THE MEDIA COVERAGE OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND FEMINIST MOVEMENTS IN LEBANON

Between the Late 1800s and the Early 2020s

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About the author

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INTRODUCTION

Media coverage of women's rights and feminist movements in Lebanon and the Arab world in general has been scarcely studied in a historically developmental manner. Such studies have focused on specific types of media, including modern traditional journalistic platforms, such as newspapers and media companies. Moreover, few studies have examined the role of media in stereotyping women in political, journalistic and activist roles in Lebanon (Mady, 2015; Iborscheva, 2012). Indeed, Sakr (2007, pp. 89) asserts that generations of "Arab women journalists and activists are among the neglected historical forces" in the development of Arab television, which can't be separated from other media forms and the type of ethos that surrounds media coverage of women's rights organizers.

For the last century, colonialism and patriarchy have reinforced each other in the Arab world to instill discriminatory and oppressive power dynamics, and keep governance controlled by a few ruling elite. Such dynamics have been repeatedly challenged by women's rights and feminist organizers, in organizational, written and representational fashions. However, the history of feminist movements in Lebanon and the Arab world can be traced centuries and millennials back, which challenges a dominant trend of orientalist historiography which claims that feminism is a recent phenomenon in the region, proving that the Arab world has long been ripe with feminist initiatives, often in complementarity with anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles. Feminist movements in Lebanon and the region are thus best understood as historically intersectional, challenging patriarchal and imperial interests and noticing the mutually reinforcing characteristics of oppressive structures.

The progress in dominant discourses around patriarchal structures cannot be isolated from broader sociopolitical developments in the region. Media coverage evolved relatedly, and the choice of themes within media coverage reflected contextually-relevant discussions around the role of women and feminist movements. As Arab world studies academic Miriam Cooke asserts (1987, pp. 57), language is "the reservoir of collective remembrance", and this review extends language to include its more general discursive dimension, expressed through various forms of media.

Accordingly, this desk review focuses on providing a far-from-extensive overview of discourses, representations and overall coverages of women's rights and feminist movements in Lebanon and the Arab World. It spans the late 1800s up until the present day, glossing over the major dominant discourses and societal trends, dividing it based on decades, major historical events such as the Civil War or World Wars, or periods where a series of close interconnected feminist initiatives took place which can't be separated on a decadal basis.

The review was done with the support of the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's Lebanon office, following a number of meetings and discussions. It is situated as part of a wider study on the history of women's rights and feminist movements organizing in Lebanon and the MENA region. Its dissemination follows the dissemination of a manuscript on Reclaiming and Decolonizing the History of the Women's Rights and Feminist Movements in Lebanon, written by Lina Abou Habib, Carla Akil and Marwan Issa.

Similar to the manuscript, the research stems from an appreciation of the importance of archiving efforts around women's rights and feminist movements in Lebanon, the region and the world, and to provide organizers and scholars with an enhanced contextual grounding and understanding of the context in which such movements operate and lead.

Scoping of Media Coverage

Media coverage is a wide, umbrella term. For scoping purposes, the desk review includes the wider range of media, going beyond traditional journalistic coverage to include novels, theatrical rep-

resentations, and other types of media concerned with covering and shaping the discourse around women's rights and feminist movements in Lebanon and the Arab world.

The review will also involve a temporally-relevant analysis of the roles different types of media played in certain eras or time periods, as well as the structures within and around media institutions such as internal dynamics within journalistic rooms, the contexts in which novels were written and internal organizational structures that impacted the discourse on women's rights and feminist movements.

Choice of Time Period

The review covers the period from the late 1800s to the early 2020s (2022), for two specific reasons.

First, media coverage focused on women's rights and feminist causes was present long before the 1800s if we take wider definitions of media, taking on several forms in earlier centuries. However, the exponential increase in journals focused on such issues and the development of a modern type of media coverage occupied with such issues, both technically and philosophically, can be adequately placed around *Nahda* or Arab Awakening narratives.

The second reason for such periodical scoping rests in the simple and modest acknowledgement of the scarcity of resources available beforehand, the limited time period for developing this desk review, and the scope of the research involved, which adequately restricts the review to more modernly defined terms of media coverage. With this being said, earlier forms of media coverage of women's rights and feminist movements are definitely needed to build on and enhance our understanding of historical processes..

LATE 1800S AND EARLY 1900S

A RISE IN WOMEN-HEADED JOURNALS AND GENDERED DEBATES

The late 1800s were an important period for women's rights in the Levant and the overall Arab region, as efforts were distinctly seen in the foundation of numerous women's associations such as Bakurat Suriya (Syrian Dawn) in Beirut and Zahrat al-Ihsan (Flower of Charity). Women-led salons were also established in Aleppo, Cairo and Alexandria, and notably, women-led news platforms and magazines emerged on the scene, most notably in Egypt and Greater Syria by Lebanese women's rights journalists, writers and advocates (Ashour et al., 2008).

The societal and economic transformations witnessed throughout the 19th century had important reciprocal ramifications on discourses around women's rights in Lebanon and the Arab region. Nahda era narratives reflected discursive changes within the Ottoman Empire and across global avenues (Zachs, 2018), going into questions on culture, the economy, political rights, and many more.

The second half of the 19th century saw rising attention toward a range of gender issues, especially in the Greater Syria region and Beirut (Zachs and Halevi, 2009). Beirut saw the establishment of the Sisters of Love women's society in 1847, for example, which focused on providing literacy training, a home for wayward girls and a tuberculosis sanatorium (Robinson, 2015).

Al Nahda al-Nisā'iyya

Furthermore, scholarship has also highlighted the concurrency of the Nahda, or Arab Awakening, with a women's awakening, or al nahda al-nisā'iyya, where a drive for improving women's access to education was noticeable. Salons, press, journals, charities and other media played the role of bringing women together and centering gender issues within ongoing societal discussions (Robinson, 2015).

Women's rights initiatives in the late 1800s, as well as the early 1900s and 1910s were focused to a large degree on educational

and charity-related initiatives (Al Rahby, 2014). A large portion of stakeholders came from the Arab middle- to upper-classes, with the exception of a few such as writer Zaynab Fawwaz, which will be discussed later (Schubert, 2020; Al Rahby, 2014). Notable initiatives include Anbarah Salam Khalidi's Awakening of the Young Arab Women Association (al-Khatib, 1984), May Ziyadeh's cultural salon, and many others (CeSSRA).

Linkages between education, income and political rights were established throughout several platforms (Booth, 1995) as women-led initiatives sprung in various forms, and throughout different geographical areas, including urban and rural areas and also diasporic contexts, which gave these initiatives contextually-specific, national, regional, and global dimensions (al-Khatib, 1984).

Writers such as Warda al-Yaziji and A'isha al-Taymuriya challenged the scarcity of women writers in public fora by choosing journalism and novel writing as avenues of involvement. However, the usage of pseudonyms was widespread, likely associated with the dangers of being an outspoken woman, which al-Yaziji, al-Taymuriya and writer Sulayma Abi Rashid also challenged (Robinson, 2015), and this applied to various forms of media including books and novels (Ashour et al., 2008).

Biographical writings centered on women were also witnessing a notable increase, with writer Zaynab Fawwaz writing a biographical dictionary of women, which is considered the second of such works after writer Maryam Nahhas Nawfal's volume on famous women's lives in 1879 (Booth, 1995).

A Rise in Gendered Debates

Debates on women's political rights were highly present in the late 1800s, particularly around suffrage rights and elections. Women writers tackled legislative and political matters, laying the foundations of later political debates around suffrage rights. It was a period of time where power relations were discussed, as suffrage rights were not limited to technicalities per se, but comprised a complex mix of legislative, social equality and participation dimensions (Zachs, 2018). While the debates remained restricted to a large part to middle class women on one hand,

and women were still not part of electoral systems on the other, such processes have helped shape later theoretical and public opinion understandings of social equality.

Zachs and Halevi (2009) explain how the debate on women in the late 1800s was an interactive process as opposed to a top-down one. It involved a widening contestation of gendered roles in society with the involvement of multiple actors, going beyond writers to include communities of readers, critics, and other stakeholders. Indeed, this was accompanied by a rise in female readership and particularly those critical of newspapers promoting gendered stereotypes.

Below are some examples of debates that took place around women's rights:

- One such debates took place between Syrian-Lebanese Hanna Kurani, who opposed the idea of women working outside the domain of the household, and Zaynab Fawwaz, who supported women's work and suffrage (Zachs, 2018). According to literature, Kurani's position did not emanate from doubts regarding women's intellectual capabilities, but rather from a proportionally higher valuation of women's wife- and household-related role, which was reflected in an article in the newspaper "Lebanon". Fawwaz, on the other hand, argued that there are no reasons that prevent women from being engaged in public works and political issues (Jomaa, 2001).

- Another such debate took place around Hadiqat al-Akhbar (The Garden of News) journal. The journal, edited and published by Khalil al-Khuri, often included humorous anecdotes, and such anecdotes reflected gendered stereotypes of women's roles. In one issue focused around the invention of the telegraph, the journal included the following anecdote:

  "If you wish to transmit information quickly from one place to another, you should tell it to a woman and then you will see that in a short time the message will pass from one place to the other faster than the blink of an eye."

> According to Zachs and Halevi (2009), the journal's growing female readership failed to see the humor of the anecdote, and the ensuing pressure and overt contestation of such anecdotes led al-Khuri to disown authorship of the anecdote, highlighting the high degree of pressure on the journal's editorial staff.

Other debates included the use of scientific or pseudoscientific means to defend views regarding women's intellectual abilities. Journals such al-Jinan, Al-Muqtataf and Thamarat alFunun appeared in Beirut, focusing on advancing arts and sciences. The journals later addressed issues of women's education and played a notable role in the debate centered around would be termed the "woman question". Al-Muqtataf, however, also featured writers generally opposing women's strive for equality and using (pseudo)scientific arguments to discredit women's intellectual capabilities. This includes writers like Shibli Shumayil, who employed thoughts that originated from Western thinkers. Women quickly responded to Shumayil under the title of "[The Defense of Women by Women]", adopting "secular" and scientific rationales for argumentation (Zachs and Halevi, 2009).

Newspapers, magazines and circulated pamphlets discussed the "woman question", often hosting both sides of the debate and in-between. On one hand, actors such as Anisa al-Shartouni penned pamphlets emphasizing that women must stay in their houses to take care of domestic affairs. On the other, writers such as Salma Kalia asserted that a woman "is not lower in rank [than a man]", adding that this is "particularly obvious after science and enlightenment has uncovered the true and natural position of a woman, her capacities and mental prowess and her ability to [do] all that a man practices." (Khater, 2014).

