**Abstract**

*This thesis considers Arab nationalism in a new light by looking at Nazik al-‘Abid’s* Nur al-Fayha*, a Kurdish woman’s magazine in 1920 Damascus. 1920 was a year of turbulent regime changes in Syria. I examine how al-‘Abid interpreted nationalism, how she argued for suffrage, education, and unveiling, and how she took on an Arab identity. Al-‘Abid ignored her Kurdish roots and instead identified with the Arab cause for the good of the nation. She chose to ignore difference in order to forge bonds between citizens. Despite her arguments, many male nationalists did not assign women’s rights to the same level of importance.* Nur al-Fayha *ceased publication in July 1920, when Faisal was deposed and the French Mandate took effect.* *Interpretations of nationalism and what it meant to be Arab continued to develop and evolve in Syria after this point.*

Nazik al-‘Abid’s *Nur al-Fayha*: A Kurdish Woman’s Magazine in 1920 Damascus

By Ceighley Cribb

*Submitted in partial completion of the Master of Arts Degree at Sarah Lawrence College, May 2016*

**Contents**

**Acknowledgments** 4

**Introduction**  5

**Chapter One:** Arab Nationalism and 1920 Damascus 14

**Chapter Two:** *Nur al-Fayha* and the Nationalist Project 21

**Chapter Three:** al-‘Abid’s Search for Women’s Inclusion 27

**Conclusion**  39

**Bibliography** 42

**Introduction**

“Many people oppose her […] and nobody cared about them because she did a great job,” wrote Nazik al-‘Abid in a May 1920 article in her women’s magazine, *Nur al-Fayha*.[[1]](#footnote-1) The article referred to a Russian woman becoming involved by contributing political ideas to magazines and newspapers. Al-‘Abid, an elite Arab nationalist Kurd, has become known as one of the early leaders in the Syrian women’s movement, which took off in the interwar period. By assuming this role, she faced opposition from men on the issues of women’s suffrage, education, and increased public involvement. Through her efforts, *Nur al-Fayha* emerged as an important addition to the rapidly expanding Damascus public sphere in this period, which was a time when women were able to gain a level of political traction due to the changing circumstances within post-World War I Syria.

The post-war period was a time of significant political transformation in the Arab Middle East, and Syria was no exception. After the Ottoman Empire lost control of Syria during the First World War and British forces occupied Damascus in 1918, Emir Faisal began his rule.[[2]](#footnote-2) The British installed Faisal, a member of the prominent Hashemite family of Mecca. By the beginning of 1920, the French laid claims to Syria after the British military occupiers evacuated Damascus.[[3]](#footnote-3) Faisal cooperated with French advisors in the early months of 1920, but moved quickly to declare an independent state of Syria in March.[[4]](#footnote-4) Until it fell to the French in late July, this state operated with a strictly Arab government. After Faisal’s government collapsed, the French began their mandatory government, which would control Damascus until 1946.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Damascus in 1920 was a complicated place, full of diverse social groups, shifting ideologies, colonial intrusions, and new political actors seeking to participate in the national conversation—of which women were a notable example. 1920 was also a year in which Syrians of all stripes were facing big questions concerning their political future: the Syrian question, the woman question, and the question of independence.[[6]](#footnote-6)

All of these questions arose from the nationalist fervor felt in Syria at this time. Although Arab nationalism had emerged during the Ottoman era, it was most widely felt and powerfully expressed only in the post-war era. Previously held as Ottoman territories, Syria and the other formerly Ottoman Arab domains desired to rule themselves as new Arab nation-states. Many social groups within these territories also craved for a voice in how they should be governed. Arab nationalism thus involved, for the first time in the post-WWI period, mass politics and full political participation.

At this complicated moment, women in Damascus burst into the nationalist political arena.[[7]](#footnote-7) Women started to demand the vote and challenged the gender norms that consigned them to the private sphere; to advocate for these goals, some notable women began to issue their own publications. *Nur al-Fayha* instantly became one of the most famous among these.

Al-‘Abid was a striking figure. A Kurdish Muslim and member of the educated elite, she took part in the Syrian Army against the French, and also promoted women’s rights years before she started her magazine. Al-‘Abid was from the *Hayy al-Akrad* Kurdish quarter of Damascus; although elite Kurds were mostly assimilated into Damascus Arab society, they maintained a geographic separation from the rest of the city.[[8]](#footnote-8) Still, al-‘Abid faced no significant difficulty with social integration into the rest of Damascene society, and the idea of Arab nationalism and unity resonated strongly with her. As such, she has no issue becoming a champion of the Arab nationalist cause, even though she was Kurdish, and Arabs dominated the movement.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Despite her seeming outsider status, al-‘Abid made nationalism the focus of her magazine, for which she acted both as a journalist and editor-in-chief. Her magazine ceased publication in July of 1920, as the French exiled her once they fully occupied Syria. Before that, however, the changing political atmosphere and simultaneous development of a more open public sphere after the First World War, along with her elite status, allowed her to speak quite freely on nationalist issues, despite not being a part of the Arab majority.

Al-‘Abid chose not to point out her own difference in her nationalist writings in *Nur al-Fayha*. This indicates that she wanted to keep the Arab nationalist movement united. She thought of the new possibilities that an independent state might give to people of all types—lower classes, and women, in particular—and focused on getting an Arab government that would be inclusive.

How did al-‘Abid, as a minority woman and as the editor and columnist for a woman’s magazine, interpret nationalism and insert herself into political discourse during the pivotal year 1920? Ultimately, as became clear through her magazine, al-‘Abid closely aligned with Faisal’s own views on Arab nationalism, believing that women should be equal citizens in the Arab nation, and that the participation of all citizens on an equal footing would lead to a modern, successful state. She became more staunchly devoted to Faisal over the duration of her magazine, even when support of Faisal began to waver during the period of Syrian independence.[[10]](#footnote-10) It is perhaps surprising that al-‘Abid continued support for Faisal even as his power to effect change declined, and his views and influence on achieving the vote for women ceased to matter as much. Nonetheless, she viewed him as integral to the nation-building process, and never stopped entrusting him with the responsibility of supporting women’s interests.

The six-month publication period of *Nur al-Fayha* demonstrates the pulse of nationalist thought and women’s activism at a time of profound change and flux in the Syrian political community. More importantly, this six-month time period was unique because ethnic minority identity was subsumed within a slightly unwieldy, inorganic identity category of an Arab nation. This changed once the French Mandate commenced. Reading *Nur al-Fayha* gives room to speculate about the openness of identity categories at this brief moment in time.[[11]](#footnote-11)

By looking at the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and nation in her writings in *Nur al-Fayha*, this thesis explores how al-‘Abid understood nationalist issues, how she called on women to participate in the political and social spheres, and how she defined the rights women should demand from the nationalist project. Women’s role in the nationalist project in 1920 has mostly been left out of the historical conversation.[[12]](#footnote-12) To address this gap in the literature, I investigate where this exceptionally articulate minority woman concentrated her focus and how her opinions can offer historians a new way to understand Arab nationalism during a crucial moment at the outset of the interwar period. I include original translations of *Nur al-Fayha* throughout this thesis.

The historical scholarship on Arab nationalism in Syria is wide-ranging.[[13]](#footnote-13) The broader scholarship on nationalism demonstrates how it began and evolved and how new groups emerged in the process. Philip Khoury’s *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (1987), James Gelvin’s *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (1998), and Stefan Weber’s *Damascus: Ottoman Modernity and Urban Transformation, 1808-1918* (2009) all show the struggle between contending interpretations of nationalism.[[14]](#footnote-14) These scholars discuss the different ways nationalism developed, from resistance to colonial occupations to city planning. These works do much to illuminate the complicated conditions that culminated in the upheavals of 1920. Where they tend to fall short is in analysis of women’s contributions to Syrian nationalism, giving credit only to male nationalists.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Historians have also recently begun to reconsider the role of minorities. The study of women’s roles has taken a backseat, however. Scholarship on Syrian women in the post-World War I era remains remarkably scant; moreover, no one has addressed the important part played by minority women during the age of budding nationalism in Damascus.

