

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE SYRIAN NATIONAL MOVEMENT (1880–1967)

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Abstract

This study examines the historical role of Syrian women in the national movement from 1880 to 1967, highlighting their active participation in political, social, and cultural spheres. During the Ottoman period, reforms in education and the rise of private and missionary schools enhanced women's access to learning, while feminist journalism and the establishment of early associations reflected growing awareness of women's rights. Under the French Mandate, Syrian women played a critical role in resistance movements such as the Great Syrian Revolution (1925–1927) and the general strike of 1936, offering logistical, financial, and direct support to the national struggle. They also advanced the establishment of associations that demanded reforms in education, personal status laws, and political rights. Following independence in 1946, women engaged more directly in political life, seeking parliamentary representation, legal reforms, and integration into political parties including the Communist, National, and Ba'ath parties. Despite setbacks caused by successive military coups, women achieved the right to vote and later to run for office, marking a turning point in their political empowerment. The research emphasizes that Syrian women's contributions were not limited to auxiliary roles but extended to leadership, advocacy, and activism that shaped the trajectory of national politics and social change. By analyzing their participation across three historical phases—Ottoman rule, the French Mandate, and independence—this study demonstrates the evolution of women's roles from marginalization to active citizenship, underscoring their enduring influence in the pursuit of equality, independence, and national identity.

Keywords: Syrian women, national movement, Ottoman reforms, French Mandate, political empowerment.

Introduction

Between 1880 and 1967, Syrian women played a prominent role in the Syrian national movement, participating in various aspects of it, whether in the struggle against the Ottoman and French occupations or in expressing demands for social and political equality. Syrian women also participated in protests and marches, and some even participated in direct combat, against the Ottoman and French occupations. The role of Syrian women emerged through their contributions to establishing national associations and clubs, spreading national awareness, and supporting the national movement through donations and logistical assistance. They called for women's political and social empowerment, and for their right to

education, work, and political representation. Developments in the feminist movement aimed to achieve gender equality in all areas and contributed to changing some of the laws and traditions that hindered women's empowerment. This study includes three chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter addresses the status of women during Ottoman rule (1880-1918), with three topics: the impact of Ottoman reforms on women's education, the role of private and missionary schools in women's education, and the impact of the feminist press on the Ottoman presence. The second chapter, titled "The Women's Movement's Position on the French Mandate (1920-1946)," explores the women's movement during the Arab government in Damascus (1918-1920), women's political activity during the French colonial period, the establishment of women's associations, and the demand for political and educational rights under the occupation. It also examines the French Mandate's position on the women's movement. Finally, the third section, titled "The Women's Movement from Independence to the War (1946-1967)," addresses the women's struggle to reach parliament and implement legislative changes related to women. It also addresses the role of women in political parties (the Communist Party, the National Party, and the Ba'ath Party). It also examines the impact of political coups on the women's movement, the development of education and women's work, and, finally, the women's movement's position on the collapse of the union between Syria and Egypt (1958-1961) and the 1967 war.

It is worth noting that the study relied on several sources, including published documents and Arabic and English books, which enriched the research with valuable information. The most important of these sources are:

- Jamil Musa al-Najjar, "The Ottoman Administration in the Baghdad Vilayet from the Reign of Governor Midhat Pasha to the End of Ottoman Rule 1869-1917 AD." This book's study provides an in-depth analysis of the Ottoman administration during a significant period in the history of the Baghdad Vilayet, and the impact of the reign of Governor Midhat Pasha in the Baghdad Vilayet on the Ottoman administration. It also clarifies the status of women during Ottoman rule.
- Ahmad Hamid Al-Qudat, *The Christians of Jerusalem: A Study in Light of Ottoman Documents*. This study examines the general conditions of Christians in the nineteenth century, based on data from the records of the Sharia Court of Jerusalem in Ottoman Jerusalem. The Ottoman state did not place any obstacles in the way of its Christian subjects; rather, it allowed them a great deal of freedom.
- Rena Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Tourism, and the Ottoman Harem*. This study contributes significantly to correcting the prevailing stereotype of submissive and reticent women in the harem. By bringing together published biographies of women who identified themselves as "Oriental" at the beginning of the twentieth century, it reveals that these women were, in fact, capable of intervening in Orientalist culture and manipulating cultural codes.
- Leslie Pearce, *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman State*. This study deals with the role of women in the Ottoman Empire, especially in the sultan's palace (harem) and their influence on power and politics. Women had a position in raising and educating the sons of the sultans, and they played a role in the emergence of strong and influential female figures.

Chapter One: Women's Conditions During Ottoman Rule (1880-1918).

Women's conditions during Ottoman rule (1880-1918) witnessed significant developments and improvements, especially in urban areas. In some rural areas, traditions remained intact. Meanwhile, the period witnessed an increase in women's participation in public life, interest in women's education, and increased awareness of women's rights, in addition to the emergence and influence of feminist journalism. (1)

A) The Impact of Ottoman Reforms on Women's Education.

