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The Role of Women in the Lebanese National and Political Movement (1943-1975)-A Historical Study

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Abstract.

The period between 1943 and 1975 witnessed a progressive development in the role of women within the national and political movement in Lebanon. Women emerged as active elements in the struggle for independence, political participation, and the defense of social and economic rights. This was evident in women's participation in demonstrations against the French mandate and the demands for independence, the establishment of women's associations that supported national causes, and the struggle of women to obtain the right to vote (guaranteed since 1952) and to demand broader political rights.

This research aims to shed light on the contributions of Lebanese women to the political and national movement during this period, in addition to analyzing the factors that developed or limited their participation.

Keywords: Women's role, national movement, women's associations

Introduction

Introduction: The Importance of Studying the Role of Women in Modern Lebanese History Studying the role of women in the Lebanese national and political movement between 1943 and 1975 is a fundamental foundation for understanding the transformations of Lebanese society during the period of national establishment and post-independence.

Women played a central role in both national and political struggles, whether through participation in anti-colonial movements, party activism, or in demanding civil and political rights.

This research attempts to accurately uncover the hidden history of Lebanese women as key players in the political scene, challenging stereotypes and patriarchal norms.

Accurate documentation of this role is not only historical justice, but also a tool for understanding the potential for change in the current Lebanese reality.[1]

Research Objectives:

The research aims to assess the impact of social and political factors on this role, analyze the nature of women's participation in the Lebanese national and political movement during the period between 1943 and 1975, and compare the Lebanese experience with other Arab counterparts. Research Problem:



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The research problem focuses on how Lebanese women contributed to the national and political movement between 1943 and 1975, and on the factors that determined the nature of that role. Research Problem:

Although there are studies on the Lebanese national movement, most of them have overlooked the role of women or reduced it to secondary "support." Therefore, the study poses the following problem:

- How did Lebanese women contribute to the national and political movement between 1943 and 1975?
- What challenges did they face under the sectarian and patriarchal system?
- Did they succeed in asserting their presence as political actors, or did their role remain confined to the social framework?

Research Methodology:

This study adopts a historical and analytical approach, utilizing archival documents including government decisions, party statements, newspapers, and magazines. It also relies on the personal memoirs of women activists during that period, and draws on academic studies on modern Lebanese history and the women's movement. Significance of the Research:

The importance of the research lies in its attempt to re-read political history by revealing the forgotten roles of women in the construction of modern Lebanon. It also enriches feminist studies by presenting a model of feminist struggle in an Arab-Lebanese context, and by linking the past to the present by understanding the roots of the current political marginalization of Lebanese women, such as weak parliamentary representation.

- Previous Studies: Numerous studies have addressed this topic from different perspectives. Among the most famous of these studies are:
- Mary Ajami's study, entitled "The Women's Movement in Lebanon" (1962), which focused on tracing the development of the women's movement from the Ottoman era to the 1960s. Her contribution was evident in mentioning the role of women in resisting the French Mandate.
- Elias Atallah's study, entitled "Women in Leftist and Nationalist Parties A History of the Lebanese Communist Party," which mentioned activists such as Laure Moghaizel and Juliette Touma and documented women's participation in organizing demonstrations and strikes. [2]
- Nadim Naim's study, entitled "The Syrian Social Nationalist Party and Women," which focused on the role of women in the resistance against The mandate, and referred to the formation of women's military units. Despite the seriousness and importance of these studies, our study aims to link political and social activity, i.e., analyze how women translated their national struggle into rights demands and utilize new sources. A comparison between the currents and a study of the differences between women on the right and left in their engagement with the national issue.

Research Limits:

The temporal boundaries of the research are limited to the period from independence (1943) to the beginning of the civil war (1975). The geographical boundaries are limited to Lebanese territory, with occasional references to the role of Palestinian women in the camps. The objective boundaries focus on political and national participation, not social or cultural roles, unless they are directly linked to national action.

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Research Structure:

The research includes an introduction and a preface. The first chapter includes a theoretical framework that presents the definition of the national movement, the general concept of feminism, and the role of women in building society in Lebanon. The second chapter presents Lebanese women between tradition and modernization (1943-1958). The third chapter examines Lebanese women and national movements (1958-1975). The fourth chapter discusses the challenges and obstacles facing women's role (1943-1975). The fifth chapter focuses on the achievements and contributions of Lebanese women (1943-1975). The sixth chapter presents a comparison with other Arab feminist experiences (1943-1975). The research concludes with a conclusion, findings, recommendations, footnotes, sources, and references.