The historiography on gender is rather limited. Elizabeth Thompson has written the only significant work on Syrian women during the French Mandate. In *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (2000),Thompson offers an entirely new lens for viewing the Mandate period. By showing women advocating for rights as citizens and the gendered state social policy they encountered, she demonstrates how women in the Levant cracked traditional systems to place themselves in a new position, from which they could debate their political and social standing.[[16]](#footnote-16) Thompson’s work illuminates how women became political participants, and how the social sphere was inherently political. Social norms, including women’s roles in the family and the question of women’s public comportment, were up for discussion and negotiation. Thompson sees women as an integral part of the new order, in which women were valuable participants in the creation and transformation of the state. Despite these significant contributions, Thompson does not really explore how minority women in particular navigated the new conditions of the post-war era. She mentions al-‘Abid and ‘Ajamy, but refrains from examining their minority status. In this way she misses an important analytical approach, one that highlights the intersectionality of gender and ethnicity.

If Thompson refrains from addressing the theme of ethnicity in her work on gender, historians such as Mordechai Nisan, Michael Provence, and Benjamin Thomas White do examine the role of minorities in the Syrian nationalist project (though without necessarily tackling gender).[[17]](#footnote-17) These scholars, by adopting an intersectional analysis of ethnicity and nation, all seek to explain how minorities were able to place themselves in the nationalist project. White’s *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (2011) is of particular importance to my own scholarship, as he contemplates the meaning of the term “minority” by highlighting the press in Aleppo and Damascus. His idea that “identities were in flux” suggests that nationalism was also in flux.[[18]](#footnote-18)

While Thompson, Nisan, Provence, and White navigate gender and ethnicity as separate spaces, I analyze gender and ethnicity side by side. This thesis pushes deeper into the same terrain by exploring the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and state in al-‘Abid’s magazine. This very important piece of the nationalist puzzle advances our understanding of how minority women interpreted nationalism in Damascus.

The minority women’s press in the Middle East began with *Al-Fatah*, an Egyptian journal established in 1893, which was run by Lebanese Christians.[[19]](#footnote-19) In Damascus, Mary ‘Ajamy, an educated Arab Greek Orthodox woman, ran a women’s magazine called *al-‘Arus* (*The Bride*), founded in 1920. ‘Ajamy’s religion did not hinder her acceptance by the majority Sunni population; the Greek Orthodox community of Damascus had no particular issues at this time integrating into the prevailing urban culture.[[20]](#footnote-20) ‘Ajamy’s magazine began publication in 1910, halted during World War I, and then resumed in 1919. Compared to al-‘Abid’s magazine, *al-‘Arus* focused more on women’s suffrage and on women’s responsibilities to a devastated homeland.[[21]](#footnote-21) *Al-‘Arus* became popular with the educated population. While editor-in-chief and columnist for her own magazine, ‘Ajamy also contributed to al-‘Abid’s *Nur al-Fayha*. [[22]](#footnote-22) *Nur al-Fayha* and *al-‘Arus* were complementary projects, rather than competitive. ‘Ajamy and al-‘Abid belonged to the same circles and shared similar ideas regarding how the new state should be configured. Al-‘Abid and ‘Ajamy focused on women’s suffrage and women’s roles in a new Syrian society. They both attempted to remove gender division so women would be seen as full political citizens.

What al-‘Abid selected for publication in *Nur al-Fayha* offers insight into what type(s) of conversations she wanted to have about the Syrian nation, women’s rights, and changing social and familial norms. Al-‘Abid had an intended audience. This audience played a role in choices of articles, which means she focused on particular readers through the conversations presented in the journals. The circulation numbers of *Nur al-Fayha* are unknown, though women more than likely read aloud and shared the ideas with their families and friends.[[23]](#footnote-23) The magazine was most likely passed around in urban areas, so there was not much of a rural audience. Despite this geographical bias, *Nur al-Fayha* is unchartered territory for a study on nationalism; and my intersectional analysis of this magazine therefore provides a unique window onto Arab nationalism in this period.

The thesis is broken into three chapters. In Chapter One, I provide background information on the history of Arab and Syrian nationalism, paying particular attention to Faisal’s own definition. In Chapter Two, I assess al-‘Abid’s *Nur al-Fayha* and what it meant to her for Syrian to be an Arab nation. This chapter necessarily continues the discussion of Faisal’s views on nationalism because her definition mirrored his so closely. In Chapter Three, I evaluate how women’s rights were presented in *Nur al-Fayha*. I deal with the question of the state and how al-‘Abid imagined the state’s future: what direction it was headed in, whether or not to embrace modernity, and the main obstacles to the nation’s success. By considering a minority woman’s role in Damascus at the outset of the interwar period, I reveal a distinctive approach to evaluating the development of Arab and Syrian nationalism.

**Chapter One: Arab Nationalism and 1920 Damascus**

This chapter examines the emergence and complex development of Arab nationalism. I will pay particular attention to Faisal’s interpretation of this concept, given the extent to which it inspired al-‘Abid’s magazine. Throughout the period covered in this thesis, al-‘Abid would remain wholly committed to the brand of Syrian nationalism put forth by Faisal. Even as nationalism began to splinter, once when many Syrians began to believe that Faisal was cooperating with the French, al-‘Abid became paradoxically even more pro-Faisal in her writings.

**Nationalism’s Roots**

Arab nationalism surfaced in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire, which had ruled Syria since 1516. The Ottoman Empire governed Syria with the intent to use its resources, land, and people to further its own interests. The Tanzimat reforms of the mid-nineteenth century created a more uniform system for Ottomans to govern more effectively. The ruling elite saw language as a unifier, so they instituted Turkish as the official language throughout the empire in 1839. This was one reason for the eventual emergence of Arab nationalism, even if Turkification policies only really became a pressing political concern in the fraught WWI period.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Arab nationalism had its roots in the nineteenth-century Arab cultural revival movement known as the *nahda*. Arabs sought to emphasize the distinctiveness of their cultural and linguistic identity, which could thrive even under the officially Turkish-speaking Ottoman Empire.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Arabic provided a basis for nation-building in defiance of the Ottomans. So too did the belief that the Ottomans kept Syria from advancing and modernizing, and the defeat of anything Ottoman became a common goal during World War I.[[26]](#footnote-26) Ottoman conscription into its army during World War I and Jamal Pasha’s massacre in wartime Damascus were the last straws for the Ottoman subjects.[[27]](#footnote-27) Before the 1916 massacre, Arab nationalism was not much of a political movement. Until this point, people could be culturally Arab, but still politically Ottoman. Jamal Pasha’s wartime decisions pushed Arabs over the edge, and political Arab nationalism thus developed as a backlash to Ottoman power.[[28]](#footnote-28)

In the first half of 1920, other versions of nationalism had yet to materialize. When they did, nationalism became far more complicated during the French Mandate, established informally in July. After World War I, people within Syria shared a common experience of having suffered during the war and ill treatment under the Ottomans.[[29]](#footnote-29) The desire for national independence and the freedom to choose one’s own fate resonated throughout the Greater Syria region. Syrians wanted a representative government drastically different from the Ottoman regime in the few years before World War I.[[30]](#footnote-30) Economic crises, famine, and other wartime struggles encouraged Syrians’ dissatisfaction with foreign intervention. Even before these conditions arose during wartime, though, nationalist sentiment had been felt in Syria beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Nationalism also gained traction with the rise of popular politics in the post-war era. But the new developments had their roots in transformations already under way in the end of the nineteenth century, under the Ottomans. Urbanization and the creation of new social spaces in late nineteenth century Damascus allowed people to meet in large numbers. The Ottomans knew they had to provide some outlet for expression, so they allowed these spaces to exist. Due in part to the new public gathering places, political participation grew in the early twentieth century.[[31]](#footnote-31) Marjeh Square, parks, and cafés gave people the opportunity to share their thoughts and converge into a united group. Marjeh Square in particular, given its location in the center of Damascus, was intended as a locus for the discussion of new ideas, and it became a site of organized protests against the Ottomans.

Along with the new gathering places, the press also contributed to the rise of popular politics.[[32]](#footnote-32) The press in the Middle East took off in the late nineteenth century, and produced a venue for the educated classes to express their opinions to a wider readership. These magazines and journals, mostly intended for women, advocated for women’s rights. They also agitated against the region’s domination by foreign powers. That a nationalist women’s press was already well-established made it easier for al-‘Abid’s *Nur al-Fayha* to take up the cause in 1920.