The nineteenth century witnessed the reforms of the Ottoman Empire, known as the Tanzimat, aimed at modernizing the state during the Ottoman Caliphate. The state introduced numerous reforms and regulations in various political, social, cultural, and educational fields, to restore the state's strength, which had been weakened and declining. The impact of these reforms became apparent in the level of women's education. (2)

In the field of education, the Ottoman Empire implemented the Ottoman Education Law issued in 1869 AD, which reformed education at all levels. Under this system, the establishment and regularization of schools in the Levant expanded, and an official educational system was established that encompassed all levels, from elementary school to university. It was based on the teaching of the Turkish language and worked to disseminate and generalize it. These educational levels were: elementary school, adulthood, preparatory school, and university school. The Ottoman reforms achieved many accomplishments in women's education. The first schools for girls were opened in 1858, followed by a boom in 1869 when elementary education became compulsory. The first intermediate-level schools and a teacher training college were opened in 1863. Educating men on job training, and women's education focused on forming better Muslim wives and mothers with knowledge of blessings. (3)

The Ottoman authorities' interest in establishing modern schools expanded during the last two decades of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. Sultan Abdul Hamid II (4) directed the enactment of laws related to reforming the educational situation in the Ottoman provinces. (5)

During this period, specialized committees were formed within the Ministry of Education, which undertook the development of formal education and began educating girls. A series of measures were issued leading to the spread of education and raising the educational level of women. These included private schools for girls to study the Holy Qur'an and its recitation, Islamic studies, literature, Ottoman, Arabic, and Persian grammar, health, geometry, arithmetic, calligraphy, history, crafts, and general information about life. Home management was an important subject taught in these schools. The Ottoman Council of Education oversaw education and the examinations held for students and teachers to ensure their ability to teach and learn (6). The Council of Education relied in its work on funds collected from taxes, a quarter of which was allocated to education, such as the education tax, which was collected at a rate of 5% from the section on roofs. (7) The Ottoman state entrusted the Directorate of Education with implementing the law and regulations it had established in the Education System. It required it to inspect schools and obligated it to submit an annual report on educational procedures and reforms to the governor, who would

then submit it to the Sublime Porte (8). In 1898, the Ottoman state obligated school principals and teachers to be Ottoman subjects. In 1895, it issued an order obligating sectarian schools to teach students the Ottoman language. In order to reduce foreign interference in education, the government ensured direct supervision of these schools, tightening restrictions on the establishment of schools. These restrictions included:

- Obtaining an official license from the state's Department of Education.
- Authenticating the certificates of teaching staff in private schools by the Department of Education.
- Presenting lesson schedules and textbooks to the Department of Education. (9)

b) The Role of Private and Missionary Schools in Women's Education.

Private and missionary schools played a significant role in women's education during the Ottoman Caliphate, contributing to the provision of equal educational opportunities for girls, enhancing their capabilities, and preparing them to participate in society. Some of these schools focused on teaching girls religious and social values, aiming to empower them to achieve their dreams and ambitions. Private and missionary schools reinforced moral and religious values and developed women's skills and abilities, enabling them to achieve their professional and personal goals. This contributed to the formation of balanced personalities qualified to participate in building an ideal society. Private schools provided educational opportunities for girls who might not have had the opportunity to attend formal or government schools. They had an impact on the development of women's education and improved the standard of living of girls through advanced educational programs that introduced innovative teaching methods. Their clear impact was evident in women's contributions to increasing their employment opportunities and their positive impact on the economy. (10)

The form of education in Syria since its fall under Ottoman rule, extending beyond the French Mandate, differed significantly from what it had before and after. This is evident from the division of schools during this period, extending from 1880 to 1918—the final period of Turkish rule—into several types (11):

First: Religious schools, attended by Islamic endowment schools spread across Homs, Aleppo, Damascus, Hama, Tripoli, and Jerusalem. These schools were endowed by sultans, princes, and charitable individuals for students of religious knowledge.

Second: Foreign schools, which had undisguised goals, namely proselytizing Christianity or Judaism and promoting the countries that had conquered them. England, Russia, Germany, and France were all keen to establish branches throughout Syria, with Beirut and Jerusalem receiving the largest share.

• Third: Private schools that were built by some intellectuals and thinkers out of concern for the future of the Arabic language and keenness on Arab nationalism. Missionary schools were established, which constituted the entry of European educational missionary missions into the Ottoman state of Syria in the second half of the 19th century AD, an incentive to modernize government education that the Sultanate adopted under System 24 of 1868 AD. Article 198 divided education into five stages (primary education, adult education, preparatory schools, and royal schools). (12) Its goal was missionary, as missionary societies dealt with all aspects of life and sought to penetrate and

establish influence. For this reason, they did not hesitate to establish numerous associations and institutions, supported by European and American missionary societies, such as the American Society for Syrian Affairs, which later became the American University of Beirut. Missionary missions played an important role in Syria during the French Mandate period, as they sought to achieve multiple goals, including Christian evangelism, spreading education, providing healthcare services, offering social assistance, and contributing to economic development. Missionaries established schools and educational institutes at various levels, in addition to expanding the educational curricula they followed for girls, such as modern sciences, foreign languages, scientific skills, and religious education, which focused on Christianity. This contributed to raising the level of education for women in the country and graduating many competent individuals. To serve its goals of improving the level of women's education and building bridges with Muslim and Christian families in the Middle East, education is a broad field and an open space for spreading ideas and carrying out the process of cultural transformation. Moreover, women's education may allow for the preparation of new elites for the Islamic community, as these associations believed, which means influencing the future of the Ottoman state. With the increase in the activity of these schools, some state officials expressed their fear of their influence on Ottoman subjects, especially since they were active in places where there were no foreign students or non-Islamic sects, in addition to their refusal to teach the official Ottoman language. (13)

c) The position of the women's press on the Ottoman presence.

- The establishment of women's associations.

