CHAPTER 8

CIVIL RIGHTS: PATRIOTIC MOTHERHOOD AND RELIGIOUS LAW REFORM

In April 1928, shortly after Nazira Zayn al-Din published her book *Unveiling and Veiling*, the Syrian and Lebanese women's union convened its first major conference.[1] Held in Beirut, the conference brought together 27 women's groups from Syria and Lebanon. The agenda aimed to place women squarely in the center of national cultural life, featuring trips to the national library and national museum and a session honoring the female Lebanese poet Warda Yaziji (1838–1924). In that nationalist spirit, the conference passed resolutions demanding use of the Arabic language and teaching of Arab history in schools. Speakers also made reports on running an efficient household, children's education, and women's groups' aid to the sick, elderly, and imprisoned. They called for more girls' schools and cleaner bakeries. Nur Hamada, founder of the Women's Arabic and Cultural Assembly, gave a speech calling for a minimum marriage age of 17, equal inheritance, repression of polygamy, and greater power for women to initiate divorce. At its closing banquet, hosted by Nazik 'Abid and Muhammad Jamil Bayhum, members discussed means of expanding the women's movement. 'Anbara Salam declared that "neither Syrian nor Lebanese women make impossible demands."[2]

The list of possible demands was notable for both its inclusions and omissions. The conference capped a decade of mobilization and represented the heart of the women's movement, celebrating members' charitable efforts in education and health. Hamada's speech voiced concerns dear to the readers of women's magazines, who saw inequalities in marriage and divorce law as the greatest impediments to stable family life and to their ability to perform social service outside the home. Neglected in the three days of discussion, however, was the issue that topped women's agenda in the early 1920s: There was no call for women's right to vote, even though the electoral campaign for Syria's constituent assembly was being waged at the time. Also omitted from the roster of speakers was Nazira Zayn al-Din, whose book was about to go into its second

printing. Perhaps she was too new a personality. Or perhaps her message was already seen to be too bold, too closely aligned to the old agenda for political rights.

The conference was, in fact, no mere culmination of women's activism since the war; it was a new departure, setting the stage for a shift in the women's movement's direction and tactics. We sorrowfully lack documentation that would fully reveal women's leaders motives. They did not likely foresee, in 1928, the precise trajectory of 1930s politics. However, in hindsight it is possible to see how they adapted to a civic order transformed by the passage of constitutions, where local state governments with parliaments took on a greater role in politics. As politics centered around the two national capitals, the joint women's union fostered national subunions, based in Beirut and Damascus. The movement would also have to situate itself anew in relationship to the emergence of nationalist political parties, the Constitutional Bloc led by Bishara al-Khuri and the National Bloc in Syria. A new kind of politics would emerge by the mid-1930s, as these parties vied with the French and their collaborators for the support of the urban masses in staging demonstrations and in electoral contests. Subaltern groups, especially the labor unions and emergent Islamic organizations, were key constituencies that each side wooed. Where would the women's movement fit among these political players?

Women's leaders appear to have adapted to 1930s by embracing a new ideology. While the two unions remained decentralized federations, a new ethos emerged at the top, which may be termed patriotic motherhood. Patriotic motherhood exalted women's domestic duties and charity work as national service and advanced demands for women's civil and social rights in order to accomplish that service. The turn to patriotic motherhood no doubt reflected external ideological influences as well as domestic political calculation. On the one hand, women's leaders likely heard about movements in India, Egypt, and Europe that embraced maternalist politics in this period.[3] On the other hand, patriotic motherhood was also an ideology suited to the movement's immediate political needs. The twin goals of the new strategy appear to have been: first, to broaden the movement's appeal and raise recruitment; and second, to help install the nationalist parties in government so that they might use state powers to redraw the gendered legal boundaries of the civic order. Women appear to have believed that their nationalist allies would be able to cut through the dilemmas of the dual legal system that had stymied reform in the 1920s. They did not anticipate, however, that nationalists would betray women's goals to forge a separate alliance with the very religious interests opposed to women's inclusion in the civic order.

