name to the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. She forged connections between WILPF and the League of Nations on issues such as drug control, refugees, and disarmament. At the start of World War II, she did not object the war as she had before, but she championed the rights of conscientious objectors. She won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946 for her work with WILPF.

Anna **Bugge-Wicksell** — (1862 - 1928) *Sweden*

Bugge-Wicksell was born in Norway. She helped found the Norwegian Association for Women's Rights, which was dedicated to women's suffrage. She moved to Sweden in 1889 after her marriage to Knut Wicksell. She continued her activism on behalf of women's political and economic rights while in Sweden. In her writings on the topic of women's rights she emphasized the necessity of women's economic independence and advocated for the creation of a pension fund for housekeepers. She earned a law degree at the University of Lund (Sweden) in 1911. She used her legal credentials to gain entry into political discussions in Sweden. She was the first female member of the League of Nations' Permanent Mandate Commission.

Josephine **Butler** — (1828 - 1906) *Great Britain*

Butler championed the social welfare of prostitutes. Her concern for the well-being of prostitutes was motivated by her Anglican beliefs. Starting in 1869, she led a campaign for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act in Britain and its colonies. The act was

introduced in the 1860s as a form of state regulation of the spread of venereal diseases in the British Army and Royal Navy; the blame for the spread of venereal diseases was placed on prostitutes, who were given genital examinations to check for signs of venereal diseases. If a woman was infected, she was put in a lock hospital. Butler advocated changing the act because it unfairly imprisoned young women who were suspected of being prostitutes. Butler's organization, Ladies National Association for the Repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act, led a successful campaign. The act was repealed in 1886. When the British Raj instated a Contagious Disease Act after the one in Britain had been repealed, she launched an international campaign against it as well. Butler also led the charge in Britain and internationally to expose the extent of child prostitution and to stem the traffic in women and children more broadly. Many consider her one of the early pioneers of international women's organizing; she invented many of the strategies, such as aligning with the press, that would be used by suffragists and other women invested in social reform.

Carrie Chapman **Catt** — (1859 - 1947) *United States*

Catt campaigned for the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution. Catt began her career as an advocate of women's suffrage in Iowa. She was nominated as the state's delegate to the National American Woman Suffrage Association. She later served as president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Connected to her efforts to secure suffrage for women, she founded the League of Women Voters. She also established the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (later known as the International Alliance of Women). Catt became a powerful voice for women's suffrage worldwide. Catt was hesitant to connect women to peace efforts because she wanted to make sure that campaigns for peace did not detract from women's efforts to obtain the

right to vote.

**Rachel Crowdy** — (1884 - 1964) *Great Britain*

Dame Rachel Crowdy was a nurse and ardent advocate for improving social conditions. She served as the Principal Commandant of Voluntary Aid Detachments in France and Belgium during World War I. Her wartime service to help the hungry and displaced during the war earned her the nomination from the British government to the Secretariat of the League of Nations. She served as Head of the Social Questions and Opium Traffic Section from 1919-1931. Upon retiring from the League she continued her public service. She sat on the Royal Commissions on the Private Manufacture of Armaments (1936) and on the West Indies (1938). She also visited the victims of the Spanish Civil War with a Parliamentary Commission (1937). During World War II she worked for the Ministry of Information reporting on bomb damage in British cities.

**Constance Drexel** — (1894 - 1956) *United States*

Drexel was born in Germany and later emigrated to the United States where she became a naturalized citizen. She became involved in the issues of woman's suffrage and peace at the International Congress of Women, which met at The Hague in 1915. She wrote reports of the congress for international newspapers—she was fluent in German, English, and French (she received a degree from the Sorbonne). Drexel earned a reputation as a journalist and features writer for newspapers in the United States. She was one of the first female correspondents to Capitol Hill. She wrote columns about the status of women around the world in the *Chicago Tribune*, *The New York Times*, and the McClure syndicate. In World War II she was indicted, but not convicted, for treason for a series of radio broadcasts in Germany in which she extolled Nazi virtues. She falsely claimed a

connection to the Drexel family in Philadelphia.