The establishment of women's associations began during the Ottoman rule at the end of the nineteenth century. They contributed to strengthening the role of women in society. They included expanding the scope of comprehensive work to provide education for women, strengthening the role of women in society, and increasing their awareness of the importance of their rights. The Syrian feminist movement developed at the end of the nineteenth century, where the demand for equal political, economic, and educational rights for men and women was the core of the movement. At that time, Syrian women did not enjoy a decent status through which they could draw their bright image due to the dominant male pattern that imposed many restrictions on them. They were classified in the second class after men, who did not allow room for others to come to the forefront instead of them or with them. A specific category of women was trying to break out of the male stereotype. We note that they were from a specific class of society, that is, women who belong to the velvet class in Syrian society, bearing the titles of ancient and wealthy families, which helped them receive their culture from within their social environment. The establishment of women's associations was the first social and cultural manifestations that Syrian women took the direction of their establishment, and they were considered an important incubator of the incubators that From there, she embarked on a career in journalism. These associations served as a meeting place for writers and thinkers who discussed and debated literary matters, literary criticism, political issues, and cultural developments, with ideas either converging or conflicting. Mariana Marrash (1848-1919), a native of Aleppo, was the first Syrian Arab woman to write for newspapers (14). These cultural and intellectual gatherings arose as women sought to

transform these unwritten discussions into articles expressing their opinions on various issues and documenting their emancipation from societal constraints. Women's associations played a role in discussing the status of Syrian women by calling for enlightenment and openness. During the Ottoman era, feminist journalism helped reject the marginalization of women. From here, we find that social reality was not conducive to the aspirations of women journalists except through some outlets brought about by political changes, which women were able to exploit to achieve their goals, which were freedom for themselves and their country, Syria. (15) - The Role of Women in Resisting the Policy of Turkification, Tyranny, and Persecution. The Union and Progress Party considered the Turkification policy a broad approach, which they applied in several directions, through official positions that demonstrated their Turanist orientation. The Turkification policy was characterized by publications and jobs, the imposition of the Turkish language on all government transactions, and its imposition as the language of instruction in schools across all Ottoman regions. The Unionists did not take into account the unique characteristics of the various nationalities within the state's borders, including the Arab nationality, for whom the Turkification policy was a blatant attempt to obliterate identity. (16)

In addition, the Arabs felt that elevating the value of the Turkish language and imposing it as an official language was a major insult to them in their provinces. (17)

The situation worsened among the Arabs, as the political leadership in the state was vehement in its efforts to impose Turkification, tyranny, and oppression, especially since the matter was unfamiliar to the Arabs (18). They showed no tolerance in its implementation. In a clear and explicit fight against the use of Arabic in official transactions, Arabs throughout the world, who were subjects of the Ottoman Empire, were forced to address their embassies in Turkish. Even officials in the Arab states communicated with the people through translators. (19) One of the harshest forms of Turkish tyranny and oppression was the Unionists' call for the non-necessity of reading the Qur'an in Arabic, and for Turks not to learn Arabic in order to read the Qur'an. Accordingly, they permitted the translation of the Qur'an into Turkish, limiting knowledge to what was translated, without the need to refer to the Qur'an in the language in which it was revealed by God Almighty. (20)

The policy of Turkification, tyranny, and Turkish oppression during the Ottoman era influenced economic, administrative, and cultural policies that aimed to change Syrian identity and focus on Turkish identity. At that time, women played a vital role in resisting the policy of Turkification, tyranny, and oppression. They contributed to preserving cultural and national identity, changing negative behaviors toward them, and strengthening their rights and freedoms. Despite the Turkification policies encouraging the Turkish language and Turkish culture at the expense of the Arabic language and Syrian culture, Syrian women proved their role in preserving their cultural identity and made vital contributions to humanitarian aid, peacemaking efforts, healthcare, and education. They faced the challenges of Turkish tyranny and oppression, and their exclusion from political participation, as they were able to remove the barriers that prevented their participation in society. The impact and prosperity of the press were linked to political events and the accompanying transformations in systems and laws. At that time, newspapers during the Ottoman era indicated the primary

goal of women's role in raising public awareness for women, in addition to raising awareness of women themselves, depicting the tremendous capabilities that women could achieve if they found someone who believed in those capabilities. They said: "To those who believe that within the soul of woman there is a power that kills germs of corruption, and that in her hand is a weapon that tears apart the depths of tyranny, and that in her mouth is consolation that reduces the burden of human misery, to those who have jealousy and zeal, to those who extend their hands to save the daughters of their kind from the abyss of this distorted environment" (21).

Second Topic: The position of the feminist movement on the French mandate (1920-1946).

A) The feminist movement during the Arab government in Damascus 1918-1920.

The establishment of the Arab government in Damascus (1918-1920) witnessed a widespread and organized feminist movement, as in subsequent periods. However, there was a growing interest in the role of women in society. Some individuals began to demand women's rights, especially in the field of education and work. At that time, creative Syrian women's writers emerged, such as the pioneer Marianna Marrash (1848-1919), who traveled to Europe and was influenced by the European cultural lifestyle. She returned to open a literary salon that witnessed rich cultural and political discussions at the time. That period witnessed many active Syrian women, some of whom participated in international women's conferences around the world. Through women's participation in international conferences, Arab women in general, and Syrian women in particular, were able to learn about Western women's issues and discourses. The idea of organizing women and demanding their rights moved to the Arab East. (22) The number of women's writers increased successively, among them Zainab Fawaz, Mary Al-Ajami, who published Al-Arous magazine, and Hind Noufal, founder of Al-Fatat magazine. (23)

The women's movement, through the Syrian Arab government in Damascus, formed an independent political force. Women contributed to redefining political culture in Syria and were pioneers in social and popular mobilization to demand reforms on several levels. Their social demands became central to the political arena. On July 24, 1920, the young Nazik al-Abed (1887-1959), who can be defined as a pioneer in the struggle for independence and women's rights, in particular, and citizenship rights in general, led a battalion of nurses from the "Arab Army" in military uniform on the battlefield in Maysalun, west of Damascus. The Arab defeat that day marked the end of the Syrian Arab Kingdom, which King Faisal had established after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in October 1918. (24)

The women's movement during Faisal's short reign (1918-1920) combined women's charities with the issue of social progress and the political goal of building an independent Arab state, seeking to demonstrate the Arabs' ability to build a modern state. (25)

Nazik al-Abed and a group of women demanded the right Voting at the Syrian Congress, and building their argument on their role during the war, following the American and British models. After deliberations, many representatives voted in favor of women's right to vote. The feminist movement sought to bring about immediate changes and arrangements to the existing situation to mitigate its negatives, without its activities affecting the patriarchal structure and its mechanisms for imposing gender discrimination. This pattern of attendance

stemmed from the desire of the participants to improve women's conditions, without a desire for radical change. (26)

B) Feminist political activity during French colonialism:

- Participation in the Great Revolution of 1925-1927, and the General Strike of 1936.

