CHAPTER 7

The Veil and the Dual Legal System

In March 1928, the 20-year-old daughter of an appeals court judge in Beirut published a 420-page book of legal and theological scholarship entitled *Unveiling and Veiling* (*al-Sufur wa al-hijab*). The book landed like a bombshell in the tidy world of the bourgeois intelligentsia in Lebanon and Syria. The author, Nazira Zayn al-Din, appeared out of nowhere, a young and thoroughly remarkable, if lonely, figure.[1] She was not closely associated with either the women's movement or the literary circles in Beirut. And yet she dared, in stronger terms than anyone before her, to turn the conventions of colonial paternalism on their heads. Zayn al-Din not only condemned the veil, but also asserted her authority, as a Muslim tutored by her father, to speak generally on issues of Islamic law. Zayn al-Din's pose as an expert in Islamic law was more radical than Nazik 'Abid's participation, in military uniform, in the battle of Maysalun eight years before. She even appealed publicly to the French mandatory state to curb the authority of religious patriarchs in civil affairs. Her book went into a second printing within two months,[2] and ignited such heated controversy that it redefined the terms of conflict between religious elites and the women's movement for at least a decade to come.

Zayn al-Din called for a spiritual understanding of Islam, whose essence was to promote the freedom and well-being of all Muslims. Following Salafi ideas, she argued that the authority of Islamic law should be restricted solely to those matters addressed in the Qur'an, and further, that innovative interpretation (ijtihad) of Qur'anic verses is acceptable. In particular, she argued that specific privileges granted in the Qur'an to a man over his wife and sisters, as in a man's greater share of inheritance, should not be generalized to justify men's universal superiority over all women. Within this general framework, she argued that women's veiling (hijab) violated the spiritual message of Islam, which generally favored equal rights between men and women.

The veil Zayn al-Din condemned was the piece of crepe or muslin fabric used to cover a woman's face. Zayn al-Din herself, like other urbanized Druze women, did not cover her face but rather wore a headscarf and long coat down to her ankles (fig. 7).[3] The veil was worn primarily by urban and elite rural women; peasant women did not generally wear it. Most urban women, even non-Muslims,[4] still covered their faces in 1928 as a sign of respectability and religious modesty, but the amount and thickness of coverage was steadily diminishing among elites and Lebanese Christians.[5] Interestingly, the most prominent Druze woman of the day, Amira Nazira Janbalat (Jumblatt), adamantly retained her face veil. In an exception to French paternalism, she was the sole female feudal intermediary with the mandatory state, being a great landowner and leader of the rural Druze community in the Shuf region south of Beirut. To avoid controversy, she never met French officials alone and never appeared in public without a veil.[6]

In a larger sense, however, Zayn al-Din used the veil as a metaphor for the way traditional legal interpretations clouded over the true essence of freedom and equality in Islam. Hers was a direct attack on the twin pillars of paternalism, not just gender hierarchy but also the mediating authority of the ulama: "The freedom of each individual is limited by the boundaries of others' freedom. No one should overstep the limits of the other, and if one oversteps, the law should return him to his limits."[7] By writing her book Zayn al-Din demonstrated her belief that all Muslims—including women—should have direct access to the law, so as to defend their rights against those who would unfairly bind them.

The subject of women's veiling and seclusion had simmered throughout the decade. In the early 1920s unveiling was linked symbolically to women's political emancipation. In the 1920 suffrage debate at the Syrian Congress, Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Kaylani suggested that granting women the vote would end their seclusion, encourage them to unveil, and corrupt politics with their foolishness. The previous year, Nazik 'Abid and a delegation of women had indeed lifted their veils while meeting in Damascus with the American King-Crane Commission, sent to poll Syrians and Lebanese about the prospect of French rule. The gesture was intended to emphasize the enlightened political ambitions of Faysal's Arab government. While 'Abid had herself photographed unveiled in her military uniform (fig. 6), it was said that she was forced to retake the veil after the defeat at Maysalun because of street hecklers.[8] Again, however, in the 1922 demonstrations in Damascus to free the arrested nationalist Shahbandar, several more women removed their veils in public for the first time.[9]

