

RECLAIMING AND DECOLONIZING THE HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND FEMINIST MOVEMENTS IN LEBANON



**FRIEDRICH
EBERT** 
STIFTUNG

*Reclaiming and decolonizing the
history of the women's rights and
feminist movements in Lebanon
Full manuscript
April 14th, 2024*

*by: Lina Abou-Habib, Carla Akil,
and Marwan Issa*

*Published by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung
Lebanon Office.*

CONTENTS

Prologue: The current context	4
Introduction: A missing “herstory”	6
Personal meanings and a journey of feminist awakening and unlearning	8
A nation of men: Patriarchy at the heart of Lebanon’s constitution and national anthem	10
Glimpses from a history of feminist activism: How is this manuscript constructed?	12
Pre-independence: Elitist voices, demands for education, and partial political participation (1920-1939)	14
Women’s rights and women-led movements in the media during that period	16
Salons, cinema, and novels covering women’s rights and movements	18
Post-independence: Women demand political and economic rights and emancipation (1940-mid 70s)	21
Protests and demonstrations for political rights	21
Protests and demonstrations for economic rights	22
The story of the Regie protests	23
Al-Ghandour Factory strikes	26
Formation of The Lebanese Council of Women	27
The rise of leftist/socialist feminism	28
The civil war era: How sectarianism and political allegiance influenced women’s rights activists and activism (1975-1990)	30
Minor legal reforms despite the civil war	34
Personal status laws	35
Supremacy of international human rights treaties over domestic laws	36
Women’s rights organizations in Lebanon and global spaces	37
The role of the media during that period	39
News and magazine coverage	39
Media coverage and cultural efforts during the Civil War	40
Mainstream press coverage	42
Literary writings and other media	43
Novels	31
Cinema	45
Post-civil war: Ephemeral hope, emerging narratives, and an expansion of global outreach (1995-1999)	46
The Beijing Conference: Emergence of new women’s organizations	48
Emerging new structures and the adoption of what is referred to as the “NGO model”	49
Legal changes and campaigns	50
Gender Equality in Conferring Citizenship	51

The feminists of the new millennium: a different discourse and Dissatisfaction with the older generations (2000 – 2019)	52
Establishment of new feminist collectives	54
Fighting racism	55
Legal changes	56
Gender quota	56
Personal status laws	57
Violence against women	57
Rape	58
Child marriage	59
Sexual harassment	59
Women, Peace, and Security	59
Demonstrations	59
Activism during the 2006 Lebanon War	60
Violence against women	60
Garbage crisis	61
Labor rights	61
Activism in the digital sphere	62
LGBTQI+ activism	62
Sexual harassment	63
“Anti-prostitution” campaign by KAFA	63
October 17th 2019 and its aftermath: political, social, and economic discontent (2019-Present)	64
Queer activists’ responses to crises	65
Media coverage	66
Where do we go from here?	69
The Lebanese Feminist Civil Society Platform	70
Anti-rights, backlash, and the LGBTQI+ movement	70
Women’s political participation	71
National Women Machineries and the Criticism of NCLW’s work	72
Limitations	74
Timeline of Major Events	75

PROLOGUE: THE CURRENT CONTEXT

At the time of finalizing this book, major and unfortunate events were taking place in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, notably a full-blown genocide perpetrated against the people of Gaza¹. The reactions vis-à-vis this genocide were the subject of heated debates as well as tension amongst the various components of what constitute the women's rights and feminist movements of Lebanon, which are the subject of this book. It is safe to say that these heated debates brought to the forefront historical tensions and schisms within the movements and revived historical divisions as well as severed collaborations.

The genocide in Gaza brought back to the forefront the question of Palestine and its positionality within social justice movements in Lebanon, the MENA region, and globally. Indeed, and since October 7th, 2023², it is obvious that Palestine remains at the heart of the politics of the women's rights and feminist movements of Lebanon as it influences the actions and public discourse of most groups albeit in different ways. I will get back to this important and critical point later on in the next chapters as I reflect on where we are now and what seems to be the future trajectory of the women's rights and feminist movements in Lebanon amidst conflicts that are far from over, heightened militarization and radicalization, an overall banalization of death and destruction, and a rapid erosion of rights and hardly earned human rights frameworks and instruments.

It is important to note that shortly before the latest of many consecutive wars on Gaza, Lebanon witnessed a rather unprecedented violent crackdown on queer communities and groups, as well as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), notwithstanding their differences and diversity³. Calls from political parties, religious leaders, and dubious "vigilante" groups went as far as encouraging physical violence against queer folks. As per usual, queerness was represented as a Western attempt to destroy the sacrosanct family and wipe out

¹ Hawaleshka, D. (2024). *History illustrated: Gaza, genocide and the world's most heinous crime*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2024/4/19/gaza-genocide-and-the-worlds-most-heinous-crime>

² Federman, J., & Adwan, I. (2023). *Hamas surprise attack out of Gaza stuns Israel and leaves hundreds dead in fighting, retaliation*. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/israel-palestinians-gaza-hamas-rock-ets-airstrikes-tel-aviv-11fb98655c256d54ecb5329284fc37d2>

³ Haddad, E. (2023). *Lebanon's LGBTQ+ community targeted from every direction*. L'Orient Today. <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1346389/lebanons-lgbtq-community-targeted-from-every-direction.html>

⁴ Access Center for Human Rights (2024). *What happens after the deportation of refugees from Lebanon? Exposing the forced deportations of Syrian refugees and their handover to Syrian authorities*. <https://www.achrighits.org/en/2024/01/29/13392/>

entire communities. This violent crackdown on individual liberties and non-binary folks was also the subject of debate amongst the women's rights and feminist movements of Lebanon. Intersectionality, as well as the basic concept of the indivisibility, universality, and interdependence of rights, was put into question again, and a consensus on what constitutes solidarity in such moments was alas not reached.

Almost simultaneously, various waves of witch hunts were conducted against refugees from Syria in Lebanon⁴. This was encouraged by hate speech and calls for violence which were aired all over social media and on many of the mainstream media. Indeed, the Syrian refugee community was targeted by most economic, social, and political actors in Lebanon as being the source of all ills, including the financial and economic crisis. As hate speech and incitement of violence against refugees in Lebanon escalated galore, physical and harmful attacks against individual refugees and refugee settlements continued to take place with total impunity. Whereas these were instances of severe infringements of human rights and dignity, they were also the subject of debate and tension within the women's rights and feminist groups. Very few collective expressions of solidarity took place thus indicating a serious rift in the movements and again, a limited and disputed understanding of what constitutes intersectional feminism and human rights.

These three serious trends, which remain ongoing, are a reminder of how the complex and multi-layered political, social, economic, and religious powers and trends in Lebanon influence and shape, at least in part, the diverse ecosystem of women's rights and feminist activism in a country as small as Lebanon. Throughout this book, I will try and reconstitute how activism for women's rights and gender equality has evolved and how it was shaped by political, social, and economic tensions, threats, and trends. I will veer away from the tendency to classify the journey of women's rights and feminism as "waves" which many consider being very much about a northern approach that assumes that history is linear and teleological. Our history may be way messier than what we would like it to be, and a move from one "wave" to another is probably an attractive analytical model but necessarily reflective of the nature of the feminist movements and the lived experiences of the various generations of women's rights and feminist activists.

⁵ Bou Ghader, F. (2024). Hate speech in Lebanon: Between a growing phenomenon and the fight against it. Salam Wa Kalam. <https://www.salamwakalam.com/articles/645/hate-speech-in-lebanon-between-a-growing-phenomeno/en>

INTRODUCTION: A MISSING “HERSTORY”

Sometime in 2010, I came across a book entitled *Muslim Women Reformers, Inspiring Voices Against Oppression*⁶. In this book, the author draws attention to the lives and work of Muslim women in different Muslim-majority countries and whom she identifies as reformers. In Lebanon, she includes only me. I do not identify either as a Muslim or a reformer. I also had no memory of being asked for information by the author. A few years earlier, I had spotted a full chapter that describes a major piece of feminist work in which I was involved for over 20 years, namely the Arab Women’s Rights to Nationality Campaign⁷. I was one of the co-founders of the campaign and have had hands-on involvement in its co-creation, iteration, and multiple revisions. Yet, I was unable to recognize most of the “facts” cited in this chapter written by a prominent scholar from the Global North who presents herself as a renowned expert in women’s movements in many countries of the region. I took the trouble of writing to the author and the publisher in an attempt to point out the many factual mistakes in the manuscript. Needless to say, I never received a response or even a mere acknowledgment.

These are not isolated incidents. Many of the women’s rights and feminist activists in Lebanon, including myself, have spent days and hours responding to long interviews and questionnaires about our lives, feminist work, and analysis of our context and current events only to find that our stories were extracted to be repackaged with little to no consideration to our lived experiences, our truth, and our voice. According to feminist activist and Rights Livelihood laureate Mozn Hassan, “One of the key challenges of the MENA region, and especially its feminist movements, is that people have written about us and on our behalf and have accordingly decided about what our lives are about and what are our needs and priorities”.

Several reasons have been put forward to explain the paucity of writing about the feminist movement by the movement itself or at least by writers and scholars who are local (in this case Lebanese). Many of us would refer to the dearth of time as well as the specific writing skills needed to produce articles and books that are deemed publishable by publishing houses that enjoy a significant distribution

⁶ Lichter, I. (2009). *Muslim women reformers inspiring voices against oppression*. Prometheus Books.

⁷ The Collective for Research and Training on Development-Action (CRTD-A). *The Arab Women’s Rights to Nationality Campaign*. <http://web.crt-da.org.lb/en/projects/wrn>

outreach. Language is also a major challenge especially when seeking to engage in the South to North movement of knowledge. While this has yet to be verified empirically, the fact remains that there is little written about the women's rights and feminist movements in Lebanon by the activists themselves as well as by local scholars who may have been part of it or have studied it.

This book is but an attempt to localize this kind of knowledge production through initiating a work in progress in writing our history while centering our own experience, learning, frustration, and growth.

PERSONAL MEANINGS AND A JOURNEY OF FEMINIST AWAKENING AND UNLEARNING

The personal is political

A journey of feminist awakening is always personal, sometimes confusing, and at times also painful. It is about re-visiting memories, incidents, and experiences, and giving them new meanings now that we know what we know. It is about discovering how our own journeys were set to be determined by patriarchy, by norms that oppress and by social institutions with which we are intrinsically involved, and which reproduce this oppression albeit in various ways.

With the benefit of hindsight, decades of encounters and learning, a series of infinite mistakes, and various attempts at self-care and healing, the reconstruction of the past starts to happen, slowly but surely. What was considered a “normal occurrence” in the past dons new meanings and dramatically different explanations. Imposed obscure ideas and obligations lose their power as one becomes and learns to be a feminist. Figures that were once considered bigger than life, powerful, omnipresent even when absent, or simply scary, begin to crumble. Life as one knows it begins to look different. What was considered to be a non-negotiable obligation can now be explained as yet another mechanism and tool to strip women and girls of agency, from controlling their feelings, their bodies, their behavior, and thoughts.

My own journey of feminist awakening was indeed laden with questioning, challenging oneself and previous behavior, fighting with oneself, shifting between being kind, understanding, judgmental, and often angry with earlier ways of thinking, believing, and behaving. The journey is far from over. However, one intrinsic part of it has been and will always be engaging with feminist ideas, feminist activists, feminist friends, and feminist writings with the result of slowly beginning to find one's inner voice, and forgiving oneself for past mistakes and poor decisions.

Over the past three years, I started teaching again and started learning from young people who were anywhere between -17 to -20year-old. Throughout this amazing learning process, I started to write and archive various thoughts expressed by students. I teach gender courses and the conversations in class are invariably about personal experiences and struggles. One of the students said during one of those heated conversations “We are all products of our own circumstances, and our circumstances are shaped by patriarchy”. I was in my late forties when I made this same discovery.

This new journey of re-engaging with teaching and learning also revealed how little is known about the history of women’s rights and feminist activism in Lebanon as I had to scramble through the literature to find research and other writings that are homegrown. The paucity of historical records, writings, and institutional and individual memory on what constitutes the history of women and women’s rights activism and the ways in which they have shaped, framed, and carried out their struggles is indeed notable. As in many countries in the region, and whilst academia abounds with literature written about and on behalf of the women and girls of the region, homegrown history, and writings are ever so rare and gold dust.

This piece of work seeks to serve multiple purposes. It is a personal endeavor in understanding one’s growth, regeneration, and transformation. It is a contribution to address a historical gap in homegrown writing on women and feminist movements in Lebanon. It is also an attempt to honor women and feminist struggles, past and present, and unpack in many ways how these have influenced and were influenced by changing social and political processes, both heavily determined by patriarchal mindsets.

This work is intentionally incomplete. It does not seek nor pretend to include all the various iterations of the women’s rights and feminist movements. Pretending to do so will be failing to give due justice to all to the innumerable women’s rights and feminist advocates and activists who have been shaping the struggles and making waves in an otherwise viciously patriarchal context that has long been hermetic to change.

A NATION OF MEN: PATRIARCHY AT THE HEART OF LEBANON'S CONSTITUTION AND NATIONAL ANTHEM

Like most post-independence constitutions in the Arab region, Lebanon's constitution maintains that all citizens are equal, yet refers to the citizen as a male and uses non-inclusive language. If that may give rise to various interpretations, the fact that Lebanon's outdated Nationality Law of 1920 vigorously maintains that only a child born to a Lebanese father will be considered Lebanese⁸ brings back to the forefront the fact that citizenship is molded around men. The constitutional and legal frameworks in Lebanon do not shy away from being discriminatory and seem to reflect a status where women may not be citizens of the state in their own right but rather subjects of male members of their families and their lives and life chances often dependent on them.

The Lebanese constitution may probably be the main culprit in codifying patriarchy and in inspiring and influencing an outrightly discriminatory body of laws⁹. Whilst this text is by no means a legal review, I will seek to simply brush over the various ways in which the law is used to keep women and girls in check. Every aspect of women's lives including their birth, education, mobility, movement, life choices, agency over their bodies, relationships, careers, and autonomy are ruled and regulated by the 18 existing religious family laws. Although some minor adjustments have been made over the past three decades in some of these religious family laws,¹⁰ these remain heavily geared towards safeguarding the rights and supremacy of men in the family. For instance, rulings concerning divorce, child custody, inheritance, and overall rights and entitlements within marriage and throughout its dissolution often favor men and confront women with the harsh realities of the absence of rights¹¹.

⁸ Lebanese Republic. (1925). *Decree No 15 on Lebanese Nationality including Amendments*. UNHCR. <https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1925/en/115994>

⁹ Lebanese National Gender Observatory (2020). *Gender analysis of the Lebanese legal system: Need for reform of discriminatory laws and practices affecting the lives of women*. <https://www.efi-ife.org/en/pdf-detail/94860-policy-brief-gender-analysis-of-the-lebanese-legal-system>

¹⁰ Lebanese University Legal Informatics Center. *Family laws of Lebanon (documents, Arabic)*. Women's Learning Partnership. <https://learningpartnership.org/resource/family-laws-lebanon-documents-arabic>

Civil laws, for their part, fail in being just and/or impartial as they appear to be built on an understanding of a family structure that is hierarchical, patriarchal, and oppressive. Indeed, women's agency over their minds and bodies is directly undermined by the persistent impunity of what is called "honor crimes", the criminalization of what is called "adultery" and which definition is restricted to the feminine "adulteress", the criminalization of same-sex relations, and the constraints and penalization of abortion, to name but a few measures that curtail individual freedoms and gender equality.

The above is but the tip of the iceberg of the various creative ways in which both the constitution and legal framework conspire to infantilize women and girls, strip them of their fundamental rights, and define their bodies and minds as the property of their families and clans. This thus gives immense privileges to religious family courts whose influence extends way beyond their remit in reproducing unequal and oppressive social relations of gender. It is only in observing and examining this general context in Lebanon that we realize the profound departure that happened in Lebanon with the enactment of a law to protect family members from domestic violence in 2014 as well as another law to penalize sexual harassment in the place of work in 2021. While both laws can lend themselves to serious improvements, they represent nevertheless a major achievement in shifting the needle in what constitutes legislating for gender equality beginning with a recognition of the root causes and results of inequality.

If still in doubt about the overwhelmingly patriarchal nature of Lebanon at the level of constitutions, laws, institutions, and social relations, one simply has to remember Lebanon's post-independence national anthem which claims without a shadow of a doubt that Lebanon is "the land where men are born".

¹¹ Human Rights Watch. (2015). *Unequal and unprotected: Women's rights under Lebanese personal status laws*. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/01/19/unequal-and-unprotected/womens-rights-under-lebanese-personal-status-laws>

¹² Moussawi, F., & Yassin, N. (2017). Dissecting Lebanese Law 293 on domestic violence: Are women protected?. Issam Fares Institute. <https://daleel-madani.org/sites/default/files/Resources/Lebanese-law2930.pdf>

¹³ Moussawi, F., & Koujok, S. (2019). The political participation of women in the Arab world: Mapping the movement, experiences and challenges facing Arab women from the beginning of the twentieth century until the post-Arab uprisings era: Expectations, paths and outcomes. In N. Yassin & R. A. Hoppe (Eds.), *Women, civil society and policy change in the Arab world* (pp. 33–61). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-02089-7>

GLIMPSES FROM A HISTORY OF FEMINIST ACTIVISM: HOW IS THIS MANUSCRIPT CONSTRUCTED?

The existing literature on women and feminist movements in Lebanon seems to identify four consecutive “waves” that flow nicely on a timeline that started from the early 40s and up to the present day. These include a First Wave (1940-1960), a Second Wave (1961-1990), a Third Wave (1991-2005), and a Fourth Wave (2006-Present). While this categorization is practical, it gives the impression, as I had indicated earlier in this manuscript, that history is linear and moves neatly from one point to another and then to another. It does seem that this neat categorization is Northern-centric where the women’s rights movement in the Global North has been nicely categorized into waves.

In their recent research, Gabriela Cano and Sàul Espino Armendariz use a political analysis to reflect on how gender and women’s struggles have evolved in Mexico¹⁴. They move away from the “waves” construct into a more fluid and grounded analysis that takes into consideration the various ways in which women’s rights and feminist movements of the Global South grow, progress, retreat, and then advance again. This book will adopt the same perspective essentially because the so-called waves are not separate categories where there is a clear movement from one wave to the other. We will examine some features of the ever-unstable political, social, and economic context and the changes over time, how the public discourse was shaped, and how priorities were determined.

As we move through periods in time with their highlights and low-lights, I will try and tease out strategies used in setting and addressing issues and thematic concerns and how these were identified, the actors, and factors that have affected the women’s rights, and feminist movements and their dynamic, as well as the key learnings with the benefit of hindsight. I reiterate that this is not a complete or compre-

¹⁴ Cano, G., & Espino Armendáriz, S. (2023). *Tensions between history and memory in the Biographical Dictionary of Women of El Colegio de México. The construction generations. Interdisciplinary Journal of Gender Studies of El Colegio de México*, 9(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.24201/reg.v9i1.1098>

¹⁵ The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action. *Women take to the streets against economic policies and rising prices*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/content/women-take-streets-against-economic-policies-and-rising-prices>

¹⁶ Collective for Research & Training on Development - Action. (2020). *My nationality is a right for me and my family: The Lebanese authorities are more fatal and discriminatory than the pandemic it self*. <https://crt-da.org.lb/node/16301#:~:text=and%20Higher%20Education-,My%20Nationality%20is%20a%20Right%20for%20Me%20and%20My%20Family,men%2C%20without%20discrimination%20or%20exclusion>

hensive exercise. This is an attempt to engage in a personal and factual review of how we got to where we are and do we look forward as we experience and deal with one of the most complex and interconnected sets of protracted crises including but not limited to conflict, economic downfall, political stall mate and oppression and an unprecedented rise of a diver and violent anti-rights and anti-gender movement.

