CHAPTER 5

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REVOLT:
THE RISE OF SUBALTERN MOVEMENTS

It is perhaps a mundane observation that Syria and Lebanon were not republics of equal citizens. This was the lot of all colonies, as well as many independent countries. What was remarkable in Syria and Lebanon of the 1920s was that the paternalistic order was in a constant state of crisis, destabilized by economic dislocation, state social policy, and the peculiar political arrangements required by the mandate charter. Indeed the state's inegalitarian reshuffling of the social order, paired with its constitutional promises of republican equality among citizens, produced a yawning gap of inconsistency that invited challenges to the colonial civic order. Into this gap rushed three subaltern movements, representing women, workers, and non-elite Muslims whose civic status was structurally subordinated to mediating elites (men, employers, elite Muslims, Christians, and the French). They were subalterns also in the sense that they had no distinct voice in the civic order. The hegemonic discourse of both the French civilizing mission and elite nationalism (replicated in many histories written since the mandate period) marginalized or ignored their concerns. The new activism of these groups derived from growing consciousness of their subaltern status and of their rights as citizens of republics to demand equality.

The subaltern movements coalesced within a broader context of frenzied postwar associationalism. While the Ottomans had registered only 31 associations in prewar Beirut, for example, the French would register 401 associations in the city and its environs, and 338 more in the rest of Lebanon between 1920 and 1942.[1] The dizzying array of associations included Ottoman-era charitable, religious, cultural, political, and student clubs, as well as new groups with new aims, devoted to sports, scouting, aviation, protection of animals, human rights, veterans' affairs, and families' mutual aid. New, too, were middle-class professional associations organized by surgeons, importers, hoteliers, teachers, lawyers, engineers, journalists, auto mechanics, hairdressers, musicians, artists, and theatrical troupes.

While Ottoman-era groups tended to be informal gatherings of friends, mandate-era groups became increasingly formalized. The mandatory state's stiffer licensing laws required from every association a statement of goals, a list of members, and records of fees paid. Formality came also because the groups grew larger. They built links across and between cities, even crossing the Syrian and Lebanese borders, with the use of new communications: the telegraph, the telephone, the train, and the many kilometers of road built by the French. Large groups, unlike the intimate clubs of the prewar era, often assembled strangers. In 1928, the Beirut newspaper *al-Bashir* published an article urging those who attend meetings to adopt proper etiquette and rules of order: they should arrive on time, should not talk, and should not smoke during the meeting. Meetings often took place in cafes and members' homes, although increasingly large groups tended to gather in hotels and cinemas.[2] These developments made possible true social movements; that is, sustained organizations that recruited large numbers of people based on shared principles.

As women's, workers,' and Islamic populists' movements emerged, their orientations changed. Under the Ottoman regime, small women's societies, labor guilds, and religious groups were closely regulated and firmly bound to the paternalistic social order of the day. They had sought reform within the prevailing norms of patronage, deference, and gender hierarchy. Now, the movements came to emphasize not just general goals of social reform, but their specific identities as subaltern citizens. They challenged the paternalistic norms of state social policy that underprivileged their members in the civic order. They especially criticized the mediating power of men over women, bourgeois employers over workers, missionaries over students, and elite ulama over common Muslims.

This chapter introduces the three movements by tracing the history of their organizational development. Their ideologies and political impact on the colonial civic order will be discussed in more detail in the remaining chapters of this book.

Roots in the Era of Ottoman Reform

The impulse for reform in the late Ottoman era came not only from the state above, but also from society below. It began in Mount Lebanon, where the mid-nineteenth century arrival of missionaries and European capitalists inspired and frightened local people into organizing their own efforts at social reform. They built educational and cultural societies (jam'iyat) to compete

with those of missionaries. As European influence spread, and as social and economic structures began to change, reform societies spread throughout the region.

Bourgeois women were among the earliest social reformers. In 1847, the Sisters of Love (Akhawat al-mahabba) was founded in Lebanon. It built a school, a hospital in Damascus, a tuberculosis sanatorium, and a hostel for wayward girls. In the 1880s and 1890s, other women's groups organized national girls' schools to compete with missionary schools in Lebanon, Damascus, Tripoli, and Homs. The most prestigious of these was the Flower of Charity (Zahrat al-ihsan) school and convent funded by the Beirut millionairess Emily Sursuq. While these efforts built upon women's long-standing activity in philanthropy, they reflected a new spirit. Their primary aim was to uplift the lower classes, particularly poor women, through education and hygiene. Women philanthropists saw themselves, then, primarily as upstanding members of the newly emergent bourgeoisie, and as collaborators in the defensive social reforms led by the Ottoman state.

Islamic reform was rooted similarly in education and competition with foreign missionaries, but it differed in relation to the state. The Ottoman state's expanding role in education and justice had worked to undermine the authority of the Muslim ulama. New schools and courts were staffed by civil servants with European-style training in education and law. Whereas the ulama had once been considered the educated elite of the empire, enjoying wide influence in government and community affairs, by 1914 their authority was considerably reduced, confined mainly to the adjudication of a narrowed range of religious law and the management of religious endowments (awqaf), mosques, and other religious institutions. In reaction to state secularization, an intellectual reform movement emerged among mid-level ulama.