**Faisal’s Definition of Nationalism**

Faisal was not from Syria, so he had to establish some sort of legitimacy there. In order to achieve this goal, Faisal—borrowing from the example of Turkification under the Ottomans—settled upon the Arabic language as the best way to amass support and establish a common identity within Syria. A common language would facilitate institution-building, such as schools, courts, and other facets of government. The Sunni Muslim religion was not to be used, in Faisal’s view, as the basis behind national unity because many more people could identify with the Arabic language.[[33]](#footnote-33) Language could be taught without much forceful persuasion, so strategically, it was the best option for national unity.

Faisal’s definition of Arab nationalism was articulated in a memorandum he submitted to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. Faisal began this memorandum by stating his definition of an Arab:

The country for a line Alexandretta---Persia southward to the Indian Ocean is inhabited by ‘Arabs’---by which we mean people of closely related Semitic stocks, all speaking the one language, Arabic. The non-Arabic-speaking elements in this area do not, I believe, exceed one per cent of the whole.[[34]](#footnote-34)

According to this memorandum, then, Faisal believed that an Arab was simply any person who spoke Arabic. Faisal’s idea was to incorporate as many people as possible into the Arab nationalist movement, and only later (after an Arab state was achieved) worry about what would happen to those who could not necessarily be identified as Arab. Further down in the memorandum, he writes:

In laying stress on the difference in the social condition of our provinces, I do not wish to give the impression that there exists any real conflict of ideals, material interests, creeds, or character rendering our union impossible. The greatest obstacle we have to overcome is local ignorance, for which the Turkish Government is largely responsible. In our opinion, if our independence be conceded and our local competence established, the natural influences of race, language, and interest will soon draw us together into one people.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Faisal wanted to ensure that what came out of all this nationalist fervor was an Arab nation, so he tried to have the broadest possible appeal. But, Faisal was not thinking about people who did not identify with the urban, Arab nationalist cause. His main concern was with gaining independence, and thus postponing debates about internal political affairs until after the state was created.

Faisal’s memorandum also demonstrates what he envisioned for the new state:

We believe that Syria, an agricultural and industrial area thickly populated with sedentary classes, is sufficiently advanced politically to manage her own internal affairs. We feel also that foreign technical advice and help will be a most valuable factor in our national growth. We are willing to pay for this help in cash; we cannot sacrifice for it any part of the freedom we have just won for ourselves…[[36]](#footnote-36)

His plan was to make a Syria free from foreign influence and embrace modernity. Throughout this memorandum, Faisal was trying to ensure that France would not undertake a civilizing mission in Syria as it had done in other colonies. The prospect of French indirect economic imperialism, through foreign investment, also alarmed Faisal.[[37]](#footnote-37) Guaranteeing Arab rule in all aspects of the political and economic system remained Faisal’s goal.

Another aim of Arab nationalism according to Faisal was “to unite the Arabs eventually into one nation.”[[38]](#footnote-38) During the Faisal era, there was an idea that Palestine should be part of Syria. Some Palestinians even began to identify themselves as a part of a Greater Syria. Faisal did not criticize the Jewish population in Palestine, but rather embraced the idea that these people, too, could be Arab. This idea of how Jews might self-identify was in fact far-fetched because many of the Jews who had emigrated from Eastern Europe would not consider themselves to be Arab. The Arab Jews, on the other hand, could conceivably identify as both Arab and Jewish given Faisal’s idea that if one spoke Arabic in the Middle East, one could be an Arab.

Al-‘Abid, who had already long self-identified as Arab, naturally embraced the fluid, expansive definition of Arab nationalism proposed by Faisal, in which the Arabic language was the ultimate unifier. By working within Faisal’s nationalism framework—and also given her elite status—al-‘Abid was in a unique position to promote the Arab nationalist cause in *Nur al-Fayha*. She in fact remained loyal to Faisal’s definition long after other nationalists began to abandon it. At the same time, as I will show in the following chapters, al-‘Abid sought to harness Faisal’s nationalism to promote the advancement of women—encouraging women to work for the nation in order for the nation to work for women.

**Interpretations of Arab Nationalism and Authenticity**

In line with Faisal’s definition , al-‘Abid adopted a notion of Arab nationalism that was inclusive of all religious, ethnic, and gendered difference, which other nationalists did not have at the forefront of the nationalist project. While many nationalist actors followed Faisal, an emergent, more inclusive public sphere and the freedom to express different viewpoints allowed nationalism to take several forms.

While Faisal and al-‘Abid envisioned a nation that included all Arabic speakers, other interpretations of nationalism pushed against this idea. Some saw nation-building as the responsibility of the urban population, since the rural population was not as cosmopolitan or educated. Others thought the Arab nation included Sunni Muslims alone, and still others pointed more specifically to Sunnis in the cities. Different factions had difference ideas as to who could be an authentic spokesperson for the Arab nationalist cause.[[39]](#footnote-39) Al-‘Abid’s acceptance as an Arab was due in part to her elite status, urban upbringing, and prior integration into the elite society. For al-‘Abid as a woman and a Kurd (albeit a member of the elite) to have a voice in Arab nationalist issues was rare in spite of who Arab nationalism was intended for by various nationalist groups.

Though Faisal proclaimed that all Arabic speakers were Arabs, the motive behind this position was to garner mass support for his rule. Pointing out social difference threatened to detract from this purpose. Also, Faisal may have feared that groups clearly different from the Sunni Arab majority would seek to protect themselves by aligning with Western powers. From his standpoint, arguments about authenticity—concerning whether or not Kurds, Lebanese Christians, or Copts could genuinely be Arab—ought to wait until after an independent Syrian state was achieved.[[40]](#footnote-40) By all appearances, al-‘Abid hoped to dispense altogether with such arguments.

The next chapter discusses the ways in which al-‘Abid’s magazine interpreted Arab nationalism. The silences regarding her Kurdishness, how she imagined the nation, and how she advocated for equality display al-‘Abid’s understanding of Arab nationalism in 1920.

**Chapter 2: *Nur al-Fayha* and the Nationalist Project**

In *Nur al-Fayha*, al-‘Abid expressed her thoughts on what it meant for Syria to be an Arab nation. As I argued in the last chapter, she believed that following Faisal’s prescription to turn Syria into an exemplary Arab nation was the best political path forward. One surprising feature of her writings in *Nur al-Fayha*, however, is the degree to which she ignored her Kurdish identity; this was not a mouthpiece for Kurdish-Syrian identity. Rather she identified strictly as an Arab. The silences regarding Kurdishness indicate how little that identity played into her political life.[[41]](#footnote-41)

Al-‘Abid’s stance on nationalism reflected her position as a well-integrated Damascene elite. Al-‘Abid possibly did not want to acknowledge her own difference as a Kurd as it would take away from the national unification cause. Most Kurds who identified strongly as such were located in northeast Syria. Unified by Kurdish language, Kurds in the northeast had a distinct identity and wanted their own state.[[42]](#footnote-42) Those Kurds living in large cities, however, had an easier time fitting in with Arab norms because survival in that environment demanded they require Arabic. Consequently, Kurds living in large cities did not express solidarity with those Kurds until the late 1920s or early 1930s. In addition to geography, class played a role in Kurdish identity politics. As of 1920, urban, elite, and middle class Kurds did not identify with Kurds of the countryside.[[43]](#footnote-43)

If there was in fact a concept of Kurdishness in the cities like Damascus, it did not add up to Kurdish nationalism. Instead, Arab nationalist fervor predominated, and if Kurdish nationalism was a factor at all, it was not publicly expressed[[44]](#footnote-44) Al-‘Abid was a member of an elite family, and there was a notion of Kurdishness as her family identified as such to maintain the relationship with their Kurdish neighborhood.[[45]](#footnote-45) Al-‘Abid knew there was a difference between her and the non-Kurdish population, strictly because she lived in a district designated for the Kurdish population in Damascus. But she chose to identify as Arab and encouraged others to do the same. The absence of Kurdish identity from *Nur al-Fayha* showed just how dedicated she was to the Arab nationalist cause.