**Millicent Fawcett** — (1847 - 1929) *Great Britain*

An early pioneer for suffrage and increased access to education, Dame Fawcett co-founded Newnham College, Cambridge in 1871. She joined the London Suffrage Committee in 1869. In 1901 she was sent by the British Government to investigate the conditions in concentration camps during the Second Boer War. She became president of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1907—she served until 1919. She is considered an instrumental force in securing the right to vote for British women over the age of thirty in 1918. She wrote a series of books including *Political Economy for Beginners* (1870), *Electoral Disabilities of Women* (1872), *Women's Suffrage: a Short History of a Great Movement* (1912), a memoir, *What I Remember (Pioneers of the Women's Movement)* (1924), and a biography of Josephine Butler (1927).

**Ishbel Hamilton-Gordon** (also Lady Aberdeen) — (1857-1939) *United Kingdom*

Born in Scotland, she married Lord Aberdeen, a liberal member of the House of Lords. Her husband was appointed Governor General of Canada in 1893, the same year she was named the first president of the International Council of Women. In addition to being president of the international organization, she served as president of the National Council of Women in Canada until 1898 when the family moved back to England. From 1906-1915, her husband was Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. After the appointment in Ireland, the family retired from government service to Scotland, where she continued to work for women's causes. She served as president of the ICW from 1893-1899, 1904-1920, and 1922-1936.

**Amanda Labarca** — (1886 - 1975) *Chile*



The Pedagogical Institute of the University of Chile certified Labarca as a teacher in 1905; she received further educational credentials from Columbia University (1910) and at the Sorbonne (1912). To expand women's access to education, she founded the Reading Circle. The Reading Circle published a journal called "Women's Action." The journal and the literary society led to the creation of the National Council of Women in Chile in 1919. In 1922, she was given a teaching position at the University of Chile in the Philosophy, Humanities, and Education department—she taught psychology. In 1933 she founded the National Committee for Women's Rights, which lobbied the Chilean government to improve protections for women. In 1946 she was appointed by the Chilean president to serve as the Chilean representative to the United Nations and the head of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women.

**Paulina Luisi** — (1875 - 1949) *Uruguay*

In 1909, Luisi was the first woman in Uruguay to qualify as a doctor of medicine. In addition to her credentials as a doctor, she was an advocate of educational reforms and women's rights and the intersection of the two. For example, she introduced the study of sex education into the Uruguayan public school system. In 1920, she founded the Uruguay Women's Association—she served as the organization's first president. At the PAAAW conference in 1922, she was named honorary vice president. She was a member of the League of Nations' Advisory Committee on Traffic in Women and Children and Child Welfare Committee from 1922 to 1932. From 1923 to 1939, she was a committee member of the IWSA. In 1935 she became involved in Open Door International for the Economic Emancipation of the Woman Worker and served on its Board of Directors.

**Bertha Lutz** — (1894 - 1976) *Brazil*

Lutz studied the natural sciences, biology, and zoology at the Sorbonne. She returned to Brazil and taught zoology at the University of Rio de Janeiro for many years; she also worked for the National Museum of Brazil in its botany department. In 1922, she attended the PAAAW conference. She founded and served as president of the Brazilian Federation for the Advancement of Women, 1922-1976. Her efforts to improve the status of women in Brazil were supported by Paulina Luisi and Carrie Chapman Catt. The organization helped expand government services to women in Brazil, such as maternity leave and equal pay for equal work. She was the permanent delegate of Brazil to the IWSA. As a member of Brazilian delegation to the 1946 San Francisco Conference, she pushed for the creation of the Status of Women Commission. She was one of four women to sign the UN Charter.

**Maria Ogilvie Gordon** — (1864 - 1939) *Scotland*

Ogilvie Gordon received a Doctor of Science from the University of London (1893) and was awarded a PhD in geology from the University of Munich (1900)—she was the first woman to receive advanced degrees from both institutions. Her geological research was conducted in South Tyrol. Her research led to a new interpretation of the tectonic structure of the Alps. Alongside her geologic research, Ogilvie Gordon championed women's issues. She served as the president of the National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland, which was affiliated with the ICW. She was influential in the negotiations for the “equality clause” in the Covenant of the League of Nations.

