The Protestor, the Activist and the Mother: Women in the Syrian Uprising
An Exploration of the Effects of the Uprising on Patriarchy

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the Master of Arts Degree in Development and Emergency Practice,
Oxford Brookes University
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Statement of Originality

This thesis is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references.

Signed: [Signature] Date: 28 September 2012

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for photocopying and for inter-library loan, and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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Statement of Ethics Review Approval

This dissertation involved human participants. A Form E1BE for each group of participants, showing ethics review approval, will be provided with this dissertation.
Abstract

This case study examines the roles women have played in the Syrian uprising and their effects on patriarchal attitudes in Syria. The purpose, therefore, is to understand these roles in order to recognise Syrian women’s capabilities and contributions. The research focuses on women’s roles as protestors, activists and mothers, and how experiences within these roles relate to patriarchy. Patriarchal perceptions of women as weak and submissive are disempowering and the concept of motherhood as the only role for women is limiting, contributing to their marginalisation in society. The analysis involved the use of primary data in the form of interviews with Syrian women and men and secondary data from various sources such as social media.

The research demonstrates that women do not share a unitary experience, factors such as class and religion influence participation. Findings show that the uprising has provided some women with opportunities to assume roles that have challenged patriarchal notions and more women are now active in the national process. More importantly, the study also argues that women’s private roles, particularly as mothers, are as important as public ones for the uprising. The fact that they are not seen asserts the continuation of patriarchal attitudes and led to the conclusion that to-date; the uprising has not changed this. Furthermore, the research has shown that as the conflict has progressed from collective civil resistance into a male dominated civil war, the destruction of lives has risen exponentially and women’s opportunities for participation have become increasingly limited. A more gender balanced civil society with greater inclusion of women in decision making processes will only come through the recognition of their wider contributions to society.
Acknowledgments

Helia Lopez thank you for your guidance and for being generous with your time.

Thank you Mum for your constant support. Charlotte thank you for your help and Lucy thank you for always being there, you have really helped me.

Wisam thanks for the help and the heated discussions.

For Dad.
# Acronyms

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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>COSI</td>
<td>Committee of Social Initiative</td>
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<tr>
<td>FSA</td>
<td>Free Syrian Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>SHRIL</td>
<td>Syrian Human Rights Information Link</td>
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<td>SNC</td>
<td>Syrian National Council</td>
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Chapter One

Introduction

Reason for doing this research

Uprisings and armed conflict are often benchmark moments for social change. They are therefore key
moments to be looking at women. Revolutions and civil wars provide women with an
opportunity to take on new roles and their conduct in these situations often redefines their
status. It is important to analyse what roles women take on and why, whether they deem
change necessary and how men react to women’s participation. This will allow a deeper
understanding of how the limitations women face in society can be tackled and their
opportunities increased.

A prevalent stereotype exists in the West of docile and submissive Arab women. However
women have been at the forefront of the recent revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa
known as the ‘Arab Spring’. Observations of those who have written on the subject highlight the
need for a greater understanding of the situation and serve as an encouragement to the
relevance of researching this subject. Political Activist and social critic Naomi Wolf believes
that, “the role of women in the great upheaval in the Middle East has been woefully under-
analysed.”¹ Hamid Dabashi, author of one of the first books to be published on the Arab Spring,
states that, “the female element in the Arab Spring has drawn little comment in the West.”² This
study attempts to redress this neglect.

The duration and all-encompassing nature of the uprising in Syria as well as its development
into a civil war state makes it an interesting yet often difficult context in which to analyse the
role of women. The passion and energy of the uprising is exhilarating whilst the violence and
death deplorable. The strong presence of women in an uprising in the patriarchal culture of the
Middle East offers a chance to evaluate the extent to which a revolution will cause social change.
Conflict situations often allow women to take on roles that challenge cultural norms and
patriarchal notions of womanhood and prove that they have more capabilities than
reproduction. There is a need to study what women are doing, so that evidence of their

¹ Wolf, Naomi, ‘The Middle East Feminist Revolution’, Aljazeera, 4 March 2011,
imperative participation will make it harder to deny them their role in decision-making processes and the post-conflict state.

Women are not one homogenous group. The analysis of women’s different realities, experiences and roles is necessary to understand why certain women take on particular functions; which women are mobilised and which women face limitations. Researching the factors that enable or discriminate against women’s participation in a period of social upheaval can help identify ways to involve more women in society in the future. Furthermore understanding why some roles are seen as more ‘real’ that others assist recognition all types of participation.

This is a period of massive instability and change in Syrian history. The eyes of the world are on Syria. Human rights groups, women’s right activists, religious groups and governments are all looking at Syria. It is ‘the’ time to be identifying issues surrounding women’s activism as there is a lot of international attention and support for the uprising. This compilation of relevant information and analyses of women’s roles may help to form part of the jigsaw in understanding the Syrian uprising.

Research aim
This research aims to better understand the ways in which women participate in national uprisings and conflict situations and the effects of this environment and women’s roles in it, on a patriarchal culture. Syria is the backdrop for this case study as it is witnessing a major uprising which has developed from a civil resistance movement to civil war and has a strong female presence.