The Great Syrian Revolution of 1925 against French colonialism began on July 21, 1925. This revolution was an extension of the Syrian revolutions that began when the French colonial forces set foot on the Syrian coast in early 1920 and continued until late June 1927. Its most prominent result was the military victory of the French mandate authorities. However, the Syrian resistance was able to destabilize the French policy in Syria and convince them that the Syrian people would not submit to French authority. Syrian women also participated effectively in the Great Syrian Revolution (1925-1927), as the presence of colonialism was sufficient to strengthen the issue of resistance and the emergence of the issue of identity linked to the national struggle for everyone. For women, there was no trade-off between the awareness of feminine “species” identity and national identity. Women sought to protect themselves from the effects of European colonial rule and from the transformations of local social, economic and cultural structures (27) that were shaken by the confrontation with the modern world in daily work and production, as the entire Islamic society was disturbed by the influence of dynamic external forces and their dominant and threatening manifestations. With its economic foundations and religious and moral values, the revolution against French domination once again became a source of women’s activism since 1925. Women worked to organize themselves into a women’s movement that had its own national political and legal struggle at the same time. In 1925-1926, up to 4,000 women gathered in Damascus to demand an end to the bombings and organize gatherings for various purposes, especially in Beirut and Aleppo. Through their various roles, women provided financial and logistical support, transportation, and providing intelligence information, in addition to their direct participation in the battles, ranging from demonstrations and political participation to providing relief to those affected by the war. Collecting donations, purchasing basic necessities and distributing them to the needy. (28)

The 1936 Strike:

The Sixties Strike that erupted in Syria in 1936 was one of the most prominent milestones in the history of the national struggle against the French Mandate. It lasted for sixty days, from December 21, 1935, to March 8, 1936 (29), and included all major Syrian cities, such as Damascus, Aleppo, Homs, Deir ez-Zor, and Latakia. This strike came in response to the policies of the French Mandate, the closure of the National Bloc offices, and the arrest of its leaders. It transformed from a protest against the increase in tram fares in Damascus into a comprehensive national movement demanding full independence. The women's movement played a significant role in the 1936 strike, raising awareness among women of the importance of national unity and the struggle against colonialism (30), and the necessity of concerted efforts to achieve independence and freedom. Women's participation in the strike contributed to strengthening the morale of the strikers and demonstrated the strength of national unity and the cohesion of the Syrian people. Women participated in the strike through the following:

1- Participating in demonstrations and demonstrations Popularity, such as their participation in demonstrations in Hama and Damascus.

2- Logistical support and supplies by providing food and healthcare, including providing medicine for the wounded.

3- Fundraising to support the strike.

Women's participation also took influential symbolic forms, including funerals for martyrs, social solidarity, and moral pressure through several practices, including their participation in blacklisting students who violated the strike. (31)

From here, we can analyze the impact of women's participation in the strike through:

1- Breaking social barriers, as their participation represented a breakthrough in the traditional social system, as they moved from their traditional role to the political public sphere. This transformation was not spontaneous, but rather the result of accumulations that began with the era of the Ottoman organizations in the mid-nineteenth century, when new social elites and modern concepts of political participation began to emerge.

2- Strengthening social cohesion.

3- Influencing international public opinion: Women's participation contributed to gaining international public sympathy, drawing attention to the nature of the Syrian struggle that united all segments of society. This influence was one of the factors that ultimately prompted France to negotiate with the National Bloc. (32)

The negotiations stipulated the conclusion of a treaty to recognize Syria's independence, but with some conditions binding Syria to France. The treaty stipulated that it be ratified by both the Syrian Parliament and the French Parliament. The Syrian Parliament immediately ratified the treaty, and it was issued by law on December 27, 1936. The Mandate revealed the true objectives of this treaty when the Foreign Affairs Committee of the French Parliament refused to ratify the treaty and did not present it to the French Parliament. (33)

It became clear that the goal was to procrastinate and provide tranquilizers to the Syrian people to calm their nationalist sentiments. The goal of receiving the delegation was not to grant Syria its independence. France continued to procrastinate in presenting the treaty to the French Parliament, and the nationalist forces in Syria continued to demand the implementation of this treaty until the outbreak of World War II. The national government was dismissed and President Hashim al-Atassi resigned at the beginning of the war, so the mandate state formed a government of directors affiliated with it. Women also participated in a prominent role in the stage of the strike and the great revolution (1936-1939), as they, through the "Arab Women's Committees," were the ones who took the initiative to go to the courts to attend the trial sessions of the arrested revolutionaries, along with a number of women. This is in order to raise their morale and make the authorities feel that the people stand with these heroes. (34)

-The role of women in armed action and its support (the Noor Al-Fayhaa Association Foundation as a model). The women's movement during the Arab Republic included associations that demanded equality and women's liberation, as well as legal reform to address existing forms of discrimination against women. Through the Nour al-Fayhaa Association, it worked to raise awareness among men about achieving equality between men

and women. It also played an active role in society. Its role in revolutions and armed action emerged from the premise of legal reform. It was linked to the national struggle against the French occupation. Its role included the participation of women in armed conflicts, whether as combatants or as volunteers supporting military operations, in addition to the support of feminist movements for armed conflict operations. Some feminist movements view armed action as a necessary means of defending women's rights and protecting their dignity in areas experiencing armed conflict. (35)