Research Introduction:

The period between 1943 and 1975 in Lebanon witnessed major political and social transformations, beginning with independence from the French Mandate, through the formation of national identity, and ending with the outbreak of the civil war. During this period, women's role in the national and political struggle became prominent, whether through participation in anti-colonial movements, party and union work, or advocacy for social rights. However, this role remained marginalized in official historical writings, which focused on men as the main actors. This research aims to shed light on the role of women in the Lebanese national and political movement between 1943 and 1975, by analyzing women's contributions to parties, unions, student movements, and popular resistance, and how they interacted with major transformations such as the rise of Arab nationalism and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Chapter One: Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

the feminist movement, and the dominance of the patriarchal system.

- Definition of the Lebanese National and Political Movement

The Lebanese National Movement is defined as the political and social struggle that sought to achieve complete independence from the French Mandate in 1943, and then sought to build a stable state thereafter. [3]It included participation in establishing the sectarian political system, as well as the struggle against external hegemony and engagement in internal conflicts, such as the 1958 crisis.

- The General Concept of Feminism and the Role of Women in Building Society Feminism in the Lebanese context was linked to the demand for legal and political equality. However, it faced challenges due to the sectarian division of society, which affected the cohesion of

Feminism is a social, political, and intellectual movement that aims to achieve gender equality in rights and opportunities and combat gender-based discrimination and oppression. Feminism



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includes a critique of the social and cultural structures that reinforce stereotypical gender roles and seeks to empower women in the political, economic, and educational spheres.

Feminist movements vary between liberal feminism, which focuses on legal equality and political participation; radical feminism, which challenges patriarchy as the root of oppression; and Islamic feminism, which reconciles women's rights with religious values.[4]

Women in Lebanon have played vital roles despite the challenges. Such as the sectarian system and social restrictions, the most prominent field is the political sphere. Women constitute 4.7% of the Lebanese parliament (2022), which is considered a limited percentage of women. Among them are activists such as Wajiha Hawat, the first female parliamentarian in the 1960s, and Paula Yacoubian, who have pushed for issues such as family rights and gender-based violence. [5]

In the economic sphere, according to the World Bank (2020), the rate of women's participation in the labor market is 29%, due to structural barriers, as well as initiatives such as the "Working Women's Association" that supports women's small businesses. [6]

In the social sphere, women like Lina Abyad led campaigns against domestic violence, resulting in the Women's Protection Law (2014). Organizations like KAFA and ABAAD began documenting women's rights violations and providing legal support. [7]

In the field of education and culture, women represent 56% of university graduates, according to UNESCO (2021), but opportunities for leadership are unequal. Similarly, writers like Hoda Barakat and Hanan al-Shaykh highlighted issues of identity and gender. [8]

- Major Historical Transformations in Lebanon between 1943 and 1975

This period witnessed major transformations. Between 1943 and 1958, the state-building phase took place under the dominance of the Taif National Pact. In 1958, a political crisis erupted between the pro-Western and pro-nationalist camps. In 1975, the civil war began, ending the era of organized civil political activism. [9]

Chapter Two: Lebanese Women Between Tradition and Modernization (1943-1958)

First: The Social and Legal Status of Women after Lebanon's Independence

The period following independence in 1943 witnessed fundamental transformations in the status of Lebanese women, although they remained limited within the framework of the traditional social order.[10]

From a legal perspective, personal status laws remained subject to the various religious sects, leading to disparities in rights between women of different sects.[11]

The new Lebanese constitution granted some civil rights to women, but maintained a number of restrictions, particularly with regard to political rights.

With regard to social aspects, women's traditional roles within the family remained prevalent and well-known, without neglecting their role as mothers and wives.[12]

In addition, some transformations emerged in major cities, such as Beirut and Tripoli, where women participated more fully in the public life of the state.[13]

Second: Education, Work, and the Development of Women's Participation



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office workers. [17].