Research questions
The main research questions are...

❖ What roles are women playing in the Syrian uprising?

❖ To what extent have the uprising in Syria and women’s roles in it led to a change in patriarchal attitudes?

❖ Is the changing nature of the conflict affecting women’s roles in the uprising?
Defining patriarchy

Walby defines patriarchy as “a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.”3 Another helpful perspective is offered by Said-Foraqaa and Maziad who focuses on Arab Women and the dual-deprivation they face in regards to decision-making, both on a personal and public level, under patriarchal authority which “isolates women from decision-making processes... on issues directly impacting their lives... [and] also denies them the ability to act as agents of change and create an empowering environment, due to women’s absence from decision-making positions.”4 I will use this approach to the definition of patriarchy as it applies to the social context under examination.

Structure of dissertation

This dissertation is organised into six chapters. Chapter One introduces the research. Chapter Two describes the research process and looks at the limitations and opportunities of the methodology. In Chapter Three theoretical literature regarding women and the State, patriarchy and women in war is discussed. Chapter Four is presented in two parts; firstly a brief overview of Syrian history and its entry into the Arab Spring, secondly, a socio-political and historical overview of the situation of women in Syria. The main discussion is contained in Chapter Five where the data is analysed and discussed with regards to the research questions. Chapter Six comprises the formulation of conclusions and proposals for further study.

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Chapter Two
Research Methodology

Doing research in a conflict situation

This research was conducted using a variety of first and second-hand data. As new articles and
discussions are being published about Syria on a daily basis collecting secondary data has been
a continuous process. Data was also collected via interviews, later analysed and used in the
main discussion.

Research approach

The nature and subject of my research did not lend itself to quantitative data collection. Whilst
Gruber and Szoltysek argue that patriarchy can be meaningfully measured in quantitative
terms, they rely on historical census micro-data, which does not apply to my research.\(^5\) To
collect and have access to enough quantitative data to analyse any changes in patriarchal
attitudes would require a longitudinal study beyond the scope and time constraints of my
research. Furthermore the chaotic situation in Syria and the relatively short time of the
uprising, make this unfeasible. In contrast, qualitative research highlights that the
comprehension of social situations necessitates the perceptions of those within it. Strauss and
Corbin highlight social movements, experiences, behaviours and feelings as issues that can be
measured qualitatively.\(^6\)

Highlighting the argument of many Realists, Walby notes “there are deep social structures, the
discovery of which is key to our understanding of gender relations.”\(^7\) To understand what
developments are occurring and what the nature of people’s experiences is, requires the
involvement of those within the context and will therefore require data collection which is more
qualitative in nature. It is especially important to know these perceptions due to the risk of bias
in secondary data. In regards to my research and its focus on women, Walby notes that, “the
way men have typically constructed what counts as authoritative knowledge is itself
patriarchal.”\(^8\) Her concern is a valid one, the male domination of news channels and news
article, even some Facebook sites, will result in the use of what they consider to be authoritative

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\(^5\) Gruber, Siegfried and Szoltysek, Mikolaj. Quantifying Patriarchy: An Explorative Comparison of Two Joint Family
Societies, MPIDR Working Paper WP 2012-017 April 2012, Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research.

\(^6\) Corbin, J. and Strauss, A., Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory

\(^7\) Walby, Theorising Patriarchy, 19.

\(^8\) Ibid, 17.
knowledge. Not all men will hold patriarchal ideology, yet many will, due to the culture in which they have been raised. As my focus is on women a lot of the information I acquired was written by women and is, therefore, less susceptible to male construction. However, to further Walby’s point, women will also have patriarchal notions; being a woman does not mean they are not formed by nor believe in patriarchal society. This is not to say that these women are ignorant but it is important to be aware of these cultural factors. Some activists have made efforts to reject this notion of patriarchy; however this still does not mean everyone’s voices are being heard. Syria is still a patriarchal society and it will take a long time for these influences to disappear. Walby concludes that, “qualitative techniques which allow women to speak for themselves are considered to be more in keeping with a feminist methodology by reducing the amount of distortion that a patriarchal based science would introduce.”9 In light of this, the majority of my interviews were conducted with women.

**Research process**

I was not able to conduct field research in Syria due to security risks, limited time and financial resources. Although I was unable to visit the country in question I was able to establish dialogue with a number of people. Data was collected from Syrian men and women residing in and outside Syria. Interviews were conducted live on Skype, in person or questions were answered in writing. Six people conducted full interviews. The interviews were conducted with Rubin and Rubin’s ‘conversational partners’ idea in mind as it “has the advantage of emphasizing the active role of the interviewee in shaping the discussion.”10 Whilst I included the same questions in all the interviews, I also let the interviewee take the discussion where they wanted it to go: “if the partners can direct the conversation to matters that they know about and that they think are important, the interviews are likely to be of higher quality.”11 All the spoken interviews followed this format. Those that were answered in writing were evidently more aligned to responding to the set questions but interviewees still elaborated on their areas of interest.