The Nour al-Fayhaa Association's reports focused on the empowerment of Syrian women through their political struggles in cases where a number of men were absent behind Ottoman lines of fire. It focused attention on social change from the bottom up, rather than from the top down, as influence emerged. The strength of some women in the Ottoman era, and their role in participating in managing state affairs, played a role in raising the morale of soldiers against occupation. Women also led special military forces in castles and fortresses, demonstrating their ability to assume responsibility for and support armed action, by maintaining internal security, monitoring, and providing early warning in the event of any threat. Nazik Abed and a group of women demanded the right to vote in the Syrian Congress, and built their argument on their role in armed action. (36) However, Abed, who supported Faisal's efforts to modernize Arab society, pledged to continue the struggle for equal rights for all citizens, men and women. Her struggle continued, along with many other women, during the Syrian mandate, which the League of Nations entrusted to France (1920-1946). They were able to build a women's movement with a significant political role in armed action, as women participated directly in combat, such as Nazik Abed, either by joining the armed forces or by joining armed groups. They provided the necessary assistance to save the lives of people affected by armed conflicts, starting with activities Physical rehabilitation and even providing emergency supplies, they played a vital role in promoting peace, peaceful dialogue and ending hostilities in many armed conflicts. Women's associations provided legal support to women who were subjected to violence or human rights violations during armed conflicts, to ensure that they obtained justice. This movement contributed to changing the Syrian political culture. (37)

c) Establishing women's associations and demanding political and educational rights under occupation. Many women's associations were established during the French mandate in Syria at the end of the nineteenth century. Their activities remained limited and limited, and did not reach all women, especially in marginalized areas. This made civil work confined to government activity through the Women's Union. Society became unable to innovate, develop, change, and keep pace with the experiences of civil work in other Arab countries. The dominance of a single party hindered the creation of a competitive atmosphere for civil work, and society sank into a state of impotence and bankruptcy that was reflected in the performance of individuals, women and men, represented by the absence of a sense of citizenship, in addition to some laws that hindered the process of social development, in addition to the existence of reasons for oppression. The Ottoman Empire was in the process of its collapse in the First World War, and the Syrian nationalist movement was seeking to get rid of Ottoman rule. The women's movement was able to collect government subsidies

due to political conflicts. Thanks to these government subsidies, some women from the urban elite gathered hungry children in the streets and provided them with baths, medical examinations, reading lessons, and manual labor. One of these women was Adila Beyhum al-Jaza'iri (1900-1975), the founder of the women's movement in Damascus (38) Among these major women's associations are:

1- The Women's Charitable Society: Syrian charitable societies emerged at the end of the nineteenth century and established schools for girls in Damascus. This movement brought together women's committees from several cities and organized its first conference in Beirut in 1928. This gathering, which included more than a thousand women representing approximately forty Syrian and Lebanese associations, attracted the attention of the press. Their program focused on social issues, not political ones at first glance. The delegates also demanded that the state establish more schools for girls, with teaching of Arabic and history. They also demanded increased health inspections of bakeries because bread, the staple food of the population, was suspected of carrying diseases due to the lack of hygiene in bakeries. They also demanded aid for the sick, the elderly, and prisoners. (39)

The conference called for reforms to women's personal status laws based on Islamic law, such as raising the age of marriage to 17, establishing measures to restrict polygamy, establishing an inheritance law that would equalize women and men, and giving women additional rights allowing them to seek divorce, especially after the delegates at the conference were informed of important reforms related to the status of women. The nascent Turkish state took action after the fall of the empire, at a time when the French mandate authorities were preventing similar decisions from being taken in Syria, not least because the French relied on the support of conservative Syrian politicians. Thus, women's demands contributed to the birth of a new political culture in Damascus. Women asserted themselves as active citizens and demanded further reforms: if they married later, they could stay in school longer, and if they inherited, they would be able to support more political initiatives. The ultimate goal of the reform program was to achieve full political rights for women, particularly the right to vote. (40)

2- The Sham Women's Association: Founded by Adila Beyhum al-Jaza'iri in 1927, it aimed to raise awareness of the importance of women's education, encourage women's work in the countryside, and revive and organize traditional handicrafts. In 1928, it contributed to the founding of the Dohat al-Adab Association, at a mass meeting at the Arab Scientific Academy. The goals of this association laid the foundation for women's participation in public life, particularly in the national struggle. This was translated into the establishment of a school to educate girls based on the progressive spirit of Arab nationalism. However, the French colonizers did not accept the idea and refused to license it. In 1931, the school opened its doors without a license. (41)

In 1933, three associations convened to launch the nucleus of the Syrian Arab Women's Union. Adila Beyhum was elected as its president, making it the second in the region after the Egyptian Women's Union in 1923, led by Huda Shaarawi. Women's magazines, such as "Fatat al-Sharq" (The Girl of the East), published by Labiba Hashem, and "al-Arous" (The

Bride), published by Mary Ajami, played a major role in promoting women's education and spreading awareness of the importance of their role in society. (42)