The debates reflect intense periods of back-and-forths processes, potentially characterized as discursive dialectics, which contributed in the shaping of the discourse on women's rights and questions of social equality.

Women-led Magazines and Journals

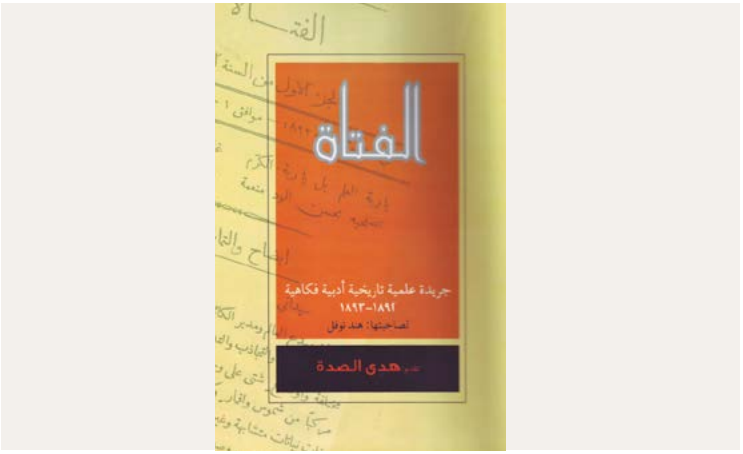
The late 1800s saw the establishment of many Arabic-language journals for women as authors, and others for women as audience (Booth, 1995). This followed women's active participation in the general Arabic press, and accompanied the institution of printing and publishing as main tools to circulate new ideas in the "transformational era" of Nahda (Rifai, 2022, pp. 4).

Egypt, and in particularly Cairo and Alexandria, were major sites for women writers and journalists to set up magazines, arguably due to its relative autonomy from the Ottoman authority (Al-Qaiwani, 2015). These journals were not only circulated in the Arab region, but also in diasporic contexts, making their way to Boston, São Paolo, and Mexico City (Robinson, 2015). Accordingly, such a rise in women's rhetoric must not be dissociated from international feminist movements, efforts to contextualize women's rights in the Arab region and in local settings, and overall Nahda sociopolitical transformations.

Many of these women's journals, however were often founded by men or in pairing with men on the masthead, and often didn't last for long periods of time, closing after less than a year, often due to financial reasons (Robinson, 2015). Other women decided to leave their publications behind after emigrating, such as Mary Yanni leaving Minerva (which she founded in 1917) at the hands of her brother after emigrating to Santiago, Chile in 1926, or Labiba Made Hashim leaving the journal Fatāt al-Sharq.

Al-Fatat is largely considered the first women's journal in Arabic (Ghoussoub; Robinson, 2015), established in Alexandria in 1892. With that, journalist Hind Nawfal is considered the first Arab woman to establish a woman's magazine which outlined its goals of defending women's rights. Nawfal's mother, Maryam al-Nahhas, competed a biographical dictionary of women in 1879 (Al Qaiwani, 2015).

Contributors to al-Fatat included a cross-confessional group of women, including Syrian Christians, Syrian Jewish and Shiite writers (Booth, 1995). **Zaynab Fawwaz** was also a writer to al-Fatat whose writings stood out thanks to their distinct social analysis.



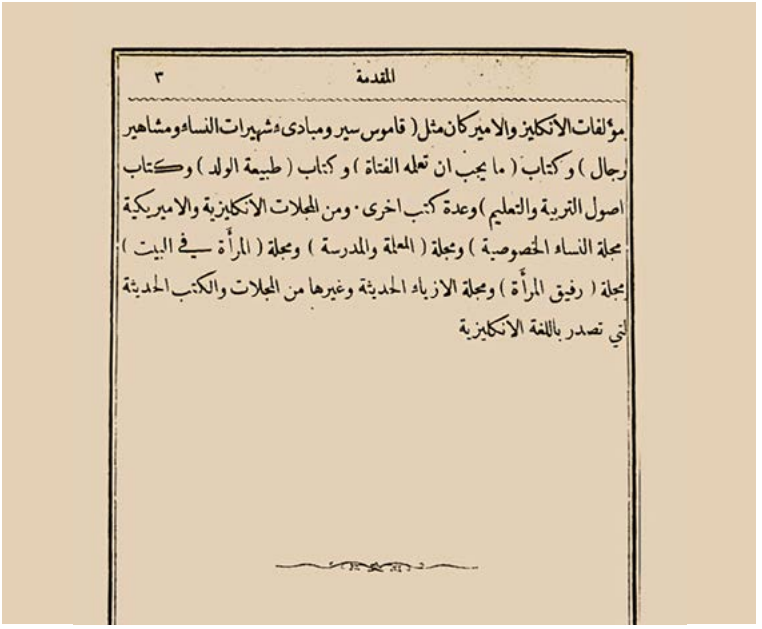
Picture 1
Source: The Women and Memory Forum

In 1910, writer **Mary Ajami** established the magazine **Al-Arous**, which is considered one of the first feminist magazines in the Arab region, discussing women's issues in a number of different spheres (al-Rahbi, 2014). Despite crackdowns by French authorities on Al-Arous, Ajami and her feminist circle circulated pamphlets covertly in Damascus (Rifai, 2022).

Picture 2
Source: JINHA Women's News Agency

Another writer and journalist considered a pioneer in women's renaissance at the time is **Rose Antun Haddad** (AUB), who, with the support of her brother Farah Antun, launched Majallat al-sayyidat wal banat (The Magazine of Women and Girls) in 1903. The magazine addressed family and educational issues, promoted women's advancement outside the household, and continued until 1906 (AUB).

Another magazine founded in Egypt by Lebanese writers is **Fatat al-sharq** (The Girl of the East). Founded and published by author **Labiba Hashim** in 1906, the magazine advocated for women's education and political involvement. Hashim had a multifrontal women's rights advocacy career. In addition to her valuation of press as an important means that has the power to transform societies, she also worked with fellow activists to establish a law that provides women with voting rights and established a literary salon (AUB). Hashim spoke on matters of positionality, believing that men do not know or understand the experiences that women go through (al-Baini, 2007). Hashim's Fatat al-sharq lasted for more than 20 years, with the monthly periodical run-



Excerpt from Majallat al-sayyidāt wa-al-banāt (AUB)

ning from 1906 to 1929. Some sources date its first issue back to 1900 (CeSSRA; Hivos).

Newspaper discourse in the late 1800s and early 1900s also included the contributions of writers such as **May Ziyadeh**, whose articles "evinced a deep awareness of the right of human beings, particularly women, to freedom and justice" (al-'Id, 2008), **Malaka Saad** who called for women's advancement in arts and literature and followed the progression of women's movements in the region, and lawyer and journalist **Salma Abi Rashed** who founded the monthly magazine **Fatat Lobnan** (CeSSRA).

This is not to say that women's issues were not discussed by earlier publications, such as **Majallat al-Jinnan** by writer and scholar **Butrus al-Bustani**. The publication saw the contributions of poet and novelist **Maryana Marrash**, who "called upon female readers to advocate for their rights, and regularly highlighted the significance of women's education in her published works". The publication could be potentially considered as part of al-Bustani's reformist project which included education and women's empowerment in certain lights, as he "viewed the rise of women's role in society as instrumental to the wider project of nation-building in Syria and Lebanon". (Rifai, 2022).

Zaynab Fawwaz remains an exceptional example of writing in the late 1800s on women's rights, as she became renown for her essays on the "woman question", emphasizing women's education and establishing her presence, especially in Egyptian newspapers and press (al-'Id, 2008; Booth, 1995).

It is estimated that in 1910, there was an estimated fifteen Arabic-language women's journals (Robinson, 2015).

A Diversity of Media Initiatives

The late 1800s and early 1900s also witnessed a rise of diverse forms of media addressing women's rights issues which weren't limited to journalistic means.

Figure 1: Screenshot from al-Khatib of women-led magazines and journals (1984)

These media included **novels and fiction works**, such as Labiba Hashima's works of fiction and her novel Qalb al-rajol (the heart of man), Butrus al-Bustani's Sa'iba in 1891, Zaynab Fawwaz's Husn al-'awaqib aw ghada al-zahira in 1899, Afifa Karam's Badi'a wa Fu'ad in 1906, Labiba Mikha'il Sawaya's Hasna' salunik, and others. "The intensive presence of women constituted a native incubator for ideas about women's liberation, pushing the issue into the public sphere", assert Ashour et al. (2008). Novel writing was considered a pivotal pathway into expressions around women's rights.

Books on women's rights were also published in the late 1800s, including by men writers, such as Muhammad ibn Mustafa ibn Khuja al-Jaza'iri's pro-women rights book titled al-iktiraj fi huquq al-inath (on the rights of women) in 1899 and Qasim Amin's Tahrir al-mar'a (liberation of women) in 1901, and others who advocated for women's rights.

The period also saw **encyclopedic** and **biographical** writings revolving around women and women's rights. This includes Zaynab Fawwaz's biographical work on Eastern and Western Women in 1894 titled al-durr almanthur fi tabaqat rabbat alkhudur (Al-Qaiwani, 2015). Fawwaz asked readers of the Beirut-based newspaper Lisān al-ḥāl to send her their biographies as part of her biographical dictionary project, which highlights the interactive and communitarian nature of writing at the time (Booth,

1995). This was preceded by Maryam Nahhas' ma'rid al-hasna' fi tarajim mashahir al-nisa' in 1879, May Ziyadeh's biographies of women writers, and others. Egypt alone saw the publication of 571 biographies of women (written by both men and women) in 18 periodicals (Ashour et al., 2008).

Speeches and **conferences** on women's rights were widespread, such as in Dimashqiyya's literary salon which was established in 1917. Many considered Dimashqiyya to be a skilled orator, and journalist. 'Afifa Sa'ab (1900-1989) considered her speeches to be groundbreaking "because they emphasized a woman's autonomy from a male relative" (Robinson, 2015, pp. 46). Women's organizations attempted to provide services to local populations during WW1, and 1919 saw what is considered the **first women's conference in the Arab World** addressing the "women's question" at the American University of Beirut (Robinson, 2015).