We will note as we go through this text that women in Lebanon protested as early as 1974 against bad economic policies and chanted “Monopoly is strangling the people’s necks,” 15. Women continued to struggle against various forms of codified, visible, and invisible discrimination. At the turn of the century, women feminist activists in Lebanon led a region-wide campaign entitled “My Nationality is a Right for Me and My Family” in 1999”¹⁶. In 2015, women protested the violence of the patriarchal regime in Lebanon¹⁷ and demanded egalitarian secular laws to replace religious family laws. Women were at the forefront of the demonstrations during the October 17, 2019 uprising demanding justice for women in Lebanon¹⁸. Women in all their diversity continued to take the initiative, plan, create slogans, and engage in widespread protests against governmental and economic corruption.

Although the backgrounds and paths of these women vary, they all share a degree of marginalization and exclusion in which their histories, stories, and struggles have been and continue to be silenced, their contributions have been overlooked, and their accomplishments have been excluded from official narratives and histories. Some of these stories will be shared in this book.

¹⁷ Hashem, L. (2017). *Feminist and women’s struggles in Lebanon’s ‘popular movement’: The intersections of the public and the private*. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. <https://lb.boell.org/en/2017/01/18/feminist-and-womens-struggles-lebanons-popular-movement-intersections-public-and-private>

¹⁸ Elbasnaly, D., & Knipp, K. (2019). *Women lead Lebanon’s protests*. DW. <https://www.dw.com/en/women-led-protests-in-lebanon-inspire-middle-east-feminists/a-50957926>

PRE-INDEPENDENCE: ELITIST VOICES, DEMANDS FOR EDUCATION, AND PARTIAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION (1920-1939)

In the early 1920s, women of means in Lebanon engaged in the creation of several groups and unions with “charitable” objectives. These included “religious, national, cultural, and family” organizations¹⁹ which, at the time, aimed at helping the poor and destitute without necessarily tackling the root causes of injustice or even acknowledging it. In 1920, the *Women’s Union in Lebanon and Syria* was formed²⁰, and legally founded in 1924, to mobilize Lebanese women’s groups and activists across both countries²¹. The union was chaired by pioneer women and organized conferences for Arab women²², including the first women’s conference in Beirut in 1928 for Lebanese and Syrian delegations²³, and targeted leftist and nationalist groups and formations²⁴. Multi-sectarian and grounded in Arab nationalism, the union’s work focused on women’s rights to vote, education, inheritance, divorce, and child custody²⁵. The union’s name was later changed to become the *Arab (Lebanese) Women’s Union*²⁶. The formation of the union paved the way for organizing efforts to advocate for women’s rights, such as the formation of *The Society for Women’s Renaissance* in 1924 to promote equality “between the sexes”, support the local economy, as well as sign, spread, and propose petitions²⁷.

¹⁹ Daou, B. (2015). *Feminisms in Lebanon: After proving loyalty to the “nation”, will the “body” rise within the “Arab Spring”?*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre, Lebanon Support. <https://doi.org/10.28943/CSR.001.009>

²⁰ Khairallah, S. (1996). *The sisters of men: Lebanese women in history*. Al Raida Journal. <https://doi.org/10.32380/alrj>

²¹ Khalidi, T. (2013). *Memoirs of an early Arab feminist the life and activism of Anbara Salam Khalidi*. Pluto Press.

²² al-Khatib, H. A. (1984). 1800-1975 تاريخ تطور الحركة النسائية في لبنان وإرتباطها بالعالم العربي [The history of the women’s movement in Lebanon and its connection to the Arab world, 1975-1800]. *Beirut: Dar al-Hadatha*.

²³ Schubert, E. (2020). The struggles for women’s suffrage in Lebanon. *Meridians*, 19(1), 202–208. <https://doi.org/10.1215/15366936-8117801>

²⁴ Thompson, E. (2000). *Colonial citizens: Republican rights, paternal privilege and gender in French Syria and Lebanon*. Columbia University Press.

²⁵ Cochran, J., Nabhani, M., Bahous, R., & Zeinati, R. (2010). *Leadership in the Middle East: The story of women in Lebanon*. Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/leadership-middle-east-story-women-lebanon>

²⁶ Fares, E. I. (1966). *الحركة النسائية اللبنانية [The Lebanese women’s movement]*. Beirut: Dar al-Thakafah.

²⁷ Institute for Palestine Studies. *Anbara Salam Khalidi - educators (1897 - 1986)*. The Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question. <https://www.palquest.org/en/biography/9714/anbara-salam-khalidi>

²⁸ Kaedbey, D. E. (2014). *Building theory across struggles: Queer feminist thought from Lebanon* (dissertation). https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_etd/send_file/send?accessionsu1405945625&disposition=inline

²⁹ Thompson, E. (2000). *Colonial citizens: Republican rights, paternal privilege and gender in French Syria and Lebanon*. Columbia University Press.

³⁰ Stephan, R. (2014). *Four waves of Lebanese feminism*. E-International Relations. https://www.e-ir.info/2014/11/07/four-waves-of-lebanese-feminism/#.VF0-gvPV_k0.twitter

Many charitable organizations emerged in the late 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s with some of them favoring religion, while others veered towards secularism²⁸. There were 36 women's groups in Lebanon by 1939, with many of them identifying as religious and philanthropic and whose work focused on the right to healthcare and education, as well as on economically supporting disadvantaged women and girls²⁹. Many of the charity projects were led by middle- and upper-class women³⁰ and aimed "to educate women to be better caregivers or better mothers"³¹. As a result, the agenda came to be focused on upper-class women and in total harmony with the paternalistic traditions and sectarian system of the time, both of which were strongly ingrained in Lebanese culture and politics. Shortly after, the concerns expanded to include a focus on women's political participation during the years of the French Mandate between World War I and II³².

While there was a regional interest in advocating for the advancement of women's political roles and participation, women activists from Lebanon were at the forefront of this effort³³. In the early 1930s, women campaigned for public government positions and legal changes despite backlash from conservative men who disrupted and largely succeeded in aborting such efforts³⁴. Between 1934 and 1939, women took the lead in demonstrations, especially in 1939 when women demanded their political right to vote and run in the parliamentary elections by capitalizing on the Lebanese-French agreement that specified equal civil and political rights to all citizens³⁵. One of the earliest events that sparked the discussion on this particular topic was the request of Deputy Sheikh Yussef Al Khazin to grant women the right to vote during a parliamentary session in 1934, which received very little support³⁶. Middle- and upper-class women also participated in the national campaign against French colonialism, especially in mass protests denouncing hunger, inflation, and unemployment between 1941 and 1943³⁷.

³¹ Stephan, R. (2012). Women's rights activism in Lebanon. In P. Arenfeldt (Ed.), *Mapping Arab Women's movements: A century of transformations from within* (pp. 111–132). American University in Cairo Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt15m7hb5>

³² Weber, C. E. (2003). *Making common cause?: Western and Middle Eastern feminists in the International Women's Movement, 1911-1948* (dissertation). <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Making-common-cause%3A-western-and-middle-eastern-in-Weber/045ecb6a57dce69f806a82f62127e43ca107aa35>

³³ al-Katib, H. A. (1984). 1800-1975. تاريخ تطور الحركة النسائية في لبنان وإرتباطها بالعالم العربي. Beirut: Dar al-Hadatha.

³⁴ Cochran, J., Nabhani, M., Bahous, R., & Zeinati, R. (2010). *Leadership in the Middle East: The story of women in Lebanon*. Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/leadership-middle-east-story-women-lebanon>

³⁵ Beyond Group. (2016). Patriarchy and sectarianism: A gendered trap. Baseline of women in politics: The case of Lebanon. <https://beyondgroupconsulting.com/publications-blog/patriarchy-and-sectarianism-a-gendered-trap>

³⁶ Shehadeh, L. R. (1999). *Women and war in Lebanon*. University Press of Florida.

³⁷ Thompson, E. (2000). *Colonial citizens: Republican rights, paternal privilege and gender in French Syria and Lebanon*. Columbia University Press.

Overall, as Lebanon was navigating some turbulent times, namely the end of the Ottoman empire, the miseries generated by the First World War, the start of a new, albeit short and high-impact colonial era, and uncertainties about what constitutes what is now known as Lebanon, the emergence of elitist women philanthropic work was obvious. This is evident with the rise of journals holding names such as “al-Mar’a al-Jadida (The New Woman, Beirut) in Beirut, al-Hayat al-Jadida (The New Life, Paris, and Beirut), al-Fajr (The Dawn, Damascus)³⁸. It is remarkable that this work was visible in the public domain and did play its part in influencing, albeit in a limited way, the social and political dialogue of that era. It is equally evident that it was intended to be “reformist” in the sense that it was meant to improve the lot of women, especially those who are identified as destitute, without for that matter challenging the root causes of their condition.

³⁸ Robinson, N. (2015). *“Sisters of men”: Syrian and Lebanese women’s transnational campaigns for Arab independence and women’s rights, 1910-1949*. Rutgers University. <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/47566/PDF/1/play/>

³⁹ Robinson, N. (2015). *Our great disappointment: Arab women’s campaign for representation on the League of Nation’s Committee on the Legal Status for Women*. American Historical Association. <https://aha.confex.com/aha/2015/webprogram/Paper15314.html>

⁴⁰ Sharma, I. (2012). *Leaving her footprint: Women’s struggle for power in French Syria & Lebanon 1920-1936*. Rutgers University. <https://history.rutgers.edu/docman-docs/undergraduate/honors-papers-2012/409-leaving-her-footprint-women-s-struggle-for-power-in-french-syria-lebanon-1920-1936/file>

By 1920, the “woman question” carried new dimensions, which reflected both domestic concerns for women’s access to social and political rights and international ones with discussions in the League of Nations gaining traction and the formation of counter-hegemonic voices within international forums. Struggles emerged such as the nomination of Nour Hamada to the League of Nations Committee on the Legal Status of Women and the protracted back-and-forth this entailed . Many women intellectuals endorsed nationalist narratives and struggles despite the fact that all too often, nationalist elites were pivotal blocks of patriarchal structures, including a focus on Arab identity, traditional culture, and territorial integrity⁴⁰.

A maternalist tone emphasizing women’s ability to nurture was the main narrative and strategy used. This language was considered less threatening than a language claiming political rights in a bid to receive support from male elites. This was the case in events such as the first widely documented women’s conference in 1928 that focused on cultural life instead of matters such as the right to vote, and delegates visited the national library and museum, but not the parliament^{41,42,43}.

⁴¹ Robinson, N. (2015). *“Sisters of men”: Syrian and Lebanese women’s transnational campaigns for Arab independence and women’s rights, 1910-1949*. Rutgers University. <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/47566/PDF/1/play/>

⁴² Thompson, E. (2000) *Colonial Citizens: Republican rights, paternal privilege, and gender in French Syria and Lebanon*. Columbia University Press.

⁴³ Hivos, Lebanon Support, & URIKA Agency. (2019). *The history of the women’s movement in Lebanon*. <https://www.womenshistoryinlebanon.org/>

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND WOMEN-LED MOVEMENTS IN THE MEDIA DURING THAT PERIOD

By 1919, estimates indicate that 29 Arabic-language publications printed by and for women had been established with varying thematic coverages such as literary, educational, or scientific matters⁴⁴. Local newspapers played a major role in covering major historical events such as the women's conference in 1928 which addressed several economic and industrial matters and passed a series of resolutions, recorded in broad strokes by newspapers. The Arabic press also covered anti-mandate demonstrations led by women and initiatives such as economic boycotts of foreign goods throughout the period⁴⁵. Newspapers, both local and international, also covered Arab women's bid to enter and influence international fora, including Nour Hamada's candidacy to the League of Nations, with the press often labeling her as "the president of the Eastern Woman's Conferences" and newspapers across the United States covering her arrival in Ohio, California, and other states⁴⁶.

Among the journals that specifically covered women's rights in the 1920s and 1930s notable examples include Princess Najla Abi al-Lama' Ma'luf's al-Fajr magazine, which targeted both men and women but especially aimed to bring general knowledge to women and emphasized women's contributions and achievements, in addition to inviting women readers to share their thoughts and writings. As Ma'luf encouraged local and regional industries, she also worked with different women's associations, such as the Lebanese Women's Associations^{47,48}.

Organizers include names such as Julia Tu'mah Dimashqiyyah, considered one of the first leading women journalists in Lebanon, who published the monthly al-Mar'ah al-jad'dah (Arabic: المرأة الجديدة; The New Woman) which is considered the first women's magazine in Lebanon⁴⁹. Dimashqiyyah addressed women to claim their livelihoods in society, promoted independent education and elevated women's literary, scientific, and social statuses, wrote for other journals, and played an important role in the Women's Association and Women's Club in Beirut with other notable members such as Ma'luf, Mari Yanni and Afifa Saab⁵⁰. The New Woman also discussed suffrage issues and kept the discussion alive, by covering events such as a parliamentary session in 1933 looking into women's political rights, where Deputy Sheikh

⁴⁴ Robinson, N. (2015). "Sisters of men": Syrian and Lebanese women's transnational campaigns for Arab independence and women's rights, 1910-1949. <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/47566/PDF/1/play/>

⁴⁵ Stephan, R. (2014). *Four waves of Lebanese feminism*. E-International Relations. https://www.e-ir.info/2014/11/07/four-waves-of-lebanese-feminism/#_VF0-gvPV_k0.twitter

Yussef al Khazin's request for women to gain voting rights was only supported by three votes⁵¹. As Dimashqiyyah's New Woman was one of the most respected magazines in the region, it is considered to be rarely matched, with Mari Ajamy's Bride also receiving notable comments and keeping issues such as suffrage rights prominent⁵². Suffrage rights were also evoked by magazines of other feminist organizers, such as Naziq 'Abid who also championed women's and nationalist causes^{53,54}.

Another issue discussing women's roles, achievements, and rights during this era is Mari Yanni's Minerva. The magazine showed solidarity with international women's rights movements, with its June 1923 issue featuring a conference discussing the International Women's Suffrage Alliance⁵⁵. Yanni also contributed to a range of other magazines, such as Dimashqiyyah's New Woman, Ma'luf's al-Fajr, and others⁵⁶.

Other journals were more locally rooted and targeted women from specific sets, such as Afifah Saab's al-Khidr journal, established in 1919. Its establishment was seen as part of a broader women's magazines movement in Shouwaifat. Al-Khidr is regarded as the first Druze women's magazine as Saab often discussed the particular status of Druze women and addressed women's education, particularly those in the countryside^{57,58}.

Women organizers and journalists often cross-cuttingly contributed to other women-led initiatives. Writers and feminists such as Salma Sayegh wrote for many magazines and edited Sawt al-Mar'a and journalist Habuba Haddad, who founded the monthly magazine al-Hayah al-Jadidah in 1921, joined the Journalists' Syndicate in Paris.

⁴⁶ The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action. Women's movements in Lebanon. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/gen/women-movements-timeline/4938#event-establishment-of-helem-the-first-lgbtqi-organisation-in-the-region-and-in-lebanon>

⁴⁷ The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action. Women's movements in Lebanon. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/gen/women-movements-timeline/4938#event-establishment-of-helem-the-first-lgbtqi-organisation-in-the-region-and-in-lebanon>

⁴⁸ American University of Beirut (2022). Women Pioneers in Arab Press (1892-1925). <https://online-exhibit.aub.edu.lb/exhibits/show/women-pioneers-in-arab-press/introduction>

⁴⁹ Hivos, Lebanon Support, & URIKA Agency. (2019). The history of the women's movement in Lebanon. <https://www.womenshistoryinlebanon.org/>

⁵⁰ American University of Beirut (2022). Women Pioneers in Arab Press (1892-1925). <https://online-exhibit.aub.edu.lb/exhibits/show/women-pioneers-in-arab-press/introduction>

⁵¹ al-Khatib, H. A. (1984). تاريخ تطور الحركة النسائية في لبنان وإرتباطها بالعالم العرب 1800-1975 [The history of the women's movement in Lebanon and its connection to the Arab world, 1975-1800]. Beirut: Dar al-Hadatha.

⁵² Sharma, I. (2012). Leaving her footprint: Women's struggle for power in French Syria & Lebanon 1920-1936. Rutgers University. <https://history.rutgers.edu/docman-docs/undergraduate/honors-papers-2012/409-leaving-her-footprint-women-s-struggle-for-power-in-french-syria-lebanon-1920-1936/file>

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Arenfeldt, P. and Golley, N.A.-H. (2012) Mapping Arab Women's Movements: A Century of Transformations from Within. Oxford University Press.

SALONS, CINEMA, AND NOVELS COVERING WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND MOVEMENTS

Women-led salons were an important medium where discussions, coverage, and public opinion on women's rights were present. The "salons emerged as spaces to discuss further all of the dimensions of the *nah-da al-nisa'iyya* (women's awakening)"⁵⁹. Salons were often managed by women who were active in other organizational fashions, such as in journalism and women's associations, as discussions in these salons played a role in the establishment of connections between women's rights activists and many women's organizations such as *Yaqzat al-Mar'a alShamiyya* (Syrian Women's Awakening Society)⁶⁰. Hostesses included Habuba Haddad, Salma Sayegh, and Hajjah Fatimah al-Rifai opened their houses for discussions on a variety of literary, gender, and other topics⁶¹.

Other media saw struggles between different actors regarding women's participation in sociocultural avenues, with many groups exerting pressure to censor cinemas and pressure against women's attendance in cinemas⁶². Marie al-Khazen expressed her ideas through the photograph, as Sharma asserts that al-Khazen representation of women "*encapsulates the dynamics of being a woman in a patriarchal society as the photograph [can be seen as a complex dialogue between women as objects of patriarchy and women as agents of their own future.]*"⁶³. Leaflets and pamphlets were also spread in bazaars reflecting both feminist and nationalist sentiments, such as a Women's Society pamphlet from Damascus, which stated⁶⁴: "*O Arabs, descendants of glorious ancestors, we appeal to you to awake in these critical times of great tragedy under the government of France. There is nothing left to us but to mount a vigorous attack and expel this government from our country.*"

Educational institutions and the beginning of a course on journalism in 1933/1934 at the American University of Beirut were also venues where women's participation in campus and public spheres became noticeable, especially through platforms such as the magazine *al Kulliyah Review* where women students questioned certain realities and expressed their opinions.

⁵⁵ Sharma, I. (2012). Leaving her footprint: Women's struggle for power in French Syria & Lebanon 1920-1936. Rutgers University. <https://history.rutgers.edu/docman-docs/undergraduate/honors-papers-2012/409-leaving-her-footprint-women-s-struggle-for-power-in-french-syria-lebanon-1920-1936/file>

⁵⁶ American University of Beirut (2022). Women Pioneers in Arab Press (1892-1925). <https://online-exhibit.aub.edu.lb/exhibits/show/women-pioneers-in-arab-press/introduction>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action. *Women's movements in Lebanon*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/gen/women-movements-timeline/4938#event-establishment-of-helem-the-first-lgbtq-organisation-in-the-region-and-in-lebanon>

POST-INDEPENDENCE: WOMEN DEMAND POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC RIGHTS AND EMANCIPATION (1940-MID 70S)

As Lebanon gained independence and its frontiers and political system were drawn and decided, the generation of early women's rights activists of the time continued to emphasize securing political rights for women remained a primary concern. Indeed, early women's rights proponents in the country may have seen a link between the country's independence and the potential for women to gain greater freedoms and rights⁶⁵. Because of this, feminist movements at the time used patriotic and nationalist language to emphasize independence as a crucial aspect of women's identity⁶⁶. This first group of activists promoted the right to vote, political representation, and access to education. These demands were also supported by the growing number of female journalists at the time⁶⁷.

PROTESTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS FOR POLITICAL RIGHTS

In response to opposition to the expansion of their political and social rights, women and men joined forces in the streets, and their collective actions grew more apparent over the following decades. In 1943, women and men marched to call for the release of Sheikh Bshara el-Khoury, the country's newly elected president following independence, Riyad al-Solh, and other cabinet members⁶⁸. Demonstrators also requested that the Declaration of Independence be published. In 1951, there were women-led marches demanding political participation and rights for women⁶⁹. The Executive Committee of Women Associations (ECWA) organized a march by car convoys to the presidential palace and a large protest demanding the right for women to vote and run for office⁷⁰.