T) The French mandate's position on the women's movement. The mandate began to transform the social transformations that began to appear, as a result of the Ottoman Tanzimat movement that began in the mid-nineteenth century, which aimed to consolidate the foundations of the state by modernizing it to social solidarity, while the period allowed for the expansion of the role of women in political, social and economic life (43). The position of the French mandate on the role of Syrian women seemed contradictory. The French administration did not directly support or encourage the women's movement, and was working to restrict the role of women by following a policy of discrimination against some population groups, which highlighted its negative impact on women's participation in public life. In addition to the position of the mandate on social life and the lack of support for social change and opposition to women's associations that spread Arab culture through newspapers founded by Nazik Abed and Mary Ajami (1888-1965), owner of the newspaper "Al-Arous" and considered a pioneer of Syrian female journalists, the "Christian Women's Club" with funding from the Faisal state. During the short reign of Faisal (1918-1920), women's charitable associations combined the issue of social progress with the political goal of building an independent, sovereign Arab state, but The French Mandate's dual stance toward the role of Syrian women contributed, on the one hand, to the expansion of women's role in public life. On the other hand, this role was restricted by French policies and the political circumstances Syria experienced after independence. The French army abolished the kingdom, parliament, and nationalist aspirations in July 1920. Faisal went into exile in Rome, and all state support for women's groups disappeared. Funds were transferred to French charities, such as the Red Cross and the "Goutte de l'Ile" (Drop of Milk). The Mandate authority significantly weakened the Syrian women's movement. The French also closed Abed's school and its association, the "Red Star," and forced many active Syrian women to join French associations. (44)

The Third Section: The Women's Movement from Independence until the War (1946-1967).

A) The Women's Struggle to Reach Parliament and Enforce Legislative Changes Related to Women.

Syrian women participated in the Independence Day celebrations after Syria's independence in 1946, and then in the demonstrations that followed independence, without achieving any breakthroughs in terms of rights. A group of educated Syrian girls participated between 1943 and 1945 in meetings held by women's organizations around the world until they reached the famous Chicago conference concerned with organizing an annual meeting for pioneering women in their society with the aim of exchanging experiences and discussing their civil and political rights. It is noteworthy that Syrian women participated in the first year with live participation, and in the following year they presented a large group of handicrafts made by Syrian women that were sold in the conference's charity market. (45)

Syrian women continued to play leadership roles in the political process throughout Syria and sought to find a comprehensive political solution to reach their effective participation in Parliament, where the Syrian women's movement played an important role in Parliament and

demanded legislative changes related to women's participation in their political and social rights. These efforts ultimately bore fruit in women obtaining the right to vote and run for office in 1949 after Husni al-Zaim's coup. It was also a period of rise for the emerging Arab bourgeoisie, as during that period the demands of the women's liberation movement began to escalate, and women's participation in public and political life became more evident. At that time, the constitution lowered the voting age to 18 for men and gave women the right to vote, provided they were married and educated. However, they were not granted the right to run for office at that time, even though they preceded a number of advanced European countries in that. The 1950 Constitution granted all women the right to vote, equal to men. The credit for this goes to Thuraya al-Hafez, who was one of the first women to establish. They have the right to participate in political elections and in parliament, as the presence of women in the world's parliaments has become a reality that affects the social, political and economic fabric of countries and the world as a whole, unlike many whose activity was limited to community work. Thuraya al-Hafez was the one who always worked hard to draw the attention of the women around her towards the right to vote and run for parliament in all her speeches (46), as she was a strong, distinguished orator known for her speeches in women's demonstrations against the French mandate. She directed women to exercise their legitimate right to vote and then run for office, so that she was the first Syrian woman to nominate herself for elections. She ran for parliament in 1953, but was unsuccessful due to the community's lack of confidence in her ability to perform such a role. She worked in the diplomatic corps. (47)

We were finally granted the right to run for elections in the 1954 elections. This was the first constitution to grant women the right to run for office on an equal footing with men. However, no woman reached parliament until the time of the union between Egypt and Syria in 1958 through the National Assembly. In 1960, two women out of 200 members from the northern region won seats: Jihan al-Mawsili and Widad al-Azhari. (48)

After the separation, there was a decline in the political rights women had enjoyed during the union era. Under the interim constitution, women retained the right to vote but not the right to run for office, which was restricted to men only. After the March 8, 1963 revolution, the constitution was amended, and Article (33) stipulated the appointment of members of the People's Assembly. On this basis, eight seats were granted to women out of a total of 95 seats in the assembly formed in 1965. In 1966, the assembly was expanded to 134 members, including 12 women and the second council was unable to hold any session, despite that the women's movement was able, through its union, to bring about legislative changes and establish women's groups in the twentieth century "The General Union of Syrian Women: (The General Union of Women) and a women's organization in Syria, founded in 1967, as a result of merging various existing women's groups, sought to achieve equality between women and men in human rights and to enhance the role of women in sustainable development and building sustainable peace (49)

b) The Role of Women in Political Parties (Communist, National Party, Ba'ath).

Syrian women play a significant role in Syrian political parties. They have contributed to the political process, participated in discussions, and worked to represent their interests and those

of society as a whole. They have played more important roles, especially in parties that rely on diversity and inclusiveness, as follows:

The Role of Women in the Legislative Party: The Syrian Communist Party recognized the role of women in society, drew attention to it, and paid great attention to it through its continuous demands for women's equality with men in political, economic, and social rights. The party struggled to attract women to the general movement for independence, democracy, social progress, and world peace, and worked to attract the best female activists to its ranks through its focus on the women's movement. At that time, the role of communist women emerged, initiated by those who waged harsh class and national struggles during that period. The League joined the International Democratic Federation of Women and developed its program of demands based on the following basic points: (50)

- 1- Demanding political rights for women.
- 2- Limiting working hours to eight hours instead of 12 for Regie employees.
- 3- Equal pay for equal work.
- 4- Preventing arbitrary dismissal of women.
- 5- Increasing maternity leave.
- 6- Prohibiting the Sale of Girls

The Role of Women in the National Party: A large number of women joined the party since its inception. These women learned about these principles through their sisters, husbands, or fathers. They discovered their personalities and their ability to contribute, debate, vote, and so on. Joining the party opened new horizons for women to be creative intellectually and contribute physically to the process of building the nation, achieving its pride, and preserving its dignity. It is well known that Afifa Girgis Haddad was the first woman to become acquainted with the party. She was the first woman to learn about the existence of the party and accompanied the first steps that Saadeh began to take. Before she took the oath of allegiance, Saadeh would entrust her with guarding the meeting place in her father's house. Once she joined, he would then assign her to record some of the proceedings of the meetings. (51)

Women in the party assumed an active role with the beginning of the party's founding, and they stood alongside men in every stage of the Social Nationalist struggle. Like men, they experienced displacement, prisons, and detention centers. They also assumed local and central responsibilities. The National Party allowed women to participate at all levels. Provided that she has the competence and qualifications, and this is what all the female comrades confirmed, and they all confirmed the lack of discrimination in treatment between female and male comrades, while mentioning that reality is not without the presence of a small percentage among men who are upset when they receive instructions from a woman responsible for them, and this reason is due to the extent of their self-awareness and the degree of their conviction in the idea of equality between men and women (52).