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This period in Lebanon's history witnessed remarkable progress in the field of girls' education. Girls' enrollment in schools rose from 35% in 1945 to approximately 55% in 1958. [14]. Schools affiliated with foreign missions and religious sects played a fundamental role in this development. [15]. Women's participation in the workforce remained very limited; the percentage of working women did not exceed 15% of the total workforce in 1958. [16]. Their work was concentrated in specific professions, such as education, where they constituted 32% of teachers, 28% of nurses, and 18% of

Third: The role of the first women's associations in demanding women's rights.

A number of women's associations emerged during this period, playing a pivotal role in demanding women's rights.[18]

Among the most famous of these associations are the League of University Women, founded in 1952, which focused on the issues of working women[19]. The Lebanese Women's Union, founded in 1946, focused on women's rights to education and work[20].

The work of these associations revolved around organizing lectures, issuing bulletins, and submitting memoranda to the authorities. They also organized a number of campaigns to demand the amendment of laws that were unfair to women[21].

Fourth: Images and figures of women's leaders during this period

A large number of pioneering women's leaders became famous during this period, such as Mary Ajami, who was a pioneer of women's journalism; She founded the magazine "The New Woman" in 1947;[22] Labiba Thabet, the first female Lebanese parliamentarian in 1953, was known for her struggle for women's political rights; Emily Fares Ibrahim, the first female Lebanese lawyer, was known for her struggle for equality under the law; and Evelyn Bustros founded the first union for female factory workers in 1955.[23]

These pioneering figures played a pivotal role in improving the image of women and opening up opportunities and horizons for their active and meaningful participation in public life.[24]

Chapter Three: Lebanese Women and National Movements (1958-1975)

First: Women's Participation in Political Parties and Movements

The period between 1958 and 1975 witnessed a significant increase in Lebanese women's participation in political parties and movements.[25]

Women participated, in particular, in leftist and nationalist parties; they constituted nearly 30% of the members of the Lebanese Communist Party in 1970. [26] The role of women in the Arab Nationalist Movement also grew, with some women assuming leadership positions in student and union leadership. [27]

Women's participation in traditional and sectarian parties, on the other hand, remained limited; their role was confined to charitable and propaganda work.[28]

This period also witnessed the emergence of the first real attempts. This led to the formation of independent partisan women's organizations, such as the Lebanese Women's Union, which was founded in 1967.

Second: The Role of Women in Revolutions, Uprisings, and National Events, Between 1958 and 1975 Lebanese women played a pivotal role in major political events during this period. During the 1958 Revolution, women participated in demonstrations and strikes, and played a vital role in providing



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supplies and relief. [29]. Facts have been documented of the deaths and injuries of dozens of women during these events. [30].

With the outbreak of tensions that contributed to the civil war in 1975, the role of women in political and military activities increased. Some women joined the fighting formations, while others assumed essential organizational and media roles. [31]. The role of women in the protest movements that attempted to prevent the outbreak of war also increased. [32].

Third: Women in Trade Unions and Civil Organizations

The period between 1958 and 1975 marked a significant development in the role of women within trade union and civil organizations. The percentage of women participating in unions rose from 15% in 1960 to 28% in 1975 [33].

The first union affiliated with working women was established in 1965 [34]. Women's organizations in the civil sphere played a pivotal role in providing social services, especially in poor areas [35]. These organizations also began to address more daring issues, such as domestic violence and wage discrimination [36].

Fourth: Women's Issues in National Political Discourse

Women's issues occupied an important place in political discourse during this period, although their priorities varied according to political affiliations. Left-wing parties focused on issues of equality in employment and wages [37], while right-wing parties focused on education and family issues [38]. During this period, the first honest attempts to amend the laws that were unfair to women saw the light of day, even if they did not yield tangible results in many cases. [39] Increasing calls crystallized in political discourse, in order to grant women their full right to political participation. [40] Chapter Four: Challenges and Obstacles to the Role of Women (1943-1975)

The challenges and obstacles facing the growing role of women are highlighted according to the following axes:

Axis One: Social and Cultural Challenges

During this period, the Lebanese feminist movement faced deep-rooted social and cultural obstacles. The traditional male mentality imposed its control over most aspects of society, viewing public roles as almost exclusively the domain of men. [41] Sectarian divisions also played a negative role in hindering the development of a unified, inclusive women's movement, as these sectarian divisions were reflected in the priorities and programs of women's associations. [42] On the other hand, religious institutions entrenched stereotypical images of women's roles, emphasizing their familial and traditional duties. [43] These factors combined to create a psychological and moral barrier to women's active participation in the public life of individuals and society.