Four of the interviewees are presented anonymously and identified by initials. The remaining two by their names as they preferred, both are relatively high profile activists and reside permanently outside of Syria. I state the gender of each interviewee upon first introduction in the main discussion.12 Dialogue was established with several other people through modes like

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9 Ibid.
11 Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative interviewing*, 15.
12 See Appendix for further information on the interviewees.
Facebook, yet factors such as lack of time, access to adequate internet connection, and limited English language skills meant full interviews were not possible. However the shorter discussions that arose from these sporadic interactions were still useful and contributed to my first-hand data. They are also identified by initials.

To organise the data from the interviews a table was constructed. It contains quotes from the interviewees, organised into themes, which support or help to answer my main questions. For reference, see Appendix.

Due to the on-going crisis there is more second than first-hand data, which has been essential to piece together the situation in Syria. A variety of secondary data was analysed including news, articles, reports and social media pages. In particular, the book of Syrian writer Samar Yazbek, *A Woman in the Crossfire*, a personal diary of the first few months of the uprising, is a very valuable source as it includes the testimonies of activists and those who witnessed many of the atrocities. One interviewee stated that it is “the main source now.” It is also particularly useful for my research being a female narrative.

**Opportunities and limitations: A reflexive view**

Researching issues surrounding gender will always be problematic, especially when cultural backgrounds are different. One must avoid singular framing in terms of researching with a western concept of empowerment – it can affect many factors, for example how one feels about the women data is collected from. It is important to be aware of and avoid this framing as it will influence the findings of the research. Awareness of how much an individual’s personal experiences conceptualise their gender is also fundamental.

Limitations to the realist approach described above are that I am not Syrian, I do not speak Arabic and I am from a different culture – a ‘westerner’. I cannot have the same knowledge as someone who has grown up in Syria. I am also conscious that I have my own values and perceptions shaped from my culture and experiences. I must, therefore, strive to be objective and approach my research without pre-conceived ideas, accepting that not all women are struggling for the same goals as western women. I have attempted to increase my understanding by speaking to Syrian women, reading about their culture, asking questions, and listening to their ideas. I have tried to stay well-informed about the situation in Syria by monitoring the news, reading recent literature, attending conferences and participating in Facebook groups run by women in Syria. In addition, I have contacted high profile activists and

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14 A.L Interview.
established dialogue and relationships with Syrians, both within the United Kingdom and abroad.

Conversely, it is possible that being an ‘outsider’ may have some benefits. As I am not Syrian, I do not reside in the country, neither do any members of my family, and I have no national or sectarian biases, I can maintain a certain level of emotional distance from the situation, which allows me to analyse and write about it objectively. I must note however, that I have found it increasingly difficult to remain impartial as I have developed relationships with those involved and become more aware of the violence and sheer brutality which is occurring within this conflict. Nevertheless my intention is to look at this research in a purely scholarly manner.

Opportunities
Having developed a close relationship with a Syrian national in Oxford has been an incredible asset to my research. This individual has provided me with valuable connections, drawn my attention to relevant movements and groups on social media sites, translated for me when necessary, and has given me a valuable insight into the country's culture.

The internet has also been an invaluable resource without which I would not have been able to conduct my research. The use of the internet, particularly social media sites, is considered of vital importance by those involved in the Arab Spring. Personally, the ability to talk directly with people in Syria and to join Syrian groups and women’s discussions on Facebook has deeply enriched my work. Although one must always be wary of the origins of information found on the internet, my research requires personal opinions and reflections and this is generally the content of such sites. Furthermore, as I am exclusively looking at women in the uprising who oppose the Assad regime, bias in terms of political motivation is not a concern.

Whether I conducted a full interview or a shorter discussion, the majority of people I spoke to said that I should not hesitate to contact them again if I had any more questions. This highlights a positive response to using the ‘conversational partners’ approach in my interviews and has enabled me to further clarify points when necessary.

Limitations
My biggest limitations were not being able to conduct my research in Syria and not being able to speak Arabic. These two factors meant that I did not have access to the full range of people I would have liked to interview, in particular, poorer women. I am very conscious of reproducing the biases of the real world in my work, as often happens in academia. Frequently, those who have fewer assets, opportunities and education have less of a voice. I did not want this to be the
case in my research, but realistically the simple fact that those I spoke to can communicate in English and have access to the internet is representative of their education and class. All the people I interviewed were educated to at least high school level with most being university educated. When I asked questions, for example about the role of poorer women, no doubt they answered with an honest opinion and to the best of their knowledge yet there are probably limits to their understanding of these women’s experiences. Female interviewee A.L actually pointed this out during our interview; highlighting an experience she had whilst working with poorer women in rural areas she stated, “I discovered that I am completely ignorant and disconnected from the truth.”15 Whilst it is positive that she is aware her perceptions of poorer, rural women are not totally accurate – others may not be. This must be considered when people are speaking on behalf of others. As Walby notes, “the limits of this approach to feminist methodology are the limits of the views of the women interviewed – concepts and notions about structures outside their experience are ruled out.”16 As a result I tried to remain aware of these issues and, where possible, back up my findings with secondary data.