The Salafiya movement called for social and spiritual reform within a purified Islam and for unity among Muslims as a defense against European encroachment. Its vision placed the ulama back in the center of public life, and appealed especially to well-educated religious scholars who had not attained prestigious posts. Like women's groups, these Islamic reformers established schools and charitable societies that obtained state subsidies to further their cause. The most comprehensive system of Muslim private schools was that of the Maqasid foundation in Lebanon, which from 1866 built dozens of schools that still exist today. Salafi reformers also forged ties with Arabists, who also came from a new generation of professionals excluded from Ottoman bureaucracy. They both formed political societies and published their ideas in new magazines, particularly after the 1908 Young Turk revolution.[3] Prominent

among Salafis at this time were Muhammad Kurd 'Ali, a Damascene Arabist scholar and newspaper publisher; Rashid Rida, an Arabist scholar from Tripoli deeply influenced by the intellectual father of the Salafiya movement, the Egyptian Muhammad 'Abduh; and Shakib Arslan, a Lebanese Druze prince and journalist exceptional in his belief that the Ottoman empire was the best means to assure Islamic unity and strength.[4]

Workers had more difficulty in establishing reform groups. Artisanal guilds had adapted to growing market competition in the nineteenth century by altering the master-apprentice relationship. Apprentices gradually became wage laborers with little real expectation of owning their own shops, and masters forged ties with merchant-marketers. The proletarianization of workers continued with the introduction of new industries, as in silk, and with large public works projects undertaken by Europeans, such as the building of railroads and ports. In these sectors, employers substituted unskilled men, women, and children for more highly paid artisans. Workers' organization was discouraged by Ottoman laws, mentioned in last chapter, forbidding them to organize separately from their masters. Proto-labor unions emerged nonetheless in defiance of the law. Some apprentices and wage laborers mounted illegal protests and strikes against their falling wages and poor conditions of work. In 1903 and 1904, striking weavers in Aleppo actually won wage raises of up to 20 percent.[5]

World War I catalyzed important changes in the aims and organizations of women, workers, and Islamic reformers. As will be seen below, it produced the leaders of a self-conscious women's movement, transformed the elitist Salafiya movement into a populist one, and disrupted labor organization so much as to permit the replacement of guilds with labor unions.

The Women's Movement

The war and French occupation transformed bourgeois ladies' charities into a self-conscious subaltern movement. Women's leaders' first break with paternalism came with their nationalist opposition to the Ottoman and the French states. Later, they came to recognize that, because of their gender, they did not fully share the privileges of their class. By the end of the 1920s, a Syrian-Lebanese women's union emerged that decried state social policies and religious laws that handicapped female citizens, and that attempted to overcome class barriers to represent all women.

The politicization of women's charities began during the war. In 1914, a

group of prominent Muslim women in Beirut established the Arab Girl's Awakening Society (Jam'iyat yaqzat al-fatat al-'arabiya) which combined girls' education with a credo to oppose all foreign rule, eventually including that of the Turks. In 1916, women mounted anti-Ottoman demonstrations against bread shortages and the execution of Arab nationalists.[6] The Ottomans responded with support for women's groups, in an effort to reunify the population and to provide war relief. 'Anbara Salam (1906–1986) later recalled how shocked women were when Jemal Pasha called them to a meeting and proposed the project. They seized his offer of funding and soon found themselves gathering hungry children from the streets for baths, medical exams, and lessons in crafts and reading.[7] Salma Sayigh (1889–1953) ran an orphanage established by Jemal Pasha. In a workshop for the poor and elderly run with state funds by 'Adila Bayhum (1902–1975), nearly 1,800 women were employed in textile and carpet weaving and handicrafts. In 1917, the governor of Beirut helped Bayhum, Salam, and Ibtihaj Qaddura (1892–1967), among others, found the Muslim Girls' Club (Nadi al-fatayat al-muslimat). It supported a library and a school for poor girls, and organized art lessons and lectures by prominent poets and religious scholars for Muslim women and girls.[8] Meanwhile the Ladies' Society (Jam'iyat al-sayyidat) was founded by Julia Dimashqiya (1888–1954), a writer and teacher, "to unite Syrian women despite differences in religion" through literary exchanges.[9]

As the war ended, these and other women activists embraced Faysal's Arab nationalism.[10] With Faysal's support, Nazik 'Abid (1887–1960), daughter of a former Ottoman bureaucrat, founded the Red Star society, a local variant of the Red Cross, and the Light of Damascus society (Nur al-fayha'), through which she promoted Arabism in a girls' school and in a magazine of the same name.[11] Faysal also sponsored the founding of the Christian Women's Club in 1920 Damascus by Mary 'Ajamy (1888–1969), a teacher and publisher of a women's magazine, to promote Arabism among Christians.[12] These seven women—Salam, Bayhum, Qaddura, Sayigh, Dimashqiya, 'Abid and 'Ajamy—would become the core founders of the women's movement in the mandate period.

With the French occupation nationalist women's groups were at first marginalized. The mandatory state shut down 'Abid's school and Red Star society, and diverted state support to its own French Red Cross and Drop of Milk society. Many nationalist women in Syria begrudgingly joined these groups, dominated by the wives of French officials. "The women who worked with the French in societies were the same women who participated in demonstrations against them," recalled a Damascene philanthropist.[13] Women also pursued

their own charitable and reform efforts without state sponsorship that they had enjoyed during the war.

Lebanon continued to be the center of the most activity: 36 women's groups were registered there between 1920 and 1939.[14] The number and character of the groups appears linked to ongoing acute social stress. Churches had been a major provider of such charity during the war, and the majority of women's groups continued to be religious charities emphasizing education and health care for mothers and girls.[15] For example, the Orthodox Society of Compassion for Ladies (Jam'iyat al-shafaqa al-urthuduksiya lil-sayyidat) was established in Beirut by Linda Sursuq in 1920 to support schools for poor girls.[16] Among Muslim endeavors, the Islamic Orphanage (Dar al-aytam al-islamiya) was the most important. It was founded in 1922 by a nucleus of women who from the Arab Girl's Awakening Society, including Ibtihaj Qaddura. The group not only cared for orphans, but also funded a range of activity promoting women's role in society through waqf foundations that drew revenues from shops in the city's markets. It was the first such foundation financed mainly by women, and was innovative in that women sat on its board of directors.[17]