***Nur al-Fayha* andIts Nationalist Vision**

Al-‘Abid clearly saw divisions within the nation, for *Nur al-Fayha* acknowledged such issues. The potential divisions in Syrian society between social classes, Sunni and Shiite sects, Muslim and Christian religions, and Arab, Kurdish, Druze, and Alawite groups alarmed her. In light of this, she addressed the challenge of social divisiveness by posing questions and then adamantly calling for unity. The magazine’s June 1920 issue asks, “What is the most wholesome means by which to eradicate sectarian hatred in our country?”[[46]](#footnote-46) This pertained mainly to religious differences between the Sunni majority and the Christian and Shiite minorities. She viewed religious sectarianism as a potential threat to the nation, but not ethnic sectarianism in Damascus because ethnic conflict was not yet a major issue in 1920. She ran articles about religious difference, but did not publish anything about ethnic difference.

*Nur al-Fayha* also discussed fundamentalism and secular political ideology. Itwarned particularly against the rise of Islamic radicalism. A more secular state was al-‘Abid’s goal, not one united under religion. Al-‘Abid discussed this radicalism in the April 13 article “Girl of the Nation, Where are You?,” which demonstrates a split in nationalist ideology.[[47]](#footnote-47) Some male nationalists, like those of the Syrian General Conference, did not believe women were entitled to the vote. Those attracted to interpreting Islam in a conservative way did not want women’s participation in the political sphere. The article contends that Islamic radicalism will hurt the women’s rights movement and women’s acceptance in the public sphere. Al-‘Abid instead argued for women to “improve the moral of the people and family connections,” than focus on the differences in ideologies.[[48]](#footnote-48) In the 1930s, this brand of Islamic radical nationalism would win out, pushing aside women’s demands; but, in 1920, the question of women’s place in the nation was still open for debate. Al-‘Abid and her team certainly recognized the divisions within their society. The removal of religious sectarianism was important for unity in this moment for Arab nationalism.

Al-‘Abid and the female columnists for her magazine wanted to be full citizens in the new Syrian nation. Just as the men and women of Syria were tired of foreigners’ interference in their affairs and ruling without any Syrian representation, *Nur al-Fayha* did not want women to be subjected to exclusively-male rule in an independent nation. Al-‘Abid made her ambitions for the emergence of a new Syrian woman clear in the May 1920 issue: “Leave your place where you are hiding because your homeland needs you…inspire and motivate others with your activities…raise your voice and remind everyone about national tasks.”[[49]](#footnote-49) *Nur al-Fayha* urged women to become politically involved and take on the responsibility for caring for the nation, for only this way would they become full citizens alongside men.

*Nur al-Fayha* staunchly supported Arab nationalism—nearly every article expressed nationalist sentiment. Only one issue was published before Faisal declared an independent Syria, but this issue included articles on gender equality for the good of the new nation and Arabic language as a unifier of all people. Faisal spent January and February 1920 negotiating with the French on how they should advise Syria and how much influence they should have moving forward. *Nur al-Fayha* believed that foreign powers could be an example to follow, but not that they should have the authority to impose their own rule.[[50]](#footnote-50)

The articles in *Nur al-Fayha*’s inaugural issue dealt with nationalism, suffrage, women’s war efforts, and strong historical women.[[51]](#footnote-51) The articles in this issue focused more on the nationalist cause than on strictly gender per se. In a story written in the first issue, a mother dealt with a child who did not wish to share a shovel. “My child will get the shovel at the end, and I do not want him to be narcissistic because I want to teach him how to help children of the homeland. If he does not do that, he will not be helpful for his homeland [in the future].”[[52]](#footnote-52) Al-‘Abid was mainly concerned with articulating what women’s role in nation-building would be, and although her magazine was entirely written by women, it seems clear that they were addressing educated, like-minded readers of both sexes. She viewed women’s participation in the nation-building process as essential to their inclusion as full citizens in the state project. Al-‘Abid wanted a state where women were regarded in an equal manner to their male counterparts, and aimed to incorporate women in political activities and the workforce.

In the seven issues of *Nur al-Fayha* published from March through July, the magazine became even more pro-Faisal, despite his general decline in popularity among the Syrian populace. During this time, Syrians came to distrust Faisal because they believed he was giving away Syria’s autonomy to the French.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Al-‘Abid imagined a nation very similar to Faisal’s vision. In April 1920, *Nur al-Fayha* stated, “We live in one nation beneath the sky, shared interests and common benefits, preferring national interests above all [other] interests.”[[54]](#footnote-54) This passage embodies what al-‘Abid advocated for the entire lifespan of the magazine. She saw herself and everyone who wished to be Arab as a part of the nation.

The July issue was published just before Faisal’s surrender, al-‘Abid’s participation in the Battle of Maysalun, and the French occupation of Damascus. These events would herald the end of *Nur al-Fayha* and the end of the intensive period of nationalism under Faisal. Al-‘Abid’s definition of Arab nationalism converged with Faisal’s and seemed to push for his importance as a central leader in order for nationalism to properly be implemented.

Al-‘Abid envisioned an all-inclusive state, one that embraced Arabness while also respecting social difference (even as she sought to downplay difference in line with the surge of Arab nationalism in 1920). She advocated for unity prior to the declaration of an independent state, then focused on women’s inclusion and continued unity under Faisal’s independent government. Religious difference was to be swept aside for the good of the whole. Some male nationalists would apply this same philosophy when it came to women. They believed women should push their own interests aside so Syria could focus on combatting foreign interference.

Gendered difference was another key issue facing nationalists in 1920, and this is the subject of my next chapter. In this final chapter, I address this tension between women’s national aspirations and conservative male reactions to women’s newfound participation in the Syrian political field.

**Chapter Three: al-‘Abid’s Search for Women’s Inclusion**

During the turbulent regime changes of 1920, beyond consistently invoking Faisal’s nationalist cause, al-‘Abid kept her focus on how the new nation should incorporate women. In this chapter, I explore how al-‘Abid sought to harness her nationalism as a means of speaking to men about women’s rights. The chapter will focus on the way al-‘Abid wanted women to help create the new nation, and how she wanted the nation to assist women in becoming equal and educated citizens. Women activists such as al-‘Abid expected the nationalist movement to be instrumental in giving them certain rights—such as the right to vote, to receive education, and to choose how to display their bodies. By explaining how women worked for the nation, al-‘Abid and the team at *Nur al-Fayha* argued that women’s work was just as important as men’s efforts to forge a successful state. As the journal showed, suffrage, education, and veiling were important issues to women involved in nationalist political activities.

**Patriotism and Women’s Rights**

Segments of Syrian society celebrated urban elite women as keepers of tradition.[[55]](#footnote-55) This meant that proper elite women should be veiled, as they symbolized the sanctity of the nation. Elite women also were supposed to represent Syrian culture, and men wanted outsiders to see this culture a certain way. What was tradition regarding women’s status and what was merely labeled tradition is a matter for speculation. Men wanted women to participate in public life as long as it served the male nation’s needs for unification and independence.[[56]](#footnote-56) It was then expected that, after men had achieved their goals, proper women would return to their pre-political roles in the home. Al-‘Abid thought the new nation should break permanently from some tradition, especially when it came to suffrage, education, and veiling.[[57]](#footnote-57)

In this period, women across the Middle East were pushing for their recognition as citizens.[[58]](#footnote-58) For example, Afsaneh Najmabadi shows, in the case of Iran, that women pled that “we are also a part of this nation,” and they justified this with their work in the home, during World War I, and in politics in the years immediately following the war.[[59]](#footnote-59) Al-‘Abid called on women of all different socioeconomic backgrounds to unite. She wanted men and women to come together on women’s issues as they had come together in supporting an independent Arab nation.[[60]](#footnote-60) An alliance on all fronts was necessary for women’s inclusion within the new state. Though women’s suffrage was not achieved, *Nur al-Fayha* opened a dialogue about this issue and continued to demand women’s right to vote up to the moment the magazine folded in July 1920.[[61]](#footnote-61)

Al-‘Abid expressed that women should “demand their legitimate rights, and improve themselves until they are in charge of what they must do: from household management and raising children and living with husbands, to serving their beloved nation.”[[62]](#footnote-62) *Nur al-Fayha* expressed that women had earned their rights, and deserve these rights based on their work in the home and the political arena. Childrearing and household management were services to the nation. Women’s work went far beyond the burgeoning political field and economic arena. After all, work inside the home was a particular contribution that men could not make. Women had the ability to raise children to vote in an educated manner, especially if women were educated themselves. Al-‘Abid believed that women could keep their traditional roles in the family, while still expanding their reach greatly in the public sphere. In her view, women deserved the right to vote because of their service to the family.