⁵⁹ Robinson, N. (2015). Our great disappointment: *Arab women's campaign for representation on the League of Nation's Committee on the Legal Status for Women*. American Historical Association. <https://aha.confex.com/aha/2015/webprogram/Paper15314.html>

⁶⁰ Robinson, N. (2015). "Sisters of men": *Syrian and Lebanese women's transnational campaigns for Arab independence and women's rights, 1910-1949*. Rutgers University. <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/47566/PDF/1/play/>

⁶¹ Hivos, Lebanon Support, & URIKA Agency. (2019). *The history of the women's movement in Lebanon*. <https://www.womenshistoryinlebanon.org/>

⁶² Amundsen, K. (2015). Elizabeth Thompson: Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000. Psi Sigma Siren, 3(1), Article 4. https://digitalscholarship.unlv.edu/psi_sigma_siren/vol3/iss1/4?utm_source=digitalscholarship.unlv.edu%2Fpsi_sigma_siren%2Fvol3%2Fiss1%2F4&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages

⁶³ Sharma, I. (2012). *Leaving her footprint: Women's struggle for power in French Syria & Lebanon 1920-1936*. Rutgers University. <https://history.rutgers.edu/docman-docs/undergraduate/honors-papers-2012/409-leaving-her-footprint-women-s-struggle-for-power-in-french-syria-lebanon-1920-1936/file>

⁶⁴ Provence, M. (2005). *The great Syrian revolt and the rise of Arab nationalism*. University of Texas Press.

During the weekly meetings of the parliament, women from all regions of Lebanon gathered in front of the building in large demonstrations to call for their political rights. Ibtiha Jaddoura, the head of the Arab Lebanese Women's Union, presented a petition to the speaker of the parliament during these marches, and there were other protests in various locations across the nation that followed.⁷¹ In 1952, under the direction of the First Lady at the time, Zalfa Chamoun, all of Lebanon's women's organizations met at the Roxy Theater to call for full suffrage.⁷² Following feminist lobbying, both educated and uneducated women were granted the right to vote and to run for office in legislative elections in 1953. Seven women attempted to run for parliament between 1953 and 1972, but none were successful.

PROTESTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS FOR ECONOMIC RIGHTS

Despite the glorification of the pre-war era in Lebanon as the "golden era" of nightlife, beauty, tourism, and carefree living, economic hardship, and wealth disparities continued to escalate with increasing pockets of poverty and destitution. Several leftist political parties organized to protest against the worsening economic situation affecting the less fortunate. As such, women's rights groups affiliated with these parties also joined forces including, for instance, the League for Lebanese Women's Rights who rallied against soaring prices and high cost of living in 1974. Other protesting groups joined the fight and called for the modification of Decree 34/67 regarding representation in trade relations and Article 50 of the Labor Law. Women marched holding banners and slogans saying "Hey mom, where is the sugar?" and "Monopoly is choking people's necks" in an attempt to showcase how poor families were affected by monopolies over goods and the galloping prices of essential products.⁷⁴

⁶⁵ Daou, B. (2015). *Feminisms in Lebanon: After proving loyalty to the "nation", will the "body" rise within the "Arab Spring"?*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre, Lebanon Support. <https://doi.org/10.28943/CSR.001.009>

⁶⁶ Pratt, N. (2020). *Embodying geopolitics: Generations of women's activism in Egypt, Jordan, and Lebanon*. University of California Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv17mrv35>

⁶⁷ Daou, B. (2015). *Feminisms in Lebanon: After proving loyalty to the "nation", will the "body" rise within the "Arab Spring"?*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre, Lebanon Support. <https://doi.org/10.28943/CSR.001.009>

⁶⁸ Abisaab, M. H. (2010). *Militant women of a fragile nation*. Syracuse University Press.

⁶⁹ Hivos, Lebanon Support, & URIKA Agency. (2019). *The history of the women's movement in Lebanon*. <https://www.womenshistoryinlebanon.org/>

⁷⁰ Tannoury-Karam, S. (2021). *Founding the Lebanese left: From colonial rule to Independence*. Legal Agenda. <https://english.legal-agenda.com/founding-the-lebanese-left-from-colonial-rule-to-independence/>

⁷¹ Hivos, Lebanon Support, & URIKA Agency. (2019). *The history of the women's movement in Lebanon*. <https://www.womenshistoryinlebanon.org/>

⁷² Beyond Group. (2016). *Patriarchy and sectarianism: A gendered trap. Baseline of women in politics: The case of Lebanon*. <https://beyondgroupconsulting.com/publications-blog/patriarchy-and-sectarianism-a-gendered-trap>

The story of the Regie protests

In addition to political participation, many demonstrations related to economic rights were held between 1935-1946 particularly against The Regie Libanaise des Tabacs et Tombacs, also known as the Regie, which became the monopoly supplier of tobacco in Lebanon and Syria in 1935⁷⁵. Up to three thousand workers, mostly rural and destitute women displaced in the old tobacco factories, organized protests in 1935 against the French in Beirut, Damascus, and Homs⁷⁶. Students and unemployed workers protested peacefully to demand the compensation and unemployment indemnities that the French government had promised them⁷⁷.

Women laborers tried to meet with the city governor but clashed with the police. Nonetheless, they unified their efforts to prepare a list of demands through a woman delegate⁷⁸. The employees went on sporadic strikes in 1944 and 1945, demanding higher pay as well as full pensions for women who left their jobs after getting married⁷⁹. In 1946, the Regie workers threatened to go on a general strike if the administration did not accept their demands, which included pay raises and long-term contracts⁸⁰. Women employees called for a walkout after the government failed to address their concerns⁸¹. In an effort to weaken the movement, several important organizers were moved from the company's branch in Beirut to the branch in Tripoli on June 11, 1946, marking the official commencement of the strike⁸².

⁷³ Joseph, S. (1996). Gender and citizenship in Middle Eastern states. *Middle East Report*, 198, 4–10. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3012867>

⁷⁴ The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action. *Women take to the streets against economic policies and rising prices*. *Civil Society Knowledge Centre*. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/content/women-take-streets-against-economic-policies-and-rising-prices>

⁷⁵ RLTT. (n.d.). History. <https://www.rltt.com.lb/Article/3/history/en>

⁷⁶ Abisaab, M. H. (2004). "Unruly" factory women in Lebanon: Contesting French colonialism and the national state, 1940-1946. *Journal of Women's History*, 16(3), 55–82. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2004.0056>

⁷⁷ Abisaab, M. H. (2010). *Militant women of a fragile nation*. Syracuse University Press.

⁷⁸ Abisaab, M. H. (2004). "Unruly" factory women in Lebanon: Contesting French colonialism and the national state, 1940-1946. *Journal of Women's History*, 16(3), 55–82. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2004.0056>

⁷⁹ Hivos, Lebanon Support, & URIKA Agency. (2019). *The history of the women's movement in Lebanon*. <https://www.womenshistoryinlebanon.org/>

⁸⁰ Thompson, E. (2000). *Colonial citizens: Republican rights, paternal privilege and gender in French Syria and Lebanon*. Columbia University Press.

⁸¹ Hivos, Lebanon Support, & URIKA Agency. (2019). *The history of the women's movement in Lebanon*. <https://www.womenshistoryinlebanon.org/>

⁸² Abisaab, M. H. (2004). "Unruly" factory women in Lebanon: Contesting French colonialism and the national state, 1940-1946. *Journal of Women's History*, 16(3), 55–82. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2004.0056>

Around a month later, the company's management extended an invitation to the workers to stop their strike in exchange for a review and consideration of their requests⁸³. The employees took over the storage facilities because they could find no indication that the administration would indeed consider their requests. Workers, both women and men, organized to prevent the company's distribution trucks from delivering cigarettes to stores, which led to violent altercations with the police, who had been called to the strike's headquarters in the Mar Mikhael and Furn el-Chebbak neighborhoods⁸⁴. During that time, Asthma Malkun formed the first strike committee, which was later combined with another one formed by male workers⁸⁵.

Government officials felt alarmed by the cohesion and organization amongst the Regie workers and ordered the police to forcibly open the storage spaces to retrieve the merchandise by force. According to Abisaab, men and women workers tried to block a truck from coming in but were met with random shootings by the police for forty minutes⁸⁶. Moreover, one of the most active women in the strikes, Warda Butrus Ibrahim, was shot by the police on June 27, 1946, becoming the first casualty. Fifteen women were wounded, while one woman, Lur Dib was in critical condition, and one woman worker was arrested⁸⁷.

Even though the Lebanese Labor Law was passed on September 23, 1946, as a result of the deaths and injuries brought on by the Regie strikes, it is important to remember that these strikes were not the only ones to occur. Earlier in 1925, significant efforts were made to organize unions and stage strikes in a variety of sectors, including the publishing industry, the shoe industry, and others⁸⁸. Women workers were intrinsic to these early forms of organizing even though they were never acknowledged as union leaders. Yet, and despite the fact that the collective activism against the Regie and the state was mostly women-led, most of the newspapers, with the exception of the few left-leaning ones, referred to the organizers as men, ignoring the existence and implications of women's activism⁸⁹.

⁸³ The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action. The fight against the Regie's monopoly and colonial rule. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/content/fight-against-regie%E2%80%99s-monopoly-and-colonial-rule>

⁸⁴ The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action. *The Regie [tobacco] Company strike*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/content/regie-tobacco-company-strike>

⁸⁵ Abisaab, M. H. (2010). *Militant women of a fragile nation*. Syracuse University Press.

⁸⁶ Abisaab, M. H. (2004). "Unruly" factory women in Lebanon: Contesting French colonialism and the national state, 1940-1946. *Journal of Women's History*, 16(3), 55-82. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2004.0056>

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ al-Buwari, I. (1986). *Tarikh al-Harakah al-'Ummaliyyah wa al-Naqabiyyah fi Lubnan: 1908-1980 (The History of the Labor and Syndicate Movement in Lebanon)*, volume 1. Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 278-321.

Women took labor issues into their own hands, defying conservative social norms and gender roles, and were at the forefront of the day and night strikes to ensure that the shipping of cigarettes was halted⁹⁰. Many women-led and participated in the strikes, notably Josephine Ashqar, Mary Baltaji, Najla Dakkash, Rose Damuri, Lur Dib, Sa'ada Hubayqah, Wardah Butrus Ibrahim, Jamilah Ishaq, Mary Khattar, Mary Ja'ja', Asma Malkun, Mary Mardini, Rafiqah Muja'is, Bahijah Nahra, Latifah Rashdan, Jamilah Shahwan, and 'Afifah Thabit⁹¹. These women were perceived as courageous, and steadfast by their colleagues, but also unruly and irrational by employers. One worker recalled that there was a sense of powerful unity and just defiance among the female activists⁹².

This important period in the history of the women's rights movement in Lebanon is often ignored, poorly recorded and documented, and absent from the national education curriculum as well as the overall narrative of social movements in Lebanon. Yet, this contribution is key as it represents a significant shift in both the demographics of the women activists on the ground and the nature of their demands. This is indeed a departure from the first often well-to-do women's rights advocates who emphasized the importance of improving the lot of their less fortunate sisters albeit within the framework of charitable and religious ideologies to a full-fledged grassroots engagement in a class struggle that challenged the power and economic status quo.

Al-Ghandour Factory strikes

Al-Ghandour Factory was a well-known establishment in the 1960s and 1970s and was also notorious for its appalling treatment of its employees. Similar to the Regie des Tabacs et Tombac, a large proportion of the workforce at the Al-Ghandour factory was comprised of women from the poorest communities in the country who experienced salary discrimination as well as verbal and physical abuse⁹³. Due to the recently established wage law that called for a 5% pay raise and an increase in the minimum wage from 185 Liras to 205 Liras, almost 1,200 working women and men went on strike on November 3, 1972, including the Chiyah and Choueifat branches of the Ghandour factory⁹⁴. Workers used other forms of protest, like marching through Beirut's streets and raising banners demanding an improvement in their working conditions. The strike's momentum persisted up until 11 November 1972, when police forces forcibly put an end to it by dispersing it with tear gas, batons, and live ammunition. Two employees died as a result, namely Yusif al-Attar and Fatimah al-Khawajeh⁹⁵. According to many, the bloody incidents at the Ghandour Factory were an early indicator of the upcoming Civil War as well as an awakening of the people about social injustice and unfair and exploitative labor conditions.

As with the workers' movements in the Regie, women led marches, sacrificed their work, experienced violence and harassment, and succumbed in many cases to military violence, yet, they are barely mentioned in the overall narrative of the Ghandour Factory uprising. The latter is one of the ominous landmarks that foretell the Civil War. Of this event, only the actions of the Ghandour administration and the male leaders of the workers remain in the people's collective memory. In fact, the leadership of organized workers' unions continued to be male-dominated with hardly any prioritization of demands that would serve women workers. These were only addressed subsequently by women's rights organizations.

⁸⁹ al-Buwari, I. (1986). *Tarikh al-Harakah al-'Ummaliyyah wa al-Naqabiyyah fi Lubnan: 1908-1980 (The History of the Labor and Syndicate Movement in Lebanon)*, volume 1. Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 278-321.

⁹⁰ Abisaab, M. H. (2004). "Unruly" factory women in Lebanon: Contesting French colonialism and the national state, 1940-1946. *Journal of Women's History*, 16(3), 55-82. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2004.0056>

⁹¹ al-Buwari, I. (1986). *Tarikh al-Harakah al-'Ummaliyyah wa al-Naqabiyyah fi Lubnan: 1908-1980 (The History of the Labor and Syndicate Movement in Lebanon)*, volume 1. Beirut: Dar al-Farabi, 278-321.

⁹² Abisaab, M. H. (2004). "Unruly" factory women in Lebanon: Contesting French colonialism and the national state, 1940- 1946. *Journal of Women's History*, 16(3), 55-82. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2004.0056>

⁹³ The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action. *Women's movements in Lebanon*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/gen/women-movements-timeline/4938#event-establishment-of-helem-the-first-lgbtq-organisation-in-the-region-and-in-lebanon>

FORMATION OF THE LEBANESE COUNCIL OF WOMEN

A series of protests were organized in Beirut and were led by pioneers Eveline Bustros and Ibtihaj Qaddoura, both coming from well-known Christian and Muslim upper-class families⁹⁶. This action took place after The Women's Union in Lebanon and Syria split in 1946 followed by the formation of The Women's Union led by Ibtihaj Kaddoura and the Christian Women's Solidarity Association led by Laure Thabet^{97,98}. In 1952, the two entities merged to form The Lebanese Council of Women (LCW), which is now an umbrella organization for 170 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), most of which are confessional and sectarian and very much conservative in their ideology⁹⁹. LCW held a consultative status within the Lebanese Parliament and played a significant role in the fight for suffrage¹⁰⁰. Although the LCW's stated mission was to lead and support the women's rights movement in Lebanon, their primary work and accomplishments were the provision of social services for women¹⁰¹. LCW did however spearhead the fight for women's suffrage, which was granted in 1953 after a decade of sustained and collective campaigning¹⁰².

⁹⁴ Traboulsi, F. (2012). *A history of modern Lebanon*. Pluto Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt183p4f5>

⁹⁵ The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action. *Women's movements in Lebanon*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/gen/women-movements-timeline/4938#event-establishment-of-helem-the-first-lgbtq-organisation-in-the-region-and-in-lebanon>

⁹⁶ Thompson, E. (2000). *Colonial citizens: Republican rights, paternal privilege and gender in French Syria and Lebanon*. Columbia University Press.

⁹⁷ Stephan, R. (2012). Women's rights activism in Lebanon. In P. Arenfeldt (Ed.), *Mapping Arab women's movements: A century of transformations from within* (pp. 111–132). American University in Cairo Press. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt15m7hb5>

⁹⁸ Daou, B. (2015). *Feminisms in Lebanon: After proving loyalty to the "nation", will the "body" rise within the "Arab Spring"?*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre, Lebanon Support. <https://doi.org/10.28943/CSR.001.009>

⁹⁹ Stephan, R. (2010). Couple's activism in Lebanon: The legacy of Laure Moghaizel. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 33(6), 533–541. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2010.09.009>

¹⁰⁰ Stephan, R. (2017). Lebanese women's rights beyond the Cedar Revolution. In S. Khamis & A. Mili (Eds.), *Arab women's activism and socio-political transformation: Unfinished gendered revolutions* (pp. 73–88). Springer International Publishing.

THE RISE OF LEFTIST/SOCIALIST FEMINISM

Sections of the women's rights movement regrouped in 1967 after the Israeli-Egyptian war. This period was marked by a general state of disappointment following the Arab defeat vis-à-vis Israel during the six-day war and the setback that this brought. Nationalist beliefs began to be critically re-examined paving the way for leftist feminists to gain ground¹⁰³. Meanwhile, women's organizations were encouraged by Fouad Chehab's reformist initiatives to concentrate on humanitarian activities¹⁰⁴. In 1967, many of the leftist feminist organizations cut links with Lebanese political parties that had earlier served as their incubators and became independent¹⁰⁵. They created their own unique organizations and entities.

This separation, which occurred in Lebanon and in many countries of the region, paved the way for the eventual growth of feminist activism in Lebanon. However, despite their organizational separation from political parties, many women's organizations frequently remained committed to their ideology. For instance, the Progressive Women's Union was (and remains to date) associated with the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP). The Lebanese Democratic Gathering of Women (LDGW) was a member of the Organization of Communist Action (OCA) and remained closely connected to its ideology whilst the Lebanese League for Women's Rights never severed ties with the Lebanese Communist Party¹⁰⁶.

-
- ¹⁰¹ Khattab, L. (2010). Civil society in a sectarian context: *The women's movement in post-war Lebanon*. (thesis). https://laur.lau.edu.lb:8443/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10725/237/Lara_Khattab_Thesis_Redacted.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y
- ¹⁰² Schubert, E. (2020). The struggles for women's suffrage in Lebanon. *Meridians*, 19(1), 202–208. <https://doi.org/10.1215/15366936-8117801>
- ¹⁰³ Daou, B. (2015). *Feminisms in Lebanon: After proving loyalty to the "nation", will the "body" rise within the "Arab Spring"?*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre, Lebanon Support. <https://doi.org/10.28943/CSR.001.009>
- ¹⁰⁴ Merhej, K. (2021). *Breaking the curse of corruption in Lebanon*. Chatham House. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/06/breaking-curse-corruption-lebanon/annex>
- ¹⁰⁵ The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action. *Women's movements in Lebanon*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/gen/women-movements-timeline/4938#event-establishment-of-helem-the-first-lgbti-q-organisation-in-the-region-and-in-lebanon>
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

Severing ties with leftist parties was, as indicated earlier, a regional rather than a Lebanese feature. Various interviews with women who were active in these parties in Lebanon and other Arab countries seem to revolve around two main lived experiences. According to one of the women activists in Lebanon (personal communication), *"We were considered to be liberated women which meant, according to most of our comrades, being promiscuous. Sexual harassment went galore and was tolerated. But the worse part was that comrades and leaders expected us to serve them, to make coffee and tea during the meetings when they would be speaking politics and talking over us".* Another activist from the same era noted (personal communication) *"We were sent to rural areas to recruit women. We were supposed to convince them to join the party. Instead, I learned about the hardships of women, how they suffer from violence at home and outside, and how nobody, including my party, cares about them. I knew then and there that if I were to continue my work with women, I will need to leave the party".*

Women's rights organizations that matured during that area, regardless of whether they kept or severed ties from left-wing parties, had nevertheless a sharp sense of class consciousness and were to a large degree membership organizations that included women from diverse parts of Lebanon as well as various communities. They were as close as possible to being secular at a moment in time when Lebanon was slowly but surely sliding into a 15-year-long war that was triggered, inflamed, and encouraged by sectarian divisions. The role of these women's rights organizations took on an interesting turn during and throughout the Lebanon civil war as they moved into humanitarian assistance as well as peacebuilding and political work while shifting away from advocacy for women's rights.