The issue took on new political salience in the mid-1920s, when Turkish women began to show their faces, and when Egyptians Huda Sha'rawi and Saiza Nabarawi staged a public unveiling at the Cairo train station to proclaim the veil "the greatest obstacle to women's participation in public life."[10] While unveiling was the initiative of Egyptian women, who protested the denial of their right to vote and join parliament in the recent constitution, it was a central project of the Turkey's Kemalist state. Kemalists saw the destruction of the harem—women's seclusion, veiling, and segregation from men—as the key to a social revolution that would lift Turkey from the backward East into the modern civilization of the West.[11]

Syrians and Lebanese felt ambivalence about the role of the state in the veiling issue. There was precedent for it. Like many European states, the Ottoman empire had imposed a visible social hierarchy through clothing laws. In 1829 the reforming Sultan Mahmud II abolished all the varieties of headgear worn by the ruling class, to be replaced by the universal fez, symbol of the state as the sole arbiter of identity.[12] The Young Turks followed longstanding Ottoman practice in regulating women's dress when they issued decrees during World War I permitting women office workers to unveil, but also requiring them to wear long skirts.[13] In 1922, Syrians were scandalized and titillated when official Turkish propaganda appeared on the streets of Damascus in the form of postcards. Along with portraits of Mustafa Kemal as the defender of Syria and Turkey against European aggression, there were drawings of "modern" Turkish women, unveiled and showing much leg, while taking carriage and boat rides with male companions. The postcards sold like hotcakes. "I am informed that they attract considerable attention in local feminine circles," said the American consul.[14]

Some Syrian and Lebanese women embraced this Ottoman legacy, and looked to the state to enforce unveiling. In 1924, articles in Dimashqiya's *The New Woman* lauded Mustafa Kemal for supporting women's reforms, forecasting that the Turkish state would vanquish "reactionaries." Dimashqiya even published photographs of unveiled Turkish women activists posing with sympathetic Turkish (male) officials, unusual in that photographs of any Muslim women were rare in the press of the time.[15] In 1925, women in another Damascene demonstration, this time protesting the state visit of Lord Balfour (who had promised a Jewish home in Palestine), took the occasion to demand suppression of the veil, to the chagrin of male nationalists who had organized the event.[16]

However, debate on the veil generally deemphasized the state's role in the issue. The articles Mary 'Ajamy published on Turkish reforms, for example,

omitted any mention of the state and focused on women's agency. One ascribed Turkish women's unveiling to their participation in the war with Greece and to the postwar economic crisis that prompted them to take jobs. Another article, a speech by a prominent Damascene woman, attributed Turkish women's revival to their higher level of education.[17] Typical of women's magazines was a 1924 article in the Lebanese *The Boudoir*, which argued for unveiling on grounds of personal health, because the veil impeded breathing.[18] Most articles in these magazines made no link whatsoever between veiling and political rights; however, the discussion of women's choice in veiling in itself became a challenge to paternal authority.

While women's magazines tended to discuss veiling as a matter of personal choice, the male press tended to cast it as an issue to be decided by society as a whole. Most newspapers opposed unveiling through much of the decade.[19] For example, *al-Muqtabas*, published in Damascus by the prominent Salafi intellectual, Muhammad Kurd 'Ali, ran a series on the topic in 1924. Reasons given in favor of the veil were that it was required by Islam, that it was the sign of Muslim women's religious modesty, and that unveiling would lead to the loss of all time-honored custom. The paper opined that Syrian women needed more education to bolster their morality before they unveiled.[20] Throughout the debate, the various writers assumed that veiling was a matter to be handled by male social engineers, and that women's unguided and personal decision to unveil would create social and moral chaos. Indeed, in most Muslim homes, men regulated the extent of veiling of women in the family.[21]

Ambivalence toward the Turkish model, and toward state intervention in general, must be understood in the context of the colonial civic order. Unlike independent Turkey and Egypt (which signed an independence treaty in 1922, although the British retained control of military and foreign affairs), Syria and Lebanon were ruled directly by a foreign, colonial, and Christian power. Mustafa Kemal was able to rally opposition to the religious establishment largely because he was the hero of the Turkish war of independence, which ousted European powers after World War I. Egypt's nationalist government was unhampered by the mandate charter's formal protection of autonomous religious legal authority, and the Egyptian women's movement directly petitioned the state for reforms to personal status law. The power of the religious establishment in Egypt remained strong, however, buttressed by the monarchy.[22]