The interactive experiences, debates and multimedia initiatives addressing women's rights demonstrated the existence of a vibrant "community of discourse" in Greater Syria, Egypt and the Arab region (Zachs and Halevi, 2009, pp. 628). Albeit an international debate on women's rights was on the rise, Arab women's experiences were localized and contextualized within this debate (Zachs, 2018). Women organizers (hitherto prominent in media endeavors) challenged the traditional statuses of women in Arab societies and centered rights advancement in sociopolitical discourses (Rifai, 2022).

Nuances in debates around women were present, as Booth (1995, pp. 129) expands that pre-nineteenth century dictionaries "do not portray a world of gendered absolutes or opposites. They demonstrate that elite women were seekers and transmitters of knowledge, vocal participants in public life, and actors in the economy". Women's education, in its turn, played a by-product role in shaping a growing class of women readers (Robinson, 2015).

The diversity of media initiatives reflects a deep-seated desire for change amid extremely restrictive and discriminatory social structures. By challenging dominant discourses, enriching social debates, and producing a wide array of diverse media, women

organizers and feminists in Lebanon ushered in this community of discourse and considerably advanced questions of rights and intersectional empowerment.

The diversity of media initiatives and creative spirit of women writers, artists and organizers highlight the deeply local and unique ways in which Lebanese and Arab women expressed themselves. Alongside participating in rising international debates on women's rights, such historical grounding serves to debunk and challenge narratives of feminist movements being largely western imports alien to the Arab region. On the contrary, it is further proof that Lebanese and Arab women were pioneers in advancing women's rights and intersectional movements, across different media forms and throughout a plurality of thematic areas and philosophical approaches.

1920S AND 1930S

Context

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed a myriad of changes related to women's rights and women-led organizational endeavors. The two decades saw the establishment of a wide range of women's associations and charities, with many speculating that the "Lebanese brand" of feminism and its first wave started during the period of the "Pioneers", or, better known as *Raedat*, in the 1920s (Stephan, 2014).

This period of organizational endeavor was also associated with elite women who conducted charitable and activist activities, which was associated with a more liberal type of organizational inclination. This came concurrently with a significant rise in print culture and education (Stephan, 2014). Feminist cadres who established charitable organizations also concentrated in parallel on women's education and participation in public life.

Women's philanthropic societies such as Sociétés des Mères, a branch of the Red Cross and the Drop of Milk organization substituted the mandate government in providing relief services and playing a role in health-related activity coordination.

The Women's Union was established in Lebanon and Syria in 1924, with a focus on cultural and social issues (CeSSRA) in a period where feminist activity started taking institutional shapes. In 1928, the union's aims were highly intersectional and included unifying women-led efforts with nationalist endeavors, so much so that French actors were concerned that the union was a "stalking horse for nationalists" (Thompson, 2000, pp. 143). The union itself had a wide spectrum of ideological inclinations, ranging from apolitical tendencies to intersectional, centrally political ones.

Another important event is the Eastern Women's Congress which took place in Damascus in 1930, concurrent with the emergence of feminist organizations such as Nour Hamada (Kallander, 2021; Arenfeldt and Golley, 2012). The movement addressed multifrontal avenues, linking differing issues including women's rights and wider social reform.

Other associations included:

- The Society for Women's Renaissance in 1924-1925 - advocating for equality between women and men and other issues (Hivos).

- The Drop of Milk Society, associated with the objectives of the mandate government.

- The Syrian Women's Awakening Society, an elite women-led charitable organization established in 1928 focused on improving the status of women in Syria while at the same time launching a critique of colonial actors – and others.

Reflecting the deeply intersectional nature of Arab women's organizing for centuries, Robinson (2015, pp. 116) explains that the "emphasis on social issues corresponded with a larger trend in women's organizing that emphasized women's ability to instill patriotic values in new generations".

On her end, Stephan (2014) identifies that women filled the strong state vacuum with their activism, focusing on employment and educational conditions for certain women, addressing local needs and "crafting a women's identity centered on a shared colonial experience forged in opposition to the definition of women's rights propounded by the West." She adds that the so-called split "between nationalism and women's activism was a Western demarcation that did not reflect the exigencies of the independence movements in the Middle East or in other 'Eastern' countries, or more importantly, how women from the region saw the connections." This was also the case for Arab women's movements in Palestine, who did not witness such a "fissure between women's rights and national rights." (Stephan, 2014).

Accordingly, Arab women have proven to be adept at pinpointing and challenging reductive notions of emancipation, recognizing the highly intersectional nature of different struggles. They rejected a separation between their right to national liberation

and their right to gender justice, actively advocating for both and even additional causes such as broader social justice issues and economic equality.

Another area where women-led organizational endeavors took place is international forums, with Syrian and Lebanese women's rights activists being excluded from early conversations around international women's rights, reflecting imbalanced power dynamics on certain international forums. This is reflected in Syrian and Lebanese women being denied national and international status by the League of Nations, with Arab women challenging such exclusion either by attempting to gain entry into certain international forums or focusing on addressing a mandate system and achieving national independence (CeSSRA; Stephan, 2014).

Increasingly Intersectional Debates

Debates around women's political rights, especially suffrage rights, were significant in the 1920s and 1930s. A significant factor were the impacts that World War 1 had on the Ottoman Empire and the increasing recognition of the pivotal importance of independence, which were linked by feminist actors to women's rights as connected emancipatory struggles.

This is evident in the names of new rising journals such as "al-Mar'a al-Jadīda (The New Woman, Beirut) , al-Hayāt al-Jadīda (The New Life, Paris and Beirut), al-Fajr (The Dawn, Damascus" (Robinson, 2015, pp. 74).

Stephan (2014) highlights how by the 1920, the "woman question" had new dimensions, which reflected both domestic concerns for women's access to social and political rights and international ones with discussions in the League gaining traction and the formation of counterhegemonic voices within international forums. Struggles include the nomination of Nour Hamada to the League of Nations Committee on the Legal Status of Women, which was met with a prolonged back-and-forth and contestation (Robinson, 2015).

Women intellectuals had to navigate linking women's rights to nationalist struggles in a context where most patriotic figures were also representative of patriarchal structures. This dynamic paved the way for discussions on Arab identity, traditional culture and territorial integrity (Sharma, 2012). Debates went as far as the Syrian parliament which discussed issues of prostitution and venereal disease prevention.

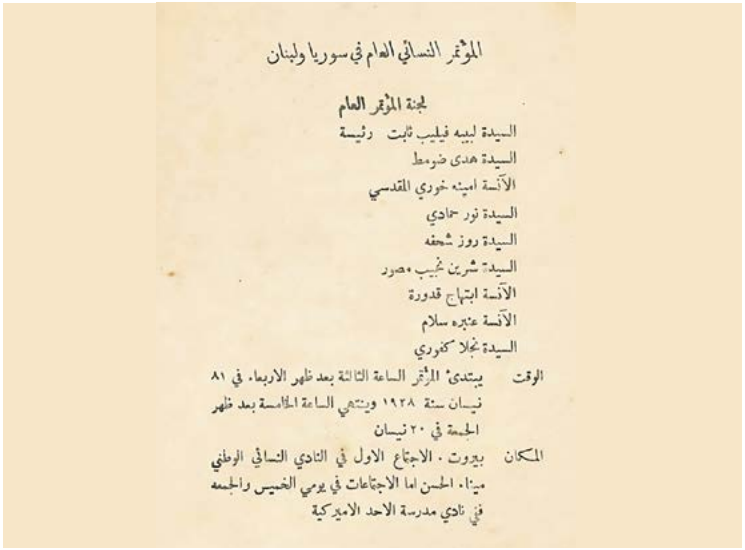
Sharma (2012) expands that struggles for women's education and employment were also prominent in the 1920s and 1930s. Dominant discourses, including (or especially) from the French side, discouraged women's participation in the workforce. The concept of "male anxiety" rose during that period as women often upstaged men in nationalist struggles to defend the homeland. Examples include their role in the 1925 Syrian Revolt (largely neglected by scholars despite its significance) and cartoons in French and Arabic newspapers highlighting a crisis of paternity and lampooningly portraying a reversal in men and women's roles (Hivos).

A maternalist tone emphasizing women's ability to nurture was still adopted as a strategy by some women organizers, as such language was considered less threatening than a language explicitly claiming political rights since it was 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 culture instead of matters such as the right to vote, and whose delegates visited the national library and museum, but not the parliament (Thompson, 2000; Robinson, 2015; Hivos).

Journal and Magazine Coverage of Women's Rights and Women-led Movements

By 1919s, 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 issues (Robinson, 2015).

Local newspapers played a major role in covering major historical events, including the women's conference in 1928 which ad-


المؤتمر النسائي العام في سوريا ولبنان

لجنة المؤتمر العام

السيدة لبيه فيليب ثابت رئيسة
السيدة هدى ضومط
الآنسة امينه خوري المقدسي
السيدة نور حمادي
السيدة روز شحفه
السيدة شرين نجيب مصور
الآنسة ابتهاج قدورة
الآنسة عنبره سلام
السيدة نجلا كفوري

الوقت يبتدئ المؤتمر الساعة الثالثة بعد ظهر الاربعاء في ٨١ نيسان سنة ١٩٢٨ وينتهي الساعة الخامسة بعد ظهر الجمعة في ٢٠ نيسان

المكان بيروت . الاجتماع الاول في النادي النسائي الوطني مينا. الحسن اما الاجتماعات في يومي الخميس والجمعه في نادي مدرسة الاحد الاميركية

The first women's conference in Beirut, 1928 (Hivos)

dressed 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 period (Stephan, 2014).

Newspapers, both local and international, also covered Arab women's bid in entering and influencing international fora, including Hamada's candidacy to the League, 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 states (CeSSRA).

Notable Examples

Among the journals that specifically covered women's rights in the 1920s and 1930s, notable examples include princess **Najlā Abī al-Lama' Ma'lūf's al-Fajr** magazine, which targeted both men and women (but particularly aimed at bringing 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'lūf encouraged local and regional industries, she also worked with different women's associations, such as the Lebanese Women's Associations (CeSSRA; AUB).

Organizers included figures such as **Julia Tu'mah Dimashqiyyah**, considered one of the first leading women journalists in Lebanon (Hivos), who published the monthly **al-Mar'ah al-jadīdah** (Arabic: **المرأة الجديدة**; The New Woman), considered the first women's magazine in Lebanon. The New Woman was one of the most respected magazines in the region.