THE CIVIL WAR ERA: HOW SECTARIANISM AND POLITICAL ALLEGIANCE INFLUENCED WOMEN'S RIGHTS ACTIVISTS AND ACTIVISM (1975-1990)

According to Giambalvo¹⁰⁷, gendered spaces were destroyed in the Lebanese Civil War, with the public and private spheres no longer being separate and distinct. This statement may be refuted by many women who lived through the Civil War and its atrocities. Perhaps a better statement would be that the Lebanon civil war made both the public and private spheres less safe for women and girls. A recent report unveiled the pervasive gendered crimes during the Lebanese Civil War, where sexual and gender-based violence, including rape and torture, was widespread, perpetrated by both state and non-state actors¹⁰⁸. Women, girls, and even infants were subjected to killing and abduction by armed groups, while the enforced disappearances of men had negative economic, social, and security implications for women and girls. Family violence against women and girls was reported to have amplified during the conflict, with instances of beatings, verbal abuse, and sexual violence by male family members.

In addition, the Lebanese Civil War generated multiple and interconnected crises which for the most part relied on women's invisible labor and care work to provide sustenance, comfort, and safety and also compensate for the breakdown of services and institutions. This role was played by women as part of the traditional social gender roles within families and communities or as part of the collective formations including civil society organizations that were created before or during the war.

¹⁰⁷ Giambalvo, T. A. (2006). *Negotiating citizenship: Arab women in militant movements. (thesis)*. <https://scholarworks.aub.edu.lb/bitstream/handle/10938/7317/t-4726.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=n>

¹⁰⁸ Legal Action Worldwide. (2022). *They raped us in every possible way, in ways you can't imagine: Gendered crimes during the Lebanese Civil Wars*. <https://www.legalactionworldwide.org/gender-equality-gbv/law-and-un-women-launch-a-report-investigating-gendered-crimes-during-the-lebanese-civil-wars/>

As such, women who were part of groups such as the Lebanese Women Collective (تجمع المرأة اللبنانية) cared for the internally displaced, distributed food and medicine, performed first aid, and raised awareness on environmental issues essentially related to garbage collection and health and hygiene. Some women peace activists like Rose Ghurayyib and Laure Moghaizel mobilized communities across Lebanon and urged the international community to pay attention to Lebanon's deteriorating situation¹¹⁰. In fact, and as part of her role as a leader of the non-violence movement, Moghaizel was the first to set up a "secular barrage" across from the National Museum encouraging citizens to scrap the mention of religion and sect from their ID cards. Though a short-lived initiative, one needs to remember that one of the first decisions to be taken at the end of the Lebanon Civil War was the removal of the religious marker from ID cards and passports.

Other forms of anti-war organizing were cultural. For instance, in 1980, in the village of Baakleen, a small group of women formed the Women's Edification Assembly focused on issues of security and stability and organized cultural activities such as theatrical performances and poetry evenings, with their purpose being to provide "*a stability which patriarchal institutions that dominated the country were not providing*" and building "*women's solidarity*"¹¹¹. The assembly also established a magazine titled Abeer listing their activities and giving a forum for women to express their opinions and vent their thoughts. The assembly saw the participation of women from different sects, challenging civil-war states of affairs, and was considered an attempt to stabilize and normalize life for children¹¹².

The role of women during the war was not confined to the women's rights movement as well as their humanitarian involvement. Other women, according to Eggert¹¹³, were involved with the militias in the war either as fighters or as part of the militias' elaborate support system. However, only a minority of women fighters claimed that their motivation to participate was related to the desire for empowerment or emancipation. Until the present day, there is very little first-hand account of women who took an active part in the war. As of 2022, there has been a program initiated by UN Women in Lebanon that aims to reclaim history and build peace at the community level and with women as actors and agents¹¹⁴.

As the Civil War escalated, many of the political parties, whether old or new, included statements in their political platform that indicated their position vis-à-vis what they perceived as women-related issues. These included their position vis-a-vis civil marriage, equal pay, equality between women and men, and women's education¹¹⁵. The position vis-à-vis civil marriage was perhaps the most contested as it indicated how political parties stood vis-à-vis Lebanon's confessional system and the authority of religious institutions. It is fair to say that most political parties decided on that matter based on their political interests and (often shifting) alliances rather than taking into consideration the situation and position of women within their families and in the public domain.

Women were excluded from decision-making processes during wartime and post-wartime peace negotiations despite being engaged in conflict, with the civil war generally marginalizing "*women's position as women*" through the breaking of a social order that was followed by a "*stronger adherence to family and tradition*" and the diverting of attention away from women's rights and women's activities except when it suited their traditional view as peacekeepers in case of demonstration or sit-in¹¹⁶. On the other hand, NGOs and women's organizations were faced with increased responsibilities and pressures, as the war forced women to enter labor markets in addition to their traditional domestic responsibilities, with their work often going unacknowledged and patriarchal structures largely unmodified. Such work included responding to the immediate needs of affected populations such as displaced people, widows, war orphans, and the disabled¹¹⁷. Struggles for women's civil rights were replaced by the provision of welfare services¹¹⁸.

¹⁰⁹ Dayekh, L. (2021). Sites of resistance: Women's activism in Lebanon under neoliberal reform in the 1990s. In *Feminist 90s: On the framework, the journey, and the conversations*. The Knowledge Workshop. <https://www.alwarsha.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Luna-Dayekh-Sites-of-Resistance.pdf>

¹¹⁰ Stephan, R., & Khoury, N. (2015). Lebanese women's nonviolence: Action and discourse. In M. M. Kurtz & L. R. Kurtz (Eds.), *Women, war, and violence: Topography, resistance, and hope* (pp. 281–298). Praeger.

¹¹¹ Ward, A. (2009). Women of the Lebanese mountains: A fight for edification. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 32(5), pp. 388–394. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2009.07.004>

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Eggert, J. P. (2022). *Women and the Lebanese Civil War: Female fighters in Lebanese and Palestinian militias*. Palgrave Macmillan.

¹¹⁴ UN Women. (2022). Women in Lebanon at the forefront of non-violent conflict resolution through UN support. <https://lebanon.unwomen.org/en/stories/feature-story/2022/09/women-in-lebanon-at-the-forefront-of-non-violent-conflict-resolution-through-un-support>

Overall, the Civil War affected, influenced, and in many cases, decided the path of many women's rights groups. As such, women's rights groups were not spared the sectarian divisions that plagued the country¹¹⁹. Most militias and political parties created and controlled their women branches and/or committees thus amplifying their war effort. Meanwhile, the labor movement and the workers' union were taken over by the de facto political powers and militias and were instrumentalized to maintain the political and sectarian status quo thus serving the interests of warlords¹²⁰. This, together with the intensification of military operations and violence, and the escalation of human casualties and material damages, most women's rights organizations morphed into charitable women's organizations and engaged in emergency assistance work, and support to refugees and war victims¹²¹. Researchers alluded to this era as one when the women's movement assumed "pastoral functions" in the form of immediate assistance and care as well as survival and livelihood, shelter, and protection. Many active women's rights and women organizations of that long and difficult era struggled to incorporate the ideals they supported into their rhetoric. The sectarian narrative remained predominant and that of "*women's rights and empowerment*" was sidelined in favor of "*more important national priorities*". The national identity took precedence yet again over the rights of women and girls, the right to equality, and simply, the right of women to have rights.

¹¹⁵ Chemali Khalaf, M. (2010). Lebanon. In *Women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa*. Freedom House. https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Womens_Rights_Middle_East_and_North_Africa_Jumbo_Book_With_Country_Reports.pdf

¹¹⁶ Khatib, L. (2008). Gender, citizenship, and political agency in Lebanon. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 35(3), pp. 437–451. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530190802525189>.

¹¹⁷ ILO (1997). Post-war Lebanon: *Women and other war-affected groups*.

¹¹⁸ Aboul-Hosn, Z. (2015). *Where were the women?*. The New Arab. <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/where-were-women>.

¹¹⁹ Chemali Khalaf, M. (2010). Lebanon. In *Women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa*. Freedom House. https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Womens_Rights_Middle_East_and_North_Africa_Jumbo_Book_With_Country_Reports.pdf

¹²⁰ Moussawi, F. (2021). Narrating 1990s Lebanon from a feminist perspective. In *Feminist 90s: On the framework, journey, and the conversations*. <https://www.alwarsha.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Fati-ma-al-Moussawi-Narrating-1990s-.pdf>

MINOR LEGAL REFORMS DESPITE THE CIVIL WAR

To say that there were no reforms made in terms of elevating the rights of women and girls during the Civil War would be a misrepresentation of reality. In fact, a number of small and punctual gains were made owing essentially to the good relations that many of the women's rights advocates maintained with the powers that be. Of equal importance was the fact that these small gains, or "baby steps", as many would like to call them, did not necessarily threaten the status quo, namely the interconnected political and sectarian system that ruled the country during war and peace. As such, Lebanese women gained the freedom to travel without their husband's permission in 1974¹²³. This was not applicable to women who had children whom they wanted to take with them. Authority over children's mobility remained within the remit of their father, the "head of the household"¹²⁴.

Later on in 1987, and essentially through the activism of Lawyer Iqbal Mrad Doughan as well as women's rights organizations, women workers registered with the National Social Security Fund (NSSF) were able to benefit equally as their male peers. This included equal social and end-of-service benefits¹²⁵. Whilst this is a notable achievement, the question as to why women and men who are subscribed to the NSSF and who pay their dues equally would have unequal benefits remains perplexing. The main reason or explanation put forward to date is the fact that the NSSF in and of itself is based on a gender-discriminatory principle that perceives women as contributing to household income rather than full-fledged breadwinners and heads of households.

¹²¹ Stephan, R. (2014). *Four waves of Lebanese feminism*. E-International Relations.

https://www.e-ir.info/2014/11/07/four-waves-of-lebanese-feminism/#.VF0-gvPV_k0.twitter

¹²² Charafeddine, F. (2009). *Predicament of Lebanese women married to non-Lebanese*. UNDP. http://www.undp.org.lb/communication/publications/downloads/mujaz_en.pdf

¹²³ Hivos, Lebanon Support, & URIKA Agency. (2019). *The history of the women's movement in Lebanon*. <https://www.womenshistoryinlebanon.org/>

¹²⁴ Chemali Khalaf, M. (2010). Lebanon. In *Women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa*. Freedom House. https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Womens_Rights_Middle_East_and_North_Africa_Jumbo_Book_With_Country_Reports.pdf

¹²⁵ Hammoud, M. (2014). *Legal and contextual research on women economic empowerment in Lebanon*. Search for Common Ground. https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Legal_and_Contextual_Research_on_Women_Economic_Empowerment_in_Lebanon.pdf

Personal status laws

Until today, personal status laws in Lebanon remain the main impediment to gender equality and to the recognition of rights and entitlements across the gender spectrum. In the absence of a unified family law system, religious courts in Lebanon are primarily responsible for enforcing personal status legislation with little if any interference from the government. The marriage, divorce, custody, inheritance, and property rights concerns are handled by the religious courts of the 18 recognized religions¹²⁶. The existence of the 18 different recognized religions with the attendant institutional structures actually means that there are 18 different articulations of “citizenship” in Lebanon. While all of these religious institutions follow unequivocal patriarchal constructs, they also tend to consider women as subordinate to men and dependent on their patriarchal family relations. Religious family laws also violate the fundamentals of women and girls’ human rights, such as the rights to non-discrimination, physical integrity, health, agency, etc...¹²⁷.

Interestingly, women’s rights advocates’ mobilization to reform family laws was one of the earliest and most progressive. Evidence indicates that women’s rights groups rallied as early as 1971 against the unjust and oppressive personal status laws still in force today. At a later stage, the Lebanese Democratic Party attempted to pass a bill to create a “unified personal status law”¹²⁸, but with no success as the bill did not even make it to parliament. At a later stage, women’s rights advocates would come together to suggest an “optional personal status law” in an attempt to find a compromise that would allow those who would like to opt out of an otherwise compulsory religious system to do so. This watered-down proposal continued to be fought and rejected as a testimony of the extent to which religious family laws remain untouchable and immune to reform.

Even though no significant breakthrough was made in reforming or challenging what constitutes the most powerful source of oppression against women and girls, yet, it is nevertheless remarkable that mobilizing for reform started before the war and continued throughout the war. Whilst the limited gains made may seem daunting, yet, the persistence to challenge religious family laws, which continue to date, is a strong indication of the growing discontent with these archaic laws which affect all women and girls in Lebanon.

Supremacy of international human rights treaties over domestic laws

A hardly known or referred to achievement during that period was the work of women's rights lawyer Laure Moghaizel, who, together with a delegation from the Human Rights Association, put forward a proposition to add a clause to the Lebanese constitution that would commit Lebanon to the International Declaration of Human Rights¹²⁹. In addition, the Lebanese Women's Democratic Gathering also advocated for the domestic use of international conventions in support of demands for women's rights¹³⁰ initiatives, which are still helpful to activists today.

Rise of the disability movement but little to no emphasis on women with disabilities

Whilst the genesis of movements led by people with disabilities was definitely a feature of the Civil War period, hardly any attention or visibility was given to the particular situation and condition of women with disabilities whose lived experiences and life chances were never given any priority. Indeed, and amidst the war, the 1980s saw the emergence of organizations led by people with disabilities. These started in Beirut and the main coastal cities but slowly moved to peripheral areas and collectively shifted focus from institutional care and rehabilitation to rights-based policy approaches. Disabled people's organizations focused on innovating new strategies and connected with non-violence movements with whom they organized marches in 1985 and 1987 demanding the cessation of violence and an end to the civil war. During the war, and as the disability movement was growing, and until today, women with disabilities continue to fight for their voice, recognition, and representation in both the disability movement and women's rights and feminist movements.

¹²⁶ Khoury, C. (2020). *Beyond religious marriages: Civil marriage, civil family laws, and the enhancement of women's rights in Lebanon*. Kohl Journal. <https://kohljournal.press/beyond-religious-marriages>

¹²⁷ Human Rights Watch. (2015). *Unequal and unprotected: Women's rights under Lebanese Personal Status Laws*. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2015/01/19/unequal-and-unprotected/womens-rights-under-lebanese-personal-status-laws>

¹²⁸ Hivos, Lebanon Support, & URIKA Agency. (2019). *The history of the women's movement in Lebanon*. <https://www.womenshistoryinlebanon.org/>

Women's rights organizations in Lebanon and global spaces

In 1975, the United Nations organized the first *World Conference on Women* in Mexico City¹³³. The space was exceptional as it was intended to bring together women's rights and feminist advocates and activists from the Global South and Global North to engage in a conversation where activists from all parts of the world would be on par¹³⁴. Lebanese women were part of a broad delegation that also included women from other Arab nations.

Lebanese women also attended the subsequent *UN Mid-Decade World Conference of the United Nations for Women* in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1980. This global event marked the conclusion of half a decade, set by the Mexico Conference of 1975 for the implementation of the World Plan of Action, which sought to achieve equality between the sexes. The importance of women acting for peace was highlighted in the conference's new Plan of Action. The conference asked the UN and its special agencies to pay attention to the needs of Lebanese women in general and women in South Lebanon in particular, to investigate ways to address those requirements, and to provide financial, material, and technical aid from diverse international sources¹³⁵.

In 1985, Nairobi hosted the third *"World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development, and Peace"*. The meeting brought together 15,000 representatives of NGOs and representatives of various nations, prompting the United Nations to refer to this occasion as *"the birth of global feminism,"*¹³⁶. The UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) was also established by the UN to carry the responsibility to *"promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the national, regional, and international agendas and in the work of the United Nations system"*¹³⁷.

¹²⁹ Civil Society Knowledge Centre. Giving precedence to international treaties. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/content/giving-precedence-international-treaties>

¹³⁰ Chemali Khalaf, M. (2010). Lebanon. In *Women's rights in the Middle East and North Africa*. Freedom House. https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/Womens_Rights_Middle_East_and_North_Africa_Jumbo_Book_With_Country_Reports.pdf

¹³¹ Wehbi, S. (2010). Lebanese women disability rights activists: War-time experiences. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 33(5), pp. 455–463. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2010.05.001>.

¹³² Kabbara, N. (2012). Non-violent resistance and reform in Lebanon. *Accord*, 24. <https://www.c-r.org/accord/lebanon/non-violent-resistance-and-reform-lebanon>

¹³³ United Nations. (1985). *World Conference to review and appraise the achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace*. <http://www.un-documents.net/nfl-intr.htm>

¹³⁴ UN Women. *World Conference of the International Women's Year*. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/mexico.html>

These three important global conferences on women took place as the civil war was raging in Lebanon. It is quite difficult to find any robust archives about the participation of women's rights activists from Lebanon as well as any information about the extent, nature, and impact of their participation. It is safe to say that there is very little takeaway from these three conferences at the level of mobilization for women's rights in Lebanon. We must remember that the country was divided and that relationships between and within institutions and communities as well as across geographies were severed, often violently. For the purpose of this book, it was not possible to find a clear list of women who participated or literature on such participation. As we continue to delve into the history and archives of the women's rights and feminist movement in Lebanon, an exploration of these spaces will probably reveal some interesting stories.

THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA DURING THAT PERIOD

The post-war period also saw cultural endeavors by women in various media such as theatre, as Nidal al-Ashkar, who was considered one of the most influential women in shaping the country and region's cultural landscape, largely credited for the development of theatre in Beirut which culminated in the establishment of avenues such as Masrah al-Madina and Mohtaraf Beirut lil Masrah¹³⁸.

News and magazine coverage

Newspaper coverage was affected by economic limitations and specifically shortages in commodities such as paper. Nonetheless, women's various initiatives received notable coverage from various news outlets, those run by women as well as more mainstream platforms. However, marginalization and silence regarding women's rights were notable throughout the period with low documentation of working women's mobilization endeavors and assumptions that syndicate members were men. Women's journals, for their part, paved the way and kept connections related to pan-Arab women's sentiments and formations of a pan-Arab women's movement¹⁴⁰.

The Arab Women's Conference in Cairo in 1944 was covered by many different newspapers, such as Filistin and Palestine Post, an English daily, with press coverage of the conference favorable to a large extent. Before the conference, Syrian and Lebanese organizations added "Arab" to their names as the conference sought Arab unity, between women in particular, and asserted support to national causes even in advance of women's rights, claiming women acted on their national support instead of only espousing it. Zahiya Doughan, for instance, emphasized writing Arab women's histories and other delegates who raised questions about women's access to social and economic domains, with the conference passing fifty-one resolutions targeted not only at Arab governments but also international audiences¹⁴¹.

¹³⁵ Accad, E. (1989). Feminist perspective on the war in Lebanon. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 12(1), 91–95. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395\(89\)90085-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(89)90085-x)

¹³⁶ Stephan, R. (2014). Four waves of Lebanese feminism. *E-International Relations*. https://www.e-ir.info/2014/11/07/four-waves-of-lebanese-feminism/#.VF0-gvPV_k0.twitter

¹³⁷ Anwar, S. (2016). UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). Jagran Josh. <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/un-development-fund-for-women-unifem-1468234818-1>

¹³⁸ Hivos, Lebanon Support, & URIKA Agency. (2019). The history of the women's movement in Lebanon. <https://www.womenshistoryinlebanon.org/>

Notable examples of writing covering women's rights include the work of Rose Attallah Shahfah, who wrote for magazines such as *al-Arous* and *Sout al-Maraa*, a weekly magazine specialized in women's affairs, and a number of books, in addition to leading several women's organizations in Syria and Lebanon¹⁴². Edvick Jureidini Shayboub became *Sout al-Maraa*'s editor-in-chief in 1951 and wrote for women audiences especially. The 1960s also saw the launching of *Donia al-Maraa* by Noura Nowayhed Halawani, a regionally popular magazine focused on various women's issues addressing a range of political and social issues¹⁴³.

Alice Kandaleft Cosma is another women's rights advocate whose work was notably covered by press materials, especially with her being the first Syrian Government appointee to the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The audience of news covering her speeches was to a large degree curious about the status of women in the Arab world, often excluding focus from her content in general, which included a merged centralization of Arab independence¹⁴⁴.

Media coverage and cultural efforts during the Civil War

Women engaged in significant artistic activities during the Civil War. These included painting, sculpting, music, poetry, and literature production which emerged throughout the period and left a mark on that difficult period. Miriam Cooke calls the *Beirut Decentrists* some 40 women who raised difficult questions around identity, women's rights, and women's experiences throughout several novels, poetries, and short stories. These stories often included the experiences of women throughout the war while men fled the country under a variety of excuses, highlighting a binary of "*women's steadfastness*" in contrast to "*men's cowardly vacillation*"¹⁴⁵.