The Politics of Patriotic Motherhood, 1928–1936

Social motherhood had been the ideological underpinning of women's activities since the war. In the early 1920s, the front page of Julia Dimashqiya's magazine *The New Woman* had combined its salutation to "daughters of my country" with a Madonna-like picture of a woman holding a baby (fig. 8). The magazine regularly printed monthly household budget schedules, recipes for toothpaste, and advice on childhood illness and pedagogy. Mary 'Ajamy's journal *The Bride*, whose name epitomized the view of the family as the core of women's identity, also featured a regular column on motherhood. These and other women's magazines stressed that a woman's motherly duties were essential to the well-being and progress of society.

What was new in 1928 was the women's union's aim to unify the efforts of socially minded mothers and to situate them in the broader nationalist struggle. There had been tumultuous conflict over the ideological stance of the union when it convened in 1927. Members debated whether the union of Syrian and Lebanese women was intended to promote political unification of the two countries. The French, who licensed all associations, appear to have been concerned that the women's union was a stalking horse for nationalists. The issue was settled and the union was officially registered after members agreed to shun politics and emphasize the social and cultural aspects of women's mission.[4] Hence, the 1928 conference delegates visited the national library and museum, but not the parliament. We might also understand the new the turn away from politics as a reaction to the failures to achieve suffrage in 1920 and 1924. If men insisted on their role as paternal representatives of the family in politics, then female citizens might seek inclusion in the civic order by becoming patriotic mothers within a separate arena of social affairs. "Motherhood is my profession," declared Rose Shahfa, a Lebanese women's union leader, to a group of women college students. "In motherhood a woman has the power to inspire the manliness and strength in her sons to build a new nation."[5]

The women's movement would mount a half-dozen more high-profile conferences between 1928 and 1935, each one elaborating upon the agenda set forth in 1928. The 1930 women's union conference in Beirut again highlighted family values, adopting resolutions for happiness in marriage and the family and for compulsory primary education, and against ostentatious consumerism, drugs, alcohol, and public prostitution. Eastern Women's conferences held in Damascus and Tehran in 1930 and 1932 followed similar agendas (fig. 9). While neither conference demanded women's political rights, the 1930 one did demand civil

and social rights, in the form of greater equality of men and women in marriage, education, work and salaries.[6]

In a sense, patriotic motherhood was an inversion of the old agenda. Whereas in the early 1920s women sought the vote in order to effect improvements in their lives, they now sought the social reforms as a prerequisite to political rights. Nur Hamada made the new agenda clear, in explaining the resolutions taken at the first Eastern Women's Conference in Damascus in 1930. Calls for marriage reform, women's education, and protection of women's home industries, Hamada said, were intended to help women be better mothers for their country's benefit, and to advance their ultimate claim to citizenship:

> What is required for women to progress is that they become perfectly educated; this education is necessary for women as much as for children . . . . Nothing more than ignorance blocks progress and the happiness of men and women. When women know how to raise children, they can demand from men their rights and take them in hand.[7]

Patriotic mothers, in other words, would earn the right to vote because they would produce patriotic children and contribute to social progress.

The rejection of an agenda that had prioritized political rights was explicit. At the February 1935 conference welcoming European feminists, both Mary 'Ajamy and Hayat al-Barazi offered revisionist histories of the Syrian women's movement in their speeches, claiming women had not really wanted the vote, and that its discussion in 1920 had been premature. This view, reflecting that of male opponents to suffrage, was a far cry from 'Ajamy's earlier claims that women had natural rights equal to those of men, which had been lost through centuries of social decadence. 'Ajamy now constructed women, not society as a whole, as fundamentally deficient. The women's revival (nahda) had been an illusion, she concluded. Women's groups did not really seek true reform, but seemed satisfied with their social events and charities. Her prescription, befitting her profession as a schoolteacher, was more education. Women would be worthy of citizenship only if they improved themselves.[8]

Given the crisis the women's movement faced by 1928, the new agenda appeared realistic. First, while individuals like 'Abid, 'Ajamy, and Dimashqiya had promoted women's suffrage, they had attracted no mass following. There had been no sustained campaign by Syrian and Lebanese suffragettes in the 1920s, only a few isolated demonstrations. Most active women remained preoccupied with their educational and charity endeavors. Most other women whom

the movement sought to recruit were busy mothers in an age of high fertility and large families. The fact that the 1928 and 1930 conferences highlighted motherhood suggests that they were, in part, an effort to unite women around issues that concerned them most. Patriotic motherhood may therefore be seen as an effort to give the women's movement's clout, just as the nationalist, labor, and Islamic populist movements were organizing mass bases. Said one delegate to the 1930 Beirut conference: "We know that individual efforts don't achieve anything in this age, an age of associations."[9]