It is against this background that Nazira Zayn al-Din's book was written and received in Syria and Lebanon in 1928. Zayn al-Din faced a dilemma in making her appeal. To whom could she direct it? If Islamic law had deviated

from Islam's original principles, would the guardians of that law, the ulama, be likely to change its orientation? And if Islamic law had strayed beyond its proper jurisdiction, who would push it back to its proper boundaries? There was no centralized Islamic authority in Syria and Lebanon, as there was in Egypt's al-Azhar college. The community of Muslim ulama, as we saw in chapter five, was in 1928 still struggling to adapt to the vacuum left by the Ottomans and was splintered by the rise of the populist movement. Each city and each Muslim sect had its own mufti with no formal hierarchy linking them to a superior authority. The French, however, considered the mufti of Beirut to be supreme in Lebanon, and Shaykh Badr al-Din al-Hasani, the father of the Syrian prime minister, Taj al-Din al-Hasani, to be the leader of Syrian Muslims. Zayn al-Din had little cause to believe this decentralized and fractured community could, or voluntarily would, respond to her appeal.

Instead, Zayn al-Din directed her book to the French state as the supreme civil authority. While she had no desire to abolish Islamic law, she made an explicit appeal for the precedence of civil law over religious law in issues of the veil and personal status. She argued that because Qur'anic verses did not clearly require women to cover their faces, and because the spirit of Islam favored freedom over seclusion, Muslim legal experts could claim no jurisdiction in the issue of veiling. She deplored the ulama's interference on this and other matters not directly addressed in the Qur'an, and called on the state to break up the ulama's monopoly on personal status law by introducing civil laws that would protect freedoms permitted by Islam.

Zayn al-Din did not ignore the fact that the state was colonial and foreign. She anticipated nationalists' objections by devoting a large segment of her book to justifying French intervention. She framed that intervention in terms of the congruence of Western liberal ideals with Islam's spirit of freedom, and in the terms of the mandate charter. Having established that veiling was not a religious matter, she argued that state support for unveiling would not violate the charter's injunction against interference in religious affairs. On the contrary, it was conservative ulama, she argued, who invited illegal French interference in religious affairs by demanding that the state enforce veiling and other un-Islamic inequalities upon Muslim women.[23]

Furthermore, she argued that veiling and seclusion were inimical to the spirit of the mandate charter, which charged the French with uplifting Syrian and Lebanese society. She compared the "veiled" Muslim world with the "unveiled" world, where reason reigned and where unveiled women were educated and better mothers. As a result of veiling (seclusion), "half of our children die because of mothers' ignorance."[24]

In perhaps her boldest move, Zayn al-Din sent ten copies of her book to High Commissioner Henri Ponsot, with an open letter that was reprinted in newspapers. In the letter, she described her book as a sociological study of Islam using the principles of "égalité, liberté, fraternité" to argue for the return of women's lost rights. She addressed Ponsot thus:

> Permit me, Excellence, to give you a copy of my book for your high appreciation, because no one would be more qualified than the Honorable Representative of France, Mother of all civilization, of liberty and all light, to extend his strong hand to save the weakened Muslim woman and lift her from the dark abyss of slavery where she was arbitrarily plunged, contrary to the Book of God.[25]

Zayn al-Din was calling Ponsot to the true ideals of the French Revolution, just as pamphlets in the Syrian Revolt had done. In the remainder of her letter, Zayn al-Din summarized her book's implications for the state's social and political policy: that men and women should mix socially because it would foster moral progress; that both sexes should be educated together and at the same level; that Islam calls for democratic government, meaning that both men and women should participate in it and vote; that, in the same democratic spirit, male and female Muslims must be free to study the Qur'an themselves, and not be bound by the interpretations of an official and oppressive class of conservative ulama; and that the Qur'an recommends clothing that is most appropriate for the well-being of all Muslims, regardless of whether it is worn also by non-Muslims, and that Western clothing, including preference of the hat to the fez and unveiling to veiling, has proven most appropriate.

Zayn al-Din thus astutely described the existing, paternalistic civic order that assured religious patriarchs power and consigned women to subaltern status. Ponsot, if he ever read the letter, likely recognized the attack on one of France's principal pillars of rule. The only response Zayn al-Din received was a brief note from a functionary of the High Commission, assuring her that Ponsot regarded her book with great interest.[26] But in contrast to policy in their North African colonies, the French in Syria and Lebanon would never make public criticisms of the veil, much less promulgate laws against it.