¹³⁹ Hivos, Lebanon Support, & URIKA Agency. (2019). The history of the women's movement in Lebanon. <https://www.womenshistoryinlebanon.org/>

¹⁴⁰ Robinson, N. (2015). "Sisters of men": Syrian and Lebanese women's transnational campaigns for Arab independence and women's rights, 1910-1949. Rutgers University. <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/47566/PDF/1/play/>

¹⁴¹ Robinson, N. (2015). Our great disappointment: Arab women's campaign for representation on the League of Nation's Committee on the Legal Status for Women. American Historical Association. <https://aha.confex.com/aha/2015/webprogram/Paper15314.html>

¹⁴² Hivos, Lebanon Support, & URIKA Agency. (2019). The history of the women's movement in Lebanon. <https://www.womenshistoryinlebanon.org/>

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Robinson, N. (2015). "Sisters of men": Syrian and Lebanese women's transnational campaigns for Arab independence and women's rights, 1910-1949. Rutgers University. <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/47566/PDF/1/play/>

Cižmíková¹⁴⁶ expands on the Decentrists' experience of middle- to upper-middle-class women coming from different linguistic backgrounds, confessions, and persuasions offering new perspectives to the war, adding an emotional lens as opposed to men's writings' external description. Cižmíková highlights that the *"very fact of these women having been located at the margins gave them a certain 'epistemic privilege' that pertains to the position of marginalized subjects as subjects possessing an alternative and more critical optics, with a sharper, keener eye that enables them to notice what escapes the view 'from the center'"*¹⁴⁷. This perspective was focused on nuances of human conditions and everyday realities with the peculiarities of day-to-day domestic and logistical tasks.

Relatedly, concepts of alienation from one's environment and society are a recurrent theme in the Decentrists' writings. Cižmíková identifies feelings that the *"official mainstream narrative of war, in which an 'ex post facto' memory is imposed upon individual members of society by the state, tries to obliterate real memory by ['creating an alienated, abstract version'] – a new memory where ['no legitimacy is given to validating loss']"*¹⁴⁸. Such writings addressed dynamics within the family and household as well as the oppressive aspects of patriarchal control and linked them to the onset of the civil war.

The Decentrists *"relayed the experience of consciousness of survival and described the war and their society through their own lenses"*¹⁴⁹, offering a daily perspective on the war in contrast to men's battle-focused narratives and asserting an evolution from passivity to action, thus being de-centered on both physical and intellectual levels¹⁵⁰. Miriam Cooke's book on the Beirut Decentrists is considered a classic, being a rare monograph about modern Arab women writers, applying contemporary feminist literary theories and centralizing women's largely neglected perspectives on incidents .

¹⁴⁵ Cooke, M. (1987). Women write war: The feminization of Lebanese society in the war literature of Emily Nasrallah. *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies*, 14(1), pp. 52–67.

¹⁴⁶ Cižmíková, D. (2012). *Women's writings on the Lebanese Civil War*. Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Azar, D. (2018). War narratives through the eyes/I'S of Women in Iman Humaydan Younes' B As In Beirut', *European Scientific Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2018.c4p7>

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Guth, S. (1994). JEAN FONTAINE, Romans arabes modernes, Tunis 1992.-(Publications de l'Institut des Belles Lettres Arabes; 32), 117 pp. MIRIAM COOKE, War's Other Voices. Women Writers on the Lebanese Civil War, Cambridge [etc.]: Cambridge University Press, 1988.-(Cambridge Middle East Library), viii, 208 pp. *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 25(3), 261-264. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157006494X00176>

Mainstream press coverage

Press coverage throughout the Civil War included coverage of women militia members and women's organizational efforts. Women's efforts comprised a range of different activities, including journalistic ones. Nidaa al Mara'a was a women-dedicated weekly in the al-Nidaa newspaper addressing a range of social, political, and cultural matters. However, throughout the war, women had limited access to major media, as activists such as Marie Debs recalled only one example where her organization was able to reach a newspaper, particularly addressing ideas related to women and peace¹⁵². Other examples include the Women's Edification Assembly's establishment of the Abeer magazine which saw the chief editorship of Malika Hamadeh, covered the organization's wide range of activities such as social work, activities for women and others, and provided a place for women to vent¹⁵³.

The inclusion of women in informal armed groups has been related to the media attention that such women garner, reportedly receiving around eight times the media coverage of their male counterparts¹⁵⁴ in what is called the "CNN factor"¹⁵⁵. Including women militia members can be part of attention garnering from national and international audiences strategy. In addition, it helps promote ideas of militias such as Kataeb being modern and the encouragement of men to join the fight despite their hierarchical and conservative edifices¹⁵⁶. Palestinian women were portrayed by Fida'i narratives as being heroines of steadfastness and celebrated in media and official documents despite their entanglement as women in patriarchal structures¹⁵⁷.

¹⁵² El Masri, Y. (2017). Women's peacemaking and peacebuilding in Lebanon: From the Civil War through the immediate post-conflict period. Beirut: Lebanese American University. <http://hdl.handle.net/10725/6481>

¹⁵³ Ward, A. (2009). Women of the Lebanese mountains: A fight for edification. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 32(5), pp. 388–394. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2009.07.004>

¹⁵⁴ Eggert, J.P. (2017). When the war started, I was ready" - *Organisational motivations for the inclusion of female fighters in non-state armed organisations during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990)*. University of Warwick.

¹⁵⁵ Ali, F. (2005). Muslim female fighters: An emerging trend. *Terrorism Monitor*, 3(21). <https://jamestown.org/program/muslim-female-fighters-an-emerging-trend/>

¹⁵⁶ Eggert, J.P. (2017). When the war started, I was ready" - *Organisational motivations for the inclusion of female fighters in non-state armed organisations during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990)*. University of Warwick.

¹⁵⁷ El Masri, K. (2013). Women in the Lebanese Civil War – The Power of Guns. American University of Beirut.

¹⁵⁸ Kurtz, M.M., & Kurtz, L.R. (2015). *Women, War, and Violence: Topography, Resistance, and Hope* [2 volumes]: *Topography, Resistance, and Hope*. ABC-CLIO.

¹⁵⁹ Khoury, N. (2020) '23. Writing Lebanese Feminist History: Rose Ghurayyib's Editorial Letters in Al- Raida Journal from 1976 to 1985', in 23. New York University Press, pp. 208–216. <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479846641.003.0024>

Al-Raida Journal served as a newsletter and archive for many writings and accounts on women's histories of activism and organizational endeavors. The journal, originally published in English and in Arabic to reach wider audiences on a local and international level¹⁵⁸, saw the writings of its editor Rose Ghurayyib who discussed then-taboo topics on family planning and contraception and scoped editorials during civil war years where feminist activism was often overlooked¹⁵⁹. The journal also took the initiative to present women's oral histories.

The journal served as a forum for intellectual discussion where testimonies and narratives against the war were published and arguments for the inclusion of women in peace processes were presented as the journal documented the peace movement in Lebanon, and also where *"gender identity became contested and transformed within the framework of war and violence"*¹⁶⁰.

Television and newspaper coverage throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s also included an element which is the importance of working women and the promotion of women's work, for reasons varying between "modernity, financial need, and economic empowerment toward emancipation"¹⁶¹.

Literary writings and other media

The Civil War period witnessed the proliferation of multiple types of artistic expression and ways to express one's views and render one's testimonies, particularly in literary fashion and in novel writing. As Čižmičová explains, women's writings contributed to the expression of multiple viewpoints and the nuances of speech on one hand and contributed to the echoing of regional particularities on the other¹⁶². Women's writings also served the purpose of deconstructing and undermining dominant discourses in their attempt to transform societal dynamics and establish new narratives. In fact, literature inspired by the civil war sees the writings of women exceeding those of men, and it is *"to these Lebanese women that the Arabic literature is indebted for"* a *"radical break with tradition"*. "They established the model of an activist literature which questions the patriarchal values of the Lebanese, and by extension Arab society, and calls for fundamental change"¹⁶³. In the words of the New York Times, a poem by kindergarten teacher Iman Khalifeh which received international mention stirred *"Beirut plan for protest"*¹⁶⁴. *"With their pens, Lebanese women were fighting the civil war (1975-92) in the hope of bringing about peace through reason and art"*¹⁶⁵.

Novels

Novelists such as Iman Humaydan Younes' paved the way for a feminist outlook regarding gender roles in the country¹⁶⁶, and those such as Gha-da al-Samman's *Beirut*, Hoda Barakat's *The Stone of Laughter*, and Hanan al-Shaykh's *The Story of Zahra* challenge gender expectation and conceptualizations of nationalism. Barakat's novel was the first modern Arabic one to feature a gay protagonist and the piece presents a critique of masculinity and undermines certain understandings of martyrdom. Other works characterize the novel as functioning "*within an ideological field that recycles stereotypes and tropes about Arab women*"¹⁶⁷. Al-Shaykh's novel was featured at the first International Feminist Bookfair in London in 1986 as it garnered considerable critical acclaim¹⁶⁸. The four authors depicted the war's senselessness through it and through its everydayness¹⁶⁹.

Writers used different languages in their writings and addressed matters of violence, war trauma, and gender relations¹⁷⁰. Writers such as Nada Awar Jarrar and others addressed hidden moods of war, going beyond masculine pure war narratives and hegemonic ones to discuss the personal lives, inner struggles, and experiences of women^{171,172}.

¹⁶⁰ Kurtz, M.M., & Kurtz, L.R. (2015). *Women, War, and Violence: Topography, Resistance, and Hope* [2 volumes]: *Topography, Resistance, and Hope*. ABC-CLIO.

¹⁶¹ Zaatari, Z. (2006). The culture of motherhood: An avenue for women's civil participation in South Lebanon. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 2(1), pp. 33–64.

¹⁶² Čizníková, D. (2012). *Women's writings on the Lebanese Civil War*. Bratislava: Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Aboul-Hosn, Z. (2015). *Where were the women?*. The New Arab. <https://www.newarab.com/analysis/where-were-women>

¹⁶⁵ Golley, N.A.-H. (2007). *Arab women's lives retold: Exploring identity through writing*. Syracuse University Press.

¹⁶⁶ Azar, D. (2018). War narratives through the eyes/1'S of women in Iman Humaydan Younes' *B As In Beirut*, European Scientific Journal. <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2018.c4p7>

Women's role during the war was often ignored by mainstream Lebanese cinema and films which often presented it as a masculine domain, often relegating women to positions of victims or omitting them. When Borhan Alawiye, the director of the film *Letter from a Time of Exile*, was asked, his reply was "that he could not imagine the experience of women"¹⁷³.

"Lebanese cinema has largely ignored the role of women as ['active agents'] in the civil war, presenting them ['as passive and silent beings']"¹⁷⁴.

On the other hand, films like *West Beirut* and *A Civilized People* focused on "mediating the experiences of women trying to cope with 'ordinary' life in wartime"¹⁷⁵, challenged dominant discourses of the war that blame an undefined other, went beyond traditional mother roles for women and didn't essentialize or idealize them. Khatib asserts that it is "the women's [voice that makes the films an important constituent in the process of creating a much-needed national discourse in Lebanon]"¹⁷⁶.

¹⁶⁷ Hartman, M. (2020). Zahra's uncle, or where are men in women's war stories?. *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 51(1–2), pp. 83–107. <https://doi.org/10.1163/1570064x-12341401>

¹⁶⁸ Golley, N.A.-H. (2007). *Arab women's lives retold: Exploring identity through writing*. Syracuse University Press.

¹⁶⁹ Biglin, B.A. (2013). *Discipline and disorder in women's fiction through the Lebanese Civil War*. Ohio State University.

¹⁷⁰ Rebeiz, M. (2022). Gendering civil war: Francophone women's writing in Lebanon. Edinburgh University Press. <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474499262.001.0001>

¹⁷¹ Gamal El-Din, H. S. M. (2018). Somewhere, home: Three Lebanese women suffering war and displacement, 4)86 (مجلة الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية), pp. 942–968. <https://doi.org/10.21608/fjhj.2018.174632>

¹⁷² Curry, B.N. (2021). Nationalism and postcolonial feminism: A literary approach to Palestinian women's resistance. Wichita State University.

¹⁷³ Khatib, L. (2006). The voices of taboos: Women in Lebanese war cinema. *Women: A cultural review*, 17(1), pp. 65–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09574040600628591>

¹⁷⁴ Hout, S. (2016). Recounting memories of resistance in 33 Days. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 38(2), pp. 481–499. <https://doi.org/10.13169/arabstudquar.38.2.0481>

¹⁷⁵ Khatib, L. (2006). The voices of taboos: Women in Lebanese war cinema. *Women: A cultural review*, 17(1), pp. 65–77. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09574040600628591>

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

POST-CIVIL WAR: EPHEMERAL HOPE, EMERGING NARRATIVES, AND AN EXPANSION OF GLOBAL OUTREACH (1995-1999)

In 1990, the end of the Civil War in Lebanon brought a new era of hope and the beginning of a much-contested reconstruction process. The process that ended the war through the agreement what is known as the Taef agreement was exclusively male-dominated and included the war-lords themselves. An obvious outcome was that the impact of the war on women and girls was never part of the peacebuilding conversation and this continued to be obliterated until today. Reading some of the existing accounts of the Lebanese Civil War and its horrors gives the impression that, unlike all wars, this one did not entail any conflict-related sexual violence or any gendered-based violence of any sort. The fact that it took more than 35 years after the end of the war for some of the women who survived sexual violence to speak out is a testimony to the oppressive and taboo nature of this trauma which has yet to be acknowledged and addressed.

As such, women were excluded and marginalized at several levels during the post-war years. A UNICEF report in 1995 indicated that despite efforts towards rebuilding Lebanon, women are faced with discrimination at legal, political, cultural, and economic levels¹⁷⁷. After the war, many donor agencies and non-governmental organizations increased efforts to support women's economic empowerment in Lebanon, with some focusing on women's entrepreneurship endeavors. As such, there was a significant and visible surge in microfinance as part of development efforts. However, many initiatives continue to see women as assistance receivers as opposed to right bearers, which discourages women from taking the initiative to form pressure groups and proactively demand and advocate for their rights¹⁷⁸.

The women's rights and feminist movement started to pick up the pace in 1995 as a result of *The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing*¹⁷⁹, which was the first formal at the state level and the second by non-governmental civil organizations, demonstrating Lebanon's commitment to women's rights on a global scale¹⁸⁰. This generation of women's rights and feminist activists aimed to improve women's economic position, political engagement and representation, and engagement in the public domain. In addition, the issue of "violence against women" began to emerge as a major area of concern and was spearheaded in Lebanon by the Lebanese Council to Resist Violence Against Women led at the time by women's rights activist, Zoya Rouhana. Partly due to the engagement of many women's rights and feminist groups in what was known as the Beijing Conference (see below), the narrative shifted towards better feminist framing of the movement and organizations adopted a welcome progressive and inclusive verbiage such as "*women's rights as human rights*", "*gender-based violence*," "*full citizenship*," and "*positive discrimination*"¹⁸¹.

¹⁷⁷ Khatib, L. (2008). Gender, citizenship, and political agency in Lebanon. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 35(3), pp. 437–451. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13530190802525189>.

¹⁷⁸ Abdo, N. & Kerbage, C. (2012). Women's entrepreneurship development initiatives in Lebanon: *mi cro-achievements and macro-gaps*. *Gender & Development*, 20(1). <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13552074.2012.663639>

¹⁷⁹ Hyndman-Rizk, N. (2019). A question of personal status: The Lebanese women's movement and civil marriage reform. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 15(2), 179–198. <https://doi.org/10.1215/15525864-7490967>

¹⁸⁰ UN Women. *Beijing and its follow-up*. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/>

The Beijing Conference: Emergence of new women's organizations

As indicated earlier, the Beijing Conference (or the UN IVth Conference on Women held in Beijing in September 1995) inspired women's rights organizations to work actively on critical issues namely violence against women as well as women's active participation in public and political life. In addition, the international community engaged closely with the Lebanese government in trying to persuade it to collaborate with women's groups and thus influence positively *"the future of gender relations in the country,"*¹⁸². The National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW) was established in 1996 with by-laws requiring the First Lady to be its president, the wives of the prime minister, and the speaker of the house to be vice presidents¹⁸³. Khattab¹⁸⁴ argues that this is a strategy of the elites to obstruct any civil society work that might potentially question the sectarian leaders' power.

Up until that point, the intellectual bourgeoisie was the major group advocating for women's rights. However, as new women's organizations emerged to bridge the third and fourth waves of feminism in Lebanon, old, autocratic institutions and alliances began to disintegrate. In 2001, 13 feminist organizations came together to form the Lebanese Women's Network, which was led by the Women's Democratic Gathering and works to advance gender equality¹⁸⁵. New organizations and collectives emerged, such as CRTD-A, which focused on the social and economic development of local communities, gender and citizenship, and the development of women's capacities and leadership in order to contribute to social justice and gender equality. Despite being the primary actors in the field of gender issues, many emerging feminist organizations opted not to join the Lebanese Council of Women, an entity they considered to be conservative as well as sectarian.

Emerging new structures and the adoption of what is referred to as the “NGO model”

In shifting towards this new era and in an effort to meet demands for due diligence and transparency, many women's rights and feminist organizations structured themselves as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) thus meeting both legal and donors' requirements. There have been several claims made that this had an impact on their ways of working with many branding “NGO-ization” as a curse befalling women's rights and feminist organizations¹⁸⁶. Whether this is correct and the extent to which this restructuring affected the agenda and modus operandi is yet to be verified. In addition, some global scholars seem to think that the ongoing reliance on donor financing and the parallel setting of agendas is a feature of what they call a “globalization” trend¹⁸⁷.

Many progressive women's rights organizations of the post-war period engaged in the newly emerging Anti-Globalization Movement, which included at the time various iterations of political and social justice movements, civil society and non-governmental organizations, political parties, networks, and coalitions from 54 countries that are committed to equality, solidarity, and diversity and who were struggling for global peace and justice. These gathered in Beirut in 2004 to show support for those in the region who are fighting for these values¹⁸⁸. Despite the fact that many women's rights and feminist organizations were part of the global gathering in Beirut, the agenda and discussions of this event which was intended to be a turning point in global mobilization and solidarity were not very much concerned with gender equality as a condition *sine qua none* for liberation and emancipation.

¹⁸¹ Council of Europe. (2011). *Make equality in law a reality in fact: Compilation of recommendations of the Committee of Ministers in the field of equality between women and men*. <https://rm.coe.int/1680595b37>

¹⁸² Hivos, Lebanon Support, & URIKA Agency. (2019). *The history of the women's movement in Lebanon*. <https://www.womenshistoryinlebanon.org/>

¹⁸³ Khattab, L. (2010). *Civil society in a sectarian context: the women's movement in post-war Lebanon*. (thesis). https://laur.lau.edu.lb:8443/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10725/237/Lara_Khattab_Thesis_Redacted.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action. Women's movements in Lebanon. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/gen/women-movements-timeline/4938#event-establishment-of-helem-the-first-lgbtqi-organisation-in-the-region-and-in-lebanon>

Legal changes and campaigns

Significant legal changes, albeit small “baby steps”, were secured during the early post-war era. Some examples include the reform of the Commercial Code in 1994 to allow women to operate businesses, and have the right to life insurance, without their husbands’ express or implicit approval. In 1997, Lebanon formally ratified the 1979 Convention to End All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which aims to ensure that all social, economic, political, and civic rights are protected¹⁸⁹. It also obligates Lebanon to implement the objectives of the Beijing Conference into national legal frameworks. El-Hage¹⁹⁰ argues that the ratification of CEDAW allowed women’s organizations in Lebanon to work and organize in a transnational scope. In order to promote greater equality between women and men working in the public sector, certain elements of the Labor Law were eliminated in 2000, particularly those that dealt with services for employees and their families. Additionally, women were permitted to work nighttime shifts, and maternity leave was increased¹⁹¹.