Likewise, women's leaders may have seen social and civil rights as more attainable, or as 'Anbara Salam put it, not impossible. It is no doubt due in part to the women's movement's advocacy, for example, that the 1930 Syrian constitution made primary education compulsory for both boys and girls. Women's condemnation of drugs and prostitution coincided with that of religious leaders, particularly the Maronite patriarch, who in the mid-1930s issued demands that the French suppress them. The social agenda was in effect a move to the political center, away from issues like the veil and the vote that marginalized women and alienated religious leaders from their cause. Women's leaders were no doubt aware that many women's charities were supported by religious endowments. Strengthening the support of religious patriarchs, rather than undermining it, might better serve women's cause.

The new agenda also seemed to fit a time of diminished expectations. A Mlle R.P. wrote to the Damascus paper *Les Echos* in 1928 that times were too uncertain, and that feminism would only rock an already unstable boat. Family life would suffer, said the writer, if women tried to play the double role of professional and housewife.[10] A delegate to the 1930 conference in Beirut alluded to intimidation, remarking that there were

> rumors everywhere that the goals of it [the conference] were a revolt against the veil, demands for rights, and a call for war against men. The conference, I assure you, did not seek anything of the sort. Our conference was 'social' more than 'feminist.' We limited our discussions to the condition of society and the family only.[11]

In a similar vein, a nationalist author of the Syrian constitution and supporter of the women's movement, Fa'iz al-Khuri, wrote in the magazine *Woman* that fathers' and husbands' control over women made it difficult for them to seek political rights: "Equality of women with men in this era and this country is impossible. . . . Women must now direct themselves to improving their household affairs and managing their housework, think of

nothing but educating their sons and daughters, and wait for equality in the next generation."[12]

Not all women's leaders shared Khuri's pessimism. They saw no need to wait for equality until their children matured, but only until nationalist governments were established. This was the second component of their ideology of patriotic motherhood: active support of the nationalist opposition. They apparently believed that the support of a vital and unified women's movement could help nationalists win their struggle against the French, much as women had done in Egypt's 1919 revolution. Once nationalists controlled the state, they would be able to fulfill women's demands for rights. Women's leaders expected that an independent nationalist state would be secular and reform-minded, and would wield greater power over religious law than the French mandatory regime could. Nationalist newspapers like *al-Sha'b* in Damascus reinforced this expectation, with numerous articles supporting women's conferences and rights.[13]

Particularly in Syria, it appears that leaders of the women's movement made an implicit deal with nationalists in the early 1930s, in which they promised to postpone their demands until nationalist aims had been won. 'Adila Bayhum al-Jaza'iri, leader of the Syrian women's union, was an exponent of this strategy. According to her daughter, Jaza'iri explicitly adopted a philosophy of independence first, women's rights next. She believed that pursuit of women's rights would only divide women from men, and so betray the cause of nationalism. She also believed that nationalists were the only political force strong enough to advance women's agenda.[14] Syrian women activists commonly believed that Zayn al-Din was a traitor for asking the French state for support against religious conservatives.[15]

That patriotic motherhood was a dramatic shift in policy is further suggested by the stiff criticism it engendered. Stalwarts of the 1920s distrusted the inverted agenda, suspecting that the emphasis on social work and nationalism forsook, rather than nurtured, future political and civil rights for women. In 1929, Georges Phares, editor of *Les Echos*, compared the Syrian women's movement unfavorably to European feminism, chastising Syrian women for giving up their pursuit of civil rights and the vote, and for merely collaborating with men in the family and in the interest of national politics.[16] Nazik 'Abid, who had presided over the 1928 conference, renounced the new agenda the following year, urging women to focus on attaining political rights.[17] 'Abid's husband Muhammad Jamil Bayhum virtually begged women in a 1933 speech at the American University of Beirut to leave off their charity work and literary events to mount a campaign for political rights.[18]