Al-‘Abid was an avid advocate for women’s rights, but it is important to note that she always urged her readers to keep national unity in mind as a strategy when bargaining for these rights. Her introduction to the February 1920 issue of *Nur al-Fayha* insisted that debate and discussion with male counterparts would strengthen the nation:

Even if a male writer and a female writer argue and fight about a subject, they will understand each other and they will arrive at truths worth expressing, and so lift this wretched nation from the ruin of misery to the peak of happiness, and build an impenetrable fortress between them and the sick, measly ideas that shame and despair bequeathed to us.[[63]](#footnote-63)

According to this view, even if men disagreed with certain ideas that women were pushing, dialogue would be key for advancing the nation as well as women’s issues. The fact that women and men were engaging each other in writing was a sign that men were beginning to take women seriously on an intellectual level, which for al-‘Abid was already a step in the right direction. *Nur al-Fayha* also advocated for unity between the sexes. The May 1920 article “Mistrusting the Husband: The Blind Jealousy” affirmed women’s duty to carry out unification. “The ignorant woman is mistrusting of her husband…When she mistrusts her husband, her husband mistrusts her.”[[64]](#footnote-64) Women were advised to listen to their counterparts in order to gain the same respect. Mutual respect would lead to the betterment of the nation.

*Nur al-Fayha* interpreted the education of women as good for the nation as a whole. Well-informed citizens would make wise decisions. These decisions would lead to the betterment of the nation. Education would also develop the nation’s workforce. In June, the article “Working Women” explained how women contributed to the workforce.[[65]](#footnote-65) This article described how women needed education in order to perform certain tasks in factory work. The emphasis was on the fact that these women had to negotiate their positions, rather than outwardly demand it simply because they were women.[[66]](#footnote-66) In other words, women would have to justify receiving certain rights. *Nur al-Fayha* cited the number of women enrolled in German universities as a comparative example to promote the cause for women’s education in Syria. “That is an example of nations who want to live. We are going to learn and teach our girls…the minimum they need to take care of children and manage their houses.”[[67]](#footnote-67)

The limitations imposed by men made activist women ask for unique ways to give them access to education, such as for their qualifications to work in factory jobs. Improving the workforce was one way to justify education. In order to contribute to industrial work, women would need special skills taught only at school. Though al-‘Abid did not have to participate in industrial work, she used her magazine to promote women from lower classes who did engage in this type of work.[[68]](#footnote-68) One of the themes that recurred throughout *Nur al-Fayha* was the importance of rights for all women, especially rights to suffrage and education. *Nur al-Fayha*’s article on class differences showed how these educated women writers intended to improve the situations of the all socioeconomic classes by emphasizing how important education was.[[69]](#footnote-69)

Education rights were also seen by Faisal and al-‘Abid as a tool to create national identity.[[70]](#footnote-70) Forging national identity was another justification for women’s education, and al-‘Abid used this to further the cause of universal education in Syria.[[71]](#footnote-71) Women were modestly successful in advocating for education rights, whereas suffrage remained a much more fraught issue. This is because suffrage would effectively integrate women into all aspects of public life, whereas education allowed for further control over women, since they would be kept in gender-segregated schools. As we will see in the next section, suffrage would remain a real uphill battle for the women’s movement at this time.

**The Politics of the Veil**

*Nur al-Fayha* discussed the veiling of women. Many lower-class working women had already removed the veil, but since middle-class and elite women were expected by the general population to represent the nation more, to call on them to unveil was controversial. Elite and middle class women generally veiled at this point. The veil represented piety, and people gave respect to bourgeois women who displayed this piety.[[72]](#footnote-72) Men and women alike were conflicted on the veiling issue. Patriots wished to portray Syria’s modernity for France and Britain, but they also wished to reinforce what made Syria its own identifiable, authentic nation, so the veil was problematic and complex whether or not women chose to wear it.

In June 1920, *Nur al-Fayha* expressed that women should not wear the veil as a requirement, but only if it made them comfortable.[[73]](#footnote-73) Here, the magazine addressed upper- and middle-class women, many of whom veiled themselves. They were responding to the popular committees, who saw the redefinition of gender roles as modern, and wanted to enforce tradition.[[74]](#footnote-74) These groups did not recognize women as autonomous figures, and believed upper-class women should wear the veil.[[75]](#footnote-75) Lower class women were actively in the work force, and the veil would detract from a job such as factory work, so they were not expected to uphold the same standards as upper-class women.

In the popular committees’ opinion, women should not be enfranchised, and upper-class women should continue to be veiled. Inclusion of women in the state would mean access to schools and hospitals, but not equality. *Nur al-Fayha* offered a stark contrast to these beliefs and demonstrated that a great division existed within the nationalist project. Though women worked for the nationalist project, the nationalist movement did not work for them.

**The Syrian General Conference**

Al-‘Abid called for universal suffrage in *Nur al-Fayha*.[[76]](#footnote-76) Even though she belonged to the elite, she argued for guaranteeing the vote to everyone; it was a way to make the nation strong and healthy. Not only was suffrage a gender issue, but it was also a socioeconomic one.To al-‘Abid, gender equality meant full suffrage rights for women, no matter their socioeconomic class or level of education. Leaders of the Syrian General Conference, learned and notable male figures, discussed women’s suffrage at their meeting of April 1920.[[77]](#footnote-77) The General Conference, formed in the era of Faisal’s constitutional monarchy, was tasked with deciding the basic components of a new Syrian constitution. Women’s suffrage was actually on the table during these talks.

*Nur al-Fayha* thusdiscussed suffrage quite frequently in the months leading up to the big meeting.[[78]](#footnote-78) Al-‘Abid’s publication, along with Mary ‘Ajamy’s *al-‘Arus*, stirred up discussion both in households and in circles of the male intelligentsia. Women’s voices were indeed being heard fairly widely; otherwise, suffrage would not have been an issue up for argument. As al-‘Abid was part of a notable family in Damascus, the male delegates of the Syrian General Conference were her class peers, and she seems to have had them in mind when she wrote about male opinion on women’s suffrage. Al-‘Abid also seemed to have the support of Faisal. Her elite family would certainly have interacted with Faisal, as urban notables still had immense political clout. She may have seen her magazine’s alignment with Faisal as a way to guarantee a secure place for women in a more equal political environment and society. Indeed, Faisal reciprocated by supporting her in her women’s literary club ventures.

As the actual proceedings of the April conference reveal, the elite male delegates were split on the question of women’s right to equal citizenship. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Kilani, a delegate from Hama, stated, “If you want the uplifting of women then open schools for them. Giving the woman the right to vote means her right to be a delegate, so do you want female delegates amongst you?”[[79]](#footnote-79) Kilani did not seem to want women to pursue education, particularly women in his province; he merely suggested it as a substitute for political enfranchisement because he definitely did not want women to have the power to vote. Kilani inspired fear within the conference by insinuating that women could potentially be representatives in independent Syria. For many at the conference, voting rights for all men were as distasteful as voting rights for women. Worst of all, if every adult had the right to vote, then a non-elite, improper woman might rise through the ranks and represent Syria.