The Syrian Revolt inspired a new wave of activity in Damascus. 'Adila Bay-hum, who moved to Damascus and took the surname al-Jaza'iri after her mar-riage, organized workshops during the revolt to offer handicraft training to displaced and widowed rural women. In 1927 she helped found, with Nazik 'Abid and others, the Syrian Woman's Awakening Society (Yaqzat al-mar'a al-shamiya), which like its Lebanese predecessor undertook a variety of social works, including English and sewing lessons for poor girls, hospital visits, and monthly cultural lectures.[18] Three years later, Thuraya al-Hafiz (b. 1912), daughter of a nationalist executed by Jemal Pasha, founded the Women's Nor-mal School Alumnae association (Jam'iyat kharijat dur al-mu'allimat), which provided schooling for poor and orphaned girls. This was the only popular women's group in Syria at the time, with members drawn from the middle classes rather than the elite.[19] Available records offer little information on women's groups in other Syrian cities until after 1930.[20]

Many women's leaders ran Arabist schools, to counter the French influ-ence in state and missionary schools. Teaching was about the only respectable profession open to elite women, and good number of women activists were teachers, including 'Ajamy, Jaza'iri, Hafiz, Dimashqiya, and Qaddura. In 1928, Jaza'iri helped found the Tree of Culture Society (Dawhat al-adab), which by 1931 opened a girls' school to offer an Arabic education and produce patriotic female citizens.[21] Meanwhile, Mary Kassab continued to run her Syrian People's School, founded in 1917 Beirut. Kassab also wrote

magazine articles advocating the standardization of curricula in Lebanon to promote national unity. Dimashqiya, too, campaigned for nationalist education and more girls' schools, in meetings with parliamentary deputies and in her magazine, *The New Woman* (*al-Mar'a al-jadida*).[22]

Meanwhile, literary salons in both cities sought to foster patriotism, social consciousness, and support for the women's movement among elite men and women. In Damascus, 'Ajamy's salon in the early 1920s attracted prominent male writers and nationalists, including future National Bloc leaders Fakhri al-Barudi and Faris al-Khuri. 'Ajamy broke social convention by gathering a mixed group of men and women together her home.[23] Another gender barrier was broken by the Women's Cultural Club (Nadwa al-thaqafiya al-nisa'iya), established in the late 1930s, which organized a series of women's lectures at the all-male bastion of the Arab Academy in Damascus.[24] In 1920s Beirut, Dimashqiya's salon was soon joined by that of Habuba Haddad (1897–1957), a pioneering female journalist and a graduate of the American University of Beirut. It attracted writers and politicians not only from Lebanon, but also from Syria, including National Bloc leader and future prime minister Jamil Mardam Bey.[25]

The range of women's activities steadily widened beyond charity and education. "Women were not left at home in those days. Society was very sophisticated, focused on nationalist and economic issues," recalled a former member of the Syrian Woman's Awakening Society.[26] Nationalist women, like their nationalist husbands and fathers, increasingly addressed the state on the social issues that concerned them. They did so both in the spirit of cooperation in matters of mutual concern and in a spirit of opposition and confrontation.

Concerning public health, for example, women's groups joined protests for cleaner streets and better state inspections of bakeries. Bakeries were a paramount health concern because bread was the main staple in most people's diets. Women's groups also called on the state to require health exams before marriage, on the same principle that prostitutes were examined: to protect brides from disease. In 1928 Beirut, Adalayd Rishani founded the Society to Stop Crime and Improve Prisons (Jam'iyat mukafahat al-jarima wa tahsin al-sujun), which campaigned for years to improve prison conditions. Rishani herself pounded on the doors of state bureaucrats until she won the right to inspect hygiene in prisons and deliver clean clothing to prisoners.[27]

Women's labor issues attracted by far the most attention. In 1924 Beirut, Dimashqiya, Qaddura and others founded the Women's Revival Society (Jam'iyat al-nahda al-nisa'iya) to protect women's handicrafts threatened by imports. The group held three handicraft expositions between 1924 and 1928,

the last of which attracted more than 20,000 visitors, including some government officials. The Syrian Woman's Awakening Society in Damascus participated in these exhibitions and also promoted local women's handicrafts. These labor efforts were not solely directed at self-help: they called upon the state for support. The Women's Revival, Syrian Woman's Awakening and Rishani's Society to Stop Crime petitioned the government to protect female artisans in particular, and traditional handicrafts in general. They also petitioned the government to set limits on women's work hours, a minimum wage, and higher tariffs on imports.[28]

Through this variety of activity women's leaders made a critical transition by the late 1920s. They began to emphasize their identity as women and their collective goal to achieve the right to full participation in the civic order. Their work as educators, philanthropists and writers was no longer simply an expression of social concern, but a vehicle through which they asserted their place in national affairs. This change in orientation occurred gradually, as leaders built linkages among the disparate women's groups. In 1921, Lebanese women's groups formed an informal union, which in 1924 became the Women's Union in Syria and Lebanon (al-Ittihad al-nisa'i fi suriya wa lubnan). Founders included its first president, Labiba Thabit, and Salma Sayigh. Prominent members included old-timers like Qaddura and Jaza'iri and three newcomers: Thuraya al-Hafiz of Damascus and Rose Shahfa and Eveline Bustros, both writers from Beirut.[29]

The women's union would become the vanguard of a self-conscious women's politics, sponsoring regular conferences of its own as well as attending international women's congresses. The union aspired to represent all women. It was emphatically cross-sectarian, including both Muslims and Christians, and it was adamantly Arab nationalist, uniting both Syrians and Lebanese. It coordinated the activities of its member groups and represented women's voices in public affairs through petitions, visits to government officials, and street demonstrations. It held its first public conference in 1928 Beirut. That same year another newcomer, Nur Hamada founded the Women's Arabic and Cultural Assembly (al-Majma' al-nisa'i al-adabi al-'arabi) in Beirut to offer women scholarly lectures and to foster international ties with other women's organizations. It helped organize the first of several Eastern women's conferences in 1930.[30] These conferences forged bonds among women as women, thereby promoting a gender self-consciousness that was less clearly articulated in prewar charity groups.