For their part, disabled people’s organizations developed new strategies during the post-war period, with a focus on lobbying for disability law and maintaining the status of the disability movement “as an *avant-garde social force working to strengthen social peace and reconciliation in the country and to push for reform*”¹⁹². Realities today however are constrained for disabled people’s organizations as they are faced with a myriad of political issues which influence the impact of pro-disabled policies and an overall CSO discourse that excludes disabled people to a large degree¹⁹³. In addition, the particular concerns, priorities, and voices of women with disabilities remained muffled.

¹⁸⁶ Mitri, D. (2015). *From public space to office space: The professionalization/NGO-ization of the feminist movement associations in Lebanon and its impact on mobilization and achieving social change*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/file/frompublicspacetoofticespaceenpdf-0/download?token=qydDzR59>

¹⁸⁷ Banks, N., Hulme, D., & Edwards, M. (2015). NGOs, states, and donors revisited: Still too close for comfort? *World Development*, 66, 707–718. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2014.09.028>

¹⁸⁸ The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action. Women’s movements in Lebanon. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/gen/women-movements-timeline/4938#event-establishment-of-helem-the-first-lgbtq-organisation-in-the-region-and-in-lebanon>

¹⁸⁹ OHCHR. *Ratification status for Lebanon*. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=96&Lang=EN

¹⁹⁰ El-Hage, S. S. (2013). *Transnational activism in Lebanon’s women’s movement: Between Fitna, Fawda, and feminism (thesis)*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. https://civilsociety-centre.org/sites/default/files/resources/transnational_activism_in_lebanon_womens_movement_between_fitna_fawda_and_feminism_sandy_el_hage.pdf

Gender Equality in Conferring Citizenship

Article 5 of decree no. 15, issued in 1925, was modified in 1960 to permit foreign women to acquire Lebanese citizenship if they marry Lebanese men¹⁹⁴. Article 4 of the same decree states that non-Lebanese women with children from a previous marriage can acquire Lebanese nationality if they marry a Lebanese man; the children they have from prior marriages may also acquire Lebanese nationality. Lebanese mothers, on the other hand, are denied the ability to pass on their nationality to their children and spouses if they get married to a foreign man, which reflects the patriarchal traditions and confessional rules that undermine discrimination against Lebanese women¹⁹⁵. The debate about nationality was postponed under the guise of the “naturalization and resettlement” of Palestinian and Syrian refugees¹⁹⁶.

In 1999, a Lebanese civil society organization, CRTD.A, spearheaded a regional campaign entitled **“My Nationality is a Right for Me and My Family”**¹⁹⁷, seeking to reform legislation to allow women from six Arab countries (Bahrain, Algeria, Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Jordan) the right to confer nationality and full citizenship. Movements from around the Arab world and internationally have backed the campaign, which has proven to be successful in Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Palestine, Libya, Yemen, and Tunisia begun to change their laws governing nationality. The matter remains contested to date in Lebanon despite small and punctual gains.

¹⁹¹ Kobaissy, F. (2010). Salwa's guide to fighting sexual harassment. *Al Raida Journal*. <https://inhouse.lau.edu.lb/iwsaw/raida131-132/EN/p01-88.pdf>

¹⁹² Kabbara, N. (2012). Non-violent resistance and reform in Lebanon. *Accord*, 24. <https://www.c-r.org/accord/lebanon/non-violent-resistance-and-reform-lebanon>

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Lebanese University. 19/6/1983 تاريخ إلغاء المادة 26 من المرسوم التشريعي رقم 47. <http://www.legallaw.ul.edu.lb/parliament/P20/2001/P2001e22/046.htm>

¹⁹⁵ Saghie, N., & El Hajj, S. Y. (2020). *Denying Lebanese women the ability to pass on nationality*. Legal Agenda. <https://english.legal-agenda.com/denying-lebanese-women-the-ability-to-pass-on-nationality/>

¹⁹⁶ Kerbaj, J. (2021). *Lebanese women granting nationality to their children “a right or a burden?”*. Anbaa Online. <https://anbaaonline.com/news/131475>

¹⁹⁷ CRTD-A. (2020). *My nationality is a right for me and my family: The Lebanese authorities are more fatal and discriminatory than the pandemic itself*. <https://crt-da.org.lb/node/16301#:~:text=and%20Higher%20Education.-,My%20Nationality%20is%20a%20Right%20for%20Me%20and%20My%20Family,men%2C%20without%20discrimination%20or%20exclusion>

THE FEMINISTS OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM: A DIFFERENT DISCOURSE AND DISSATISFAC- TION WITH THE OLDER GENERATIONS (2000 – 2019)

The new millennium continued to be politically turbulent and volatile in Lebanon. Events such as the 2000 liberation of the South, the 2005 Independence Revolution, the 2006 Israeli war, and the 2008 internal military skirmishes had an impact on the country's sociopolitical status with women being part of various forms of mobilizations during that time. These landmark events were followed by a series of consecutive protests in 2011, 2015, and 2019, where women's involvement as participants as well as leaders and political mobilizers was evident and strong.

Many argue that the March 2005 demonstrations were a turning point in the visibility of women as politically active citizens who claimed the space for engagement in contentious politics. Their role was not limited to being secondary rather they contributed to the movement in terms of planning, organizing their own demonstrations, and adding a women element to resistance¹⁹⁹. In fact, women's role during the 2005 revolution is seen to have played a key role in the evolution of gender standards in Lebanon²⁰⁰ and is seen to be significant in these events. Mother's Day on the 21st of March, 2005, saw a call by Leila Saad to all Lebanese mothers to pray at 12:55 pm, the time of previous prime minister Rafik Hariri's assassination, which was echoed by various women's associations and CSOs²⁰¹.

Women leaders in the 2005 revolution rose to the scene such as Asma Andraos and Nora Jumblatt, despite their affiliation to traditional patriarchal and conservative figures. They also played a role in influencing media coverage of the protests, such as Jumblatt's coordination with the al-Nahar newspaper during protest days to hide protest material in the newspaper's truck²⁰². Such endeavors have notably highlighted women's increased awareness of their rights as citizens and the infusion of the resistance movement with a new type of consciousness, despite some elements of women's participation being described as elitist and critiques of women's participation highlighted the number of Louis Vuitton purses and Gucci backpacks among women during the demonstrations²⁰³.

¹⁹⁸ Stephan, R. (2010). Leadership of Lebanese women in the Cedar Revolution in F. Shirazi (ed.) *Muslim Women in War and Crisis*. University of Texas Press, pp. 175–197. <https://doi.org/10.7560/721890-012>.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Stephan, R. (2018). Lebanese women's rights beyond the Cedar Revolution. In S. Khamis and A. Mili (eds) *Arab women's activism and socio-political transformation: Unfinished gendered revolutions*. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 73–88. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-60735-1_4.

¹²¹ Kurtz, M.M. & Kurtz, L.R. (2015). *Women, war, and violence: Topography, resistance, and hope* [2 volumes]. ABC-CLIO.

¹²² Stephan, R. (2010). Leadership of Lebanese women in the Cedar Revolution in F. Shirazi (ed.) *Muslim Women in War and Crisis*. University of Texas Press, pp. 175–197. <https://doi.org/10.7560/721890-012>.

¹²³ Ibid.

Establishment of new feminist collectives

This period saw the emergence of new and interesting groups and formations. Helem was established in 2004 as the first organization in the region and in Lebanon concerned with the rights of the LGBTQI+ community²⁰⁴. KAFA (Enough) Violence & Exploitation²⁰⁵ also emerged as a key player as a service provider and a powerful lobbyist on issues related to gender-based violence and the exploitation of women and children. Meem broke off in 2007, became independent, and concentrated on all topics unrelated to politics and religion²⁰⁶. One year later, a Civil Society Coalition (CSC) was created due to the growing evidence and anger on domestic violence in order to support women and advocate for a domestic violence law²⁰⁷.

The feminist network Sawt Al Niswa was established in 2009 as an independent space for theorizing and knowledge creation. The network brought together feminist authors, activists, and creatives whose work documents, examines, and reflects on the experiences and reality of women in the Arab world²⁰⁸. In 2010, Feminist Collectives was founded as an online forum for the publication of political viewpoints²⁰⁹. After breaking up, Nasawiya attempted to distinguish itself from other feminist movements by emphasizing self-empowerment, “identity politics,” and mutual assistance. It saw itself as “a reconstruction of the Feminist Collective”²¹⁰. Despite their lack of affiliation with any political party or philosophy, the political realm was approached by knowledgeable individuals, promoting a-posteriori politicization. However, the political disagreements were what ultimately caused these formations to wind down after a period of high-intensity activity as well as a new and fresh discourse.

²⁰⁴ Chaer, N. (2020). Sensing queer activism in Beirut. In R. Stephan & M. Charrad (Eds.), *Women rising: In and beyond the Arab Spring* (pp. 173–184). New York University Press. <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479846641.003.0020>

²⁰⁵ KAFA. About. <https://kafa.org.lb/en/about>

²⁰⁶ Chaer, N. (2020). Sensing queer activism in Beirut. In R. Stephan & M. Charrad (Eds.), *Women rising: In and beyond the Arab Spring* (pp. 173–184). essay, New York University Press. <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479846641.003.0020>

²⁰⁷ Moussawi, F., & Yassin, N. (2019). Civil society advocacy and policy entrepreneurship: Examining the making of the Law 293 to criminalize domestic violence in Lebanon. In N. Yassin & R. A. Hoppe (Eds.), *Women, civil society and policy change in the Arab world*. Palgrave Macmillan.

²⁰⁸ Sawt Al Niswa. (2015). Sawt Al Niswa. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 11(3), 371–373. <https://doi.org/10.1215/15525864-3142603>

²⁰⁹ The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action. Women's movements in Lebanon. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/gen/women-movements-timeline/4938#event-establishment-of-helem-the-first-lgbtq-organisation-in-the-region-and-in-lebanon>

²¹⁰ Strelow, C. (2020). Nasawiya. The Borgen Project. <https://borgenproject.org/tag/nasawiya/>

²¹¹ Issa, S. (2021). Surviving displacement, alienation, and Kafala in the nineties: An oral history of grassroots organizing. In *Feminist 90s: On the framework, journey, and the conversations*. <https://www.alwarsha.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Lina-Abou-Habib-Feminist-consciousness-in-nineties-Lebanon.pdf>

Fighting racism

Although organizing by migrant domestic workers started during the civil war with Malini (Mala) Kandaarachchige who arrived from Sri Lanka and organized the Sri Lankan community surrounding Dahr el-Souane around mutual aid praxis in the nineties²¹¹, movements and organizations emerged in the 2000s. In 2010, the Anti-Racism Movement (ARM)²¹² was founded as a grassroots movement by activists, feminists, migrant workers, and migrant domestic workers after a notable instance of racism and discrimination occurred at Sporting Club, a resort on one of Beirut's private beaches. Since then, the group has worked to expose and combat racist and discriminatory behaviors and laws in Lebanon through its lobbying and initiatives to raise awareness. Eгна Legna Besidet, a community-based Ethiopian collective, was established in 2017 by migrant domestic workers who work on raising awareness, mobilizing protests, fostering solidarity, as well as providing legal and shelter assistance²¹³. Other initiatives were also created to address the power imbalance between migrant domestic workers and their employers, namely Maidames, a series of 20 photo portraits by Beirut-based contemporary artist Chaza Charafeddine in 2018²¹⁴. This exhibition portrayed the women as glamorous TV celebrities and popular figures in an attempt to have a more positive lens.

In 2015, the Syndicate of Men and Women Domestic Workers was founded²¹⁵, despite the Lebanese Ministry of Labour's resistance to its formation. The Minister of Labor rejected the syndicate, threatened to use force against the workers who requested the assembly and refused to provide the syndicate a license to formalize its existence²¹⁶. Foreign and migrant employees are not covered by the Lebanese Labour Law's legal protections; hence they have no right to establish such organizations. The assembly demanded the recognition of the right to organization for all workers, ratifying the ILO Convention no. 189 concerning the conditions of domestic workers and the abolishment of the exploitative Kafala system (the sponsorship system), and ratifying the ILO Convention no. 87 concerning freedom of association and the right to the organization.

Legal changes

Several attempts for legal change were made to promote women's political participation through a quota (2006 and 2021), reform the personal status laws (2011), and enforce laws to protect women from violence (2014, 2016, and 2017). The work of feminist activism helped advance a law on domestic violence, abolish the rape law, and pass a law on sexual harassment²¹⁷.

Gender quota

The civil war exacerbated the dynamics of marginalization of women inside the parties further excluding women from politics²¹⁸. The National Commission on Electoral Law developed a law in 2006 proposing a 30% quota for women in the Parliament, combining the majoritarian and proportional systems, in response to demands from women's organizations to abolish this exclusion²¹⁹. However, the measure did not pass, and efforts to impose a quota for women were still being made²²⁰. In the same year, the appointment of Ferial Dalloul in 2006 had a big impact on the number of women in Lebanon's judicial system²²¹.

²¹⁸ RDFL & Lebanon Support. (2017). *A historical overview of women's achievements in Lebanon*. <https://www.rdflwomen.org/eng/a-historical-overview-of-womens-achievements-in-lebanon/>

²¹⁹ Hussein, W. (2017). The 'female quota' in Lebanon: A temporary solution to a chronic political problem. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. <https://lb.boell.org/en/2017/02/17/female-quota-lebanon-temporary-solution-chronic-political-problem>

²²⁰ Tabbara, R. (2021). *Women's representation in parliament: A tale of plentiful proposals but limited political will*. L'Orient Today. <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1279197/womens-representation-in-parliament-a-tale-of-plentiful-proposals-but-limited-political-will.html>

²²¹ Assi, R. (2018). *Women in the judiciary in Lebanon*. UN ESCWA. https://www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/event/materials/presentation_lebanon.pdf

²²² KAFA. *Exploitation and trafficking in women*. <https://kafa.org.lb/en/node/176>

²²³ Hivos, Lebanon Support, & URIKA Agency. (2019). *The history of the women's movement in Lebanon*. <https://www.womenshistoryinlebanon.org/>

²²⁴ Dabbous, D. (2017). *Legal reform and women's rights in Lebanese Personal Status Laws*. CMI. <https://www.cmi.no/publications/file/6341-legal-reform-and-womens-rights-in-lebanese.pdf>

Personal status laws

In 2011, KAFA reopened the dialogue on personal status laws²²². The campaign demanded the removal of Lebanon's objections to CEDAW provisions including Article 16, which deals with marriage and family law, as well as the integration of CEDAW standards in order to equalize the conditions of men and women. The slogans used throughout the campaign included "The personal status laws are "dissonant" and "an outdated/patriarchal law cannot govern us today." The Lebanese youth demonstrated against the sectarian system because it is a significant barrier to gender equality and unrestricted citizenship rights.

Women had a crucial role in this mobilization campaign, actively contributing to organizational efforts while employing various forms of protest. For instance, discussions on women in the anti-sectarian movement were prepared by the feminist collective Nasawiya, which supported the march ²²³. This involvement includes a demonstration led by women on March 8, 2011, International Women's Day. The Network for the Rights of the Family started the campaign entitled **"Campaign 13/15"** in 2011 to change custody laws in all confessions as an outgrowth of these ongoing initiatives²²⁴. However, in addition to all the rights protected by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the laws are still enforced by religious tribunals, and women are still denied their right to equality before the law. The initiative was successful in increasing the Sunni age of custody from 7 for boys and 9 for girls to 12 for both sexes .

Violence against women

In 2011, Law 164 against human trafficking was passed by the government, criminalizing human trafficking in Lebanon . Moreover, the Lebanese Penal Code's Article 562, which lessened the punishment for killing Lebanese women under the pretense of defending honor, was repealed . However, Sections 193, 252, and 253 are still in effect and are utilized to lessen punishments in femicide cases. The Lebanese Parliament established Law 293 in 2014, which many argued is incomplete but still a good step forward, in response to criticism from feminists, criminalizing domestic violence . This law was controversial and opposed by religious authorities for fear of losing their source of revenue .

Rape

Civil society organizations sought to amend Article 522 in 2016, which permits a rapist to wed his victim(s) in order to avoid being prosecuted²³⁰, including the campaign entitled “A White Dress Doesn’t Cover Rape” by the ABAAD Resource Centre for Gender Equality. Billboards showing ladies wearing “bloodied and tattered white bridal gowns” were utilized in the campaign in Beirut and other cities in Lebanon. The campaign attracted the interest of both domestic and foreign media, and it was hailed as a success by Lebanon’s civil society actors. Article 522 was abolished on August 16, 2017, following the campaign against it²³¹.

Child marriage

In 2017, ABAAD and the Lebanese Women’s Democratic Gathering (RDFL) filed a draft proposal to the Parliament that would ban child marriage and raise the legal age of consent to 18 years²³². Additionally, KAFA presented action plans to end gender-based violence generally and early marriage specifically to safeguard kids²³³. Since 2015, the NGO has been pushing the parliament to approve legislation lowering the marriage age to 18 by utilizing films to protest this practice²³⁴.

²²⁵ Al-Asmar, J. (2022). *The question of child custody in Lebanon: Patriarchy consolidates the “crimes” of sectarian laws*. Assafir Al-Arabi. <https://assafirarabi.com/en/46656/2022/07/31/the-question-of-child-custody-in-lebanon-patriarchy-consolidates-the-crimes-of-sectarian-laws/>

²²⁶ Cheleblian, B. (2018). *Trafficking in human persons: Law and practice in Lebanon*. Al Raida Journal. <https://doi.org/10.32380/alrj.v4i1.1794>

²²⁷ Human Rights Watch. (2011). *Lebanon: Law reform targets ‘honor’ crimes*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2011/08/11/lebanon-law-reform-targets-honor-crimes>

²²⁸ Moussawi, F., & Yassin, N. (2017). *Dissecting Lebanese Law 293 on domestic violence: Are women protected?*. Issam Fares Institute. https://daleel-madani.org/sites/default/files/Resources/lebaneslaw293_0.pdf

²²⁹ Baroud, Z., & El-Alayli, G. (2019). In M. Afkhami, Y. Erturk, & A. E. Mayer (Eds.), *Feminist advocacy, family law and violence against women: International perspectives* (pp. 90–109). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

²³⁰ Domat, C. (2016). *Campaign grows in Lebanon to abolish law enabling rapist to marry victim*. Middle East Eye. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/campaign-grows-lebanon-abolish-law-enabling-rapist-marry-victim>

²³¹ UN Women. (2017). *Historic day for women in Lebanon as Parliament repeals rape law*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2017/8/news-lebanon-parliament-repeals-rape-law>

²³² Fakhri, L. (2017). *Lebanon: Pass bill to end child marriage*. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/12/lebanon-pass-bill-end-child-marriage>

Sexual harassment

In 2017, Members of Parliament voted to approve “the draft law aiming to criminalize sexual harassment and racial discrimination” during the January parliamentary sessions, but they later withdrew their support after one member raised the concern that “will every WhatsApp message allow for a sexual harassment complaint”. Other MPs expressed similar worries. The government was allowed 10 days to analyze the law and send it back to parliament at the request of the minister of women’s affairs, Jean Ogassapian²³⁵. In 2020, the Parliament passed anti-sexual harassment Law 205²³⁶.

Women, Peace, and Security

In 2019, a National Action Plan (NAP) to implement Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security was approved by the Lebanese government²³⁷. The strategy intends to improve women’s protection and representation in leadership roles, as well as their regular participation in discussions on issues of peace and security.

Demonstrations

In addition to legal reform efforts, many demonstrations took place to raise awareness of disability rights during the war (2006), protest violence against women (2014), the garbage crisis (2015), labor rights (2016), and economic and political corruption (2019-2020). As indicated earlier, young women were active and visible in these street protests. This voice and presence were very vocal and powerful during the short-lived October 17th uprising.