The efficacy of patriotic motherhood as a strategy to mobilize women and achieve reforms was called into question even as nationalist agitation crested in the mid-1930s. On the one hand, the alliance with nationalist elites in both countries appeared to pay off in rallying women to the movement. Hundreds of women, particularly the new generation of female students, joined nationalist demonstrations. During the elections for the Syrian constituent assembly in 1928 for example, Thuraya al-Hafiz, leader of the Women's Normal School Alumnae association, led a women's demonstration in conjunction with one organized by the National Bloc in Marja Square.[19] On the other hand, when women rushed to claim the political rights that they had deferred, they found that the nationalists and state governments were in no hurry to advance women's causes; indeed, they even found themselves mocked for proposing reform. In February 1935, a new group named the Women's Committee for the Defense of Lebanese Women's Rights petitioned the government to allow women to work as city mayors and judges. The petition reasoned that such experience would prepare women for fuller roles as citizens, both as voters and parliamentary deputies. The Lebanese government, controlled by French collaborators, rejected the appeal. To add insult to injury, the newspaper *Les Echos* quipped: "One would be curious to know how veiled women might sit as judges, with a veil over their faces."[20]

The year 1936 raised women's hopes, as nationalists finally convinced the French to negotiate independence treaties. The treaties promised just the sort of national governments that women expected would be able to assert civil limits on religious authority. However, in Lebanon, the first elections in years had installed a new government in January under the francophile Emile Eddé. Eddé, who had brushed aside discussion of women's rights in the Council debates of 1923, was as cool toward the women's movement as Syria's leader Shaykh Taj, who had offered only begrudging support for the women's conferences held in Damascus, and refused to support the women's delegation to Istanbul in 1935. Nonetheless, the Lebanese women's union seized the moment when a draft treaty was produced. On the basis of article six, which guaranteed citizens' political and civil rights without discrimination, Ibtihaj Qaddura, union president, personally submitted a petition to Eddé demanding equal rights with men. Eddé assured Qaddura of his concern for women's future, but simply pointed out that the constitution limited suffrage to men only. Undaunted, Qaddura approached parliament in early 1937 with another petition arguing that since Lebanese women were citizens, and were half of the national community, they deserved their full rights as citizens. Again, no response.[21] In the years remaining before World War II, the Lebanese government, even after the nationalist

Constitutional Bloc gained a parliamentary majority in 1937, would do nothing to enhance women's political or civil rights.

Nor would the National Bloc government in Syria, elected to power in 1936. By 1938, even 'Adila Bayhum al-Jaza'iri had become disillusioned. That year, women had staged nationalist demonstrations of their own against the cession of Alexandretta to Turkey (fig. 10). Jaza'iri and 22 other women from Syria and Lebanon also attended the Eastern Women's Conference for the Defense of Palestine in Cairo, devoted to support for the ongoing revolt against the neighboring British mandate. Jaza'iri and Eveline Bustros of Lebanon were even elected a vice-presidents of the conference.[22] But during her stay in Cairo, while talking with women from other countries, Jaza'iri experienced a change of heart. Until then, she had been committed to the nationalist struggle first, postponing women's rights to a second, later stage. But she had grown impatient with the National Bloc's stonewalling on women's reforms, and now vowed to pursue them simultaneously.[23]

Indeed, Jaza'iri's worst fears would be realized early in 1939, when the National Bloc forged an open alliance with religious conservatives against reform of personal status law. The root cause of the nationalists' betrayal lay in the structure of the civic order, and in the whims of politics that would undermine the independence treaties.

Nationalists' Betrayal: The Politics of the Dual Legal System

While patriotic motherhood was conceived as an adaptation to a paternalistic civic order, it did not account for the particular attributes of that order. It especially did not foresee the political implications of the dual legal system. These factors would not only drive the nationalists into the arms of religious patriarchs, but also make personal status reform all but impossible for the most well-meaning nationalist government. The structure of the civic order predisposed political rivals to play out their conflicts on the field of gender, ensuring that subaltern women would become not just pawns, but sacrificial lambs in political deals.

In hindsight, what is most puzzling about the women's movement's shift to an ideology of patriotic motherhood was its timing. The agendas of the women's conferences targeted personal status law just as it was becoming clear how difficult it would be to accomplish such reform. The confidence voiced by Nur Hamada and 'Anbara Salam at the 1928 conference would be

shaken within a few months, as protests against Zayn al-Din's book flared. In 1932, women got a further taste of things to come when a new group of directors of Islamic schools in Damascus, named the Committee for Indigenous Schools, organized Friday meetings to protest the resolutions of the 1932 Tehran conference.[24] Despite evidence of mounting resistance, women's conferences continued to issue calls for reform in laws on marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody.