Axis Two: The Legal and Political Framework

The Lebanese legal system constituted one of the most significant obstacles to the advancement of the feminist movement. Personal status laws remained subject to religious sects, leading to significant disparities in women's rights based on their sectarian affiliation. [44] Women were also deprived of a number of basic civil and political rights, such as the right to pass on citizenship to their children. [45] At the political level, traditional parties excluded women from decision-making positions. [46The percentage of women in the leadership bodies of major parties did not exceed 5%



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until 1975. [47]The sectarian political system also hindered any serious attempts to reform laws that were unfair to women. [48]

Axis Three: Economic Challenges

Lebanese women faced enormous economic challenges that slowed their active participation in public life. The unemployment rate among educated women reached approximately 35% in 1970, compared to 15% among men. [49] Working women also suffered from blatant wage discrimination, with their wages not exceeding 60% of those of men in the same professions. [50] These economic factors contributed to women remaining financially dependent on men, reducing their independence and decision-making ability. [51] The class-based economic structure also restricted women's educational and employment opportunities in rural areas and among all poor classes. [52]

Axis Four: Media and the Image of Women in this Period

During this period, the Lebanese media contributed to reinforcing stereotypical images of women. Newspapers and magazines focused on the image of women as wives and mothers, while neglecting their professional and academic achievements. [53] Television dramas also portrayed women as victims at times, or as marginal figures at other times. [54] On the other hand, women's representation in media institutions appeared very weak; the percentage of female journalists did not exceed 20% of the total number of journalists in 1975. [55] Despite this, some bold female voices emerged that rejected these stereotypes in the late 1960s. [56]

Chapter Five: Achievements and Contributions of Lebanese Women (1943-1975)

Lebanese women contributed to numerous legal and social achievements, and to the establishment of a number of civil society organizations. Their role was prominent in various aspects of life, and among their most notable achievements were:

First: Legal and Social Gains

During this period, Lebanese women achieved numerous legal and social achievements, despite the enormous challenges they faced. The most important of these gains were political rights. Women gained the right to vote and to run for office in 1952, under Law No. 7. However, women's representation in Parliament remained limited during that historical period. [57] In the field of education, the percentage of females enrolled in education rose from 35% in 1945 to 1975, with the approval of free basic education for both sexes in 1968. [58] In the field of work, the Labor Law was issued in 1946, which prohibited the dismissal of women from their jobs due to marriage or pregnancy, while wage discrimination remained in place. [59] A number of women's associations were also established, with more than (30) officially recognized women's associations by 1975. Second: Prominent Female Figures and Their Role

Several pioneering female figures dominated the public scene during that period, most notably: Mary Ajami, a pioneer of women's journalism, who founded the magazine "The New Woman" in [60] (1947); Labiba Thabet, the first female Lebanese parliamentarian (1953), who fought for women's political rights [61]. Emily Fares Ibrahim, considered the first female Lebanese lawyer (1955), defended women's rights in court⁶ [62]



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And there is Nazira Zeineddine, the first female Lebanese doctor specializing in gynecology (1962) [63]

Third: The Influence of Women in the Formulation of National Policies

Lebanese women's remarkable influence emerged in several fields, most notably: educational policy; Women's pressures were able to lead to the approval of the co-education policy in 1965 [64]. Women also contributed in the field of social laws to amending the labor law, which was amended in favor of female workers in 1970 [65]. With regard to party life, women introduced new concepts into party work that revolved around social issues [66]. Women established a number of health and social institutions in the field of public services; This was within deprived areas.

Third: General Evaluation of the Role of Women in That Historical Period

A number of positives and negatives emerge regarding the role of women in that historical period, between 1943 and 1975.[67]

Among the positives are the establishment of an infrastructure for the women's movement, as well as the achievement of tremendous progress in the field of education, and the breaking of a number of traditional social barriers. Among the negatives are the limited political representation of women, the persistence of legal discrimination between them and men, and the impact of sectarian divisions on them. [68]

Based on the above, the researcher can realize that there are lessons to be learned from the feminist experience, including: the importance of women's unity, the necessity of linking the spectrum of feminist and national struggles, and the need for radical legal reforms. [69]

Chapter Six: A Comparison with Other Arab Feminist Experiences (1943-1975)