It has been difficult to carry out research in a society in conflict, particularly one in a state of civil war and this has caused certain limitations. One woman who was answering questions by email had to leave Damascus and was therefore unable to complete the interview. I had problems conducting full interviews with others as electricity cuts and government attempts to control communication meant that often Skype and Facebook did not work. Understandably, time and emotional pressures also meant that many initial discussions were not followed up, however fear may also have been an element. Considering the situation in Syria, some may have felt fearful to openly share their opinions with a stranger.

Ethical considerations

Difficulties with contacting poorer communities and my position as a western researcher are also ethical considerations.

In addition, the safety of my interviewees was also of great concern as I was investigating the experiences of people involved in opposing the Assad regime. Those who speak out against the regime often suffer great brutality if discovered. Many Syrians however, are overtly vocal on social media sites about their opposition to the government, as protection they use pseudonyms or software to make their profiles less traceable. All the people I spoke to were already openly anti-regime and after explaining the aim of my research and my academic associations, they were still happy to share their views and experiences with me. I must therefore conclude that

15 A.L Interview.
16 Walby, Theorising Patriarchy, 18.
their safety would not have been jeopardised by our discussion. However, to guarantee their safety, I use pseudonyms for all the interviewees residing within Syria, as well as for those outside of Syria who requested to be kept anonymous.
Chapter Three

Literature Review and Theoretical Discussion

Women’s roles in the Syrian uprising span the spectrum, from educating their children about the concept of freedom to risking their lives by going into the street to demand it. Women have taken on many roles in this uprising and many factors influence the way in which they participate. Participation of women in national processes and regime change is mostly theorised by feminist scholars with the diversity of women’s experiences as a driving theme. Anthias and Yuval-Davis in their work *Woman-Nation-State* note that there is no unitary category of women, "they are divided along class, ethnic and life-cycle lines.”¹⁷ Moreover, in looking at the links between women, state practices and ethnic/national processes, five major, but not exclusive, ways have been determined by the authors, in which women have tended to participate:

“(a) As biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities;”¹⁸ the classic illustration whereby forms of population control are used as a strategy to limit or increase the number of people born within specific ethnic groups.

“(b) As reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups;”¹⁹ in terms of reproduction, women are controlled in ways that reproduce the boundaries of the symbolic identity of their groups or that of their husbands. In order to maintain group boundaries, legal marriage is generally required for a child to be recognised as a group member. In addition, religious traditions often dictate who can marry whom. Syria is exemplary with laws that make it very hard to marry someone of a different religion, a strategy that helps maintain divisions between different societal sects.

“(c) As participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as transmitters of its culture;”²⁰ women are seen as the ‘cultural carriers’ of the ethnic group who are often required to transmit heritage and ways of life to other members of the group, especially the young.

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¹⁹ Ibid.
²⁰ Ibid.
“(d) As signifiers of ethnic/national differences – as a focus and symbol in ideological discourses used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of ethnic/ national categories;”21 women do not only teach and transfer cultural and ideological traditions – "Very often they constitute their actual symbolic figuration." Images of mothers who have lost their sons in war are used in national conflicts or liberation struggles to call men to fight “for the sake of our women and children.” 22

“(e) As participants in national, economic, political and military struggles;”23 the roles women have played in national liberation struggles have varied but generally they are seen to be in a supportive and nurturing relation to men even where they have taken most risks.

Usually only one or two of the dimensions of women’ s roles are explored depending on historical and societal contexts of states.24 Category (e) is the main one that women fall into in the Syrian uprising – all other categories actually fall under this one as they are looked at in terms of a national struggle.25 However these identified ways in which women participate are useful in analysing the variety of women’s roles especially the less visible ones.

The work of Anthias and Yuval-Davis provides a framework within which I will analyse my data; however, I have also found it useful to review a more defined theory of patriarchy. Concepts of Sylvia Walby in her work *Theorising Patriarchy* reaffirm those of Anthias and Yuval-Davis and build on their framework, offering further guidance and structure for my research. In particular, Walby's analyses of feminist theories have been intrinsic to my methodology. As Sylvia Walby states, “the concept of ‘patriarchy’ is indispensable for an analysis of inequality.”26

Anthias and Yuval-Davis warn against the simplistic breakdown of factors such as class and highlight the importance of avoiding forms of reductionism "which see national processes as fundamentally class processes or as representations of generic sexual divisions and conflicts."27 Walby agrees, "certain aspects of patriarchal relations can be captured by the concept of class but not all."28

21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid, 12.
25 The situation in Syria would fall under the banner of a "national process." The scale of the uprising is larger than any sect or ethnic group, it is an all-encompassing movement of people from all corners of society who identify totally with their country and proudly proclaim that they are Syrian and that they want change.
Whilst Walby highlights the need to take into account the differences women face due to factors such as their ethnicity, Anthias and Yuval-Davis warn of the danger of completely isolating factors such as ethnicity and “not considering how much they intersect with other modes of differentiation such as class and gender.”29 In the context of the Syrian uprising, one must identify how being a woman and a Kurd, for example, affects how she participates. This is not to say that all Kurdish women will have the same experience. According to Walby “existing feminist theory has a view of women as more uniform and individual than really is the case.”30 Her education, class and familial background, to name a few factors, are all important influences.