The resolutions calling for personal status reform present a second puzzle. To whom were they addressed? While Lebanese women did petition their government for the right to vote and hold office, there is no indication in available records that the women's unions ever submitted formal petitions to any governmental authority on personal status reform. Neither is there any record of women's public demonstrations on behalf of the reforms. Perhaps the resolutions were intended vaguely to influence public opinion through their publication in the press.[25] Or it may be that women pursued their agenda informally, through private and personal contacts with politicians, to whom many women's leaders were related. In either case, the resolutions played directly and disastrously into the hands of conservative elites.

The power of established religious interests, not just Islamic populists, grew in the decade after the 1928 conference that articulated patriotic motherhood. By the late 1920s, Muslims were rebuilding power structures dismantled after the Ottoman withdrawal. Official ulama and reform-minded Muslims began to create their own millet-type structures, like the Muslim Council in Lebanon. The Council's leader, the Beirut mufti, increasingly claimed to represent all of Lebanon's Muslims. However his claim was challenged when, in the 1930s, Shi'i Muslims of south Lebanon organized their own millet and separate courts, with French approval.[26] In Syria, Islamic populists also began to make claims to authority over public morality that went well beyond the Muslim community, seeking a return to a past era when Islamic law was the virtual common law for the entire community.[27]

Catholic leaders in Lebanon also began to make claims to universal moral authority that superseded the balkanized sectarian system. The Pope's decrees against women's work outside the home and their presence in cafes, immoral movies, gambling, and other issues were routinely printed in newspapers as authoritative statements on social morality. The French believed that Rome was attempting to position itself as the supreme Catholic authority in Lebanon.[28] On the other hand, the new Maronite patriarch, Antoine 'Arida, sought to distance himself from Rome and French Jesuits by routinely asserting himself as the spiritual representative of the whole country. In the mid-

1930s, he waged a campaign against prostitution and juvenile delinquency not just among Catholics, but in the whole population.[29]

The French both feared and encouraged the organization of religious affairs autonomously from the state. They interpreted the mandate charter's clause prohibiting religious discrimination as a call for equality among all sects, which they believed should be achieved through the disestablishment of Islam.[30] They particularly welcomed the disaggregation of the Muslim community into separate ones for Sunnis, Shi'is, Druze, and 'Alawis, because it "weakens the Sunni Muslim bloc."[31] For similar reasons, the French were alarmed in the mid-1930s by rumors that Greek Orthodox Lebanese were seeking a political alliance with Lebanese Sunnis in favor of union with Syria, and by the cooperation between 'Arida and the Syrian National Bloc in leading landowners' protests against the state tobacco monopoly.[32]

The 1930s were thus a decade of heightened battle between the state and religious leaders for authority. Given the growing rift between the French and religious patriarchs, nationalists saw the opportunity to recruit the latter to their own struggle for independence. As Philip Khoury put it: "Syrian nationalist leaders almost always sided with the religious establishment and the Muslim majority on critical religious issues, many of which became important symbols of opposition to French rule. To have done otherwise would have undercut the support system on which their power base rested."[33] The same might be said for Lebanese politicians, who could not afford to alienate religious sentiments. The francophile Emile Eddé competed with the nationalist Bishara al-Khuri for support from the Maronite Church, which wielded great influence over its flock. Meanwhile, the Sunni Lebanese opposition committed to union with Syria worked to smooth differences between its secular members in Beirut and sectarian Muslim leaders from Tripoli.[34]

To foster an alliance with religious elites, nationalists would abet patriarchs' efforts to increase the scope of their religious authority. And because personal status laws were precisely the power base from which religious patriarchs sought to extend their power, the contest would necessarily be played out on legal issues of central concern to the women's movement. Women's personal status would be sacrificed to the politics of cooperation between Lebanese and Syrian politicians and religious patriarchs.