Response was much less lukewarm among sections of the Syrian and Lebanese public. The book inspired a debate that raged for at least two years after its publication. Some reviewers compared her to other revolutionaries, like Mustafa Kemal and the Egyptian Qassim Amin, whose 1899 book *The*

Liberation of Woman had made a stir in the Arab world. A review in a Lebanese women's magazine proclaimed:

> This woman, Nazira Zayn al-Din, smashed with her gentle fingertips these remaining bonds [on women's freedom], and from the hills of Lebanon called the Islamic world to social renewal, and her call echoed on the banks of the Barada and the Nile and the Tigris-Euphrates."[27]

Support was also offered initially by prominent Muslims like Muhammad Kurd 'Ali, who was said to order 20 copies of the book for the Arab Academy in Damascus, which he headed and which published a favorable review in its journal. Likewise, Muhammad Jamil Bayhum, the well-known Lebanese advocate of women's rights and husband of Nazik 'Abid, also welcomed the book.[28] The official magazine of the Egyptian women's movement hailed the book as an inspiration to action. Within a year, Zayn al-Din's book, or at least parts of it, was translated into several languages.[29]

However, hostile reviews soon overwhelmed initial praise. Interestingly, while one might expect opponents to have dismissed the book as merely a reflection of heterodox, liberal views about women belonging to Zayn al-Din's own Druze sect, this was not the case. The book was written and received as a criticism of mainstream Sunni Islam.

Zayn al-Din's violation of the codes of paternalism drew bitter invective. Most outrageous, it appears, was her hubris in presuming that a young woman might speak publicly on matters of religious law, and worse, dare to criticize the work of prominent scholars. Even those who supported the book's premise doubted that a young woman could have such extensive knowledge of scripture and legal interpretation.[30] A teacher in Hama proclaimed on the front cover of his book-length response that Zayn al-Din's book was full of scholarly errors, and written with evil intent to "seduce the sons of Muslims and pave the way for their departure from religion."[31]

The mufti of Beirut published a statement on the veil, in oblique but clear reaction to her book, which began: "The issue of the veil is a religious one and the established ulama are the ones authorized to judge this important issue." He scolded Muslims for deciding the issue themselves, or asking counsel from people not formally trained as ulama. He then proceeded to condemn unveiling: "The call to lift the veil is a call to wickedness" and is a "bad innovation" made by "modern women who smash the pillars of chastity and honor." Furthermore, the veil "conserves the lineage and makes men's hearts secure concerning the mother of his children."[32] In condemning Zayn

al-Din's scholarly effort, the mufti reaffirmed paternalism both in the family and in religious authority.

Zayn al-Din's most vigorous opponent was Shaykh Mustafa Ghalayini, a professor at the Islamic College of Beirut who would be elected the first president of the Muslim Council later in 1928. Ghalayini was a dangerous foe, in that he had studied with Salafi scholars before World War I and had supported moderate women's reform, especially the need for their education. He was, however, a controversial figure. Younger members of the Muslim Council would oppose his nomination as Beirut qadi (head judge in Islamic courts) in 1933 because they thought he was a fanatic.[33] Zayn al-Din sent Ghalayini a copy of her book, presumably because of his earlier sympathy for women's education. She may not have appreciated the drastic changes in the thinking of Islamic reformers since the war based increasingly on a reified and essentialist conception of difference between Eastern (Islamic) and Western civilization.

Within months Ghalayini published his own book in response, collecting speeches he had made at mosques in the interim. It was a visceral attack. Ghalayini lambasted Zayn al-Din for presuming that she was more intelligent than the "old ulama" against whom she argued. He tore apart her argument, claiming that her Salafi-inspired efforts to reinterpret scripture were simply errors. In a curious twist to his argument, however, Ghalayini acknowledged that the book displayed an impressive breadth of knowledge. This he ascribed to Zayn al-Din's father, the judge, whom he assumed had helped her write it. But then Ghalayini contradicted himself again. In fact, he said, there were so many mistakes that Zayn al-Din (that is, her father) could not have written the book, after all. He accused Zayn al-Din of treason, of being the dupe of a foreign conspiracy by a secret committee of missionaries and Orientalists who wrote the book to make Muslims doubt their religion, their history, and "their social and national life." In his view, Zayn al-Din's revival of the tumult caused by Qassim Amin's book 30 years before was simply a plot by missionaries to cause disorder (fitna) in the Muslim world, and so destroy Islam (Qassim Amin had faced similar accusations).[34] To save the religion, Ghalayini urged women to obey the dictates of official Islam, and to restrict their lives to their homes and families.