*Nur al-Fayha* had also emphasized women’s work during World War I as a reason why they deserved voting rights and included what women could have done more of.[[80]](#footnote-80) If women were “sending magazines and newspapers…[and spreading] political ideas, then we would not have lost many men in the war.”[[81]](#footnote-81) This work also came up at the General Conference. The delegate Da’as al-Jurjis, of Hosn al-Akrad, pointed out:

What you observed during the war [World War I] of the service of women in the army is evidence of the importance of the help of the gentler sex. And the presence of the lady in the armed services is far more important than the process of voting. And the danger that some of the present brothers see [in giving such a right to women] can be removed because a woman has the right not to give an opinion, and the lady who is careful to avoid having the pen touch her fingertips has the right to not vote.[[82]](#footnote-82)

Women’s suffrage would, in Jurjis’s viewpoint, undermine the traditional patriarchal system and thus make men uncomfortable. While Jurjis emphasized that women participated in the war effort, he clearly did not believe this warranted granting women full or equal citizenship. In the face of such opposition, al-‘Abid and her team were constantly seeking new rationales for women’s right to vote. If they had not earned that right by serving in the war, then they deserved it by virtue of their work as mothers and educators.[[83]](#footnote-83)

*Nur al-Fayha*’s contributors saw women’s voting rights as essential to the maintenance of a healthy nation, in which all people were political actors, fought colonialism and imperialism, and asserted independence.[[84]](#footnote-84) And here, education was linked in their argument to the suffrage issue. One of their more eloquent opponents, however, was ‘Adel Zu’ayter, of Nablus in Palestine.[[85]](#footnote-85) Zu’ayter stated:

There is no doubt that each and every one of us want[s], desires, and must work to make the woman arrive at a level of advancement where she can take her right. And despite what has been said about the benefit of giving women the right to vote, I still see its approval at this moment does not coincide with the welfare of the nation. Some of the European nations have not taken this step [until they underwent] developments that lasted hundreds of years, while we are now only at the beginning of our societal life. Every nation has traditions and wise mores, and if the laws are not based upon these then it is to be feared that revolutions and unrest will break out. Yes, it is true that the *Shari‘a* [Islamic jurisprudence] may give the woman the right to vote, but it does not say that the nation is obliged to pass legislation that give the woman the right to participate in it [the electoral process]. Permission is one thing, and obligation is another. We are now in a difficult situation. We came to this place to express the opinion of the nation, and if we pass legislation that it does not accept, and we are in our current situation, then will we have kept that trust?[[86]](#footnote-86)

Zu’ayter appeared not to consider women as a part of the 1920 Syrian nation. In his view, the “level of advancement” correlated with education.[[87]](#footnote-87) He did not believe women possessed the intellectual capacity because most of them were not educated to his satisfaction. By this rationale, uneducated men should not have the vote, either. Zu’ayter compared Syria with European nations, which had not given universal suffrage to women at this time. He did not think Syria was societally developed enough.

But al-‘Abid argued just the opposite. To her, in order for the nation to progress, it must allow women access to education and voting privileges.[[88]](#footnote-88) Zu’ayter thought women’s suffrage would break from tradition. However, this argument was severely flawed. Giving any of the population the right to vote violated tradition. Voting rights was a new concept, given that Syria had only recently emerged from the control of the Ottoman Empire.[[89]](#footnote-89) Zu’yater’s rationale for the subordination of women bore a close resemblance to the Ottomans’ rationale for subordinating Syria. This gave al-‘Abid grounds for her argument that nation-building required women’s enfranchisement.

Al-‘Abid and educated women did receive some support from a few delegates. Subhi al-Tawil of Latakia proposed, “An educated woman is better than a thousand ignorant men, so why would we give men the right to vote and yet deprive educated women from that same right?” [[90]](#footnote-90) Tawil knew the conference had already agreed upon universal suffrage for men, and he saw only educated people as worthy of the vote. He could not comprehend why uneducated men had been given the right to vote, while educated women were more deserving. *Nur al-Fayha* and al-‘Abid disagreed that education should be a prerequisite for enfranchisement.[[91]](#footnote-91) The magazinestood up for the rights of all women, no matter their upbringing, social status, geographical location, religion, or economic position.[[92]](#footnote-92) However, had educated women been granted the vote, it is possible that al-‘Abid would have accepted this as a good first step and then kept pushing for voting rights for all women.

The Greater Syria Conference as a whole did not seem to think the city’s male population would support woman suffrage. The delegate from Damascus, Ahmad al-Qadamani, explicitly protested against women’s voting rights. Qadamani argued against Latakia’s representative Subhi al-Tawil: “We in Damascus do not want that [women’s enfranchisement] to be the case, so just make it so in Latakia!”[[93]](#footnote-93) This comment made Syria look more divided than the nationalists would wish. If different regions had separate sets of laws, then a united, independent Syria would be far out of reach. Damascus, along with Aleppo, was a center of economic and political power. If densely-populated Damascus did not embrace women’s rights, then voting rights would look illegitimate in other parts of the country. *Nur al-Fayha*, based in Damascus, pressed that women’s rights were essential for the nation as a whole, even though the city representative at the conference begged to differ.[[94]](#footnote-94)

The Syrian Conference ultimately chose to table its debate on women’s suffrage.[[95]](#footnote-95) If al-‘Abid’s male peers welcomed women’s assistance in nation-building, most did not accept women as full citizens.[[96]](#footnote-96) The Conference was a key turning point, in which the women’s nationalist energies were sold out. While this period of Syrian history is typically seen as a time of striking national unity, it is clear that the nation was deeply divided on gender issues. Women would be citizens, but not equal citizens.

Al-‘Abid’s and Faisal’s mutual support occurred as a result of them both needing each other in the fight against other elites and popular committees attempting to uproot the values they held so strongly, especially that of inclusiveness. The nationalist movement gave way to a particular political moment in 1920, but the splits in nationalist ideology took away any improvement this moment in 1920 brought.

From February to July 1920, it was a heady, if turbulent time with many issues on the table, accompanied by many new political energies and political actors. This chapter has shown some of the main currents in the debate over women’s status and roles in the Syrian nation in this brief period, culminating in the unsuccessful discussion of their equal citizenship in the Syrian General Conference.

**Conclusion**

This thesis explores Syrian Arab nationalism through the lens of one key woman’s newspaper. This helps us see the contours of both the national project and the women’s movement at a key moment of flux and uncertainty. In the first chapter, I argue that Faisal and al-‘Abid adopted a version of Arab nationalism that was inclusive of all differences, and she believed that following Faisal was path to a successful Arab state. The second chapter explores al-‘Abid’s Kurdishness in the realm of Arab nationalism and how she envisioned the new state identity. The final chapter discusses how al-‘Abid expected the nationalist movement to contribute to women’s rights to vote and education, the advocacy on unveiling, and how the Syrian General Conference lashed back against these ideas.

Al-‘Abid’s definition of nationalism remained staunchly tied to Faisal’s throughout his dramatic shift, from cooperation with the French to declaration of independent Syria. In her opinion, nationalism’s success depended on his leadership.[[97]](#footnote-97) Her nationalism was broader than his, however, in that she saw the inclusion of women and all social classes as not merely desirable, but rather as essential to nation-building. *Nur al-Fayha* thus articulated a more progressive worldview than other nationalists.

After the Battle of Maysalun in July 1920, *Nur al-Fayha*’s publication ended. Ultimately, al-‘Abid’s nationalist messages in *Nur al-Fayha* and her participation in the Battle of Maysalun against the French led to her exile from Syria. The French saw her not just as a military threat, but also as a threat to the establishment of their mandate system. As al-‘Abid had a voice that women and men alike listened to, Faisal highly regarded her, and that was the most powerful threat she posed. France allowed her back into Syria in 1922, but at first she had to promise not to resume her nationalist, political activities.

Although al-‘Abid’s exile put an end to *Nur al-Fayha*, she remained dedicated to enhancing women’s rights. She might have continued publishing in the first period of the French Mandate, the period where nationalists remained steadfast and resolute in their overall goals, if the ban on her political activity had been removed. Al-‘Abid’s elite status had given her the space to express her political leanings, but conflict gave more space for women to engage in political and civil society activities. The First World War had allowed women to emerge fully as political actors and greatly contributed to al-‘Abid’s having the space she needed to publish *Nur al-Fayha*.