**Chrystal Macmillan** — (1872 - 1937) *Scotland*

Macmillan was the first woman to graduate from the University of Edinburgh with a degree in science. She was the first woman to plead for the cause of women's suffrage in

front of the House of Lords. Macmillan was a member of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in Great Britain and a member of the IWSA—she served as vice president of the organization from 1913-1923. She co-wrote with Maria Vérone and Marie Stritt (Germany) *Woman Suffrage in Practice* (1913). She was also active in the international peace movement. She participated in the International Congress of Women at The Hague in 1915. She presented the resolutions passed at the congress to President Wilson and other world leaders whose countries had not yet entered World War I. Macmillan served as a delegate of the IWSA to the Paris Peace Conference. She championed the cause of women's independent nationality. In 1929, she co-founded the Open Door International for the Economic Emancipation of the Woman Worker. She served as the organization's president until her death in 1937. She ran for office, unsuccessfully, in 1935.

**Germaine Malaterre-Sellier – (1889 - 1967) France**

During World War I, Malaterre-Sellier provided wartime relief to women and children as a member of the French Women's Association. Her wartime activism led to a career of organizing on behalf of women's causes, in particular women's potential to secure international peace. To that end, she served as the vice president of the Women's Union for the League of Nations; was the vice president of the International League of Moral Disarmament; and was the president of the Peace Section of the National Council of French Women. She organized the 1932 Mediterranean Women's Congress in Constantine, Algeria. She was a member of the IWSA and served as a representative of the organization on the 1935 tour of the Middle East in advance of the Twelfth Congress in Istanbul in 1935.

**Alice Paul** — (1885-1977) *United States*

She received a BA in biology from Swarthmore College and an MA in sociology from the University of Pennsylvania. After working in settlement houses in New York City, she traveled to England to study at the Quaker Study Center (Paul was raised in the Quaker tradition). While in England she met the Pankhursts, a famous suffragist couple and joined their militant Women's Social and Political Union. She was imprisoned three times for her suffrage activism in England. She returned to the United States in 1910. She pursued a PhD in economics at the University of Pennsylvania. Her dissertation was entitled "The Legal Position of Women in Pennsylvania." She received a law degree from the American University in 1922. In 1928 she earned a Doctorate in Civil Laws. In addition to her studies, she was active in the suffrage movement in the United States. She founded the militant Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage in 1913, which became the National Women's Party in 1914. She was chairman and then International Secretary of the NWP. After the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, she drafted the Equal Rights Amendment and the Equal Rights Treaty. Her activism was increasingly international in the 1930s and 1940s. She served on the Women's Consultative Committee at the League of Nations. She continued to be active in the women's movement until her death; in 1964 she ensured women were included in the parties protected by the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

**Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence** — (1867 - 1954) *Great Britain*

Pethick-Lawrence started her career as an educator. In addition, she was an early women's rights advocate in Great Britain. She served as the treasurer of the Women's Social and Political Union. In 1907 she started the publication "Votes for Women" with her husband. She was imprisoned in 1912 for her activism. Following her arrest, she was

ousted from the WSPU. She joined the United Suffragists. She attended the 1915 International Congress of Women at The Hague. She ran for a regional governmental seat in 1918, the year women in England over the age of 30 were granted the right to vote. She was not elected to the post.

Princess Gabrielle **Radziwill** — *Lithuania*

Radziwill was born into the Radziwill family, which had long been a powerful magnate and princely family in the region that became the state of Lithuania. She was appointed to the League of Nations Secretariat. She developed extensive relations with women's organizations and other non-governmental organizations, which did not have a formal channel to the League's proceedings. She worked to ensure that women's issues were represented at the League.

Josephine **Schain** — (1886 - 1972) *United States*

She received a LLB from the University of Minnesota in 1908. She began her career as a settlement house worker in Minneapolis. She later worked on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. While in New York she became active in the suffrage and peace movements. She was director of the Department of International Relations for the National League of Women Voters from 1924 to 1928. She was national director of the Girl Scouts of America from 1933 to 1938. From 1933 to 1938, she simultaneously served as the director of the Peace and Disarmament Committee of Women's International Organizations and as a member of the IWSA. Later, from 1949 to 1955, she served as an executive in the Pan-Pacific Women's Association. She was a consultant to the US delegation to the United Nations Conference in San Francisco in 1945.