By the early 1930s, the women's movement had emerged as a significant presence in the civic order. Its conferences drew increasing press attention. It

consisted of about 40 women's groups with at least 500 to 1,000 full-time, active members, concentrated mostly in Damascus and Beirut.[31] Hundreds more women were regularly recruited for special events, like street demonstrations and conferences. As Part Three will illustrate, the union directly confronted paternalism in the colonial civic order by organizing public campaigns for women's rights, especially in education, health, and labor. Its anti-sectarian nationalism directly challenged the construction of the civic order around sectarian division and mediated hierarchies. In addition, the union campaigned for the reform of paternalistic religious laws on marriage, divorce, custody, and inheritance that limited women's autonomy and civic participation.

This latter issue was in fact critical to the movement's future, for the union leaders' agenda and appeal were severely limited by class and custom. Women's leaders came from a privileged elite that had espoused ideals of social progress before the war, and that took a liberal view toward customary and religious restrictions on women's behavior. Nazik 'Abid was not only related to Syria's first elected president, but also married into a leading, progressive Sunni family in Beirut, the Bayhums. 'Adila Bayhum, from that same family, married into the al-Jaza'iri family of Damascus, descended from the famous Algerian leader who had been exiled to the city in the mid-nineteenth century. Julia Dimashqiya married the mayor of Beirut. Eveline Bustros, a future women's union president, was descended from two prominent Greek Orthodox families, the Tuenis and Sursuqs, and married into a third. The men of these families were unusually permissive, in a society where men generally protected family honor by controlling women's contacts outside of the home. Most women and girls required men's permission to attend meetings, parties, and school.[32] These customs were popularly sanctioned by reference to religious laws. The power of easy divorce granted to men and emphasis on seclusion in Islam may well account for women's lower activism in Syria. Muslim women feared divorce if they left the home without their husbands' permission.[33]

Recruitment to the women's movement was also likely limited by the social conventions of class. Cradled in the conventions of a more permissive bourgeoisie, the groups were likely inhospitable to women from modest backgrounds who might have otherwise been free to join. Most women's groups operated much like elite ladies' clubs that existed in late-nineteenth-century Europe and America, and in contemporary Egypt and Turkey.[34] The clubs were in a sense extensions of women's homes; meetings followed bourgeois rules of etiquette. They made a public role available to women who had the leisure to spare a few hours per week, but who were not in a position to take up full-time philanthropy. The groups' sources of funding also biased their agendas toward elite

concerns. They were supported through a combination of personal wealth, patronage, and member fundraising, thereby tying them directly to the urban bourgeoisie and to religious institutions.

Women's leaders sought to make a transition to a more popularly based movement by staging public conferences and demonstrations. However, the transition from charity club to mass movement was as yet incomplete by the early 1930s. And while leaders of the union attempted to unite the many women's clubs into centrally coordinated movement like that of the National Bloc in Syria, custom and class conspired against consciousness and unity. Initiative remained dispersed among the many local clubs inspired by religious affinities and bourgeois paternalism. The obstacles to expansion and central leadership would weaken the women's movement vis-à-vis its opponents in the civic order.

The Labor Movement

Like women, workers sought a fuller role in the civic order, free from the control of mediating paternalistic elites—in their case, bourgeois employers and French concessionary companies. Unlike women, workers faced fewer obstacles to spreading subaltern consciousness and to recruiting a mass movement.

The labor movement developed in spite of, and in reaction to, the state's repression of workers in the 1920s. Three factors contributed to the transition from guilds that mixed workers and employers to employee-only unions among diverse trades. First, workplaces began to change. The war's military conscription and economic collapse further disrupted deteriorating master-apprentice relations in old-style artisanal workshops. At the same time more and more workers found jobs in new factories or in public-sector companies, where hierarchical bonds of family and master-apprentice were absent. Second, workers' stress increased with the prolonged period of labor dislocation and instability after the war. Third, new ideas about the rights of workers spread, primarily due to the organizing efforts of Communists and the influence of the International Labor Organization.

The first attempts to organize workers coincided with the start of the mandate. In 1920, railway workers at the French D.H.P. company (Damas-Hama et Prolongements) staged a large strike for higher wages. Tramway and other workers soon followed their example. In 1924, the Lebanese People's Party was founded by Yusuf Yazbak, a 23-year-old Communist journalist, and Fu'ad al-Shamali, an organizer of tobacco workers, in cooperation with Jewish Com-

munists sent from Palestine. The party advocated labor unions, more support for public education, the liberation of women, anti-sectarianism, and public control over waqf revenues. The following year, the party merged with a separate Armenian Communist organization. The new Communist Party united branches in both Syria and Lebanon, and actively supported efforts of local workers to organize.[35] Because of French repression, however, the party would not become a political force in its own right until after 1935.

Labor strikes proliferated in the late 1920s. Between 1926 and 1929, workers staged 47 strikes in Beirut, Aleppo, Damascus, and Homs for higher pay and accident insurance, and to protest tax and price levels set by the government. In the vanguard were public-sector workers at ports and in railroad, tramway, and electric companies, along with workers in the tobacco and transport industries. They were joined by many artisans, particularly in textile and shoe-making trades. The number and size of strikes increased in the early 1930s, as wages fell and unemployment rose. By 1932, more than 30,000 artisans had gone bankrupt in Damascus alone. In 1930, strikes included 650 cement factory workers in Tripoli, 2,000 Aleppine weavers, and all of the auto drivers and mechanics in Lebanon. In January 1932, 5,000 Lebanese drivers and mechanics struck again for four days, an impressive proportion of the transport sector, which employed 10,000 Syrians and Lebanese in taxi, trucking, and repair services. Many of the strikers won higher wages and tax reductions, but not accident insurance.[36]