Dimashqiyyah called on women to claim their livelihoods in society, promoted independent education and the elevation of women's literary, scientific and social statuses, wrote for a number of other journals and played an important role in the Women's Association and Women's Club in Beirut alongside other notable members such as Ma'lūf, Mari Yanni and Afifa Saab (AUB).

The New Woman also discussed suffrage in its issues and kept the issue alive by covering events such as a parliamentary session in 1933 looking into women's political rights. At the session, Deputy Sheikh Yussef al Khazin's request for women gaining voting rights was only supported by three votes (al-Khatib, 1984).

Mari Ajamy's magazine, **Bride**, also received notable commends, focusing on political matters such as suffrage rights and striving to keep the issue alive (Sharma, 2012). Political issues were also evoked by a range of magazine established by feminist organ-

Figure 3: Profile of Julia Dimashqiyya (Forum of culture and issues of the times, 2022)

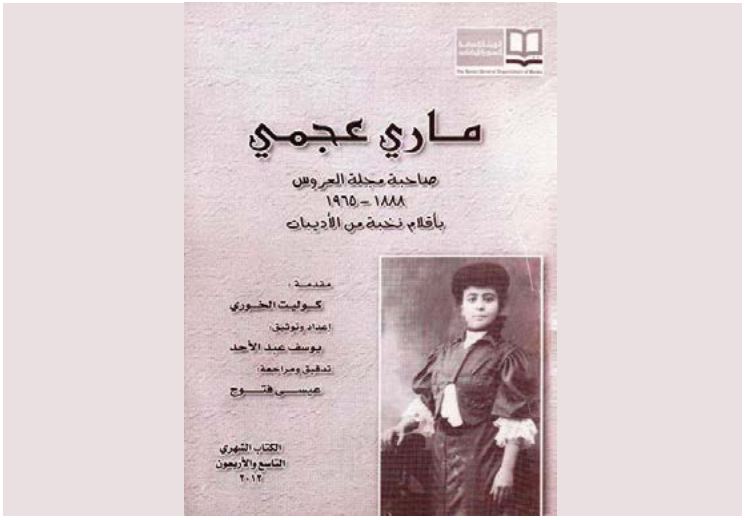


Figure 4: Profile of Mari Ajamy (Khartash, 2012)

izers, such as **Mary Ajamy**'s **Bride**, which focused on suffrage rights, and **Naziq 'Abid**'s work that championed women's and nationalist causes (Sharma, 2012; Arenfeldt and Golley, 2012).

Another issue discussing women's roles, achievements and rights in the Nahda era is **Mari Yanni**'s **Minerva**. The magazine showed solidarity to foreign feminist movements, with its June 1923 issue featuring a conference discussing the International Women's Suffrage Alliance (Sharma, 2012). Yanni also contribut-

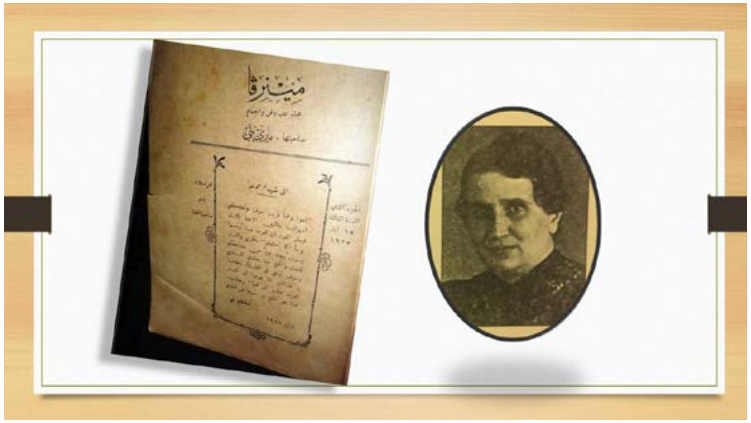


Figure 5: Mari Ajamy and an excerpt from Minerva (al-Ahmad, 2022)

Figure 6: Profile of Afifa Saab (Memory of the Revolution Media Documents Art, 2021)

ed to a range of other magazines, such as Dimashqiyyah's New Woman and Ma'luf's al-Fajr, and others (AUB).

Other journals were more locally rooted and targeted women from specific sects, 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 the Shouwaifat area around Beirut, and al-Khidr is regarded as the first Druze women's magazine with Saab often discussing the particular status of Druze women and addressing women's education, particularly those in the countryside (AUB; CeSSRA).

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**, while journalist **Habuba Haddad**, who founded the monthly magazine **al-Hayah al-Jadidah** in 1921, joined the Journalists' Syndicate in Paris.

These different experiences shed light on how women's rights organizers and feminists contributed to each other's works, wrote for their comrades' platforms, and amplified each other's voices. This allowed one's work, and consequently the wider group of feminists' work, to gain more prominence.

Conferences, Salons, Cinema and Novels Covering Women's Rights and Movements

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed the proliferation of women-led conferences prioritizing women's rights, commonly dated first to 1928 with the Women's Conference and followed by other Arab conferences in Beirut, Jerusalem, Damascus and other cities.

In 1930, the First Eastern Women's Conference saw the participation of delegates from women's associations from different "Eastern" countries. Participants from Syria attended to raise the issue of the French mandate, with Dimashqiyyah addressing colonial divisions impacting feminist/political endeavors (Stephan, 2014). Syrian women also helped organize the Second Eastern Women's Congress in 1932 in Tehran (Arenfeldt and Golley, 2012).

In May 1930, an issue of l'Egyptienne covered 'The Feminist Congress in Beirut':

> *"A large convention was held last month in Beirut. Uniting women from the Arab world…it allowed hope for greater united participation in the future…Various important issues were discussed and put up to the vote such as: women's access to art schools, the abolition of licensed brothels…the question of universal peace was also raised."*
> *(Armstrong, 2016).*

This review considers women-led **salons** as another important medium where discussions, coverage and public opinion on women's rights were notable. The "salons emerged as spaces to discuss further all of the dimensions of the nahḍa al-nisā'iyya (women's awakening)" (Robinson, 2015, pp. 74).

Salons were often managed by women who were active in other organizational fashions, such as in journalism and in 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 Yaqẓat al-Mar'a al-Shāmiyya (Syrian Women's Awakening Society, 1928) (Robinson, 2015). Hostesses included Habuba Haddad, Salma Sayegh and

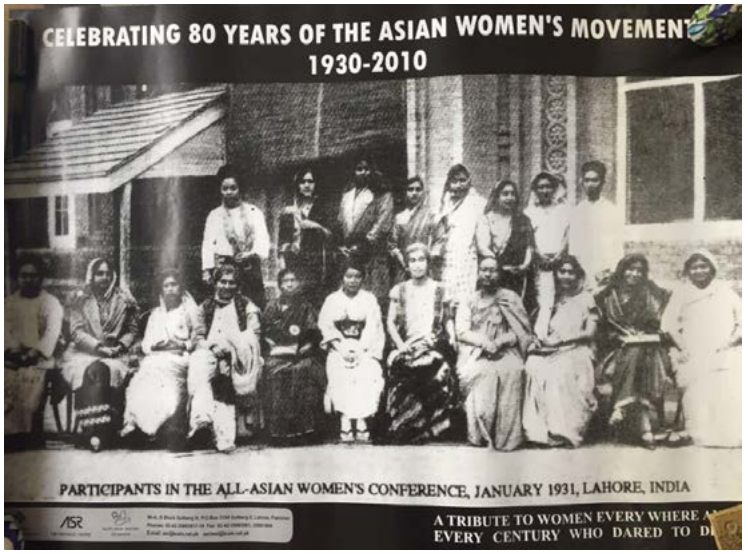


Figure 7: Participants in the all-Asian Women's Conference (Alam in Wikimedia Commons, 1931)

Hajjah Fatimah al-Rifai, who opened their houses for discussions on a variety of literary, gender, and other topics (Hivos).

Other forms of media covering women's rights movements faced significant challenges, particularly with regards to women's participation in the public sphere. Many groups exerted pressure to censor and pressure against women's attendance in **cinemas** (Amundsen, 2005).

Marie al-Khazen expressed her ideas through **the photograph**. Sharma (2012, pp. 15) asserts that al-Khazen's representation of women "encapsulates the dynamics of being a women 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.'".

Leaflets and **pamphlets** were also spread in bazaars reflecting feminist and nationalist sentiments intersectionally, such as a Women's Society pamphlet (Provence, 2005, pp. 65) from Damascus, which stated:

O Arabs, descendants of glorious ancestors, we appeal to you to awake in these critical times of great tragedy under the govern-

ment of France. There is nothing left to us but to mount a vigorous attack and expel this government from our country.

Naturally, **protests** and on-the-ground action were a recurrent medium used by women to contribute to various sociopolitical issues (Sharma, 2012).

Educational institutions and the beginning of a **course on journalism** in 1933/1934 at the American University of Beirut provided venues for women's participation in campus and public life. The university saw the establishment of local platforms such as the magazine al Kulliyah Review, where women students questioned certain sociopolitical realities and expressed their opinions (Okkenhaug and Flaskerud, 2005).

WORLD WAR 2 AND POST-WW2 (1950S AND 60S)

Context

Few has been said, especially in mainstream media, about the role that women have played in Lebanon and the Arab region in times of war and post-war. The review has shown how women's rights campaigns have merged women's rights demands with nationalist matters.

During WW2, women's rights movements took different directions. While some recentered the role of women to its domestic spheres, others took a more Marxist inclination to achieving independence and women's rights. Others, however, focused on specific policy issues such as women's fundamental rights to education and better participation in public educational venues, while a huge portion committed to conducting charity work (Robinson, 2015). Women's NGOs prioritized access to economic and social needs among women in rural areas and with limited access to resources as a result of the country's history of conflict (Zaatari, 2005).

The war period saw the establishment of the Arab Feminist Union (AFU) in 1944 following the Arab Feminist Congress in Cairo of the same year to further women's political, legal and economic rights in Arabic-speaking countries (Najjar, 2020), with the Lebanese Arab Women Federation reiterating the same sentiments (Armstrong, 2016).

Other associations in Lebanon were established across sectarian lines, such as the Lebanese Women Solidarity Association, bringing together elite women from 20 Christian organizations in the country (CeSSRA).