After *Nur al-Fayha* ceased publication, interpretations of nationalism and what it meant to be Arab continued to develop and evolve in Syria. During the French Mandate period, concepts of identity changed. In Damascus, ethnic minorities began to identify themselves as distinct groups rather than Arabs. In 1920, al-‘Abid and as many as half of Damascene Kurds had been thoroughly integrated into the majority Arab society.[[98]](#footnote-98) By 1930, these Kurds continued to speak Arabic and to embrace urban culture, but they now identified strongly with the Kurds in the northern part of the country who were trying to create their own autonomous region.[[99]](#footnote-99) The increasing salience of minority identity arose due to a variety of factors. The French pitted groups against each other, in order to maintain control in the mandate, and they categorized the population by ethnicity. Kurds and Christians were explicitly categorized as minorities fundamentally different from the Sunni Muslim majority. The French used the term to indicate that a particular group was either vulnerable or dangerous, which supposedly justified French interference in Syrian affairs. Al-‘Abid had viewed unity around Arab identity as the main way to combat foreign intervention, and history seems to have proved her right. During the Mandate, the French took social difference (ethnic as well as religious) among Syrians and exploited it for their own national interests.

The Arab nationalist movement splintered into many pieces under the French Mandate that began when Faisal was deposed in July 1920, and these divisions sharpened after the Great Syrian Revolt ended in 1927.[[100]](#footnote-100) The idea of pan-Arab unity survived, but women’s rights were pushed aside in the name of nationalism. Men who had earlier accepted women as nation-builders gave in to radical Islamic pressure and agreed to suppress women in order gain the numbers necessary to combat the French and affect change. As historian Philip Khoury has observed, “Nationalism was many things to many people.”[[101]](#footnote-101) For al-‘Abid, it had included women’s rights to suffrage, education, and the choice to unveil. Despite the force of her arguments, many male nationalists did not assign women’s rights to the same level of importance.

**Bibliography**

Primary Sources

Greater Syria Conference. “Women and the Vote in Syria: A Parliamentary Debate About the

Relationship Between Gender and Citizenship in the Proposed State.” 25 April 1920.

Transcription.

Memorandum by the Emir Faisal submitted to the Peace Conference. 1 January 1919. In

*The Struggle for Arab Independence: Western Diplomacy and the Rise and Fall of Faisal’s Kingdom in Syria*. Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1977.

“Answers to the Suggestion.” *Nur al-Fayha* (15 June 1920): 198.

“Girl of the Nation, Where Are You?” Nur al-Fayha (31 May 1920): 116.

“Let’s Understand the Lesson.” *Nur al-Fayha* (1 February 1920): 8.

“The First Literary Correspondence.” *Nur al-Fayha* (31 May 1920): 119.

“Mistrusting the Husband: The Blind Jealousy.” *Nur al-Fayha* (31 May 1920): 121.

“Monthly Happenings of the Society.” *Nur al-Fayha* (1 February 1920): 26.

“Response Against Unfair Attack.” *Nur al-*Fayha (15 June 1920): 182-184.

“The Rights of an Arab Woman: Before Islam and After It.” *Nur al-Fayha* (1 February

1920): 7.

“That Is How Mothers Should Be.” *Nur al-Fayha* (1 February 1920): 14.

“The Two Muslim Sisters in Civilization and the Badia.” *Nur al-Fayha* (13 April 1920):

131-137.

Untitled article. *Nur al-Fayha* (1 February 1920): 4-8.

Untitled introduction. *Nur al-Fayha* (1 February 1920): 1-4.

“Working Women.” *Nur al-Fayha* (15 June 1920): 187.

Secondary Sources

Abu-Lughod, Lila. *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*.

Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998.

Baron, Beth. *Egypt as a Woman: Nationalism, Gender, and Politics*. Berkeley, CA:

University of California Press, 2005.

Baron, Beth. *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press*. New

Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994.

Bunton, Martin and Cleveland, William, L. *History of the Modern Middle East*. Boulder, CO:

Westview Press, 2013.

Deeb, Lara. *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi’i Lebanon.* Princeton,

NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006.

Fleischmann, Ellen L. *The Nation and Its “New” Women: The Palestinian Women’s*

*Movement, 1920-1948.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003.

Gelvin, James L. *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the*

*Close of Empire.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998.

Gelvin, James L. “The Other Arab Nationalism: Syrian/Arab Populism in Its Historical

and International Contexts.” In *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East.*

Eds. Janet Janowski and Israel Gershoni. New York, NY: Columbia University

Press, 1997.

Hathaway, Jane. *The Arab Lands under Ottoman Rule: 1516-1800.* New York, NY:

Taylor & Francis, 2008.

Hourani, Albert.*“*Ottoman Reform and the Politics of Nobles.” In *The Modern Middle*

*East: A Reader*, 83-109. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993.

Khoury, Philip S. “The Paradoxical in Arab Nationalism: Interwar Syria Revisited.” In

*Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East.* Eds. Janet Janowski and Israel Gershoni. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Khoury, Philip S. *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism,*

*1920-1945.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Khoury, Philip S. *Urban Notables and Arab Nationalism: The Politics of Damascus*

*1860-1920.* New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Masters, Bruce. *The Arabs of the Ottoman Empire, 1516-1918: A Social and*

*Cultural History*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

Moubayed, Sami. *Steel and Silk: Men and Women Who Shaped Syria, 1900-2000.*

Seattle, WA: Cune Press, 2006.

Najmabadi, Afsaneh. *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and*

*Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity.* Berkeley, CA: University of California

Press, 2005.

Nisan, Mordechai. *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-*

*Expression.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 1991.

Pappé, Ilan. “Arab Nationalism.” In *The Sage Handbook of Nations and Nationalisms*, edited

by Gerard Delanty and Krishan Kumar, 500-513. London, UK: Sage, 2006.

Provence, Michael. *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism.* Austin,

TX: University of Texas Press, 2005.

Quataert, Donald. *The Ottoman Empire: 1700-1922*. New York, NY: Cambridge

University Press, 2000.

Russell, Mona L. *Creating the New Egyptian Woman: Consumerism, Education, and*

*National Identity, 1863-1922.*

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York, NY: Random House, 1978.

Tejel, Jordi. *Syria’s Kurds: History, Politics, and Society*. New York, NY: Routledge

Press, 2009.

Thompson, Elizabeth. *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege and*

*Gender in French Syria and Lebanon.* New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Thompson, Elizabeth. “Sex and Cinema in Damascus: The Gendered Politics of Public

Space in a Colonial City.” In *Middle Eastern Cities 1900-1950: Public Places*

*and Public Spheres in Transformation*. Eds. H.C. Korsholm Nielsen and J.

Skovgaard-Petersen. Copenhagen: Aarhus University Press, 2001. 89-111.

Wagner, Heather Lehr. *The Kurds*. New York, NY: Chelsea House Publications, 2002.

Weber, Stefan. *Damascus: Ottoman Modernity and Urban Transformation, 1808-1918.*

Copenhagen: Aarhus University Press, 2009.

White, Benjamin Thomas. “The Kurds of Damascus in the 1930s: Development of a

Politics of Ethnicity.” *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 6 (November 2010): 901-

917.

White, Benjamin Thomas. *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics*

*of Community in French Mandate Syria*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh

University Press, 2011.

Yuval-Davis, Nira. *Gender and Nation*. London, UK: Sage, 1997.

Zeidan, Joseph T. *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond.* Albany,

NY: State University of New York Press, 1995.

Zeine, Zeine N. *The Struggle for Arab Independence: Western Diplomacy and the Rise*

*and Fall of Faisal’s Kingdom in Syria*. Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1977.