A further discussion of patriarchy which is theoretically and contextually useful for this study is that presented by Nader Said-Foqahaa and Marwa Maziad. They look specifically at Arab women in their work ‘Arab Women: Duality of Deprivation in Decision-making under Patriarchal Authority,’31 History, geographical location and religion are all contributing factors to the way society is constructed. Islam is fundamental to Middle Eastern history and character and Islamic interpretations have been used to back up patriarchal attitudes.32 However, patriarchy does not belong to Islam alone, many Christians in Syria hold similar patriarchal values, it is a cultural factor. Said-Foqahaa and Maziad state that “in the Arab world, traditional patriarchy is built upon a hierarchy of roles and authorities.” Their work on Arab women and patriarchy defines the idea of dual deprivation in decision making, “vicious and multi-layered circles surrounding women’s abilities to make decisions concerning their own lives on the one hand, and restricting their capacity to delve into established institutional mechanism of decision making, on the other.”33

Anthias and Yuval-Davis’ point, that citizenship constructs men and women differently, is intrinsically linked to Said-Foqahaa and Maziad’s discussion. In broad terms, they believe women are a special focus of state concern as a social category with a specific role, namely human reproduction.34 They highlight how the welfare state itself is constituted in a gendered way, essentially male in its capacities and needs.35 Looking specifically at Arab women, Said-Foqahaa and Maziad develop this point by highlighting how societal decisions reflect the existing power distribution. This leads to rationalised discrimination against women,

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29 Walby, Theorising Patriarchy, 13, and Anthias and Yuval-Davis, Women-Nation-State, 2.
30 Walby, Theorising Patriarchy, 14.
31 Said-Foqahaa and Maziad, ‘Arab Women.’
32 Muñoz, Gema Martin, ‘Patriarchy and Islam,’ Quaderns de la Mediterrània 7, European Institute of the Mediterranean. 37, 43.
33 Said-Foqahaa and Maziad, Nader, Arab Women, 234.
34 Anthias and Yuval-Davis, Women-Nation-State, 6.
35 Ibid.
particularly in terms of decision making. “Policies operate under the pretext of being the means for maintaining the balance, survival, and continuity of society,” so that women are kept in their “natural place.” This “natural role” is firmly associated with the reproductive process, making it compulsory if one is to be a ‘real’ woman. This separation of women from decision-making processes on a personal level, “also deprives them of the ability to act as agents of social change, in light of their absence from decision-making positions,” conclude Said-Foqahaa and Maziad.

*Women and civil war*

When I began my research the violence in Syria had not yet reached its current level. It was certainly violent but not yet a civil war, as it is now classified. Protestos do still run, activists are still working hard, dialogue and political discussions continue, however the nature of the situation is now very much a military one. Although the work of Anthias and Yuval-Davis covers militant struggles, further theoretical contextualisation with literature more specifically related to women and war is helpful to understand how this has affected the roles women play.

Krishna Kumar’s work on *Civil Wars, Women, and Gender Relations,* highlights five characteristics relevant to women and gender relations in intrastate conflicts that help the analysis of the situation in Syria.

1. *Belligerent parties deliberately inflict violence on civilian populations.* The majority of casualties in civil wars are civilians, “a trend that alters a country’s demographic composition and social relations.”

2. *Civil wars displace substantial numbers of people.* Refuge is sought in other parts of the country or in neighbouring countries, which profoundly affects gender relations.

3. *Women’s own participation in civil wars contributes to the redefinition of their identities and traditional roles.*

4. *There is usually a conscious attempt to destroy the supporting civilian infrastructure during civil wars.*

5. *Such conflicts leave a legacy of anger, bitterness, and hatred among the belligerent groups that is difficult to heal.*

Further to these points, the focus on women and war in *The International Review of the Red Cross 2010* is valuable as it moves away from stereotypical depictions of women in war towards

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40 Kumar, Women and Civil War, 6.
41 Ibid, 6,7.
a better understanding of the multitude of roles, responsibilities and challenges that shape the way women experience armed conflict and its effects.\textsuperscript{42}

A common theme in the literature is the need to correct the image of women in war as passive victims, which is reflected in public opinion and the media. Natsios, in the foreword for Kumar, highlights how women are not passive spectators in civil war but active participants\textsuperscript{43} and Pnaffer, Editor in Chief of the \textit{Review}, reiterates the point, "the reality is that women also take an active role in hostilities and in their aftermath: as politicians, combatants, leaders of non-governmental organisations and social or political groups, and peace campaigners."\textsuperscript{44}

Moreover, in their article, From Helplessness to Agency: examining the plurality of women's experiences in armed conflict',\textsuperscript{45} Haeri and Puechguirbal note how women’s continuous association with children deprives them of a sense of agency as it highlights their reproductive functions "to the exclusion of other non-reproductive related needs." This is closely linked to Anthias and Yuval-Davis’ and Said-Foqaha’s points that women are seen by the state as a social category with the particular role of reproduction.\textsuperscript{46} However, as Haeri and Puechguirbal state, women’s participation in hostilities is one of the most overt ways to dispel the idea of their weakness.\textsuperscript{47}

Haeri and Puechguirbal note that in some conflicts women actually take up arms and join rebel groups, although generally, this has not been the case in Syria. However, they focus, as does Kumar, on women's assumption of support roles during conflict, such as medical care, transportation, communications, and intelligence as has occurred in Syria.\textsuperscript{48} These new roles help to redefine female identities and are a major focus of literature on women and war. Haeri and Puechguirbal bemoan the injustice of the lack of credit women receive for their wartime experiences, despite valuable roles, new or traditional.\textsuperscript{49} This lack of recognition leads to exclusion from discussions in the post-conflict phase.