The Role of Women in the Ba'ath Party: Since 1967, feminist movements and movements have been part of the containment of political life in Syria, directly through the General Union of Syrian Women, founded in 1967. The role of women in the Ba'ath Party emerged through their work and political participation, demanding their right to education and the

dissemination of culture in the region. The Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party considered women one of the fundamental pillars of society, upon which the nation's advancement, development, and progress depend. Therefore, it devoted the utmost attention, care, and attention to them. This forward-looking view of women's significant role in nation-building prompted many Syrian and Arab women to join the ranks of the Ba'ath Party early on, driven by their strong belief in the party's ability to direct their energies and realize their ambitions and dreams of freedom and liberation from the shackles of ignorance, backwardness, and outdated customs and traditions that restricted Syrian women and prevented them from fulfilling their historical and cultural roles guaranteed by all divine laws and laws. (53)

C) The Impact of Political Uprisings on the Feminist Movement

Political coups have a significant impact on the Syrian feminist movement, suppressing women's rights, hindering their progress in various fields, and exacerbating the problems women face in society. This was the case in 1949 when Husni al-Za'im staged a military coup in Syria, the first military coup in modern Syrian history. The coup overthrew the government of President Shukri al-Quwatli, abolished the constitution, and suspended the activities of political parties. Husni al-Za'im opened the door to military coups in Syria and negatively impacted the role of women in Syria, ending the short period of women's empowerment that had begun with independence. The coup led to the suppression of political and social freedoms, leading to a decline in the role of women in public and political life. (54) The movement continued, with interruptions in activity, until August 14, 1949, when Sami al-Hinnawi led the second coup in modern Syrian history against Husni al-Za'im, with support and planning from the Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq. Al-Hinnawi was the military front for the coups. The second coup took place in December, led by Adib al-Shishakli. The second coup overthrew the rule of Sami al-Hinnawi, who had assumed power after the first coup. Al-Hinnawi assumed the position of President of Syria. The presidency remained in al-Hinnawi's hands for two days, before he officially handed power to Hashim al-Atassi. Free elections were held during the reign of Sami al-Hinnawi, who did not want to remain in power, and a temporary constitution was drawn up for the country. However, the process of returning to the constitutional system suffered an early setback at dawn on December 19, 1949, when a military coup took place, led by Adib al-Shishakli, who in turn ended the rule of Sami al-Hinnawi. (55)

Political coups and tensions diverted attention from women's issues, such as education, employment, and political participation, delaying the achievement of equality. This focus shifted to traditional roles. Despite this, women continued their relentless and supportive struggle until, after independence, Syrian women gained the right to vote for the first time during the second military coup led by Sami al-Hinnawi (1949), and then the right to run for office in 1953, at the end of the Shishakli era. Here, it is essential to note the pioneering role of Akram al-Hawrani in promoting equality, justice, and fairness for women during this period. Discussing the amendment to the electoral law, he said: "The (Arab!) woman is more peaceful in her feelings, more pure in her soul, more humane, and more protected than the man, and yet she is oppressed, almost as if she were naked." (56)

Military officer Adib al-Shishakli was able to seize control from behind the scenes, and by 1953, another military dictatorship had been established. The introduction of the army into Syrian political life led to the destruction of the rule of the elite minority, or what was known as the "oligarchy," opening the way for the middle classes to participate in political life, until the Syrian coup of 1963, also known as the March 8 Revolution. This is the official name given to the military coup that took place in Syria, led by the Arab Socialist Ba'ath Party, on March 8, 1963, against President Nazim al-Qudsi and the elected government headed by Khaled al-Azm. This coup witnessed the overthrow of the post-independence republic (1946-1963) and the rise of the Ba'ath Party, due to reactionary forces and the secession from Egypt. The results of the coup included the abolition of political and economic freedoms, the establishment of a one-party state in Syria, and the implementation of emergency law since 1963, following the popular uprising. The coup also imposed the adoption of Ba'ath slogans and policies as the working motto of the Syrian state. (57)

The coup led to the establishment of a one-party state, weakening the role of civil society and institutions that might have played a role in promoting women's rights. The absence of democracy led to a lack of accountability mechanisms, contributing to increased human rights violations, including women's rights. Strict military censorship of the media and communications also limited women's ability to express their opinions and participate in public debate. (58)

A second coup followed in 1966, overthrowing the party leaders and installing a new leader, Salah al-Din al-Bitar. The coup occurred due to an escalating power struggle between the party's old guard, represented by Michel Aflaq, Salah al-Din al-Bitar, and Munif al-Razzaz. Supporters of the old guard in the army were ordered to transfer their rivals. Two days later, the Military Committee, supported by younger factions, staged a coup that included heavy fighting in Aleppo, Damascus, Deir ez-Zor, and Latakia. As a result of the coup, the two historical founders of the party fled the country and spent the rest of their lives in exile. The coup caused a permanent split between the Syrian and Iraqi regional branches of the Ba'ath Party and their respective national leaderships. Under the new regime, Syria launched a propaganda campaign against the Iraqi Ba'athists. The new government would be overthrown in the Corrective Movement of 1970, which brought Hafez al-Assad to power. The attitude of these regimes toward the Syrian women's movement was either prohibition, containment, or absorption. This halted the "natural development of the women's movement," and what remained, according to al-Rahbi, was absorbed into the General Union of Syrian Women (GUSW). She continued, "No new women's associations were licensed, and this has continued from 1963 to the present day." (59)

The coups led to a disruption in the activity of the women's movement, as some coups led to a strengthening of the relationship between the movement and the government, while other coups led to a deterioration in the relationship and a narrowing of the movement's space for work. (60)

C) The development of education and women's work.