In the 1930s, workers in other new sectors began to organize. The number of industrial firms in what the French called the "modern" sector more than doubled to 900 between 1932 and 1939. These included food processing, textile, shoemaking and cement factories, as well as an oil refinery in Tripoli. According to a 1937 government report, these firms employed more than 200,000 workers, more than one-quarter of the labor force.[37] While industrialization created a new working class, a small, salaried middle class also began to form in cities. In addition to the burgeoning civil service, thousands of clerks, accountants, managers, hotel and restaurant employees, and translators worked in the new banking, trade, and tourism industries, especially in Lebanon. Workers in many of these sectors formed associations. When budget cuts led to the layoff of 2,000 Syrian civil servants in 1933–34, the dismissed workers formed associations in several cities to mount protests.[38]

Women were also a small but growing part of the labor movement. In November 1930, for example, several hundred female workers in the tobacco industry picketed government offices in Beirut. Women were not, however, formally organized with male unions. There appears to have been some

ambivalence on the part of union leaders. Fu'ad al-Shamali, in his 1929 book
Workers' Unions (*Niqabat al-'ummal*), called for equal pay for male and female
workers, not because it was just, but because employers were hiring women
instead of men because their wages were lower. Shamali also called for prohi-
bitions on women's work in dangerous jobs, which could be construed as a
means of excluding them from higher-paying factory jobs. However, the 1925
and 1931 party programs did call for women's legal, social, and economic
equality.[39]

While strikes were at first spontaneous events, they soon fostered sustained
organizations, some of which became employee-only labor unions. Lebanese
auto mechanics and drivers formed a national association by 1929, which
included both owners and workers. That same year in Aleppo, 600 drivers and
mechanics struck to claim the right to organize a union. In 1933 typesetters
and shoemakers in Beirut formed the first true employee-only unions, in defi-
ance of the Ottoman law that still banned them.[40] The French continued to
maintain that Syrian and Lebanese workers did not deserve protections that
their own workers enjoyed, as stated in a 1933 report: "The mandatory power
does not feel it necessary to intervene energetically, either to introduce ele-
ments of modern labor law in its own administrative organs . . . or to lead the
States to a reform of this type."[41] In face of French repression and indiffer-
ence, unions of various trades forged administrative links that enabled them
by the mid-1930s to mobilize large numbers of workers simultaneously.

The labor movement gained further momentum with the reorganization
of the Communist Party in the mid-1930s. The party replaced its longtime
president, the Lebanese Shamali, with the Syrian Khalid Bakdash, under orders
from Moscow to arabize and broaden the party's membership from its Armen-
ian base. Consequently the party embraced popular nationalist goals and
began publishing magazines and leaflets with translated doctrine and appeals
to the French to adhere to their "democratic mission in the world." The party
grew in these years to more than 2,000 members and even fielded candidates
in Lebanon's parliamentary elections of 1934 and 1937.[42] Another source of
inspiration was from France itself, where Communist, Socialist, and labor
union agitation peaked in 1934–35 to bring down the conservative govern-
ment. French labor activists visited Syria and Lebanon in 1933 and 1934, when
they established the Party for the Defense of Unions and the Press in Syria.
Finally, the election of the leftist Popular Front government in Paris in 1936
ended, temporarily, the arrests and censorship that had limited the Syrian-
Lebanese Communist Party's outreach.[43]

By the late 1930s, Syrian and Lebanese workers had attained a well-developed

subaltern consciousness and won virtual recognition of their class-based move-
ment. In Damascus alone, there were 12 employee-only unions and 71 mixed
unions.[44] Although exact figures are not available, it would not be far off the
mark to estimate that at least 10 percent of the estimated 200,000 industrial
workers were organized. Furthermore, the movement was poised to challenge
the paternalistic employment regime enforced by the state since the 1920s. Labor
leaders demanded their rights to legal recognition and state protections from
employer abuse. The leaders also challenged paternalism more broadly, as
women's leaders did, with their democratic anti-sectarianism, opposed to a civic
order divided among fiefs of religious patriarchs. Despite latent class tensions
between bourgeois women and labor, they both held the belief that equality
would come only through the expansion of social rights, meaning state inter-
vention in social affairs. They thus shared the étatist esprit that fueled depres-
sion-era politics around the world.

Islamic Populism

While World War I had opened a window of opportunity to the labor and
women's movements, it virtually closed the door upon the Salafi reformers.
Elitist Salafi thinkers had predicated their ideas on the possibility of absorbing
change coming from Europe into a reformed Islam, as a means of strengthen-
ing Islamic civilization. The fall of two Islamic governments, first the
Ottomans and then Faysal, strained the credibility of a movement that had
never built a popular following anyway. Instead, postwar conditions opened
the way for the Salafiya's opponents, who defended what they saw as invio-
lable Islamic tradition. These Islamic populists built the social movement that
the Salafiya never had. They shared with the other two subaltern movements
both nationalism and the determination to raise their status in the colonial
civic order. However, they held very different views toward paternalism and
the state.

Like the Salafi reformers, Islamic populists came mainly from the petty
bourgeoisie of merchants, professionals, and mid-level ulama. Indeed, some
populists were themselves embittered former Salafis. Also like the Salafis, they
sought to reclaim religious authority lost under Ottoman reforms, and now
foreign rule.[45] But unlike the Salafiya, the new groups recruited popular fol-
lowings, especially in the poorer quarters of Damascus, Homs, Hama, Aleppo,
Latakia, and Tripoli. They sought to call all Muslims back to an Islamic way of
life through mass meetings at mosques, popular celebrations of the Prophet's

birthday and through their schools, magazines, and good works. As they popularized their message, they began to encroach on elite nationalists' constituencies. While nationalists continued to speak at mosques and Prophet's birthday celebrations, only a few remained intimate with religious milieux. Many of them embraced distinctly secularist ideologies. By the 1930s, they were beginning to lose their audiences to Islamic populists, who exploited class antagonisms to pose as defenders of the poor against secularist elites.[46] The populists thus challenged Salafi and nationalist claims to represent their elitist Islam as the unifying spirit ('asabiya) of the nation.[47]