Zayn al-Din called foul play. In 1929 she published a second book with commentary on responses to her first:

> I know, Shaykh Ghalayini, that stirring up feelings against a book by a young woman like me is easy for someone like you, because I don't have the opportunity to stand on the pulpit [minbar] that you stand on, or

> to speak to the audiences you do, in order to exalt the truths I have offered and to condemn the lies given in response. A noble man doesn't use a weapon that another does not have at hand.[35]

Precisely because of the norms of veiling and seclusion that Zayn al-Din criticized, women were discouraged from attending mosques or speaking in public to men. Through the medium of print, however, Zayn al-Din maintained that she had written her book by herself. In an interview in the women's magazine *Minirva*, she displayed an ease and depth of thought concerning the book's argument that suggests she had at least a major role in writing it. She bemoaned the fact that women could not meet religious scholars on an equal footing in legal matters: "Some who hold to the veil took advantage of their religious standing in the public mind and met in mosques, and in every meeting claimed that Nazira wants to destroy the pillars of religion." And she regretted that by addressing Islamic law, she had fallen into the trap she had hoped women could avoid: "Why don't men pay attention to these laws of equality . . . [instead of] limiting their concern to the issues of [women's inequality in] testimony and inheritance? Isn't that proof of their prejudice toward women, as in their command to veil?"[36]

Zayn al-Din's attempt to work from within the tradition of Islamic law, in order to argue for its limits, boomeranged. Scholars like Ghalayini easily dismissed the book's broader social and political argument by focusing upon narrow legal debates about whether or not Islamic scripture enjoined the veil. In effect, by constructing the veil issue as a legal one, Zayn al-Din had played right into the hands of conservative Muslim scholars, and put herself—and all women—at a disastrous disadvantage. The issue of veiling had bounced back into the court of religious patriarchs more definitively than ever. After 1928, it would be more difficult for lay Muslims, male or female, to write with authority on the issue. Learned ulama had vehemently reclaimed veiling as a matter of religious law, not of personal choice or civil law.

The impact of Zayn al-Din's book was amplified by the nature of the civic order, which was riven not only by anti-colonialism, but also by the dual legal system. Under such circumstances, her appeal to the French mandatory state easily invited charges of treason. The colonial state was simply taboo, off-limits, not a viable instrument of public policy. This produced two variant responses. Ghalayini represented the anti-statism of religious patriarchs who relished their enhanced post-Ottoman autonomy. Ignoring Zayn al-Din's own injunction against French interference in religious affairs, he condemned her letter to the high commissioner as inviting just such intervention and as a violation of the

mandate charter: "Do Muslim women want their veils removed by the force of sword and gun?"[37] Islamic populists' responses, on the other hand, were statist in spirit. A hostile review of Zayn al-Din's book in the Damascene newspaper *al-Istiqlal*, for example, preached the need to reclaim the state from foreign control in order to use it to enforce Islamic tradition against secularist reformers: "What will things come to when Islam ceases to be the official religion of the Syrian state? Indeed, a group of extremists make claims to its powers. They are present before us among students of the republic in Syria, who advocate lifting the veil from the faces of Muslim women, and allowing them to dance in gatherings with men."[38]

While some members of the secularist nationalist elite continued to support Zayn al-Din and unveiling, a class divide yawned as popular classes were rallied to the opposition. Islamic populists seized the opportunity in Damascus, after the conservative Shaykh Taj was appointed prime minister in early 1928, to mount violent attacks upon unveiled women. During that spring's election campaign for Syria's constituent assembly, which coincided with the publication of Zayn al-Din's book, candidates wooed the populists and exploited popular piety for votes. Damascene mosque preachers launched so strong and so popular a campaign against unveiling that newspapers feared to criticize them. And in repeated incidents, men threw acid upon elite women who were deemed insufficiently covered or who wore European-style clothing.[39] A group of elite women apparently organized in revenge, to spray acid on men wearing Western suits.[40] But when several women mounted an anti-veil protest in Damascus's main Hamidiya market, they met an angry mob.[41]