²³³ Ramadan, T. (2021). *Campaigns against child marriage in Lebanon rising amid parliament’s inability to amend law*. L’Orient Today. <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1283308/campaigns-against-child-marriage-in-lebanon-rising-amid-parliaments-inability-to-amend-law.html>

²³⁴ Khalife, L. (2016). *Lebanon’s Kafa fights to #RaiseTheAge for child brides*. StepFeed. <https://stepfeed.com/lebanon-s-kafa-fights-to-raise-the-age-for-child-brides-4037>

²³⁵ Hamze, R. (2017). *The withdrawal of the harassment law in Parliament: Gloating, mockery, and fear of opening doors*. The Legal Agenda. <https://legal-agenda.com/%d8%b3%d8%ad%d8%a8-%d9%82%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%88%d9%86-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%aa%d8%ad%d8%b1%d9%91%d8%b4-%d9%81%d9%8a-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%85%d8%ac%d9%84%d8%b3-%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%86%d9%8a%d8%a7%d8%a8%d9%8a-%d8%b4%d9%85/>

²³⁶ Jabbour, R., & Elzir, A. (2022). *Sexual harassment in the workplace in Lebanon – where are we headed?*. World Bank Blogs. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/sexual-harassment-workplace-lebanon-where-are-we-headed>

²³⁷ UN Women. (2019). *Press release: The Government of Lebanon endorses Lebanon’s First National Action Plan on UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security*. <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2019/9/press-release-lebanon-first-national-action-plan-on-wps>

Activism during the 2006 Lebanon War

According to Wehbi & Lakkis²³⁸, disability rights activists were involved in advocacy campaigns against the war that included nationwide demonstrations, as well as frontline emergency relief and reconstruction efforts during the 2006 Israeli invasion. They also raised awareness on disability issues to advance the disability rights agenda by talking about people who were injured in the war and acquired impairments or became disabled. Wehbi²³⁹ also discusses how the strategies, approaches, and imposed conditions of foreign funding during this period negatively affected disability rights activism in Lebanon, particularly the exclusion of disabled people in decision-making about their lives and imposing ideas of what the North believes to be a competent practice.

Naber & Zaatar²⁴⁰ discussed how the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 2006 interrupted the feminist and LGBTQI+ activism, as priorities changed. Activists and organizations had to stop all kinds of activism in order to address basic needs and provide shelter for people. For example, organizations such as the CRTDA had to shift from their regular programs around gender equality and social justice to focus on emergency and relief operations and other aspects such as monitoring internally displaced people centers composed largely of women and children. Moreover, the war intensified the power of sectarianism in Lebanon, which reinforced heteronormative and patriarchal demands, including the gender binary and heterosexual family ideals. This caused feminist activists to engage in such conventional frameworks of unity in the form of *"family"*, as well as made patriarchy more apparent within the political movement.

Violence against women

On International Women's Day in 2014, more than 3,000 women in Lebanon participated in a march against violence against women²⁴². According to Salameh²⁴³, there was a diversity of activists compared to the previous years, and stood out as there was no presence of mainstream political parties or prominent figures in society.

Garbage crisis

In 2015, activists led protests against the government's corruption and mismanagement of garbage collection, as waste filled the streets and neighborhoods of the country²⁴⁴. The movement was known to be the "You Stink" movement, based on the name of the leading group²⁴⁵. According to Kaedbey & Naber²⁴⁶, these protests fostered new kinds of discussions, particularly about change in the regime and regional solidarity, and mobilized feminist activists on the ground within anti-sectarian, antiracist, leftist, and/or feminist alliances. Women's involvement in the Popular Movement (al-Hirak) in Lebanon and the movement to mobilize people to demand an end to Beirut's garbage crisis culminated in the creation of the Feminist Bloc. This coalition was created by a group of feminist activists from Sawt Al Niswa who observed a lack of women's demands in political mobilizations and patriarchal structures²⁴⁷. The slogan "The patriarchal regime kills," used by the Bloc, stands for an intersectional feminist perspective that transcends gender, ethnicity, and class²⁴⁸. However, by the end of the movement, members of this bloc found it hard to continue the work considering the feelings of frustration, burnout, and exhaustion²⁴⁹.

Labor rights

On Labor Day in 2016, domestic workers marched alongside civil society organizations in support of the ILO Convention no. 189 on the provision of fair working conditions for domestic workers and to end violence against domestic workers at police stations²⁵⁰. For the past seven years, this march has been customary on Labor Day in Lebanon. It is still used to promote the rights of employees, particularly domestic workers who are frequently the targets of discriminatory laws and societal norms.

²³⁸ Wehbi, S., & Lakkis, S. (2010). Lebanese women disability rights activists: War-time experiences. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 33(5), 455–463. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2010.05.001>

²³⁹ Wehbi, S. (2011). Crossing boundaries: Foreign funding and disability rights activism in a context of war. *Disability & Society*, 26(5), 507–520. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687599.2011.589187>

²⁴⁰ Naber, N., & Zaatari, Z. (2014). Reframing the war on terror: Feminist and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) activism in the context of the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon. *Cultural Dynamics*, 26(1), 91–111. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0921374013510803>

²⁴¹ Abou-Habib, L. (2006). Lina Abou Habib interview on the Lebanon War (2006), its impact on women, and effective international aid work (video). *Women's Learning Partnership*. <https://learningpartnership.org/resource/lina-abou-habib-interview-lebanon-war-2006-its-impact-women-and-effective-international>

²⁴² Kalin, S. (2014). *Lebanese march against domestic violence in rare non-partisan protest*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/article/cnews-us-lebanon-protest-women-idCABREA270LS20140308>

²⁴³ Salameh, R. (2014). *Gender politics in Lebanon and the limits of legal reformism*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. <https://civilsociety-centre.org/paper/gender-politics-lebanon-and-limits-legal-reformism-en-ar>

Activism in the digital sphere

This generation sets itself apart by using the internet, and particularly social media, as a platform to communicate with other feminists around the world²⁵¹. This allowed women's rights and feminist activists to mobilize in the virtual sphere. In doing so, modern feminists claimed social media platforms and the Internet in particular, which connected them to their counterparts around the world. The ways in which online and offline advocacy tools have materialized into real change were demonstrated in cases such as civil marriage and violence against women²⁵².

LGBTQI+ activism

According to a queer feminist activist in a conversation with Sanaa H.²⁵³, the start of the queer movement in Lebanon was facilitated by online chat channels, such as Gay Lebanon and Lebanon forums, and other mailing lists. This allowed them to move into the public sphere, as people started going out together. This kind of momentum pushed people to talk more about sexual issues. In fact, access to the internet helped initiate the first contact between different activists who belong to the LGBTQI+ community²⁵⁴.

²⁴⁴ Nakhoul, S. (2015). *Lebanon's rubbish crisis exposes political rot*. Reuters.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-protests-crisis-insight-idUSKCN0R70GO20150907>

²⁴⁵ Jay, M. (2015). *Speaking to the organisers of Beirut's You Stink group*. The National News. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts/speaking-to-the-organisers-of-beirut-s-you-stink-group-1.9178>

²⁴⁶ Kaedbey, D., & Naber, N. (2019). Reflections on feminist interventions within the 2015 anticorruption protests in Lebanon. *Meridians*, 18(2), 457–470. <https://doi.org/10.1215/15366936-7789750>

²⁴⁷ Makki, M., Mawla, M., Khatib, I., El Mir, H., & Kaddoura, S. (2018). Lessons learned in the making of a feminist bloc. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 14(3), 363–367. <https://doi.org/10.1215/15525864-7025553>

²⁴⁸ Hashem, L. (2017). *Feminist and women's struggles in Lebanon's 'popular movement': The intersections of the public and the private*. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. <https://lb.boell.org/en/2017/01/18/feminist-and-womens-struggles-lebanons-popular-movement-intersections-public-and-private>

²⁴⁹ Makki, M., Mawla, M., Khatib, I., El Mir, H., & Kaddoura, S. (2018). Lessons learned in the making of a feminist bloc. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 14(3), 363–367. <https://doi.org/10.1215/15525864-7025553>

²⁵⁰ KAFA. (2016). Migrant domestic workers demands on workers' day 2016. <https://kafa.org.lb/ar/node/208>

²⁵¹ Hammoud, S. (2022). *Digital transformation and feminist activism on social media in Lebanon*. European Institute of the Mediterranean. <https://www.iemed.org/publication/digital-transformation-and-feminist-activism-on-social-media-in-lebanon/>

Sexual harassment

The Adventures of Salwa campaign was started by a group of young feminist activists centered on Salwa, a 2D animated character who uses her red bag to combat sexual harassment in a variety of settings²⁵⁵. The campaign went beyond raising awareness through awareness-raising videos to include discussion groups, research, protests and street actions, a sexual harassment help hotline, and a draft law²⁵⁶. Salwa's quick films were inspired by scenes from the non-mixed women's discussion groups the group set up in feminism-focused spaces, colleges, and high schools. Young women had the chance to discuss sexual harassment, share their own stories, and "break the taboo and start talking about it" during these forums. The ad linked to a crowdsourced map called QawemeHarassment where individuals could locate occurrences of sexual harassment on a map and was inspired by Egypt's Harassmap²⁵⁷. The map lost popularity since mobile internet access was not as widespread in Lebanon at the time as it was in Egypt. Another group released a new map in 2016 called Harasstracker²⁵⁸.

"Anti-prostitution" campaign by KAFA

In 2014, KAFA also introduced the "anti-prostitution" campaign "Al Hawa Ma Byinshara" ("Sex/love cannot be bought") in September 2014²⁵⁹. KAFA considers prostitution a form of sexual exploitation in which women are forced into it in Lebanon and around the world²⁶⁰. The movement demanded that the abusive and violent behaviors that women engage in during "prostitution," as well as human trafficking, be made public²⁶¹. However, a lot of observers and civil society players disagreed with KAFA's strategy, taking the position that "prostitution" should not be treated as a crime but rather should be legalized and regulated like sex employment is in many other nations²⁶².

²⁵² Hyndman-Rizk, N. (2020). New media/new feminism(s): The Lebanese women's movement online and offline. In R. Stephan & M. Charrad (Eds.), *Women rising: In and beyond the Arab Spring* (pp. 173–184). New York University Press. <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479846641.003.0020>

²⁵³ H, S. (2015). *A political movement for Lebanon? A conversation on feminism and queerness*. Al Kohl Journal. Retrieved from <https://kohljournal.press/a-political-movement-in-lebanon>

²⁵⁴ Abdel Khalek, M. N. (2020). *Advocating for the rights of sexual minorities within a sectarian system: The case of postwar Lebanon* (thesis). https://laur.lau.edu.lb:8443/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10725/13515/Mazen_N_Abel_Khalek_Thesis_Redacted.pdf?sequence=3

²⁵⁵ Ayoub, N. (2012). "Salwa's adventures" – a women's initiative in Lebanon: No to sexual harassment. Qantara. <https://en.qantara.de/content/salwas-adventures-a-womens-initiative-in-lebanon-no-to-sexual-harassment>

²⁵⁶ Kobaissy, F. (2010). *Salwa's guide to fighting sexual harassment*. Al Raida Journal. <https://inhouse.lau.edu.lb/iwsaw/raida131-132/EN/p01-88.pdf>

²⁵⁷ Young, C. (2014). HarassMap: Using crowdsourced data to map sexual harassment in Egypt. *Technology Innovation Management Review*, 4(3), 7–13. <https://doi.org/10.22215/timreview/770>

²⁵⁸ Massena, F. (2016). *How a new website is helping Lebanese women avoid sexual harassment*. Al-Monitor. <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/03/lebanon-sexual-harassment-awareness.html>

OCTOBER 17TH 2019 AND ITS AFTERMATH: POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC DISCONTENT (2019-PRESENT)

In late 2019 and early 2020, the demonstrations on October 17 against political and economic corruption were led by women²⁶³ and queer folks, as graffiti denouncing homophobia adorned the city of Beirut²⁶⁴. The slogans and demands of the demonstrators were centered on feminist concerns, including passing a unified personal status law, ending violence against women in all of its forms, abolishing the Kafala system, as well as the inclusion of women in all their diversity as well as persons with disabilities²⁶⁵. One prominent activist, Rasha Younes, discussed how this movement created a new collective consciousness where there was an organic fusing of different groups and identities, indicating a departure from identity politics²⁶⁶. Although many of the protestors belonged to organizations, they were part of the mobilization as individuals and activists rather than representatives of their organizations²⁶⁷.

²⁵⁹ KAFA. (2014). Annual report. <https://kafa.org.lb/sites/default/files/2019-01/PRpdf-82-635689245975040950.pdf>

²⁶⁰ KAFA. (n.d.b). *Exploitation and trafficking in women*. <https://kafa.org.lb/en/node/176>

²⁶¹ Jabbour, G. (2014). Exploring the demand for prostitution: *What male buyers say about their motives, practices, and perceptions*. KAFA. <https://kafa.org.lb/sites/default/files/2019-01/PRpdf-69-635469857409407867.pdf>

²⁶² Reda, A. (2020). *Sex workers as workers: A critique of abolitionist approaches to sex work in Lebanon*. Kohl Journal. <https://kohljournal.press/sex-workers-workers>

²⁶³ Elbasnaly, D., & Knipp, K. (2019). *Women lead Lebanon's protests*. DW. <https://www.dw.com/en/women-led-protests-in-lebanon-inspire-middle-east-feminists/a-50957926>

²⁶⁴ Nagle, J., & Fakhoury, T. (2022). *Resisting sectarianism: Queer activism in postwar Lebanon*. Zed Books.

²⁶⁵ Abou-Habib, L. (2020). *Women in revolution: A fourth wave of feminism?* <https://www.aub.edu.lb/ifi/news/Pages/women-in-revolution-a-fourth-wave-of-feminism.aspx>

²⁶⁶ Nassif, G. (2021). *Resistance, gender, and identity politics: A conversation with Rasha Younes*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. <https://doi.org/10.28943/CSR.005.005>

²⁶⁷ Fournouzlian, S. L. (2021). *A non-'sectarian' Lebanon*. (thesis). https://laur.lau.edu.lb:8443/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10725/13709/Sandra_L_Fournouzlian_Thesis_Redacted.pdf?sequence=1

QUEER ACTIVISTS' RESPONSES TO CRISES

LGBTQI+ activists and leaders responded to the economic crisis in Lebanon by being a source of support in various forms for those who were displaced and/or neglected in the complete absence of the government²⁶⁸. The Queer Relief Fund, established by a group of activists from the queer community, worked together to provide direct assistance for those who were most marginalized: the queer community, migrant workers, and the elderly. Services and products distributed include hot meals, food boxes, medication, sanitary and menstrual products, and direct cash assistance for medical conditions, reconstruction, and rent²⁶⁹. According to Khoury & Traboulsi²⁷⁰, the Yalla Care Coalition was created as a call for action to be able to coordinate emergency responses through a network for marginalized and oppressed groups. It consisted of eight organizations, including Haven for Artists, Marsa Sexual Health Center, Queer Relief Fund, LebMASH, Arab Foundation for Freedoms and Equality, Skoun, SIDC, and MOSAIC, all of which are inclusive of marginalized communities and work toward compiling data and providing support and aid. Through a Go-FundMe campaign, the coalition started fundraising efforts in May 2020 to respond to the needs of the LGBTQI+ community amid the COVID-19 outbreak in early 2020.

Following the Beirut Blast on August 4, 2020, Marsa Sexual Health Center, Haven for Artists, and the Queer Relief Fund worked collaboratively on relief efforts related to the explosion, including but not limited to financial assistance, renovation, reconstruction of shelters, assistance with advanced rent, relocation of shelters, food security, medical intervention, surgeries, and fundraising. In addition, Haven for Artists, a cultural feminist organization in Beirut that intersects art and activism, turned their space into a shelter for vulnerable individuals who had lost their homes after the blast²⁷¹. Even while individuals who are part of the organization were dealing with the crisis and trauma, they worked in emergency response for those whom they knew needed it.

²⁶⁸ Saade, T. (2020). *Beirut's LGBTQ community is trying to leave Lebanon*. Vice.

<https://www.vice.com/en/article/vx88q9/beirut-lgbtq-community-is-trying-to-leave-lebanon>

²⁶⁹ Alameh, K. (2020). *Queer Relief Fund | How this activists initiative provides support for marginalized victims of the Beirut explosion*. Jdeed Magazine. <http://jdeedmagazine.com/queer-relief-fund-how-this-activists-initiative-provides-support-for-marginalized-victims-of-the-beirut-explosion/>

²⁷⁰ Khoury, C., & Traboulsi, K. (2021). *Yalla Care Coalition - A descriptive report*. Haven for Artists. <https://cdn-5e344ff7f911c80ca0df760f.closte.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/87/2022/02/YALLA-CARE-Report-2021-Edited.pdf>

²⁷¹ Ekanayake, R. (2021). *Spearheading a haven for creatives in Lebanon*. Womena. <https://womena.com/read/spearheading-a-haven-for-creatives-in-lebanon/>

MEDIA COVERAGE

There was an increased attention to the role women, queer and feminist organizers have played in the protest movement through different forms of media. Local coverage is largely restricted to alternative platforms and not mainstream ones such as Beirut Today, Megaphone, al-Modon, and others as mainstream media continue to be restrained by sectarian and traditional topics. These articles highlight numerous organizational endeavors by feminist activists and emphasize matters such as women's presence helping to create a more secure environment²⁷², spray paints across Lebanese walls with feminist slogans, and the reclaiming of public spaces²⁷³, showcasing women's "leadership" within the protest movement²⁷⁴.

Feminist organizers incorporated feminist demands and gender equality in the wider sociopolitical demands that were commonplace throughout the protest movement and focused on social, economic, and political issues. Women's frontline presence also meant them standing up to violence from security forces and militia supporters²⁷⁵. In Duque's CNN article, she mentions that women "have been key mobilizers" in the uprising, noting their role in "leading marches, organizing sit-ins, chanting, discussing politics, and setting up tents, among other functions"²⁷⁶. Furthermore, the news pieces highlight how women's frontline action in Lebanon is inspiring feminists across other Arab countries to stand up in a back-and-forth between masculine ridicule and feminist response attempts²⁷⁷.

In addition, journalistic pieces of work such as Hamzeh's article in al-Modon highlight how women were able to break stereotypical images of Lebanese women, from ones portraying women as only interested in fashion trends to ones portraying them as fierce fighters and defenders of their rights²⁷⁸. The article also highlights how feminist organizers such as Alia Awada challenged claims that the "revolution is female" in favor of claims that the "revolution in Lebanon is feminist", as feminism discusses a wide range of socioeconomic issues and in Lebanon change demands by feminist have incorporated gender equality as part of the uprising's general demands. Policy demands that addressed issues such as reforms of personal status laws and child marriage also gained traction²⁷⁹. A feminist march on the 3rd of November 2019 and the role that women's rights and organizations have played have been noted by articles such as that of CIVICUS Monitor²⁸⁰. A piece in Peace Insight (2020) presented a compilation of "short stories, observations, and experiences, collected and assembled by writer and local peacebuilding expert in Lebanon, Sawssan Abou-Zahr".

²⁷² Rose, S. (2019). *Lebanese women are breaking taboos to be face of protests*. The National News. <https://www.thenationalnews.com/world/mena/lebanese-women-are-breaking-taboos-to-be-face-of-protests-1.927728>.

²⁷³ Kowal, C. and Fosgrau, S.S. (2019). *Women are on the frontlines of the Lebanese protests*. Beirut Today. <https://beirut-today.com/2019/12/02/women-frontlines-lebanese-protests/>

²⁷⁴ CIVICUS Monitor (2020). *Lebanon: Unprecedented use of violence in anti-government protests*. CIVICUS Monitor. <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/lebanon-unprecedented-use-violence-anti-government-protests/>

²⁷⁵ Anderson & Cheeseman. (2019). *Women stand defiantly at the vanguard of Lebanon's protest movement*. Middle East Eye. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/women-stand-defiantly-vanguard-lebanons-protest-movement>

²⁷⁶ Duque (2019). *Lebanon's protests could mark a victory for women*. CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/11/22/opinions/lina-duque-lebanons-protests-could-mark-a-victory-for-women/index.html>

²⁷⁷ Elbasnaly, D. (2019). *Women lead Lebanon's protests*. DW. <https://www.dw.com/en/women-led-protests-in-lebanon-inspire-middle-east-feminists/a-50957926>.