Haeri and Puechguirbal are wary of abiding by the notion of feminine peace and masculine aggression and war which only contributes to the presentation of women as the weaker sex.

\textsuperscript{43} Natsios, Andrew, Foreword in Kumar, \textit{Women and Civil War}, vii.
\textsuperscript{44} Pfanner, \textit{International Review of the Red Cross}, 5.
\textsuperscript{46} Anthias and Yuval-Davis, \textit{Women-Nation-State}, 6.
\textsuperscript{47} Haeri and Puechguirbal, ‘From Helplessness to Agency,’ 109.
\textsuperscript{49} Haeri and Puechguirbal, ‘From Helplessness to Agency,’ 108.
They state that culture has been one of the most important "transversal themes" in regards to women and war as it directly influences gender relations, "the socially ascribed roles, responsibilities, opportunities and limitations for males and females, that exist in any society."\textsuperscript{50} In the Syrian context the role of culture, particularly with its connection to patriarchy, is paramount to understanding what roles women can play and the significance of when women go against their cultural norms. However, in all situations, "it is simplistic to judge vulnerability on the basis of stereotypes."\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 121.
\textsuperscript{51} Pfanner, \textit{International Review of the Red Cross}, 5.
Chapter Four

Section One, Syria in Context

Syria is situated in the Middle East and is bordered by Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon, Israel and Jordan. The country is religiously diverse. Sunni Muslims are most prevalent representing 74% of the population (63% are actually Arab speaking the rest are mostly Kurds). Alawites represent 12% of the population and the remaining Muslim sects consist of Shias, Ismailis and Druse; 12% of the population are Christian and there is also a small Jewish presence. In terms of ethnic composition 90% of the population, including Bedouins, are Arab, there are 1.5 million Kurds, and the rest consists of Armenians, Circassians and Turcomans.52 There are also 400,000 Palestinians and 1 million Iraqi refugees.53

Historical background

Syria has a long and complex history, which cannot be covered comprehensively in this short review. Syria was part of the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman empires. The Ottoman Empire began to disintegrate after World War One and in 1922 Syria came under French control. A nationalist uprising against the French occupation in 1925-26 was quickly quelled. In 1936 France agreed to grant Syrian independence, however this did not occur and the population rebelled again in 1945. In response the French bombed Damascus, only for Syria to become independent a year later.54 This period characterises Syria’s continual battle for self-rule, symbolically the Syrian flag that was used during this time is the one currently used by the opposition against Assad.

The Ba’ath party was founded in the 1940s with aims of socialism, Arab Nationalism and anti-imperialism. Egypt and Syria joined forces for a short while in 1958, forming the United Arab Republic, however Syria ended the union in 1961 unhappy with Egypt’s domination. In 1963 the Baath party took power in a coup. This brought significant changes to the political landscape as elite domination diminished and the military and lower and middles classes gained influence. At this time a state of emergency was declared that is still in place today.55

55 Galić and Yildiz, Development in Syria, 26-27, and BBC News Middle East, ’Syria Profile.’
During the French occupation, Syrian minorities, particularly Alawites, were placed in top government and military positions.\(^{56}\) In 1970, the minister of defence and an Alawite, Hafez al-Assad, took power in a final and bloodless coup and was elected President the following year. On the domestic front, Assad tried to create stability and improve the economic situation by focusing on agriculture and modernising infrastructure. He continued to grant himself more power with the new constitution of 1973, whilst working to gain social control and limit all types of opposition. Fuelling sectarian angst, the Alawites received privileges in return for being loyal to the regime. Alawite families were dispersed to major cities, especially rebellious or Sunni majority areas. Methods such as tax hikes were used to drive many large families in Damascus to the outskirts, providing vacancies for Alawites. Mousa explains how “the Assads successfully fragmented the population; an atmosphere of complete distrust enveloped the country, where public mention of any politically related topic was taboo.”\(^{57}\) To protect himself, Hafez ensured the top layers of the military and intelligence were filled with fellow Alawite officers and he established 13 different intelligence agencies that were totally independent from each other.\(^{58}\) Any opposition faced great repression.\(^{59}\)

The Syrian Branch of the Muslim Brothers formed in 1946. Several Islamic societies joined under its name with the aim of reviving Islam. During Hafez al-Assad’s rule, a militant branch of the Brotherhood took over, in 1980 Muslim groups started riots and the Brotherhood organised an armed opposition to bring down the secular state. The result was the outlawing of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1981 and the subsequent massacre of 10,000-30,000 people in a three week period within the city of Hama, by the Assad regime.\(^{60}\)

After the strife with the Muslim Brothers, Assad started to support ‘Societal Islam’ as a political strategy. Endorsing certain Islamist groups, who called for an Islamic mode of life especially in terms of social behaviours, was appealing to the Sunni majority. For the regime it provided an alternative to the Muslim Brothers and increased its legitimacy. It encouraged people to seek consultation and answers in religion not politics. In collaboration with the government, these

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\(^{58}\) Arar, ‘Syria: To oppose, or not to oppose?’