In Lebanon, 'Anbara Salam, the women's activist, recalled that after Zayn al-Din's book appeared conservatives campaigned for a return to thicker face veils. As in Damascus, class politics appear to have been at play. In 1927, Salam had made a dramatic statement by giving a lecture, unveiled, to an elite male audience, in an event sponsored by Education Minister Bishara al-Khuri (the future first president of independent Lebanon) to honor a famed Arabic teacher. She had begun the lecture wearing a face veil, but the audience could not hear her voice and asked her to remove it. It was the first public lecture by an unveiled woman before men in either Syria or Lebanon. However, afterward Salam met repeated moral condemnations from conservatives unconnected with the elite Arab nationalist milieu. Town criers bemoaned the destruction of morals in the streets of Beirut and, as in Damascus, men attacked women with acid, razor blades, and iron prongs for not veiling sufficiently.[42]

The gravest consequence for the women's movement, given the fates of Salam and Zayn al-Din, was ascendancy of opinion that women's voices should not be heard in public. Women had in the 1920s staged a virtual unveiling by making their voices heard through their magazines and conferences.[43] While the male press continued to suppress their names, out of supposed deference, and fretted about publishing their photos, women's magazines since the mid-1920s routinely published photographs of female doctors, scientists, writers, philanthropists, teachers, students. This unveiling had been accomplished before 1928 without recourse to justification in Islamic law. Now the law was being used to silence them. As in contemporary France, many men appear to have viewed women's changing dress and behavior, particularly their increased public presence, as an omen of the revolution that the 1920 suffrage debaters feared and as a threat to civilization itself. As the writers in *al-Muqtabas* argued, unveiling would unloose female sexuality, and so create social chaos. These views were embedded in Islamic legal scholarship dating from the medieval era,[44] and easily deployed by men who sought desperately to maintain their privileged place in the civic order.

The 1928 controversy shook the women's movement's confidence, even as it sought to regroup after failing to attain suffrage. The magazine *Woman* (*al-Mar'a*), in its 1930 inaugural issue, despaired of the chaos women faced in making choices about their lives:

> Some scholars believe woman's duty is to keep her instinctive nature, extolling her lack of education as good. . . . others believe women should be equal to men in all aspects of social, political and civic life. . . . The Muslim woman stands before these debates baffled and confused, not knowing which path to take.[45]

The magazine tried to ease women's dilemma by offering open debate, publishing articles variously pleading for gradual unveiling, supporting the veil, and rejecting it absolutely as the totem of Arabs' backwardness in contrast to Turks. Some women in other magazines continued to praise Zayn al-Din for her courage against "reactionaries."[46] Others became defensive about seeking any change in Islamic law. A delegate to a 1930 women's conference in Beirut defended the exclusion of the veil from its agenda: "Why should we unveil? What benefit is unveiling to society?. . . . I believe Islamic law grants woman all the rights she needs."[47]

The politics of the veil continued long after Zayn al-Din's brief prominence, and became embroiled in the rising nationalist fervor and class tension

of the early 1930s. Opinions polarized between secular nationalists and religious populists, between those who saw the veil as the cause of backwardness and those who saw it as a bulwark of Islamic culture.[48] As street attacks on women continued, elites' newspapers gradually changed their views to favor unveiling.[49] When the Syrian parliament opened in 1933, elite nationalists even invited a contingent of unveiled women to view the proceedings from the gallery.[50]

In this polarization, class politics merged with a new politics pitting East against West. This was evidenced in fierce debates about men's headwear that now coincided with those about women's veils. Younger men rejected the fezzes of their fathers, in favor of "national" headgear such as military berets and kuffiyas. It was also evidenced in the press's mockery of women who adopted short sleeves and short hair fashionable in Europe.[51] In a new twist, a women's group called the League of Modesty emerged in 1934, in apparent alliance with Islamic populists. Dressed in white shrouds, members policed the streets with scissors and a flask of acid, attacking elite women who wore European fashions.[52] The politics of dress thus came to be manipulated in class rivalries. Islamic populists and their following viewed themselves as subalterns in a civic order that privileged a francophile, Westernized elite. There is no little irony that the elitist French collaborator, Shaykh Taj, exploited those subaltern sentiments by courting pro-veiling supporters in the 1928 elections.