Doris **Stevens** — (1892 – 1963) *United States*

Stevens graduate from Oberlin College in 1911. She was a teacher and social worker in Ohio and Michigan before she dedicated herself to the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Stevens was the executive secretary of the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage, which became the National Women's Party in 1915. Stevens organized the NWP's campaign in California in 1916. In 1920, Stevens published *Jailed for Freedom*, which chronicled her multiple incarcerations on behalf of women's rights, especially the right to vote. Stevens served in several positions on the executive committee of the NWP. In addition, she was vice chairman of the NWP New York branch, led the NWP Women for Congress Campaign in 1924, and was appointed the chairperson of the Committee on International Action. Stevens remained in the NWP until 1947, when she left because she thought the organization had started to prioritize international issues at the expense of domestic ones. At the end of her career, Stevens advocated for creating feminist studies as a legitimate field of academic inquiry.

**Marta Vergara — (1898 - 1995) Chile**

Vergara was a member of the Chilean delegation at the Conference on the Codification of International Law in 1930, where she spoke on behalf of Chile's support of women's equality in nationality. She also chronicled the conference for "Equal Rights," the organ of the National Women's Party in the United States. In 1931, she founded the Movement for the Emancipation of Chilean Women—a Popular-Front feminist organization. The organization published "The New Woman," between 1935 and 1941. She wrote widely on the topic of the emancipation of women in Chile and internationally. Vergara was a proponent of the Organization of American States and aligned with the IACW. In 1962, she published her memoir, *Memories of an Irreverent Woman*.

**Maria Vérone** — (1874 - 1938) *France*

When she was fifteen, Vérone attended the Congress of Free French Thought. It was the start of her long career as an activist. Her first campaigns addressed the standardization of education in France. In 1897 she became the editor of Marguerite Durand's *La Fronde*. She later served as the editor of *l'Aurore*. In 1905 she joined the French League for Women's Rights, which was affiliated with the IWSA; she was the president of the French branch of the organization from 1919 to 1938. In 1908 she traded in her editor's pen, obtained a law degree, and became a lawyer. She used her law degree to advance the cause of women's suffrage in France.

**Ruth Frances Woodsmall** — (1883 - 1963) *United States*

Educated at the University of Nebraska (BA) and Wellesley (MA), Woodsmall began her career as an English teacher in Colorado and Nevada. During World War I, Woodsmall worked with the War Work Council as a director of Hostess Houses in the United States and France. In 1920, she became the executive secretary of the YWCA in the Near East. She left the post in 1928 after receiving a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to study the changing status of women in the Middle East—the research was turned in *Moslem Women Enter a New World* (1936). Woodsmall returned to the YWCA in 1932. From 1935-1947, she served as the General-Secretary of the World YWCA. After World War II, she worked for the YWCA in Japan. In 1949, she became the Chief of the Women's Affairs Section of the United States' High Commission for Occupied Germany. She left her post in Germany in 1952. She served on UNESCO's Working Party on the Equality of Access of Women to Education and on the UNCSW in 1949 and 1952. In addition to the book published in 1936, Woodsmall published another book, *Women and the New*

*East* (1960), and two studies “Eastern Women Today and Tomorrow” (1933) and “Study of the Role of Women, Their Activities, and Organizations in Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Syria” (1955).



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## Interview

Anissa Najjar - Beirut, December 16, 2012

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<sup>950</sup> To ease the usage of digitized library catalogues, I have preserved the diacritical marks in the transliteration of the Arabic journal, newspaper, and book titles. Titles were transliterated into English; to locate titles housed in archives in France, Germany, or South America convert the titles into Arabic-French, Arabic-German, Arabic-Spanish, and Arabic-Portuguese transliteration systems.

<sup>951</sup> Referenced in dissertation as *al-Hayāt al-Jadīda*

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