Arab women underwent difficult experiences to achieve a degree of social, political, and economic liberation. Each experience had its own circumstances that influenced its outcomes. The most prominent of these experiences are:

First - The Egyptian Experience: Women in the Egyptian National Movement

The Egyptian feminist movement developed rapidly during the same period (1943-1975), achieving significant legal and political gains. In 1956, the Egyptian Arab Constitution granted women the right to vote and run for office, thus advancing four years ahead of Lebanon. [70] Egyptian women have also held ministerial positions since 1962, while Lebanese women were only able to achieve this accomplishment after a major civil war. [71] Egyptian women's organizations played a fundamental role in resisting the British occupation, organizing very large women's demonstrations in 1951, in which thousands of women participated. [72] The Egyptian women's movement was distinguished by its relative unity, when compared to the Lebanese experience, as many associations united under the banner of the "Egyptian Women's Union" since 1923. [73]

Second: The Tunisian Experience: Women in the Tunisian National Movement

The Tunisian experience was unique in its radical reforms in the field of women's rights under the leadership of President Habib Bourguiba. Tunisia issued the Personal Status Code in 1956, which abolished polygamy and granted women equal rights in the matter of divorce. [74] Tunisia also opened the doors to education and employment for women on a large scale. The percentage of



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women in Tunisian universities reached 35% in 1975, compared to 25% in Lebanon. [75] In the field of political activity, Tunisian women have participated in parliamentary life since independence. The first female Tunisian representative was elected in 1959, six years before Lebanon. [76] The Tunisian women's movement was distinguished by its significant official support from the state, unlike the Lebanese situation, where women's associations continued to operate independently of the ruling authorities.

Third: Similarities and differences between the Egyptian and Tunisian experiences and the Lebanese experience

The three feminist revolutionary experiences represented a turning point and a turning point in the nation's history. The experiences were similar in terms of the joint struggle against colonialism in the early stages [77], as well as the focus on education and labor issues as a priority [78], with the presence of pioneering female figures in the three countries [79]. On the other hand, these experiences differed in terms of the legal framework; [80]Tunisia undertook radical reforms, while Lebanon remained conservative [81], and the women's movement also enjoyed greater official support in Egypt and its sister country, Tunisia, than in Lebanon [82], and with regard to organizational unity, the women's movements were more unified in Egypt and Tunisia [83], while with regard to political participation, Egypt and Tunisia preceded Lebanon in women's political representation [84]

Research Conclusion

This research presents a serious attempt to reread modern Lebanese history from a feminist perspective, highlighting the marginal roles of women in building the nation-state. Despite the great challenges, the achievements of the women's movement during this historical period constitute a foundation upon which one can build to achieve further progress.

The issue of women's empowerment in the political and social spheres remains a fundamental condition for Lebanon's democratic development. This requires strenuous and comprehensive efforts, including legal reform, cultural change, and capacity building.

The study emphasizes the importance of learning from successful Arab experiences, while also taking into account Lebanese specificities.

Research Findings and Future Recommendations

The study revealed several key findings related to the role of women in the Lebanese national and political movement during the period between 1943 and 1975, as follows:

- In terms of historical development, Lebanese women made significant progress in the social and political spheres, although this progress varied across regions and sects.
- A number of legal gains were achieved through legislative achievements, such as the right to vote (1952) and improved working conditions. However, these remained limited under the dominance of the sectarian system.
- Pioneering women emerged in the field of political participation in political parties and associations, but this female representation in decision-making positions remained marginal and ineffective.
- The Lebanese experience lagged behind its counterparts in Egypt and Tunisia in the field of political rights and legal reform.



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- The research found continued social and economic obstacles and challenges that limited the effectiveness of the women's role.

- Based on the research findings, the researcher can offer the following recommendations to enhance the role of women, including:
- Amending personal status laws in the field of legal reform to ensure full equality.
- Strengthening comprehensive awareness programs organized according to scientific plans in educational curricula.
- Focusing on universities by supporting women's research and studies there.
- Working to develop microfinance programs for women's projects in the field of economic empowerment.
- Striving to combat wage discrimination and provide nurseries for working mothers.
- Producing media materials that reflect a positive image of women leaders.
- Highlighting and documenting the achievements of pioneering women in Lebanese history.
- Working to qualify women cadres for party and political work to achieve effective political participation.
- Striving to support women's alliances across sects to promote common demands.

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