The struggle for power touched on various details, particularly women's lives, and it cast a shadow over Syria, both men and women. During the purges that took place at the beginning

of the coup against Nasserist officers, as a result of their preparation for a coup on July 18, 1963, Ms. Nimat Haffar was almost among those sentenced to death, had the officer in charge at the time not approved the sentence. Regarding the constitution and the rights of female citizens, the constitution retained all legislative, legal, and linguistic sources that excluded them, which were previously discussed in the adoption of jurisprudence as the primary source of legislation and its impact on women. Article (7) states that citizens are equal before the law in rights and duties, and Article (8) states that the state guarantees citizens equal freedom, security, and equal opportunities. (61)

Article (18) states that: 1- Work is a right for all citizens and a duty dictated by honor, and the state must provide it to citizens. 2 - The state protects labor, guarantees workers fair wages for their work, specifies working hours, and ensures social security and regulates the right to rest and vacation. (62)

The development of Syrian women's education and work has relied on the legislative constitution to protect women's rights. The country must be governed by a constitution and laws based on international human rights law, which includes women's right to education and the right to work in various aspects of life. Education and work are the most important pillars that contribute to strengthening the role of women in Arab society, as they enable them to build their capabilities and achieve economic and social independence. Women's participation in the labor market is not just a step toward achieving social justice; it is a key factor in strengthening the national economy, as working women contribute effectively to improving family income and reducing poverty rates, which enhances the stability of society as a whole. However, Arab women still face multiple challenges in obtaining suitable employment opportunities, making their empowerment in the fields of education and work a necessity to enhance their role and influence in society. (63)

d) The position of the women's movement on the collapse of the union between Syria and Egypt (1958-1961) and the 1967 war.

The women's movement in both Syria and Egypt was affected by the collapse of the union between the two countries in 1961. This collapse impacted the role of women in society, as the basic civil laws (personal status) and penal laws were retained. Their support for this period, and the transition from a parliamentary form to one that recognized hierarchy, contributed to the creation of various threats at the societal level, especially since this period was characterized, as Syrian memory holds, by excessive repression or police rule, characterized by restrictions on freedoms, the closure of associations, the abolition of parties, and the silencing of the free press under the stifling pressure of Nasserism. (64)

The women's movement, with its firm positions, continued its demands to improve women's rights in various fields, such as education, employment, and political rights. This led to an increased awareness of the importance of women's rights and their role in society, particularly in the 1961 laws and decrees. Women, then, were empowered through their positions in social life, where they obtained the ability to pass on Syrian citizenship to their children in specific cases. As for the remaining constitutional provisions, women's political rights, which they had enjoyed during the era of unity and before, were regressed. Their representation in parliament was absent, pursuant to this interim constitution, which established the right to

vote but not the right to run for office. At this stage, the age limit for parliamentary candidates was amended to 30 years, and was restricted to males only. According to the detailed legislative decree that the Ba'ath Party aspires to within the discourse of the constitution and the state, Article (24) stipulates that the state must provide women with all opportunities that enable them to contribute effectively to public life, in honor of their struggle and support for building a society that history has documented throughout the ages, focusing on the fundamental role of women and their positive impact on society. The state must work to remove the restrictions that prevent their development, enabling them to participate in building a socialist Arab society. The Ba'ath Party's intellectual system considers Syrian women to enjoy the rights of citizenship and to be equal to men, and that the party strives to improve their status in general. Thus, it seems natural for the articles to be similar between the ruling party's vision and the position of the women's movement toward the country's constitution, as this confirms the significant development in the status of women. (65) However, during this complex period of Ba'athist power struggles, women were confined to the Women's Union, which was established by legislative decree on August 26, 1967, to organize women's efforts and contributions. Women's supportive stance toward the party had a significant impact on the women's movement and their contribution to life. The public in the subsequent stages. (66) The 1967 war had a positive and indirect impact on Syrian women by increasing awareness of social issues and encouraging more women to participate in political movements. Women did not stand idly by during the 1967 aggression on Arab lands. Women played an important role, forming a quasi-governmental organization called the General Union of Syrian Women in 1967. This was an alliance of women's welfare associations, educational associations, and volunteer councils with the aim of achieving equal opportunities for women in Syria. Then, the features of women's presence in Syrian society began to take on a strong role, but the general situation in the country was unstable due to the military's control of power. The status of women was also unstable in terms of work and presence in public life. A new era began with the presence of a government that came from... The ranks of the military led by Hafez al-Assad and a new era begins in the lives of the Syrians. (67)

Conclusion:

The above demonstrates the vital role of women in the Syrian national movement. Women participated in various aspects of the movement and contributed to social and political change in Syria. With their steadfast positions and intellectual and cultural capabilities, they were able to make sacrifices on all levels. They faced all challenges and obstacles during their political activity, particularly from the Ottoman presence, through the French Mandate, what happened before the Great Revolution of 1925 and during the revolution, and all the dramatic events that occurred after independence. We must not forget their role in political decision-making and societal development. They continue to give, work tirelessly, fulfill their duties, and contribute to building a state of citizenship, equality, and justice.

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