In 1952, the Lebanese Women Union and the Christian Women's Solidarity Association merged to form the Lebanese Council of Women, bringing together women across different sects with the organization firmly advocating for Palestinian liberation in 1948. While the organization retained some elitist inclinations,


النهار

الجمهوريون يتفوقون على الديمقراطيين بينما يتعادل الحزبان في مجلس الشيوخ

ايزنهاور يبلغ الرئيس ترومن عن استعد

صحيفة بريطانية تعلن ان نجاح ايزنهاور نشر الر

صدر المرسوم الاشتراعي بتعديل قانون الانتخابات العامة

خفض عدد النواب الى ٤٤ واقتراح انشاء «مجلس اعلى»

تقسيم لبنان الى ٣٣ دائرة انتخابية

منها ٢٣ دائرة فردية

جدول ملحق بالمرسوم الاشتراعي رقم ٦

مرض المستشفى مدير شركة الكهرباء فتأخرت دروس اللجنة الحكومية

المرأة تعرض قضيتها في حفل خطابي تديع في شخص رئيس الوزراء نصيراً رحيماً

Figure 8: Excerpt from al-Nahar, 1952 (Hivos).

Figure 9: Excerpt from al-Nahar, 1952 (Hivos).


النهار

البعث يعتبر الدستور الاتحادي إنتصاراً له

البيطار: علينا أن نبدأ حالاً «مرحلة التطبيق»

السعدي: سنتمسك بحرفية الدستور عند التنفيذ

خيضر يستقيل من امانة المكتب السياسي حطالياد وراكبر في القضايا الأساسية

قاتل الأمير السعودي يروي الأسباب للبوليس

Figure 10: Excerpt from al-Nahar, 1963 (Hivos).

significant work was being done among working-class women labor activists (Schubert, 2020).

However, such organizational endeavors were not matched with relative enthusiasm in post-war national-level political negotiations. A quintessential example of that is the fact that the Arab Feminist Union was excluded from the negotiations that preceded the Arab League in 1945.

Legislatively, the post-war period was significant for women's rights in Lebanon, as women continued to advocate for women's rights to vote after independence, gaining this right in 1953.


profile

Emily Fares Ibrahim
Receives
The National Cedar Award

Ms. Emily Fares Ibrahim outstanding writer, poet, feminist and a pillar in Arabic literature was awarded The National Cedar Award by the President of the Lebanese Republic on November 19, 1992. Who is Emily Fares Ibrahim?

She was born in 1914. Her father was an officer in the Lebanese Police force during the administration of the first President of Lebanon (1926-1934), Charles Debbas. Her grandfather, Habib Fares, was a leading lawyer and Doctor of Law and her uncle, Felix Fares, was a prominent scholar and writer. Consequently, Ibrahim's background was rich with substance and she was exposed to leading literary circles. Her first experiences in literature were in French having attended school in Beirut at a time when influence from France was at its peak. She was heavily exposed to symbolic romanticism and to the works of classical writers like La Fontaine, Molière, Racine and Corneille, and novelists like Henry Bordeaux and Paul Bourget.

Author of Adibat Libnaniyat - Literary Lebanese Women

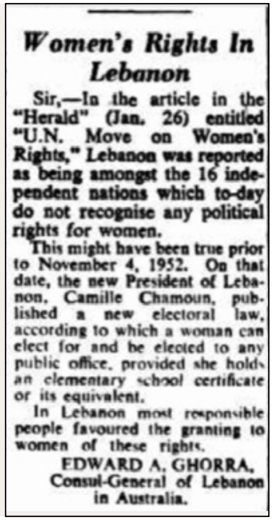
President of the Lebanese Council for Women

the first major influence on Ibrahim's ideas. It was the era (1930's) when Gibran inspired the masses and the young with his revolutionary moral philosophy and poetry. Other giants in Lebanese literature who were to influence Ibrahim's awakening to Arabic literature were Elias Abu Shabakeh, Youssef Ibrahim Yezbeck, Amin Rihani, Amin Nakhleh, Michael Naimy, and the leading female writer of the thirties, May Ziadeh.

Ibrahim strongly identified with Ziadeh and her literature. She vividly

remembers, with nostalgia, the "Literary Salon of Charles Corm" that hosted the giants of Arab literature. She was the only female writer in the Salon of Charles Corm in the forties.

Of the leading publications of Emily Fares Ibrahim that we will highlight in this article are Adibat Lubnaniyat - Literary Lebanese Women (1961) and Al-Harakah al-Nisa'iyah al-Lubnaniyah - The Lebanese Women's Movement (1966).


Women's Rights In Lebanon

Sir,—In the article in the "Herald" (Jan. 26) entitled "U.N. Move on Women's Rights," Lebanon was reported as being amongst the 16 independent nations which to-day do not recognise any political rights for women.

This might have been true prior to November 4, 1952. On that date, the new President of Lebanon, Camille Chamoun, published a new electoral law, according to which a woman can elect for and be elected to any public office, provided she holds an elementary school certificate or its equivalent.

In Lebanon most responsible people favoured the granting to women of these rights.

EDWARD A. GHORRA,
Consul-General of Lebanon
in Australia.

Figure 11: Excerpt from al-Raida journal (al-Raida).

Figure 12: Excerpt from the Sydney Morning Herald, 1953 (Trove)

Beforehand, president Camille Chamoun's previous passed decrees only gave the right to vote and to be elected to any public office exclusively to women educated at the primary level or holding equivalent certificates.

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, was largely credited for the development of theatre in Beirut. This culminated in the establishment of avenues such as Masrah al-Madina and Mohtaraf Beirut lil Masrah (Hivos).

The 1950s witnessed the first women to run for parliaments. Feminist, poet and literary writer Emily Fares Ibrahim was the first woman to run for parliament in Lebanon in 1953. In the years after, eight women ran for elections between 1953 and 1975 (Hivos).

The 1960s saw the election of the first woman parliamentarian in Lebanon, namely Myrna Boustany in 1963 (Hivos).

Finally, the war and post-war periods witnessed a number of on-the-ground women initiatives, with several protests noted and


From Loom to Puff | 21

ثمن العدد ٥ غروش

الأحرار المصوّرة

العدد ١٠ السنة الاولى

الاثنين ١٥ آذار

اسبوعية . ادبية . انتقادية . فكاهية . روائية

اخطبوط الريجي يلتف على السكاير

2. The Octopus Régie. *Al-Ahrar al-Musawwara*, a weekly magazine, published this caricature reflecting the apprehension that started to grow against the Régie in French Lebanon and Syria. An octopus, in this case the Régie, tightly surrounds the Syrian-Lebanese major cities (Damascus, Homs, Hama, Aleppo, Tripoli, Latakia, and Beirut), implying the stifling of their economic freedom. *Al-Ahrar al-Musawwara* 1, no. 10 (Mar. 15, 1926), 1. Reproduced by Katrin Dinkel.

Figure 13: Excerpt from al-Ahrar al-Musawwara (Hivos).


الديار

اصطدام دام بين عمال الريجي ورجال الدرك

يؤدي الى مصرع فتاة في الثامنة عشرة من عمرها

ووقوع ١٣٢ جريحا وجريحة اثنان منهن بحالة خطرة

كل أمل في عقد مؤتمر الصلح في الصيف

تطورات بريطانية واميركية في تريستا

هل توصل الرئيس الخوري لاتفاق على مسألة الاسكندرونة

الى اليونان

الجامعة العربية وقضية مصر

Figure 14: Excerpt from al-Diyar, 1946 (Hivos).


وفد الجمعيات النسائية الطرابلسية ، الذي زار عاصفة الشمال عنجاً لدى الحكومة على اغفال حقوق المرأة السياسية
وقد بدت في الصف الاول رئيسات الجمعيات النسائية في طرابلس

Figure 15: Excerpt from al-Sharq, 1952 (Hivos).

covered throughout. Examples include the strike of Lebanese feminists in 1946 to force French forces to leave (Perkins, 2016) and the Regie Libanaise des Tabacs et Tombacs strikes in 1944 and 1945 by a number of Lebanese women and men, as well as the Regie's major strike in 1946. In 1951, women organized massive demonstrations in demand for political rights, followed in 1952 by the Roxy Movie Theatre Demonstration for suffrage rights (Hivos).

Women organizers led a number of demonstrations focused on independence from French forces, despite a lack in government support and strong backlash. These calls for independence were accompanied with calls for better access to economic and material resources for women, often in light of domestic duties (Robinson, 2015; Hivos).

Activists advocated for matters such as the right to vote, political representation and access to education, with organizer Ibtihaj Kaddoura affirming that "a woman is no longer solely for the home, because the whole world can no longer do without her services" (al-Khatib, 1984).


تظاهرات نسائية تعم لبنانه

كانت لجنة التشريع البرلمانية اقترحت ان
تمنح المرأة اللبنانية حقوقها السياسية تدريجيا
حيث تبدأ بالتصويت في انتخابات البلدية ولما
كانت مطالب المرأة تشمل حقوقها السياسية
كاملة بلا قيد ولا شرط فقد قوبل هذا
الاقتراح في الاوساط النسائية بالاحتجاج
الشديد واقيمت تظاهرة نسائية اشترك فيها
نحو ٣٠٠ سيدة وآنسة ، وتوجهوا مركبين
الى دار البرلمان حيث قابل وفد منهن عطوفة
رئيس المجلس وسلمه عريضة لجنة المنظمات
النسائية وهي تتضمن الاحتجاج على اقتراح
اللجنة وتكرار المطالبة بالحقوق السياسية كاملة

Figure 16: Excerpt from al-Mustaqbal (Hivos).

News and Magazine Coverage

Newspaper coverage during the World War 2 period was affected by economic limitations due to the switch of most economic activity toward war affairs, specifically shortages in commodities such as paper. Nonetheless, women's various initiatives received notable coverage from various news outlets, including those ran by women but also more mainstream platforms.

However, marginalization and silence regarding women's rights were notable throughout the period, with notably low documentation of working women's mobilization endeavors and common assumptions that syndicate members were men (Hivos). Women's journals, for their part, paved the way and kept connecting matters to pan-Arab women sentiments and formations of a pan-Arab women's movement (Robinson, 2015).

The Arab Women's Conference in Cairo in 1944 was covered by a number of different newspapers, such as Filistīn and Palestine Post, an English daily, with press coverage of the conference favorable to a large extent. Prior to the conference, Syrian and Lebanese organizations added "Arab" to their names as the conference sought Arab unity, between women in particular. They asserted support to national causes even in advance of women's

المستقبل

تدشين الصفاة والمطار برعاية صاحب الفخامة

المرأة اللبنانية تطالب بحقوقها الكاملة

من اين لك هذا ..!