\(^{59}\) Galié and Yildiz, Development in Syria, 26-27, and BBC News Middle East, ‘Syria Profile’.

groups discouraged their followers from getting involved in politics and asked them to support the regime.61  

**Bashar al-Assad – The evolution of the crisis**

In 2000 Hafez died and his son, Bashar al-Assad, took power. He began his presidency speaking of modernity, development and Syrian-style democracy, which must be “in response to the needs of our society and requirements of our reality.”62 The same year groups of intellectuals met and pushed for issues such as an end to the state of emergency and more freedom of information, it became known as the “Damascus Spring.” Bashar freed 600 political prisoners but went no further in responding to their demands, crushing this flourishing civil society a year later.63

Mohammad Magout describes the development of the “Assad Cult”: the image of the Assad’s, and the language of the state, was re-moulded when Bashar came to power to try and move away from the revolutionary rhetoric of Hafez and appeal more to the younger generations and middle class. Propaganda used everyday language “loaded with sentimental and religious vocabulary to express devotion to the president and the country.”64 Yet, despite promoting himself as a reformer, there remained no opportunity for any organisation to form unless under direct control of the Assad government. All groups or collectivities that included different parts of society were immediately destroyed. As Magout notes, every effort was made by the regime to keep Syrian society “broken into atomized individuals who do not trust each other” disabling themselves from forming connections outside of one’s sect, tribe, neighbourhood, etc. He uses a quote by a well-known Syrian writer, Yassin al-Haj Saleh, to describe how “the regime is based essentially on denying the political existence of Syrians as independent citizens who are able to organize, oppose, and contend.”65

One method of manipulation was education. The Ba’ath party invested in, and encouraged, education with positive results. Education became compulsory and free for children aged 6-11 and the illiteracy rate was reduced from 60% in the early 1970s to 20% today.66 Education is considered important in relation to development and modernity; it is an instrument through which new generations can be introduced to the state. In Syria it is a platform for ideological

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61 Manea, *The Arab State and Women’s Rights*, 182.
63 Ibid.
indoctrination with Ba’ath school books teaching their version of society and history. In their work Galié and Yildiz, highlight how keeping youth in school for as long as possible keeps them socially and politically controlled, “they stay out of trouble and can be nationally moulded.” However, frustration has grown as higher levels of education are not matched with adequate jobs – a point that played a fundamental part in the uprising.

The Arab Spring

The Arab Spring has become the name for the series of demonstrations that recently swept across the Middle East and North Africa. They were sparked on 18 December 2010, in Tunisia, after Mohamed Bouaziz set himself on fire in protest at the confiscation of his produce cart. Protests in Tunisia inspired those in Egypt, Libya and Yemen, with unrest soon spreading to other countries demanding the removal of leaders who had held power for decades. All protests began as non-violent and shared characteristics of civil resistance, however many were met with violence from the authorities. So far rulers have been forced from power in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen, with a major civil protest erupting in Bahrain.

Syria’s entry into the Arab Spring

The first demonstrations in Syria occurred after the regime arrested and tortured several young teenage boys for spraying anti-regime graffiti, inspired by the Arab Spring, on their school wall in Dar’a. Initial demands and protests did not call for the downfall of the regime. As peaceful demonstrations spread across the country and grew substantially, Assad responded with lethal force – as Arar puts it, in the hope that “the barrier of fear that was starting to collapse would be immediately restored.” However, despite the violence, determination to overthrow the regime grew.

The Shabiha, affiliated with security forces, have been used to crush demonstrations. They shoot into the crowd and beat up demonstrators. Army personal are executed for refusing to

67 Galié and Yildiz, Development in Syria, 57.
68 Galié and Yildiz, Development in Syria, 57,58.
69 Dabashi, Hamid, The Arab Spring, 17.
71 Yazbek, Samar, A Woman in the Crossfire, 119.
72 Arar, ‘Syria: To oppose, or not to oppose?’
73 The Shabiha are militiamen aligned with government, more commonly known as pro-Assad thugs, they are nearly all Alawite and believe they need to defend their sect to the death. Their brutality has long been known in Syria but they have become a common feature of the regime’s attempt to control the uprising. Alexander, Harriet and Sherlock, Ruth, ‘The Shabiha: Inside Assad’s death squads,’ 2 June 2012, The Telegraph, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/9307411/The-Shabiha-Inside-Assads-death-squads.html, accessed 10/7/2012.
shoot civilians.74 Thousands have been detained, many during peaceful demonstrations, and there is a high rate of torture in detention which has resulted in deaths.75 Civilian massacres such as those in Houla (108 killed) and Qubair (78 killed), where government-backed militia stabbed and shot their victims, many, women and children, have also characterised the uprising.76 Scorched earth policies have also been used.77 With the realisation that there would be no restraint on behalf of regime agents, some people felt the need to arm themselves and thus the current situation has evolved.78 On 29 July 2011 the Free Syrian Army (FSA) announced its formation and since then their numbers have steadily increased.79 The situation is now that of two armies at war. On 12 June the situation in Syria was described as a “full-scale civil war” by the head of United Nations peacekeeping operations.80 A timeline of major events is shown in the Appendix.