The religious-secular and populist-elite cleavages had originated before World War I and widened in the Faysal era. After 1908, conservative ulama organized popular opposition to the state's new secularism and to elitist Salafi doctrine, especially its attack on popular traditions like visits to the tombs of Sufi saints.[48] Although they were defeated, their influence revived during Faysal's rule. Popular militias organized in late 1919 employed an Islamic rhetoric against Faysal's secularist government. These volunteer militias became the foundation of localist political opposition. In popular quarters of cities, often where rural migrants settled, they provided social welfare services, collected taxes, and even dispensed local forms of justice. But even as they promoted the civil autonomy of fraternal citizens, they also employed an explicitly paternalistic political language, often comparing the king's role to that of a father, and the duty of the elite toward the poor to that of family members toward one another.[49] A few years later, Islamic populist groups would revive the militias' anti-statist and communitarian ideology.

With the imposition of French rule in 1920, a clear ideological break with Salafi reformers occurred. The elitist Salafi reformers emphasized intellectual renewal. They used critical reason (ijtihad) to arrive at basic Islamic principles, stripped of accretions of tradition, that could be applied to the current needs of the community and strengthen it in a rapidly changing world. Islamic populists shared the Salafis' mission to save Islamic civilization, but they spoke in defensive terms, emphasizing preservation rather than reform. They focused less on abstract legal interpretation than on the promoting a pious Muslim lifestyle, often embracing the traditions that the Salafiya had sought to strip away. And they gave fiery political speeches voicing a far more adamant opposition to foreign influence than the Salafi reformers ever did. The change in the tone of Islamic reform is understandable as an adaptation to a changed, postwar context, where the former security of Muslims under the rule of an Islamic empire had given way to uncertainty under French rule.[50]

French control of education, in particular, appears to have sparked the organization of Islamic populist groups. As early as 1919, Lebanese ulama protested against the state's use of male inspectors in girls' schools, forcing the French to hire a female inspector.[51] In 1924, the French reported opposition to new French missionary schools in Homs led by an Islamic group that included city notables.[52] In Hama at the same time, an Islamic society (jam'iya) was building schools for Muslim boys and girls, and a group called Party of God (Hizb Allah) was formed by dissident, lower-ranking ulama, to the alarm of Muslim elites.[53] The most important of these early Islamic populist groups was the Progressive, or Noble, Society (Jam'iyat al-gharra—referred to hereafter as al-Gharra), founded in 1924 Damascus by a prestigious religious scholar to protest French control of education. Al-Gharra at first focused mainly on building its own Islamic schools. But under the new leadership of Muhammad al-Daqr and 'Ali al-Daqr, veterans of Faysal-era popular militias, who had ties to the influential Tijaniya Sufi order, al-Gharra built a strong following among the "illiterate" masses in the city's Shaghur and Maydan quarters. Members wore turbans as a symbol of protest against European influence and waged demonstrations against the mixing of sexes in schools, blaming the state for promoting loose morals throughout society. In the 1930s, new leading members included 'Abd al-Hamid al-Tabba' and Muhammad Sa'id Sadiq, both Damascene merchants in the ailing textile industry. The Tabba' family also had close relations with the Faysal-era militias. Ahmad al-Sabuni, an Aleppine religious leader known for anti-French sermons and protests against the state's closure of a Qur'anic school also emerged as an al-Gharra leader.[54]

In the early 1930s, similar groups formed among the petty bourgeoisie of various cities. In Damascus, the Islamic Civilization Society (Jam'iyat al-tamaddun al-islami, referred to hereafter as al-Tamaddun) and the Society of the True Islamic Path (Jam'iyat al-hidaya al-islamiya, referred to hereafter as al-Hidaya) were both founded about 1931. Al-Hidaya's Damascene leader was Kamil al-Qassar, a merchant, teacher in an Islamic college (madrasa), publisher, and later a judge (qadi). Al-Hidaya also formed branches in Homs and Hama, where the group was suppressed by the French in 1933 for preaching against alcohol and gambling in local cafes. The Hama branch complained to the League of Nations that the French permitted Christian proselytism but unfairly prohibited that of Muslims.[55] Al-Tamaddun was unique in that its members were a generation older and more prestigious than those of other groups. Its leaders in 1936 included an Islamic jurisconsultant (mufti), a preacher (khatib), a philologist, a writer, a lawyer and a doctor, all men who had risen from modest origins through education. They opened schools in

villages outside of Damascus and provided scholarships to poor students. In Aleppo, the Society for Piety and Morals (Jam'iyat al-birr wa al-ahlaq) raised money to help the poor, and, in 1938, to build an Islamic college.[56] These groups engaged in bitter conflicts with French officials over control of waqf foundations, the reform of Islamic law courts, and the right to speak freely at mosques.

But it was their education protests that drew the most popular support. Islamic populists spoke directly to Muslims angered by the inversion of the social pyramid under the French. In 1929, a Muslim group in Hama protested against parents who sent their students to the new school run by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart. In 1931, parents in Tripoli pulled nearly all Muslim students out of foreign secondary schools. In 1932, a Hama group mailed 100 letters to parents, urging them to withdraw their children from foreign schools as well. The letters quoted a French writer who claimed "the best way to destroy the base of Islam is to educate Muslim children in Christian schools." The same year in Homs, the French confiscated all copies of a tract published by Shaykh Safa Siba'i, entitled "Call to Truth" (al-Da'wa ila al-haqq), which condemned missionary schools for aiming to undermine Islamic values.[57] In 1933, 2,000 people at a rally in Tripoli shouted, "Down with foreign schools, long live national schools!"[58] Tripoli Muslims also would wage a campaign throughout the 1930s against the overcrowding of state schools, which were attended mostly by Muslims.