وقاديشا ايضا ...!

Figure 17: Excerpt from al-Mustaqbal newspaper, 1949 (Hivos)

rights, claiming women acted on their national support, instead of only espousing it.

Robinson (2015) also highlights the work of women such as Zahiyah Doughan, who emphasized writing Arab women's histories, and other delegates who raised questions of women's access to social and economic domains. The conference passed fifty-one resolutions targeted not only at Arab governments, but also international audiences.

Notable examples of works covering women's rights matters 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 Lebanon (Hivos).

Edvick Jureidini Shayhoub became Sout al-Maraa's editor-in-chief in 1951 and wrote for women audiences in particular. The 1960s also saw the launching of **Donia al-Maraa** by **Noura Nowayhed Halawani**, a regionally popular magazine focused on various women's issues and addressing a range of political and social matters (Hivos).

Alice Kandaleft Cosma is another feminist 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 were to a large degree curious about the status of women in the Arab world. However, news would often not focus on the content of her speeches, which included a merged centralization of Arab independence (Robinson, 2015).

Some women writers received considerable attention by scholars during the post-war period, but this was not the case for **Laylá Ba'albakī**. According to Igbaria (2015), her opposition to patriarchy made her a target as she addressed various taboo topics and challenged patriarchal understandings of matters. These include matters of women's need of men, body ownership, maternity and child-bearing, and others.

Moreover, this period of time witnessed the publishing of several novels and short stories by women writers (Aghacy, 2001).

CIVIL WAR

Context

Before the Civil War in 1975, Lebanon was considered a context offering unique cultural openness and freedom of expression in the 1970s, with Beirut as the region's media hub (Trombetta, 2018). Moreover, by 1970, girls had made notable grounds in access to education as estimates indicate that around 44.9% of students enrolled in private schools were women (al-Raida). The start of the civil war had profound impacts on social, political, economic and cultural states of affairs.

While some notions claim that the Lebanese Civil War was a not a "women's war", research and media on women's involvement prove otherwise, especially when taking the very reason associated to women's participation: their insistence on being involved (al-Raida).

Women's participation came in different forms, including in anti-war organizing. Conflict-wise, the form of women's participation in militia action depended on various organizational factors and differences between militia's modes of operation (Soulié-Caraguel, 2021), which will be expanded upon below. The notion that women were more inclined towards peace while men were more inclined towards violence was also debunked during that period, as women performed many military roles during the war, despite these roles remaining largely unrecognized (ILO, 1997).

Women were often excluded from decision-making processes during wartime and post-wartime peace negotiations despite being engaged in conflict. The civil war generally marginalized "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-in (Khatib, 2008).

Anti-War Efforts

Anti-war organizing took on various forms throughout the civil war years. al-Raida journal covered a silent protest in 1983 that saw the participation of 400 women in front of a UNICEF building, with the protest being considered "the first documented instance of a peace movement by Lebanese women" (Aboul-Hosn, 2015).

In the village of Baakleen in 1980, a small group of women formed the Women's Edification Assembly focused on issues of security and stability, and organizing cultural activities such as theatrical performances and poetry evenings, with their purpose being providing "a stability which patriarchal institutions that dominated the country were not providing", and building "women's solidarity" (Ward, 2009).

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 children (Ward, 2009).

Anti-war efforts by women included marches throughout the 1970s and 1980s that were suppressed by men invested in power conflicts (Fernea, 1989). They also included a nonviolent movement comprised of protests, petitions and forums and calls by actors such as Laure Moghaizel for women to intervene not only through their care work, but also through asserting their rights to stop bloodshed and to "enter contentious politics and make their voices heard" (Kurtz and Kurtz, 2015, pp. 287).

Increased Responsibilities

On the other hand, NGO's and women's organizations were faced with increased responsibilities and pressures, as the war forced women to enter labour markets on top of their traditional domestic responsibilities, with their work often going unacknowledged.

Such work included responding to immediate needs of affected populations such as displaced people, widows, war orphans and the disabled (ILO, 1997). In general, struggles for women's civil rights were in many places replaced by the provision of welfare services (Aboul-Hosn, 2015).

Women were active in a number of organizations involved in the civil war in both traditional militia and left-wing groups (Ribas-Mateos, 2019), but that didn't stop a number of women from sticking to feminist demands of sociopolitical integration. In 1983, a Lebanese Women's Council conference called for eliminating forms of discrimination against women and for peace and national unity. There is a lack of evidence on how the reactions were to the conference, though "it was likely ignored, mocked, or denigrated by much of the rest of the Lebanese media as most feminist activism in Lebanon has been and continues to be" (Whetstone, 2013, pp. 66).

Women and People with Disabilities

Some scholarships have focused on often-omitted experiences of women with disabilities (Wehbi, 2010). The 1980s saw the organizational endeavors of multiple disabled people-centered organizations, shifting focuses from ones on care and rehabilitation to ones on a rights-based, policy approach. Disabled people's organizations focused on innovating new discursive strategies, as well as anti-violence movements, organizing marches in 1985 and 1987 and camps and seminars promoting disability and human rights and encouraging other civil society organizations' protest endeavors (Kabbara, 2012).

Female participation in the civil war seemed to have been facilitated by societal and attitudinal changes towards women during the pre-war period, with shifts in traditional gender norms and expectations being amplified by the war (Eggert, 2021). Nonetheless, breakthroughs in traditional norms remained restrained by conservative and patriarchal societal realities. Attempts by women to expand their rights were often met with guilt tripping, including from fellow women and motherists (Whetsone, 2013; Eggert, 2021).

Debates and Media on Women's Rights

What is commonly referred to as the second cycle of feminism is usually located around the Arab defeat of the Six-Day War. The cycle is intricately linked with leftist inclinations and anti-establishmentarian thinking. Feminist organization become somewhat autonomous and connected to leftist parties such as the Organization of Communist Action (Stephan, 2014; CeSSRA).

The debate on women's rights, particularly in "third world" countries, became increasingly central in international fora around that period, with 1975 witnessing events such as the World Conference on Women in Mexico City (CeSSRA).

The civil war was not a period where women unity around a common cause was necessarily visible (Aboul-Hosn, 2015). While women were involved across various and not necessarily parallel nor friendly organizational efforts, notable women-led efforts focused around peacebuilding. Kindergarten teacher Iman Khalifeh initiated the Peace Movement in Lebanon per example, while other feminist organizers, youth initiators and disabled people's organizations played their own role in promoting calls for peace, despite these efforts largely losing momentum by the war days (Aboul-Hosn, 2015).

Other women's efforts, including written ones, focused on addressing war-related apathy and indifference among conflicting sides, while Palestinian women such as Sahar Khalifa and Raimonda Tawil critiqued men's ways of fighting (Cooke in Golley, 2007).

Two Different Readings

Feminist perspectives on the war often view it as carrying double burden on women, on both domestic and social levels. Such views are complemented by analysis highlighting that political leaders remained largely male, whereas women's roles were relegated to non-proactive ones (al-Ajeel, 2023).

They also argued that feminist efforts were diminished by more survivalist perspectives during the war, with general diminishment of political and social consciousness (Khatib, 2008).

Other perspectives, on the other hand, note that women's participation in the workforce and women's voices overall became more prominent during the war, citing incidents such as that of the Beirut Decentrists (al-Raida). Efforts to historicize women's realities during the war were negatively impacted by the central government's collapse and the lack of adequate archival and historical curricula material relating to the war (Ragin, 2020).

The Beirut Decentrists

Among notable artistic efforts that emerged throughout the civil war period and that left a stamp on war-related discourses was the experience of what Mariam Cooke (1987) branks the Beirut Decentrists.

Not fewer than forty women, the Decentrists rose questions around identity, women's rights and women's experiences throughout a number of novels, poetries and short stories. These stories often included the experiences of women throughout the war in which men fled the country under a variety of excuses, highlighting a binary of "women's steadfastness" and "men's cowardly vacillation" (Cooke, 1987, pp. 56).

Čižmíková (2012) expands on the Decentrists' experience of middle- to upper-middle-class women coming from different linguistic backgrounds, confessions and persuasions and offering new perspectives to the war which added an emotional lens, as opposed to men's writings which was limited to external description. Čižmíková (2012, pp. 151-152) 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 centre'".

This perspective was focused on nuances of human conditions and everyday realities, including the peculiarities of day-to-day

domestic and logistical tasks. Relatedly, concepts of alienation of one's environment and society is a recurrent theme in the Decentrists' writings. Čižmíková identifies feelings that "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'" (pp. 154). Such writings addressed domestic and familial dynamics and oppressive aspects of patriarchal control and linked them to the very 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" (Azar, 2018, pp. 86-87), 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 decentered on both physical and intellectual levels (Azar, 2018).

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 developments (Guth, 1994).

In a region of recurrent conflicts and crises and the dominance of grandiose black-and-white narratives, the experience of the Decentrists inspires writers across the Arab world to go beyond reductive views of sociopolitical issues. By recognizing the daily intricacies and realities of different social groups, one gains a more informed view on the nuances of living through crisis in the eyes of different social groups.

As marginalized communities in Lebanon and the Arab region tend to suffer disproportionately during periods of shock, bringing in a more inclusive approach to narrative-building becomes crucial. It challenges the dominant trend of putting dominant figures, usually men, on a pedestal and providing them with savior status. It provides an in-depth appreciation of the sacrifices that different social groups contribute to mitigate and resolve crisis situations and the different forms of harm that each social group uniquely suffers from. It remains an inclusive lens that remains

absent in dominant political circles in Lebanon and the Arab region.

Press Coverage

Press coverage throughout the civil war included coverages of women militia members and women's organizational efforts, which comprised a range of different activities, including journalistic ones. Nidaa al Mara'a, per example, was a women-dedicated weekly in the al-Nidaa newspaper addressing a range of social, political and cultural issues.

However, throughout the war, women had limited access to major media. Activist Marie Debs, for example, could only recall one instance where her organization was able to reach a newspaper, discussing ideas related to women and peace (El Masri, 2017). Other examples include the Women's Edification Assembly's establishment of the Abeer magazine, which saw the chief editorship of Malika Hamadeh, covering the organization's wide range of activities and providing a place for women to vent (Ward, 2009).

Women in the Fighting

The inclusion of women in informal armed groups in media coverage has been largely associated to the media attention that such women gather, reportedly receiving around eight times the media coverage of their male counterparts (Eggert, 2017) in what is called the "CNN factor" (Ali, 2005).