The women's movement was caught in this emergent web of class-based, ideological conflict between "East" and "West." In the early 1920s it had been possible to be both a nationalist and a progressivist who admired European ways and European feminists. After the Nazira Zayn al-Din scandal, it was no longer so. Zayn al-Din's most vocal critic, Ghalayini, had implied in not so subtle terms that all women's efforts at liberation were inspired by Western and Christian conspiracy. Bourgeois leaders of the women's movement fretted over their taste for European fashions, calling on women to wear clothing made only from "national" textiles. Their effort to extricate themselves from the paralyzingly divergent sartorial symbolics of progress, nationalism, and Islamic morality was evident in a resolution drafted by a Lebanese delegate to the 1932 Tehran Eastern Women's Conference: "Women of the Orient must choose among the mores and customs of the West those which are good and commendable, leaving aside all which is founded on passions."[53] Adopted unanimously to sustained applause, the article was clearly a comfort to women whose lifestyles depended on Western imports.

These tensions exploded in public in 1935 Syria. At a February conference in Damascus honoring visiting European feminists, Mary 'Ajamy declared in

her speech that, "The East is not stagnant, as you can easily observe. . . . It had faith in Western culture, but it found that this same culture often provoked a disintegration of faith and morals." 'Ajamy, herself a Christian, asserted a specifically Eastern basis for feminism within Islam: "Muhammad granted woman the free disposition of her property, whether she was married or not, and he asked the counsel of his most devoted, intelligent, and daring wives."[54] In a similar spirit, Hayat al-Mu'ayyad al-Barazi, a Muslim leader of several women's groups, echoed Zayn al-Din in declaring that the Prophet never imposed the veil on women other than his wives. But when the Dutch visitor called on Eastern women to reject the veil as a symbol of servitude to men, the 500 unveiled women in the room froze. The atmosphere grew so hostile that the interpreter had to ask her to revise her comment.[55] Following the conference, the Islamic populist group al-Gharra issued a statement prescribing head-to-toe coverage for all women, and a leading Damascene newspaper, *Alif-Ba*', agreed. The French newspaper in town criticized *Alif Ba*'s view, and condemned the fact that Damascene women feared violent reprisals if they dropped their veils.[56]

When Syrian women planned an April trip to an international women's conference in Istanbul, they faced a peculiar dilemma. While the veil had been constructed in Syria as a symbol of the East, most "Eastern" women who would attend the conference, including Egyptians and Turks, had unveiled since the 1920s. Many Syrian women's leaders, including 'Adila Bayhum al-Jaza'iri, still wore the veil. The exception was Hayat al-Barazi, who admitted to a reporter that social pressure was so intense she would never have unveiled without the support of her father and husband (the current education minister).[57] Turkey, on the other hand, vaunted itself as a European country, and had recently awarded women the right to vote. This tension translated into a financial dilemma: Shaykh Taj refused to sponsor the Syrian delegation as official representatives of the state, under the pretext that Arabic was banned at the conference (it was not). In the end, the women decided that those with the financial means would attend the conference on a personal basis. [58] Upon their return in late April, nationalist university students opposed to Shaykh Taj organized a reception.[59] Women were still caught between conflicting male demands, leaving little room for them to make the veiling issue their own.

The trauma of the veil was felt far more deeply in Syria and Lebanon than in Turkey or Egypt, in part because foreign rule raised the stakes of debate to an all-out confrontation between East and West. Colonial rule not only polarized politics, but also weakened the state, and civil law, as an instrument of reform. In Turkey, as we have seen, the independent state also advocated a

strict divide between East and West, but promoted the "new woman," unveiled, as a symbol of the country's break with its Ottoman past.[60] In Egypt, Sha'rawi's 1923 unveiling had not started a new controversy, but rather marked the end of a long and gradual process.[61] Nationalist leader Sa'd Zaghlul himself endorsed unveiling, and there was only one demonstration against the veil, in 1928, to protest its lingering requirement at the king's court. In 1937, the ulama of al-Azhar issued an edict (fatwa) in support of unveiling and by 1940 veils virtually disappeared in urban Egypt.[62]

The Zayn al-Din controversy reinforced the dual subalterity of Syrian and Lebanese women, wherein the dual legal system buttressed gendered and mediated barriers to their participation in the civic order. The controversy compounded the crisis felt in the women's movement after the defeat of women's suffrage, and forced a fundamental change in the movement's orientation: It would have to define goals that appeared homegrown, not inspired by Western models.