²⁷⁸ Hamzeh, R. (2020). *"The revolution is female" in 17 October... And after it women won't stay silent* (الثورة "أنفى" في 17 تشرين.. وبعدها لن تسكت امرأة). al-Modon. <https://shorturl.at/vCHlW>

²⁷⁹ Fakihi, L. (2019). *Lebanon's women have fought for change – and should get it*. Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/11/01/lebanons-women-have-fought-change-and-should-get-it>.

Other coverages focused on a historical and dynamic analysis of protest movements from the point of view of queer movements, such as Sahar Mandour's article for Amnesty International titled "[f]ifteen years of LGBTI community activism in Lebanon: A story of existence and oppression"²⁸¹ and Cindy Salame's analysis²⁸² in the journal *Kohl* where she claims how "it is instrumental to consider the potentialities generated by the October 17 revolution for queer1 movements to construct new solidarities". A chant against homophobia was discussed in an article by Ali Harb in *Time* titled "'This Revolution Has Raised the Bar.' How Lebanon's Protests Have Created a Surprising Space for LGBT Rights"²⁸³. From their part, Human Rights Watch's coverage of the Lebanese protest movements also claims "Lebanon's LGBT Reclaim Their Power" in a 2020 article where the organization said that "[l]esbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people and their rights in Lebanon are part and parcel of the nationwide protests that began on October 17, 2019"²⁸⁴.

Finally, a 2021 report by UN Women documented sexism against female protesters and sexist slander and harassment against female parliamentarians, government officials, and reporters. Personal details of female reporters were circulated on social media, an online campaign harassing a female reporter took place and the report claims that the security situation for female reporters covering the protests was deteriorating. As part of the report, female reporters "described encountering different forms of violence than their male counterparts; the violence towards the female reporters was considerably more intense and gender-based" (pp.9)²⁸⁵. The study highlights how "female reporters covering the protests were disproportionately targeted with more — and more intense — physical and online violence than their male counterparts were" (pp. 4)²⁸⁶.

²⁸⁰ CIVICUS Monitor (2020). *Lebanon: Unprecedented use of violence in anti-government protests*. CIVICUS Monitor. <https://monitor.civicus.org/explore/lebanon-unprecedented-use-violence-anti-government-protests/>.

²⁸¹ Mandour, S. (2019). *Fifteen years of LGBTI community activism in Lebanon: A story of existence and oppression*. Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/press-release/2019/05/lgbt-community-activism-in-lebanon-a-story-of-existence-and-oppression/>

²⁸² Salame, C. (2021). Forging solidarities: Queer voices in the October 17 revolution. *Kohl*, 7(1). <https://kohl.journal.press/forging-solidarities>.

²⁸³ Harb, A. (2019). *'This revolution has raised the bar.' How Lebanon's protests have created a surprising space for LGBT rights*. *Time*. <https://time.com/5726465/lgbt-issues-lebanon-protests/>.

²⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch. (2020) 'Lebanon's LGBT People Reclaim Their Power', *Human Rights Watch*. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/07/lebanons-lgbt-people-reclaim-their-power>

²⁸⁵ UN Women (2021) 'Comparative Study of Violence Against Female Reporters and Male Reporters During Lebanon's 2019 Protest Movement'. <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/09/comparative-study-of-violence-against-female-reporters-and-male-reporters>.

²⁸⁶ UN Women (2021) 'Comparative Study of Violence Against Female Reporters and Male Reporters During Lebanon's 2019 Protest Movement'. <https://arabstates.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/09/comparative-study-of-violence-against-female-reporters-and-male-reporters>

**WHERE DO WE
GO FROM HERE?**

THE LEBANESE FEMINIST CIVIL SOCIETY PLATFORM

The Feminist Civil Society Platform in Lebanon comprises 52 feminist civil society participants and activists brought together by UN Women following the August 4th explosion. They collectively formulated a comprehensive Charter of Demands to prioritize women's issues in the response strategy to the disaster. Subsequently, the Platform has undertaken numerous advocacy initiatives, such as aiding in the formulation of sector plans within the Lebanon Reform, Recovery & Reconstruction Framework (3RF), along with engagements with donor community representatives in Lebanon, as well as leaders from the United Nations, European Union, and the World Bank, to communicate their gender-focused priorities and requests.

ANTI-RIGHTS, BACKLASH, AND THE LGBTQI+ MOVEMENT

The backlash against the queer community and its organizations gained ground following the October 17th uprising. Queer folks who had played an important role in expanding the narrative and demands of the uprisings and in bringing in a much-needed intersectional and inclusive framework were hunted down in more ways than one. This included public threats by armed militias as well as physical intimidation and violence. On the other hand, a number of writings based on interviews and close encounters with queer activists note the divisions within the movement, a matter that is shared within all social and justice movements. In an interview with five queer feminists by Sanaa H.²⁸⁷, feminist activists pointed out that Meem was developed organically to support and exchange services, as well as for political discourse, work, and awareness. However, they also discussed the fragmentation of the political movement due to the lack of intersectionality and a shared goal, or agreement on its implementation, among the LGBTQI+ community in Lebanon. One of the activists particularly addressed the lack of political movement in Meem and Nasawiya, and criticized how people associate the end of such feminist collectives with the end of the political movement, as if the movement revolves around these collectives and there was no political discourse before them. Moreover, one of the activists pointed out that the members did not work in the same way. The historical review of genesis, growth, maturity, and tensions within the queer movement is a matter deserving in-depth reflection that is feminist, supportive, safe, and candid and is beyond the scope of this book. It does however merit attention in such a way that focuses on amplifying the voices of the activists.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Since women's suffrage in Lebanon, very little progress has been made in terms of women's political participation. According to Henderson et al.²⁸⁸, female representatives of political parties in Lebanon identified the following barriers to women's participation in politics: (1) cultural and patriarchal traditions and norms, (2) laws and women's rights, (3) challenges in transitioning between private and public sphere, (3) fear, (4) lack of confidence, (5) deference to men's decision-making, (6) gender inequality in finances, (7) lack of training programs, and (8) difficulty in accessing political networks. Based on recent studies by the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship²⁸⁹ and Kaston²⁹⁰, it seems that there have not been any major improvements to the challenges and barriers to women's political participation since 2015.

Some studies show that it is perhaps easier for women to participate in municipal elections than in parliamentary elections. Kassem²⁹¹ found an increase in the number of women running in municipal than for parliamentary elections, which could be for the following reasons (1) municipal elections are held every six years as opposed to four years, and (2) laws governing municipal elections are non-confessional. While a gender quota is not necessarily the solution to resolving the challenges that women face in the political sphere, women's rights and feminist activists have been trying to put a gender quota on the table since 2006, but to no avail. This could be due to various reasons, including the general public's perceptions of women's leadership abilities, the idea that a quota is not democratic, and the assumption that giving women political power may allow them to change laws, such as the Personal Status Laws, that would potentially threaten the power of religious entities and leaders in Lebanon.

²⁸⁷ H, S. (2015). *A political movement for Lebanon? A conversation on feminism and queerness*. Al Kohl Journal. <https://kohljournal.press/a-political-movement-in-lebanon>

²⁸⁸ Henderson, T., Nelson, C., & Chemali, Z. (2015). Increasing women's political participation in Lebanon: Reflections on hurdles, opportunities and hope. *Journal of Politics and Law*, 8(4), 233. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jpl.v8n4p233>

Rowayheb²⁹² argues that the role of political leaders and their political interests play a huge role in why there has not been a proper empowerment of women's political participation in Lebanon, as they have a huge influence on whether women make it in the political sphere or not. In most cases, women who make it to the political sphere are affiliated or related to male family members who are or were politicians. Many women parliamentarians were able to make it because they were the being the widows, wives, daughters, and sisters of male political "gures", such as Nayla Mouawad who became an MP after the assassination of her husband President Renee Mouawad, Settrida Geagea gained a parliamentary seat when her husband, the head of Lebanese forces was in the prison, Bahia Hariri gained her political influence through her brother the late prime minister Rafic Hariri²⁹³. This is in line with Stephan's study that explores the role of kinship in women's in their activism²⁹⁴. According to the author, women's rights activists in Lebanon use their extended family networks, referred to as Mahsoubieh, to establish their credibility in society through their family name as well as the position and influence they occupy.

²⁸⁹ Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship. (2023). *Upcoming municipal elections in Lebanon and women's political participation*. https://asfariinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Shifting-Narratives_OutcomeDocument.pdf

²⁹⁰ Kaston, E. S. (2022). *Structural challenges to women's political representation: The cases of Lebanon and Tunisia. (thesis)*. https://scholarworks.aub.edu.lb/bitstream/handle/10938/23340/KastonEmil_2022.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

²⁹¹ Sbaity Kassem, F. (2012). Can women break through? women in municipalities: Lebanon in comparative perspective. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 35(4), 233–255. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2012.04.002>

²⁹² Rowayheb, M. G. (2014). Lebanese leaders: Are they a factor of political change? *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa*, 5(3), 181–200. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21520844.2014.961396>

²⁹³ Khoury, D. (2013). *Women's political participation in Lebanon*. Middle East. Heinrich Böll Stiftung. <https://lb.boell.org/en/2013/09/23/womens-political-participation-lebanon>

NATIONAL WOMEN MACHINERIES AND THE CRITICISM OF NCLW'S WORK

Civil society activists criticized the work of NCLW, claiming that all they do is present “flowery reports to the UN on the developments achieved since Beijing”²⁹⁵. In addition, El-Hage²⁹⁶ argues that women are segregated from decision-making processes in the NCLW's gendered structure as the NCLW displaces international pressure on women's rights from an elitist perspective. She adds that not only does NCLW become the scapegoat of the Lebanese government's unresponsiveness, but also fragments women's advocacy groups. Some activists pointed out the signs of state feminism, including the lack of transparency and accountability, competition for funding from different organizations, selective choice of issues to address, and a representation in international organizations, while sidelining civil society organizations in terms of presence, representation, and voice²⁹⁷.

²⁹⁴ Stephan, R. (2017). Lebanese women's rights beyond the Cedar Revolution. In S. Khamis & A. Mili (Eds.), *Arab women's activism and socio-political transformation: Unfinished gendered revolutions* (pp. 73–88). Springer International Publishing.

²⁹⁵ Khattab, L. (2010). *Civil society in a sectarian context: the women's movement in post-war Lebanon*. (thesis). https://laur.lau.edu.lb:8443/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10725/237/Lara_Khattab_Thesis_Redacted.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y

²⁹⁶ El-Hage, S. (2015). *Between fitna, fawda, and feminism: Implications of religious institutions on Lebanon's women's movement*. Civil Society Knowledge Centre. <https://doi.org/10.28943/CSKC.001.30003>

²⁹⁷ Abou-Habib, L. (2021). Feminist consciousness in nineties Lebanon: A journey of discovery, hope, and transformations. In *Feminist 90s: On the framework, journey, and the conversations*. <https://www.alwarsha.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Lina-Abou-Habib-Feminist-consciousness-in-nineties-Lebanon.pdf>

²⁹⁸ Abisaab, M. H. (2010). *Militant women of a fragile nation*. Syracuse University Press.

LIMITATIONS

This manuscript is a contribution towards localizing the writing and documentation of women's rights and feminist movements in Lebanon. It has been developed through an extensive scoping of the existing literature as well as a review of the ways in which the various forms of existing media discussed and represented women's rights and feminist activism. This volume is incomplete. It is not an exhaustive encyclopedia. It simply seeks to tell the story of these movements and how this story is intimately connected to significant changes, upheavals, and transformations in Lebanon. While scoping the literature, we noticed a significant gender and geographical imbalance in the writings on women in Lebanon. This is resonant with the situation in other countries of the region²⁹⁸. It is also apparent that the role that women have played in naming and shaping struggles remains invisible in the dominant narratives on labor, social and national activism. This is not surprising since the available local narratives are predominantly produced by male elite. Issa²⁹⁹ notes that the mobilization of other vulnerable groups, notably migrant domestic workers in Lebanon during the nineties is also incomplete. The emergence of social media and online networks may have made it easier for the younger generation of feminist activists to document their movement as well as own and shape one's own narrative³⁰⁰. Meanwhile, telling the stories of the women's rights and feminist activism in Lebanon remains work in progress and any piece of work will remain incomplete until we are all able to weave our stories through our personal journey.

²⁹⁹ Issa, S. (2021). Surviving displacement, alienation, and Kafala in the nineties: An oral history of grassroots organizing. In *Feminist 90s: On the framework, journey, and the conversations*. <https://www.alwarsha.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Lina-Abou-Habib-Feminist-consciousness-in-nineties-Lebanon.pdf>

³⁰⁰ Qazzaz, H. (2021). Fighting all demons: Feminist voices on popular protests in Lebanon and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. *Gender & Development*, 29(2–3), 431–446. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2021.1978726>

TIMELINE OF MAJOR EVENTS

Year	Key Event
1924	Formation of Women's Union in Lebanon and Syria
1924	The Presbyterian Mission established the American Junior College for Women as the first women's college in the Middle East
1924	Formation of Society for Women's Renaissance
1928	First women's conference in Beirut
1943	Demonstrations for Lebanon's independence and political rights
1935-1946	Fighting Regie's monopoly and colonial rule
1944	The First Arab Women's Conference
1947	Formation of Christian Women's Solidarity Association
1952	The Roxy Movie Theatre Demonstration
1952	Formation of Lebanese Council of Women by Lebanese feminists Ibtihaj Qaddurah and Laure Moghaizel
1953	Lebanese women obtained women's suffrage
1960	Article 5 of Decree no. 15 was amended to allow foreign women married to Lebanese spouses to become Lebanese citizens
1963	Election of the first woman parliamentarian, Myrna Boustany
1965	Lebanon became signs the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which grants citizens (men and women) their right to choose their citizenship
1967	Independence of the women's organizations from political parties
1970	Legal recognition of the League for Lebanese Women's Rights
1971	Campaigning for a unified personal status law, including a bill for a unified personal status law
1972	Al-Ghandour Factory strikes
1973	The Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World was founded
1974	Right to travel without husband's permission
1974	Protesting economic policies
1975	The World Conference on Women, Mexico City

1975-1990	Lebanese Civil War
1976	Establishment of the Lebanese Women Democratic Gathering
1977	Ratification of the ILO Convention
1980	World Conference of the UN for Women in Copenhagen
1983	Legalization of contraception
1985	The Third World Conference on Women
1987	Women gain equal accessibility to social benefits
1990	Laure Moghaizel, with a delegation from the Human Rights Association, makes a proposal for a clause to be added to the Lebanese constitution to commit Lebanon to international treaties regarding human rights issues
1993	Women gain the right to testify in matters related to land registry
1994	Women gain the right to engage in trade and access to life insurance without the husband's permission
1994	Women gain the right to pursue a career in diplomacy
1995	The Fourth Conference on Women in Beijing
1997	Ratification of CEDAW
1997	The "My country, my town, my municipality" nationwide campaign by LADE
1999	"My nationality is a right for me and my family" nationwide campaign by CRTDA
1999	Amending Article 562 from the Lebanese Penal Code to stipulate an exemption from punishment in honor crimes
2000	Enhanced maternity leave and parity in the workplace
2001	Establishment of the Lebanese Women's Network
2004	The Anti-War and Anti-Globalization Movement
2004	The first administration to have female ministers
2004	The establishment of Helem, the first LGBTQI+ organisation in Lebanon and the region
2005	The nationwide campaign 13/15 by The Network for the Rights of the Family launched to reform custody laws in all confessions
2006	The first female Supreme Court judge

2006	A draft bill to for a 30% quota for women in the Parliament by the National Commission on Electoral Law
2006	2006 Lebanon War
2007	Meem, an LGBTQI+ group, was created as a splitoff from Helem
2009	Launch of Sawt Al Niswa, a feminist knowledge production platform
2010	Article 59 of the Lebanese Labour Law was amended to grant Palestinian refugee workers the same rights as Lebanese workers
2010	Nasawiya was founded
2010	The Anti-Racism Movement (ARM) was created as a grassroots movement of activists and feminists, along with migrant workers and migrant domestic workers
2010	The Adventures of Salwa, a grassroots campaign against sexual harassment
2011	The first woman president of the Bar Association- Amale Haddad
2011	A law penalising the crime of people-trafficking was issued
2011	Article 562 was repealed to abolish the legal codification of honor crimes
2011	Raising the age of maternal custody in Sunni confessions
2011	Equalizing men and women in inheritance fee-related exemptions
2011	Back to the lobbying for a unified personal status law by KAFA
2012	Adoption of the the National Strategy for Women in Lebanon (2011-2021) by the Lebanese government
2013	Extending maternity leave for women
2014	Extending maternity leave for women
2014	Issuance of Law no. 293 for the Protection of Women and Family Members from Domestic Violence
2014	Article 3 of Law no. 293 stipulated the amendments of Articles 487, 488, and 489, which discriminated against women with regards to adultery
2014	"Anti-prostitution" social media campaign "Al Hawa Ma Byinshara"by KAFA
2015	Formation of the Feminist Bloc during the garbage crisis protests

2015	Establishment of the Syndicate of Men and Women Domestic Workers
2016	Creation of a Ministry of Women's Affairs
2016	Labour Day marches by domestic workers
2016	Campaigning against Article 522 that allows a rapist to marry his victim(s) to evade prosecution
2017	Abolishment of Article 522
2017	Establishment of Ethiopian collective Eгна Legna Besidet
2017	Proposing a bill to allow civil marriage in Lebanon
2017	The Parliament passed a bill allowing married women to run for municipal office in their hometowns instead of having to run in their husbands' hometowns
2017	The personal status law of the Druze confession in Lebanon amended to raise age of maternal custody from 7 to 12 years for boys and 9 to 14 years for girls, and Article 3 prohibits marriage for boys and girls until they reach the ages of 16 and 15, respectively
2017	Draft law to end early/child marriage
2017	Draft law on sexual harassment approved by Parliament, retroactively rejected few minutes later
2019	The Council of Ministers endorsed the NAP 1325 on Women, Peace and Security
2019	October 2019 protests
2020-2022	COVID-19 pandemic outbreak
2020	Parliament passes Law No. 205 to criminalize sexual harassment
2020	Beirut Blast
2020	Feminist and women's organizations respond to the Beirut Blast
2020	Migrant domestic workers stranded in the streets or consulates
2021	First domestic worker in Lebanon to file slavery case against employer
2021	Women activists fight period poverty
2021	Proposal for women's quota in the parliamentary elections by Fiftyfifty
2022	Armed woman breaks into Lebanon's BLOM Bank demanding her savings
2022	Unlawful crackdown on LGBTQI+ gatherings
2022	Lebanon elects record number of women to parliament

lebanon.fes.de

**FRIEDRICH
EBERT  STIFTUNG**

IMPRINT

The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. Commercial use of media published by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is not permitted without the written consent of the FES.

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Lebanon Office
157 Marfa' – 1st Fl., Rue 73 (Saad Zaghloul), Majidiye | Beirut 7306 2012
<https://lebanon.fes.de>

Responsible for content:
Merin Abbass, Resident Representative, FES Lebanon Office.

To request our publications:
Info.lebanon@fes.de

visit our digital publications library





Lina Abou-Habib is the Director of the Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut. She also teaches undergraduate and graduate gender courses at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at the American University of Beirut and is the Gender Project Director for the AUB MEPI-TLS Program. She currently serves on the Board of the Urgent Action Fund and is the Chair of the Doria Feminist Fund. Abou-Habib is a member of the Editorial Committee of the Gender and Development Journal published by Oxfam.

Lina Abou-Habib was previously the Executive Director of Women's Learning Partnership and before that, the director of CRTD.A. She has worked extensively with the Royal Tropical Institute (KIT) and with several international and regional organisations in designing and managing programmes in the Middle East and North Africa region on issues related to gender and citizenship, economy, trade and gender and leadership. She served as the Secretary and then as the Chair of the Board of the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). She has considerable experience in feminist qualitative research, gender analysis, and training/facilitation and writes regularly on the issues of care work, citizenship, feminist recovery, and feminist movements in the MENA region. She was a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Applied Humanities, Institute of Public Policy (Auckland University of Technology). As a global gender consultant, Abou-Habib worked in most countries of the MENA region, in West Africa and the Caucasus.