Including women militia members can be part of an attention-grabbing strategy by militias, such as Kataeb, targeting national and international audiences. In addition, it helps promote notions of militias such as Kataeb being "modern" and the encouragement of women to join the fight, despite the organizations' hierarchical and conservative structures (Eggert, 2017).

Palestinian women were portrayed by Fida'i narratives as being heroines of steadfastness and celebrated in media and official documents (El Masri, 2013).

Al-Raida

Al-Raida journal served as a newsletter and archive for many writings and accounts on women's histories of activism and organizational endeavor. The journal, originally published in English and in Arabic to reach wider audiences on a local and international level (Kurtz and Kurtz, 2015), saw the writings of its editor Rose Ghurayyib. Ghurayyib discussed then-taboo topics on family planning and contraception, and oversaw editorials during civil war years where feminist activism was often overlooked (Khoury, 2020). The journal also took initiative to present feminist oral histories.

Al-Raida served as a forum for intellectual discussion where testimonies and narratives against war were published, and arguments for the inclusion of women in peace processes were presented. The journal documented the peace movement in Lebanon and pioneered discussions where "gender identity became contested and transformed within the framework of war and violence" (Kurtz and Kurz, 2015, pp. 285).

Television and newspaper coverage throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s also included a particular element, namely the importance of working women and the promotion of women's


of *Al-Raida*, we are proud to present the recollections, views and suggestions of several heroines of the Lebanese civil war. These dynamic, resourceful and courageous women, who are but a representative sample of a much larger group, have a great deal to offer to Lebanese society as it emerges from a long nightmare of death and destruction. These women may also have much to impart to the women who are now picking up the

Adnan, and *The Foreman's Fortress*, by Layla Usayran for examples of literature by the Beirut Decentrists.

(2) Miriam Cooke (1987) *Women Write War: The Centering of the Beirut Decentrists*, Oxford: Center for Lebanese Studies.

Photograph by Hayat Karanouh

AL-RAIDA Vol. XII Nos. 70 & 71 Summer & Fall 1995 13 AL-RAIDA Vol. XII Nos. 70 & 71 Summer & Fall 1995

Figure 18: Excerpt from al-Raida journal (al-Raida)

Editorial

Rosemary Sayigh*

Women in Lebanon Tell Their Lives

Introduction: Oral History

Oral history as research approach emerges partly from nineteenth century European romantic nationalism, with its enthusiasm for folk-lore and folk-narrative, partly from journalistic investigation into social conditions, for instance Mayhew's study of the London poor (1861) or, much later, the radio journalist Studs Terkel's classic study of the Great Depression (1970). Another contributory influence was the turn taken by historians towards material conditions, social relations, culture and 'mentalities'. Ironically, anthropology contributed little to oral history in spite of its primary focus on pre-literate peoples. This was because anthropologists like Malinowski believed that 'primitive' peoples either had no history, or did not know it.[1]

Paul Thompson in his introductory book on oral history explains why most historians reacted with distrust to a method associated from its beginnings with the desire to record - hence implicitly to change - marginality.[2]

curricula in the Arab world. Several factors may explain this strange omission: most Arab universities are state-controlled, with social study curricula built on 'classic' Western texts, with little attention to recent critical trends. In courses on methodology, the survey is dominant. Critiques of Western epistemology such as those made in Subaltern Studies are not to be found on Arab university reading lists. It may also be that the hierarchy of the written over the oral may be stronger in the Arab region than in, say, India which also possesses both literate and oral traditions. How otherwise explain the neglect of orality by social scientists in the Arab region? In spite of an enormously rich verbal culture, we find no teaching or research in sociolinguistics, little research focussed on everyday speech, few folklore studies, and almost no life story recording.[3]

The particular relevance of oral history for Al-Raida is that

Figure 19: Excerpt from al-Raida journal (al-Raida).

work, for reasons varying between "modernity, financial need, and economic empowerment toward emancipation" (Zaatari, 2006, pp. 42).

Literary Writings and Other Media

The civil war period witnessed the proliferation of multiple types of artistic expression, ways to express one's views and ways to render one's testimonies, particularly in literary fashion and in novel writing.

As Čižmíková (2012) 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 other. 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, ample literature examining the civil war period often classifies the writings of women above those of men. According to

Čižmíková (2012, pp. 150), 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". (Čižmíková, 2012, pp. 150). In the words of the New York Times, a poem by kindergarten teacher Iman Khalifeh which received international mention "stirred" Beirut plans for protest (Aboul-Hosn, 2015).

> "*With their pens, Lebanese women were fighting the civil war (1975-92) in the hope of bringing about peace through reason and art*" (Cooke in Golley, 2007, pp. 15).

Novels

Novels such as Iman Humaydan Younes' paved the way for feminist approaches towards gender roles in the country (Azar, 2018). Others, such as Ghada al-Samman's Beirut, Hoda Barakat's The Stone of Laughter and Hanan al-Shaykh's The Story of Zahra challenge gender expectations and certain 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, while undermining certain understandings of martyrdom (al-Raida).

Literature characterizes the novel as functioning "within an ideological field that recycles stereotypes and tropes about Arab women" (Hartman, 2020, pp. 83). Al-Shaykh's novel was featured in the first International Feminist Bookfair in London in 1986 as it garnered considerable critical acclaim (Cooke in Golley, 2007).

The four authors depicted the war's senselessness, with a particular focus on its everydayness (Biglin, 2013). Writers used different languages in their writings and addressed matters of violence, war trauma and gender relations (Rebeiz, 2022). Writer Nada Awar Jarrar and others addressed hidden moods of war, going beyond masculine pure war narratives and hegemonic ones to discuss personal lives, inner struggles and experiences of women (Gamal el-Din, 2018; Curry, 2021).

Cinema

Women's role during the war was often ignored by mainstream Lebanese cinema and films, which often presented it as a masculine domain and relegated women to the position of victims, or omitted them. When Khatib (2006) asked Borhan Alawiyeh, the director of the film Letter from a Time of Exile about the omission of women in movies, his reply was "that he could not imagine the experience of women" (pp. 65).

> *"Lebanese cinema has largely ignored the role of women as ['active agents'] in the civil war, presenting them ['as passive and silent beings']"* (Hout, 2016, pp. 487).

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" (Khatib, 2006, pp. 69), challenged dominant discourses of the war that blame an "undefined other", went beyond traditional mother roles for women and did not essentialize nor idealize them.

Khatib (2006) 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" (Khatib, 2006, pp. 76).

Post-War

Despite varying conclusions as to how the war impacted women's participation in the workforce and gender dynamics in society, women were found to be excluded and marginalized at several levels during the post-war years. A UNICEF report in 1995 concluded that women are faced with discrimination at legal, political, cultural and economic levels (Khatib, 2008).

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 and an observable 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 taking initiative to form pressure groups and proactively demand and advocate for their rights (Abdo and Kerbage, 2012).

The Beijing conference in 1995 is considered an event that gave momentum to women organizations and debates on gender equality, not only through the formation of women's advancement committees but also through the conference's impact on Lebanon signing the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the creation of a National Women's Commission (International Labour Organization, 1997). However, women's voices remained largely quiet in post-war Lebanon, with them largely excluded from decision-making positions across various sectors (al-Raida).

From their part, disabled people's organizations developed new strategies during the post-war period which focused on lobbying for a 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" (Kabbara, 2012, pp. 34). Realities today, however, are constrained for disabled people's organizations as they are faced with a myriad of political issues constraining the margin of adequacy of pro-disabled people policies and an overall civil society discourse that excludes disabled people to a large degree (Kabbara, 2012).

Queer people had a different experience during the war, as homosexuality was and remains taboo in the country. While the war period might have had the silver lining of turning police forces' attention away from what they consider public indecencies, post-war period coverage of queer people in popular magazine and TV shows were done with an intent of mockery to a considerable degree. Halwani (2002) gives the example of an article on lesbians by the magazine Apostrophe, where the magazine gave the impression that it was genuinely interested in a serious discussion on homosexuality and lesbian realities, but ran the piece in a special issue subtitled "Men".

THE EARLY 2020S (UNTIL 2022)

Not so different from other decades in the Lebanese context, the 2000s were a period of political turbulence and instability in the country. Events such as the 2000 liberation of the South, the 2005 Independence Revolution, the 2006 war, the 2008 events and the pro-change movements of 2011, 2015 and 2019 had a notable impact on the country's sociopolitical dynamics, and women were naturally well involved during such changes.

Women's involvement in such movements, particularly pro-change endeavors, had become more and more apparent, and their role acknowledged in its own way.

Stephan (2010a) argues that during the March 2005 demonstrations, women acquired a new image as politically active citizens, with much more room for engagement in contentious politics. Their role was not limited to being participants on the side or playing a supportive role, but rather was seen to be contributive to the movements in terms of planning. Women organized their own demonstrations and added a "feminine" element to resistance (Stephan, 2010a).

In fact, women's role during the 2005 revolution was considered central, and it played a key role in the evolution of gender standards in Lebanon (Stephan, 2017). 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 CSOs (Kurtz and Kurtz, 2015).

Women's contribution and planning to the anti-Syrian occupation nonviolent resistance was a way through which women added a feminist dimension to liberation. This relates to how women's rights activists linked between gender-related equality, violence, contentious politics, democracy, and peace building (Kurtz and Kurtz, 2015).

Women organizers 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 al-Nahar newspaper during protest days to sneak protest material in the newspaper's truck (Stephan, 2010b). These endeavors have shed light on women's increased awareness of their rights as citizens and the infusion of the resistance movement with a new type of consciousness. However, some elements of women's participation were considered distinctly elitist. Class-based critiques of women's participation highlighted the number of Louis Vuitton purses and Gucci backpacks among women during the demonstrations (Stephan, 2010).

Women's rights organizations also showed notable levels of organizational flexibility. During the 2006 Israeli occupation-Lebanon war, 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 (Abou-Habib, 2006).

Newsroom Dynamics

Since this review is centered on media coverage of women's rights and feminist movements, a focus on internal newsroom dynamics and women journalists is deemed important to understand dynamics behind certain coverage choices. It's important to begin by acknowledging that mainstream media TV companies are extremely impacted by the sectarian nature of the country's sociopolitical structure, thus rendering mainstream media to a large extent influenced by elitist and sectarian political interests.

Media's independence and freedom is also harmed by the absence of professional and adequate unions for press and broadcast journalists (Mady, 2015).