Such sacrifice had ample precedent, as in the way governments had appeased opponents of the 1917 Ottoman Family Law. An attempt to impose the state's reformist legal agenda, the law codified personal status laws that had once been left to the discretion of the various religious communities. The law also aimed to enhance Muslim women's rights in marriage, divorce, and

inheritance.[35] Patriarchs of all three religions protested that it illegally undercut their authority. In Syria, Faysal's regime abrogated the 1917 Family Law outright, under pressure from Muslim conservatives, who gained reaffirmation of the ban by the mandatory state in 1930. In Lebanon, Jews and Christians won immediate exemption from the French, who sought their support at the outset of the mandate. In 1930, Lebanese Sunni Muslims, likely conservative populists, petitioned for a similar exemption. They complained particularly about article 130, which required state-appointed arbitrators in divorce cases to protect wives from husbands' abuse: "How can the destiny of two spouses, bound by divine law, be submitted to the fantasy of one or two arbitrators they didn't choose?" The Lebanese government denied the petition, however, with the consent of the Beirut qadi and mufti.[36] Nonetheless, provisions of the law were routinely ignored. Although article four set Muslim women's minimum marriage age at 17, Nur Hamada was still demanding its enforcement in 1928. In both Syria and Lebanon, the decisive factor in the fate of the 1917 law was not a concern for women's rights, but the affirmation of concord between government officials and religious elites.

Governments' indifference to women's calls for personal status law reform was thus rooted in their greater interest in appeasing religious patriarchs, who were jealous of their legal autonomy as guaranteed by the mandate charter. In April 1928, for example, Emile Eddé proposed to permit Lebanese civil courts to handle marriage and divorce cases. It was immediately opposed by Christian patriarchs. Two years later, Eddé capitulated, officially ceding legal control to non-Muslim religious courts in areas that most directly related to women's status: marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody. The snub toward the women's union's demands for reform was quite clear: The very same law did in fact transfer to the state other areas of Christian law that were unrelated to women's personal status, in an effort to equalize the jurisdictions of Christian and Islamic courts.[37] State control over women's personal status was apparently sacrificed to appease Christian patriarchs for other diminutions of their powers.

The gendered boundaries of this power struggle were further underlined by the fact that the one actual campaign for reform of personal status law in the 1930s was undertaken by the French themselves, and again in blatant disregard of women's resolutions. Not once, in any of the French documentation on their reform effort, was reference made to the wishes of women.[38] And yet, the proposed reforms would create a controversy as big, and as detrimental to the prospect of ever attaining women's personal status reform, as the Zayn al-Din case had.

The proposals for personal status reform grew out of France's desire to equalize the status of non-Muslims and Muslims, with the dual object of neutralizing the threat of Islamic populists and of diminishing the autonomy of non-Muslims.[39] The initiative actually came from petitions by the Vatican and local Christian patriarchs, who sought greater uniformity in marriage practices and protection from the influence of Islamic law in matters such as inheritance. In 1933 the Conference of [Catholic] Patriarchs issued a joint request to the government asking for changes in rules on engagements, marriage between different Christian sects, alimony, and other matters.[40] In 1935, a hitherto unknown Beirut group, presumably Christian, named the Association for the Defense of the Race submitted a petition that also called for uniform marriage laws, including a single minimum marriage age, as a means of promoting marriages and population growth.[41]

In response, the French in 1936 decreed a statute on religious communities, reaffirming the communities' legal autonomy and requiring everyone to follow the laws of his or her community. The law drew Muslims' opposition because it appeared to put them on the same level as other religious groups and to allow for Muslims' conversion to Christianity, prohibited in Islamic law. So new talks were set up to revise the decree. In late 1938, the new high commissioner, Gabriel Puaux, decreed a revised law "to regulate, on a civil level, the conflicts among religious laws and to permit a unified national life based on the essential equality of personal rights. For too long Islamic law has been arbitrarily imposed on non-Muslims, creating a deep crevice that divides the nation."[42] The 1938 decree required citizens to follow civil law (rather than Islamic, as done since the Ottoman era) in matters not explicitly stated in the laws of their religious community. It also permitted citizens to disavow any religious affiliation, wherein their personal status would be determined solely by civil law. Finally, it imposed a stricter requirement to register marriages with the state.[43]

In effect, the 1938 law was an assault on the dual legal system; it proposed the standardization of citizens' civil rights that were heretofore so varied under differing religious laws and even permitted, for the first time, citizens to claim their status solely under civil law. Lebanese Christian patriarchs supported the proposal because it guaranteed equality. But while Christians had much to gain from equality, Muslims stood to lose their dominant status. The French effectively abolished Islamic law as the common law of the land.