As the 1930s progressed, populists forged stronger interurban links among youth. A string of groups carrying the names Youth of Muhammad and Muslim Youth (Shabab Muhammad and Shubban al-Muslimin) emerged in Homs (1934), Aleppo (1936), Damascus (1937), Tripoli (date unknown), and Beirut (1941). Members were mostly students and teachers, although the Aleppo branch also included some engineers and merchants. The Homs branch, which met in the famous Khalid Ibn Walid mosque, grew to 800 members in 1941 by recruiting boy scouts under the leadership of Mustafa al-Siba'i.[59] The Damascus branch, based at the prestigious Tajhiz preparatory school, was later said to have been founded in imitation of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. However, the Damascus group clearly originated before the Egyptian Muslim Brothers visited Syria in 1935, for Tajhiz students began publishing a religious magazine, *Lisan al-talaba*, in 1931.[60] Moreover, the Egyptians expressed surprise at finding Syrian groups similar to their own during their visit. And Mustafa al-Siba'i, who would found the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood in 1945, was studying in Cairo during the 1930s.[61]

At the same time, Islamic populists engaged directly in nationalist issues, as

popular discontent grew with the ongoing economic depression and the polit-
ical stalemate in negotiations for an independence treaty from the French. In
December 1934, a group of nearly 200 Aleppine "Muslim extremists," as they
were called by the French, sent a petition to the League of Nations protesting
the suspension of the Syrian parliament.[62] In January 1936, shortly before a
general strike broke out in Damascus, a lunar eclipse was interpreted by the
population as an omen for the new year. According to a frightened Jewish
observer: "Youths and fanatics, beating their bodies, paraded in all the streets,
[proclaiming that] the hour of Islam's revival has arrived!"[63] The outbreak of
Arab revolt in Palestine in April 1936 particularly mobilized populist religious
sentiment. Al-Tamaddun, among other groups, supported Palestinian Arabs
by collecting and delivering donations.[64] Attacks on Jewish residents of Dam-
ascus were also reported. National Bloc leaders sought to contain the Islamic
populists with appeals for unity of all citizens, regardless of religion.[65] The
attacks ceased after newspapers reprinted an appeal by Bloc member Fakhri
al-Barudi: "The Jews of Damascus live with us and share our rights and duties.
Everyone must watch over them as they watch over themselves."[66]

The creed ('aqida) of al-Tamaddun, printed in its journal between 1937 and
1939, may serve to illustrate the ideology of Islamic populism in the period. Its
seven articles stated the beliefs to which all members were to subscribe (they
are paraphrased here): (1) a Muslim believes in Muhammad, God and the
Qu'ran, which should be read daily; (2) integrity, virtue and knowledge are
the pillars of Islam: the believer must be virtuous with others and spread
Islamic knowledge through the Muslim community; (3) a Muslim has a right
to work and earn a living in order to provide for himself, contribute to chari-
ty, and support the people of his own country; (4) a Muslim must support
and protect his family, and promise to teach them Islam; he must not send
children to schools that don't respect his beliefs, nor read any books that
declare Islam their enemy; (5) a Muslim must restore the glory of Islam by
raising up its people and reintroducing Islamic laws; (6) Muslims are mem-
bers of a community bound by the Islamic creed, and so must foster fraterni-
ty; (7) the backwardness (sic) of Muslims is due to their distance from their
religion; reform lies in returning to Islam's teachings.[67]

Al-Tamaddun and other populist groups must be seen in a transitory con-
tinuum between older Salafi thought and the Islamism that emerged after
World War II. In contrast to later Islamists, Islamic populists of the 1930s
appear not to have made overt claims to control the state, although they did
insist on a Muslim ruler. Populists' concerns were often shared by establish-
ment ulama, who despite their appointment to official posts felt marginalized

under a non-Muslim ruler. Like the populists, the stodgy Maqasid founda-
tion, dating from the nineteenth century, promoted its Islamic and Arabic
education against the French curriculum in Christian schools. Establishment
ulama who controlled revenues of the state waqf administration routinely
granted subsidies to Islamic populist groups. Nationalists also supported
them; the National Bloc, for example, gave subsidies to the Youth of Muham-
mad in Damascus. In general, high-ranking ulama, nationalists, and populists
often collaborated in protests against French meddling in education, the waqf
administration, and Islamic law and courts.[68]

However, Islamic populists remained distinct from elite ulama in their self-
consciousness as subalterns in the civic order. As al-Tamaddun's creed shows,
they sought to defend the rights of those who struggled to support their fam-
ilies in the unstable postwar economy. Like many popular Islamic movements
in the Arab world, they posed an alternate vision of the civic order, based on
fraternal communalism and opposed to old hierarchies.[69] Tamaddun's creed,
for example, made no reference to respect for the authority of elite ulama, but
rather preached fraternity and the duty of Muslims to pursue individual study
of the Qur'an. Populists apparently rejected the class status of elite ulama,
especially their pretensions to be mediators between common Muslims and
God and between common Muslims and the state. Populist groups in Damas-
cus viewed with suspicion, for example, the formation of the Society of Ulama
(Jam'iyat al-'ulama), which stated in its 1937 manifesto that it aimed to restore
the former status of elite ulama: "[The ulama] will be the mediators between
the nation and the men in power, and they will pass on to the latter the com-
plaints of the former concerning religion and morals."[70] The Society of Ulama
would later demand a degree of control over Islamic courts that ulama had
not enjoyed even under the Ottomans. Populists feared that the elite ulama's
bid to act as paternalistic mediators between them and the government would
only obstruct their own agenda for reform.[71] In the 1940s, populist antago-
nism toward mediated authority would feed into the rise of a new Islamism
that preached direct control of the state by Muslims.