1. “The First Literary Correspondence,” *Nur al-Fayha* (31 May 1920): 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Zeine N. Zeine, *The Struggle for Arab Independence: Western Diplomacy and the Rise and Fall of Faisal’s Kingdom in Syria* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1977), 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Sykes-Picot Agreement gave France the notion that the Syrian provinces were theirs to rule under a mandate. Britain and France divided up Ottoman lands in this agreement, with France taking Syria and Lebanon. While not enforced immediately after WWI, France began using powerful influence after British troops evacuated from Damascus in late 1919. Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Zeine, *The Struggle for Arab Independence*, 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The Treaty of Sévres in August 1920 marks the beginning of French Mandate. See Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The Syrian question was one of what will the borders of Syria be and who will be included in the national project. The woman question was one of what women’s role would be in an independent state society. See Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Nationalism meant a sense of Arab unity (at least, this was Faisal’s definition). Memorandum by the Emir Faisal submitted to the Peace Conference, 1 January 1919, In *The Struggle for Arab Independence: Western Diplomacy and the Rise and Fall of Faisal’s Kingdom in Syria* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1977), 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Benjamin Thomas White, “The Kurds of Damascus in the 1930s: Development of a Politics of Ethnicity,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 6 (November 2010): 903. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Identity at this point in history was fluid, especially where nationalism was concerned. Some nationalist groups saw anyone who spoke Arabic to be Arab. Some saw all Sunnis as a part of a different nationalist sect. Some said one had to be racially Arab to be a part of their nationalist group. Philip S. Khoury puts it best when he states, “Nationalism was many things to many people.” Philip S. Khoury, “The Paradoxical in Arab Nationalism: Interwar Syria Revisited,” In *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East,* Eds. Janet Janowski and Israel Gershoni (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1997), 287. The term “minority” became a part of the discourse in 1919, used by the occupying colonial powers, though it was not frequently used until a few years into the French Mandate. Benjamin Thomas White, *The Emergence of Minorities in the Middle East: The Politics of Community in French Mandate Syria* (Edinburgh, Scotland: EdinburghUniversity Press, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. The Syrian Conference and factions of the general population thought Faisal was negotiating with and accommodating the French imperialists, so they lost their confidence in him. James L. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Identity had not yet set in. Only French divide-and rule policies during the Mandate would entrench a politics of difference. See Benjamin White’s *The Emergence of Minorities* and Philip Khoury’s *Syria and the French Mandate* on French Mandate politics for the tactics the French used to exploit difference. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Elizabeth Thompson’s *Colonial Citizens* remains the only significant comprehensive study on gender in the French Mandate from 1920 to 1946. Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Elizabeth Thompson, Mordechai Nisan, and Philip Khoury together exemplify this scholarship. Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French* Mandate; Nisan, *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression;* Thompson, *Colonial Citizens.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*; Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties;* Stefan Weber, *Damascus: Ottoman Modernity and Urban Transformation, 1808-1918 (*Copenhagen: Aarhus University Press, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Syrian and Arab nationalism were two different concepts. Arab nationalism involved a pan-Arab unity, while Syrian nationalism argued for unity within its borders and perhaps integrating other Arabs into the state at a later point. During the mandate era in the Middle East, these types of identity sparred with one another. See Philip Khoury’s *Syria and the French Mandate*. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens,* 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Nisan, *Minorities in the Middle East;* Michael Provence, *The Great Syrian Revolt and the Rise of Arab Nationalism (*Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2005); White, *The Emergence of Minorities.* [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. White, *The Emergence of Minorities*, 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Joseph T. Zeidan, *Arab Women Novelists: The Formative Years and Beyond* (Albany,

    NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 421. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Mordechai Nisan, *Minorities in the Middle East: A History of Struggle and Self-Expression* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 1991), 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Sami Moubayed, *Steel and Silk: Men and Women Who Shaped Syria, 1900-2000* (Seattle, WA: Cune Press, 2006), 474. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Moubayed, *Steel and* Silk, 474. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Beth Baron, *The Women’s Awakening in Egypt: Culture, Society, and the Press* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Weber, 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Martin Bunton and William L. Cleveland, *History of the Modern Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2013), 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Weber, 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Bunton and Cleveland, *History of the Modern Middle East*, 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. For more on political Arab nationalism see Ilan Pappé, “Arab Nationalism” in *The Sage Handbook of Nations and Nationalisms*, eds. Gerard Delanty and Krishan Kumar (London, UK: Sage, 2006), 500-513. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Weber, 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Zeine, 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Memorandum by the Emir Faisal submitted to the Peace Conference, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Memorandum, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Memorandum, 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Memorandum, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. White, *Emergence*, 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Nisan, 4 and Provence, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. 1 However, given al-‘Abid’s status as a member of an influential family in the city’s Kurdish quarter, we might regard her outlooks as reflective of those of other Kurds. Further research would be needed to justifiably support this claim. See White, *Emergence*. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. 2 They were promised this by the Treaty of Sévres. See Philip Khoury’s *Syria and the French Mandate*. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. 3 Heather Lehr Wagner, *The Kurds* (New York, NY: Chelsea House Publications, 2002), 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. It was not expressed until the Arab nationalist movement begins to splinter in the mandatory period. See Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate*. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Jordi Tejel, *Syria’s Kurds: History, Politics and Society* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. “Answers to the Suggestion,” *Nur al-Fayha* (15 June 1920): 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. “Girl of the Nation, Where are You?” *Nur al-Fayha* (31 May 1920): 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. “Girl of the Nation, Where are You?” 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. “Girl of the Nation, Where Are You?” 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. “Let’s Understand the Lesson,” *Nur al-Fayha* (1 February 1920): 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Untitled article, *Nur al-Fayha* (1 February 1920): 4-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. “That Is How Mothers Should Be,” *Nur al-Fayha* (1 February 1920): 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Though Faisal turned his back on foreign powers, Syrians still believed he cooperated with the French when he was negotiating with them. Faisal was concerned with maintaining independence under his constitutional monarchy, so he had to negotiate with the French in order to keep his vision of complete autonomy. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*, 2; Zeine, 119 and 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. “Answers to the Suggestion,” 198. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 171. See also Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London, UK: Sage, 1997), and Lila Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*, 213-215. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. *Nur al-Fayha* (15 June 1920), 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 207-231. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Najmabadi, 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. “Untitled introduction,” *Nur al-Fayha* (1 February 1920): 2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. *Nur al-Fayha* (July 1920). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Untitled introduction, *Nur al-Fayha* (1 February 1920): 2-3. Translation from Thompson, *Colonial Citizens.* [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Untitled introduction, *Nur al-Fayha* (1 February 1920): 1. Translation from Thompson, *Colonial Citizens.* [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. “Mistrusting the Husband: The Blind Jealousy,” *Nur al-Fayha* (31 May 1920): 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. “Working Women,” *Nur al-Fayha* (15 June 1920): 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Thompson, *Colonial Citizens*, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. “Let’s Understand the Lesson,” 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. “Working Women,” 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. “Working Women,” 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. White, *The Emergence of Minorities*, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. “Working Women,” 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*, 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. “Response Against Unfair Attack,” *Nur al-Fayha* (15 June 1920): 182-184. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*, 213-214 and 277. The popular committees “claimed to embody the nation and represent its will.” They organized demonstrations, claimed to represent the masses, and were composed mostly of the common people, but elites were active within them in order to secure their power in a future Syria. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*, 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. “Untitled introduction,” 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Greater Syria Conference, “Women and the Vote in Syria: A Parliamentary Debate About the Relationship Between Gender and Citizenship in the Proposed State,” (25 April 1920). [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Untitled introduction, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Greater Syria Conference, “Women and the Vote,” 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. “Working Women,” 187. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. “The First Literary Correspondence,” 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Greater Syria Conference, “Women and the Vote,” 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. *Nur al-Fayha* (15 June 1920). [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. *Nur al-Fayha* (1 February 1920). [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Palestine was seen as a part of Greater Syria, as was Lebanon, which explains why delegates from these places were included in the constitutional process. Syria hoped to encompass the immediate surrounding regions, a principle of Arab nationalism. See Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate.* [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Greater Syria Conference, “Women and the Vote,” 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Greater Syria Conference, “Women and the Vote,” 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. *Nur al-Fayha* (15 June 1920). [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties*, 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Greater Syria Conference, “Women and the Vote,” 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. “Response Against Unfair Attack,” *Nur al-Fayha* (15 June 1920): 182-184. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. “Response Against Unfair Attack,” *Nur al-Fayha* (15 June 1920): 182-184. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Greater Syria Conference, “Women and the Vote,” 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Untitled introduction, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Greater Syria Conference, “Women and the Vote,” 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Untitled introduction, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. *Nur al-Fayha* (July 1920). [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Kurds in the northern portion of Syria were promised autonomy in the Treaty of Sèvres in 1920. See White, *Emergence*. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. White, *Emergence*. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. The loss of the revolt signifies the first split of the mandatory period. The French become much more of a strong influence in period that begins after the revolt. See Khoury’s *Syria and the French Mandate*. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Khoury, “Paradoxical,” 287. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)