Huge demonstrations broke out in March 1939 among outraged Muslims in every Lebanese and Syrian city. Mass meetings were organized in

mosques, markets closed, and thousands marched in the streets. Sunni, Shi'i, and Druze Muslims in Beirut, Damascus, Tyre, Tripoli, Tartus, and elsewhere accused the French (correctly) of attempting to downgrade Islam's status. They protested the law as an illegal intervention into religious affairs. They condemned retention of the 1936 provision permitting Muslims to convert to Christianity. And they rejected state wedding registrations as tantamount to civil marriage, which would permit Muslim women to marry non-Muslims in violation of Islamic law. The Society of Ulama, leader of the protests in Damascus, sent a telegram with 223 signatures to Puaux demanding repeal of the law. Echoing the anti-Salafi sentiments voiced in the Zayn al-Din affair, its leader, Kamil al-Qassab, proclaimed: "Muslim law is a divine law that cannot be modified."[44]

Even the secularist National Bloc joined the protest. The Bloc had won the 1936 Syrian elections because it had pushed the French to negotiate an independence treaty. But in December 1938 the French parliament refused to ratify it. This was a serious blow to the government of Prime Minister Jamil Mardam Bey, which rapidly lost support to dissenting factions. Faced with the imminent demise of his government anyway, Mardam Bey decided to resign as a sign of solidarity with the Muslim protesters. He did so even though his government had supported the 1938 decree and even published it in the official register. In face of the massive protests and increasing violence, Puaux concluded that all reform of personal status law was doomed to failure. In March, he publicly retracted the decree in a radio broadcast.[45]

Leaders of the women's movement were no doubt disturbed by nationalists' support for Islamic populists who incited the protests. While there is no record of women's reaction to the reform proposal, there may well have been some support for it: A 1920 poll on civil marriage in 'Ajamy's *The Bride* had featured women who advocated civil marriage because it offered them more equal rights.[46] On the other hand, many women likely joined the protests in national solidarity. However, the National Bloc's propaganda undercut any notion of women as direct participants in the political battle. Various Bloc leaflets proclaimed: "France is the enemy of God!" and "The French want to take from you your wives, your daughters, and your children!"[47] The phrasing is an example of how, despite the women's union's years of nationalist activism, nationalist leaders assumed the voice of men talking exclusively to other men. As in the armed conflicts of the 1920s, male nationalists viewed the confrontation with the French in paternalistic terms, as a rivalry between themselves and French males over sovereignty over women.

Conclusion

Patriotic motherhood was a risky adaptation to the 1930s civic order. The gamble paid off insofar as women made their voices heard in conferences and demonstrations, and so inserted their issues into the political agenda. But the strategy also reinforced the twin pillars of paternalism that women opposed. As subalterns in the civic order, women's weakness lay in their legally imposed deference to men. By choosing to ally along class lines with their relatives among the nationalist elite, women's leaders masked, and effectively reinforced, the terms of their subaltern status. And, by stressing their service to the nation through motherhood, women were accepting a status of indirect citizenship. Like the mother and sisters who visited the dying soldier on the battlefield in the World War I poem discussed in chapter one, they participated in the nation mainly through their relationship to husbands, brothers, and sons. This was a status that religious patriarchs were all to ready to mediate in the dual legal system.

As a result, women ended the decade with no real legal gains. Their civil status remained unchanged, and if anything, locked in an iron cage by the alliance of nationalists with religious conservatives. Moreover, the second aim of patriotic motherhood, recruitment of a mass base for the women's movement, remained largely unfulfilled. Despite the participation of many women in nationalist rallies, the movement had expanded only modestly beyond its bourgeois-salon core of 1928. To some observers, the movement appeared weak, disorganized and unpopular by the end of the decade.[48] The reasons for this will be discussed more fully in Part Four. But as the next chapter will show, one promising opening in the legal boundaries of the colonial civic order was the advance of women's—and men's—social rights in the 1930s. In contrast to the stalemate on civil rights, the state was obliged to acknowledge basic rights to public health, education and labor protection.