An International Women's Media Foundation report in 2011 found that the ratio of employment in news companies was more

than 2:1 in favor of men, with matters even more accentuated in governance and top-level management levels (IWMF, 2011).

Indeed, generations of "Arab women journalists and activists are among the neglected historical forces" in Arab television's development (Sakr, 2007 in Mady, 2015, pp. 41). Research on women in media, however, remains relatively rudimentary, with some attributing rising rates of women in media to societal and cultural developments (Mady, 2015).

Discrimination within television status is obvious, with a research in 2000 claiming that women only get 18% of top ranking positions, which are relatively monopolized by men despite the fact that 85% of journalism and communication students are women (Mady, 2015). Mady also adds factors such as the lack of gender-sensitive provisions and sexual harassment-tackling laws in the Lebanese press syndicate's codes of professional conduct.

However, Mady (2015) adds that many significant advances in the sector were made in women's access to previously male-dominated spaces. Arab women journalists opened new discursive spaces and women proved to be successful journalists in times of both war and peace. Moreover, Mady's primary research shows that women's role in the media field was believed to be "as appreciated as that of a man" (pp. 181). The study found that appreciation is rather focused on character more than anything else, that women respondents believed that "women can occupy the same positions as men in the Lebanese television newsroom" (pp. 199), that women formed a majority of newsroom employees, that most respondents found that "management opportunities were equal for both men and women" (pp. 201) and that "recognition was not gender sensitive" (pp. 211). Most respondents in Mady's research also rejected the notion that Lebanese newsrooms are an old boys' club. The research also claimed that there was no hard news/soft news dichotomy in the Lebanese newsroom as is dominant in other contexts, where women cover light news while men cover hard news given that women in Lebanon were at the forefront of hotspot coverage. Despite these matters, women still did not show up in top management positions despite newsroom environments changing considerably and women powerfully occupying middle-level and senior management positions.

A Decade of Organizations and Demonstrations

Coverage of women's rights and feminist movements in the Arab world and in Lebanon in particular significantly increased during the last decades, as women were playing increasingly central roles to a series of movements, starting from 2005 and going through the 2010s such as in the 2011 anti-sectarian protests, the 2015 garbage protests and the 2019 uprising.

International Coverage

Feminist organizers' endeavors and involvement in events such as the 2019 Lebanese protest movement gained traction in local, regional and international media. Titles of news articles, blogs and journals show the centrality of and increased attention to the role that women, queer and feminist organizers have played in the protest movement by different forms of media (annex for samples).

Local coverage that focused on marginalized groups and feminist organizers' role was 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 environment (Rose, 2019), spray paints across Lebanese walls with feminist slogans and the reclaiming of public spaces (Kowal and Fosgrau, 2019), showcasing women's "leadership" within the protest movement (CIVICUS Monitor, 2020).

These articles also highlighted how feminist organizers incorporated feminist demands and gender equality in the wider sociopolitical demands that were commonplace throughout the protest movement with a focus on social, economic and political issues.

Women's frontline presence also meant them standing up to violence emanating from security forces and militia supporters

(Anderson and Cheeseman, 2019). In Duque's (2019) 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 function". Furthermore, the news pieces highlight how women's frontline action in Lebanon is inspiring feminists across other Arab countries to stand up to in a back-and-forth between masculine ridicule and feminist response attempts (Elbasnaly, 2019).

In addition, journalistic pieces of work such as Hamzeh's (2020) 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 rights. The article 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.

Policy demands that addressed issues such as reforms of personal status laws and child marriage also gained traction (Fakih, 2019). 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 Monitor (2020), which quotes co-founder and co-director of Fe-Male Hayat Mirshad's assertion that the revolution "is a women's issue", and that there is no liberation "without equality".

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" (Mandour, 2019) and Cindy Salame's analysis (2021) in the journal Kohl that talks about how "it is instrumental to consider the potentialities generated by the October 17 revolution for queer movements to construct new solidarities".

Articles discussed very specific issues such as chants against homophobia during protests, the spaces that were created by queer organizers and the notable role that they played in the 2019 protests (Harb, 2019; Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Finally, a 2021 report by UN Women documented the backlash and sexism against female protesters, as well as the sexist slander and harassment against female parliamentarians, government officials and reporters. Among the incidents, the 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" (UN Women, 2021, pp. 9). A UN Women 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).

Coverage in a negative light of feminist movements and the 2019 protests was the case for many media platforms affiliated to traditional ruling class parties. This ranges from direct accusations of the movements being stirred by Western powers to criticisms of their thematic approaches under pretext of foreign agenda influence. In addition, ruling class figures and supporters on social media platforms intentionally lumped together civil society groups, alternative political groups, academics and anyone challenging the mainstream status-quo under the umbrella of "civil society", invisibilizing the nuances within the wider anti-establishment movement.

Similar to the internal discussions in the early 1900s, today's feminist organizers also noted the importance of safe and inclusive spaces for discussion, brainstorming and strategizing. Collaborations between feminist organizers, migrant workers' initiatives, LGBTQIA+ initiatives and refugee groups were key for the foundation of many community spaces such as the Dammeh Cooperative, Haven for Artists, Mansion, and others which proved as important media for discussions and organization.

CONCLUSION

Countless takeaways could be sowed when one looks into the history of media coverage of women's rights and feminist movements in Lebanon and the Arab region.

Among those is the fact that learning about the unique history of endeavors by women writers, artists and organizers reveals the indigeneity of feminist movements in Lebanon and the Arab region. It reveals the diversity of methods and ways of expression that women of the region have used to challenge dominant narratives.

On one hand, Arab feminists that did not isolate themselves from international discussions around gender justice and actively participated in shaping their outcomes. On the other, they formed local, national and regional revolutionary discourses centered on intersectionality, particularly that between gender justice and national liberation from imperial and colonial powers.

Second, delving into the history of women's rights and feminist organizing reveals that women in Lebanon and the Arab region have long challenged conceptualizations of marginalized groups as immobile victims and actively struggled not only for one specific cause such as gender justice, but to address the wider logic of how social dynamics operate and sow inequality, patriarchy and discrimination and advance an intersectional understanding of marginalized groups' realities that is rooted in empowerment.

Thirdly, the history of women's rights and feminist organizing reveals that while ruling class figures and patriarchal structures have always sought to silence certain voices and repress the freedoms of certain social groups (often the majority of society), feminists have always found a way to express themselves. The wide diversity of media initiatives, the different forms of expression through artists' work and the different structural forms of organization reveal not only tenacious defiance to oppressive structures, but also incredible creativity and operational flexibility that further studies are yet to reveal.

Finally, a key takeaway that this brief study highlights is that the road to freedom is far from linear. In regions such as Lebanon and the Arab region, and with the recurrency of crises, conflicts, and backlashes against human rights, progress remains difficult to discern. However, similarly to how Zaynab Fawwaz advanced women's empowerment during periods of political turbulence in the Ottoman Empire, how women organized humanitarian activities and advanced national liberation and gender justice during the two World Wars, how the Decentrists brought forward a different narrative to the Civil War centered on daily realities and social inequalities, and how intersectional feminist movements today advocate for the empowerment of marginalized groups amid an ever-so-turbulent Middle East, progress is always made but often not appreciated at the moment. It contributes to the larger, humanity-sized story of human rights advancement built on continuous dialectics of struggles.

This research is far from extensive and remains no more than a drop in the ocean of the history of women's rights and feminist movements in Lebanon and the region. It aimed to gloss over some of the major debates, discursive trends and societal changes around women's rights and feminism across the last century and few decades.

This effort is cemented in a great appreciation of the necessity to archive, historicize and trace feminist efforts across decades and centuries, so that today and future generations can have a better grasp of their history and the dynamics that dominate sociopolitical structures.

Today, Lebanon and the Arab region face a myriad of struggles ranging from socioeconomic crisis and conflict to climate change. The intersectional approach that feminist movements in the region have historically brought forward remains foundational to learn from, build upon and continue to build a more sustainable, resilient and inclusive Arab World.

ANNEX

Sample of articles covering the 2019 Lebanon protest movement:

International:

- "Women lead Lebanon's protests" in German news organization DW (Elbasnaly, 2019)
- "A movement in good company: Voices of Lebanese women" in the London School of Economics and Political Science's blog section (Maddah, 2021).
- "Female protesters on the frontline in Lebanon" in France24 (Cheval, 2019).
- "Lebanon's protests could mark a victory for women" in CNN (Duque, 2019).
- "['If Not Now, When?']: Queer and Trans People Reclaim their Power in Lebanon's Revolution" in Human Rights Watch (Younes, 2020).
- "Lebanon protests seen as an 'opportunity' for LGBT+ community" in Reuters (Greenhalgh, 2019).
- "Lebanon protesters march over domestic violence bill" in the BBC (BBC, 2014).
- "In Lebanon, Violence Between the Sheets Is Legal" in WOMEN'S eNews (Daher, 2011).
- "In Lebanon, a Tangle of Religious Laws Govern Life and Love" in the Atlantic (Sussman, 2011).
- "Lebanon: Laws Discriminate Against Women" in Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2015).
- "['The revolution is changing me. It's making me hope']: young women on the protests in Beirut" in openDemocracy (Hao, 2019).
- "Lebanon's Women Have Fought for Change – and Should Get It" in Human Rights Watch (Fakih, 2019).
- "A women's revolution within the Lebanese revolution" in Peace Direct (Abou-Zahr, 2020).

Regional:

- "Women and women's rights are central to Lebanon's protest movement" in the Middle East Institute (Nassar, 2019).
- "Women stand defiantly at the vanguard of Lebanon's protest movement" in Middle East Eye (Anderson and Cheeseman, 2019).
- "What takes Lebanese women to front line in protests?" in al-Monitor (Frakes, 2019).
- "Lebanese women are breaking taboos to be face of protests" in the National News (Rose, 2019).
- "Women and students are at the heart of Lebanon's protests" in Arab News (Houssari, 2019).
- "'The revolution is female': Why feminist issues are driving Lebanon's protests" in the New Arab (Khalil, 2019).

Local:

- "Women are on the frontlines of the Lebanese protests" in Beirut Today (Kowal and Fosgrau, 2019).
- "['The revolution is female'] in 17 October... And after it women won't stay silent ("الثورة أنثى" في 17 تشرين.. وبعدها لن تسكت امرأة")" in al-Modon (Hamzeh, 2020).
- "Forging Solidarities: Queer Voices in the October 17 Revolution" in the journal Kohl (Salame, 2021).

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