Indeed, there already was friction between Muslims who rejected separa-
tion of state and religion, and those who sought to constitute Muslims as one
of several religious communities (millets) autonomous from the state.[72] The
former group, including Islamic populists and many Syrian ulama, sought a
return to the Ottoman system, wherein the state embodied and represented
the dominant Muslim community and the non-Muslim millets were subordi-
nated to it. Populist pressure is likely responsible for the Syrian constitution's
requirement that the president be Muslim. The latter group was represented

by Salafi-minded elite Muslims like those in Lebanon who in 1928 formed a
Muslim Council headed by the mufti of Beirut to protect Sunni interests, just
as Christian and Jewish millets had done since the Ottoman era. The council
presupposed the existence of a secular, nonsectarian state. So, in a way, Islam-
ic populists resembled the labor and women's movements in their rejection of
mediation and their demand for a direct relationship with the state. However,
their vision of the state as a religious institution privileging Muslim interests
contrasted with women's and workers' vision of the state as a secular guaran-
tor of equality and welfare.

   While Islamic populists clearly opposed one pillar of French paternalism,
mediated rule, they upheld the other pillar, gender hierarchy. Their campaigns
against state educational policy, for example, primarily targeted girls' school
attendance. In choosing this issue, they tapped an anxiety broadly felt in the
population, and especially a resentment against elites who sent their daugh-
ters to French schools. Many families of lower status chose to keep their
daughters home rather than have them learn French language and culture;
they were apparently far more concerned about girls coming under French
influence than boys. Families that could afford it sent their daughters to pri-
vate Muslim and Arab schools like those of the Maqasid foundation and 'Adila
Bayhum al-Jaza'iri.[73]

   Muslims first protested against girls' education in secular schools during
Faysal's regime, because of the potential for immoral social mixing between
the sexes.[74] The same complaint was made repeatedly against the French, not
just in the name of morality, but also in the belief that girls' schools were
France's primary weapon in their attack on Islamic civilization. In 1934, a
group of merchants, a pharmacist and a shoemaker in Latakia sent a petition
to the Permanent Mandates Commission in Geneva, protesting that:

> The French authorities seek to offend Muslims in everything they hold
> dear: they control their waqf foundations . . . they paralyze their Islamic
> courts . . . finally, they force Muslim girls to gain their education in boys'
> schools. A French inspector entered, without permission, classrooms
> where there were Muslim girls and teachers who respect the law of the
> veil.[75]

High Commissioner Damien de Martel, Ponsot's successor, claimed the class-
room intrusion was the result of an accident. But his memo to Paris also
revealed the truth of populist worries about France's intent to undermine the
norms that they held to be traditional in Islam. De Martel concluded his

memo by remarking that the road was still long "to leading numerous elements of the Levantine population to more modern views."[76]

Conclusion: Revolt Against the Colonial Civic Order

The three subaltern movements reflected the deep faultlines of gender, class, and religious tension that underlay the general crisis of paternity under French rule. Into a political arena dominated by French and nationalist debates over independence, the subalterns inserted the mundane social affairs of families, households, and their neighborhoods. In so doing, they politicized French social policies and they disrupted nationalists' claims to represent a unified populace. The subalterns had not, by the mid-1930s, structurally altered the unlevel playing field of the civic order, but they had made their silenced voices heard. They would complicate politics for the remainder of the mandate—and beyond.

The subaltern movements shared basic traits. All three represented groups structurally subordinated in the civic order. All three followed a similar trajectory, from small, prewar groups to social movements that, in reaction to French rule and its expansion into social affairs, attracted members in various cities to a common agenda. All three also moved beyond their focus on immediate social needs to articulate the common political interests of their constituents within the wider civic order. Leaders of the movements recognized the subaltern status of their groups and sought to throw off the guardianship of paternalistic intermediaries—be they husbands, fathers, bourgeois employers, or officially sanctioned ulama. They all deployed, in the process, some variant of a fraternal ideal against prevailing paternalism.

However, the three movements diverged radically in their levels of consciousness and mobilization and in their visions of citizenship in an ideal, reformed civic order. While women and labor converged in their democratic rhetoric of equal rights and direct relations between state and citizen, they diverged in their attitudes toward gender and class. While bourgeois women's leaders could not appeal beyond their class, labor unions remained blind to the plight of unorganized women workers. In short, neither group fully appreciated the other's common subaltern status. Likewise, while Islamic populists and women nationalists shared contempt for French schools, each also saw the other as an enemy. Women's leaders sought Salafi-style reforms to religious laws that hamstrung their civic participation, while Islamic populists sought to strengthen those very laws as the bulwark of Islamic civilization.

Finally, the labor movement and Islamic populists sought to recruit the same constituency of the urban lower classes, but on diametrically opposite terms. Labor employed a democratic language of rights and class conflict, while Islamic populists invoked a paternalistic vision of community.

The rivalry among the subaltern movements, and their common challenge to paternalism, infused the civic order with a new style of political bargaining. While all three subaltern movements were nationalist, they showed ambivalence toward the nationalist movement, led by the same paternalistic elites who subordinated them. The subalterns were thus caught in a dilemma between rejecting the state, and appealing to the state for reforms that would mitigate elite privilege and promote egalitarian rights. Nationalist elites variously bonded together to preserve their privileges or, especially during elections, tried to attract the support of subaltern groups. Not all subaltern groups were, however, created equal in this new political game. While the labor movement struggled to legalize employee-only unions, Islamic populists and women enjoyed legal recognition of their associations. And while most workers and Islamic populists, being male, enjoyed full legal standing as individuals in the colonial civic order, women did not. Women were legally deprived of the right to vote, and bound by religious law to obey their husbands and fathers; they did not enjoy the civil autonomy that men did. This weakened women's ability to bargain for their cause at election time, when only the votes of men would be courted by pro-French and nationalist candidates.

Subsequent chapters will analyze how women's dual subalterity—their subordination both to mediating elites and to males—became a central pillar of the colonial civic order. As a result, gender often became the arena for conflict and compromise among competing political groups. The gendered fulcrum to mandate politics will be analyzed first in efforts to redraw the civic order's legal boundaries (Part Three) and then in conflicts over the its spatial boundaries (Part Four).