On 14 September 2012, the death toll, both civilian and military, was at 26,000.81 Rape is also a factor in the conflict; however numbers are extremely hard to establish as it is a crime that often goes undocumented.82 There are now over 200,000 refugees as a result of the violence and destruction.83

Why an uprising in Syria?

Several commentators have tried to explain the reasons behind Syria’s entry into the Arab Spring, I will address a couple.

Patrick Seale’s explanation starts with Bashar al-Assad’s failure to implement reforms when he came into power in 2000. Instead of recognising “the thirst for political freedoms” he became more repressive. Corruption added fuel to the fire leading to privileges for a few whilst the

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80 Aljazeera, ‘Interactive: Timeline of Syria Unrest.
majority endured hardships and a brutal security setup. Above all, however, Seale puts Assad’s failure to grasp and resolve two key issues. The first, a large growth in the population which resulted in “an army of semi-educated young people unable to find jobs.” The second, the 2006-2010 drought, and the exacerbation of the disaster by government neglect and incapability, which resulted in the forced migration of hundreds of thousands of farmers to impoverished urban suburbs. After the trigger of the events in Dar’a, these two factors were the “prime motors” of the uprising and its proliferation. As Seale puts it, “the foot-soldiers of the uprising are unemployed urban youth and impoverished peasants.”

Drawing on Lisa Wedeen’s theory of people being ‘tipped’ from compliance to rebellion, Magout noted that people will not rebel if they believe only a few Syrian will join them. They may dare to be subversive, however, if they believe many will join them in this disobedience. The events occurring in other parts of the Arab world seem to have been the inspiration needed to re-politicise Syrians despite being severely oppressed for decades. With small subversive acts, such as anti-regime graffiti and a sit in in front of the Libyan Embassy, Magout concludes that, “many Syrians became aware that others are likely to join them if they engage in transgressive behaviour... that would lead eventually to "tipping" large sectors of Syrian society from submission to resistance.”

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85 Magout, Cultural Dynamics in the Syrian Uprising, 7.
86 Ibid, 8-10.
Section Two, Contextualising Women in Syria

To understand the roles women are playing in the current uprising, we must review their position in Syria’s recent history, particularly under Assad’s policies. We must also explore the culture of patriarchy in Syria, which is heavily directed by cultural and religious groups, and which holds such influence that even the Assad regime has had to bend to its call.

Elham Manea’s case study of Syria in her book *The Arab State and Women’s Rights* offers an in-depth look at women’s experiences since independence, in particular the manipulation of women’s rights and groups under Assad rule. Galić and Yildiz also present a comprehensive view of the situation of Syrian women.

**Laws**

The law regarding nationality is discriminatory; women cannot pass on their nationality to their children. The Kurdish have no citizenship at all regardless of gender. There is no unified family law in Syria. There are a series of family laws that relate to the different groups of Syrian society. In September 1953 the Syrian Islamic Personal Status Law was issued. It treats women as inferior and dependent on their male relatives, for example a woman can be considered disobedient if she leaves her marriage residence or works without her husband’s permission. Supposedly, women can set conditions to the marriage contract which might allow these restrictions to be bypassed. Urban upper class women in particular were more able to negotiate freedoms within these contracts. Druze, Jews and Christians were excluded from its provisions and dealt with family law with their own religious doctrines: however they are all similar in regards to requiring obedience from women. Islamic family law is applicable to non-Muslims in matters that concern testate or intestate successions, paternity, legal capacity and representation and all Syrian women are subject to a male guardian.

**Women’s activism and representation**

Activists for women’s rights have had an uphill struggle. Manea starts by looking at the Women’s Union of Syria and Lebanon which was formed in 1924. It was a multi-sectarian and

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87 Manea, *The Arab State and Women’s Rights*.
88 Galić, and Yildiz, *Development in Syria*.
89Several months into the uprising, to try and appease the Kurdish population Assad has stated he will give grant them citizenship, BBC News Middle East, ‘Timeline: Key moments in Syrian crisis,’ BBC, 18 July 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-18891150, accessed 16/07/12, and Galić, and Yildiz, *Development in Syria*, 54.
90 Manea, *The Arab State and Women’s Rights*, 160-164.
91 Ibid, 161.
Arab nationalist party that supported groups aiming to change laws and increase women’s public participation. Predictably, Islamists and conservative forces opposed it, and nationalists and the public were generally adverse to their ideas. Several events delayed women’s suffrage. One was the gradual unveiling of some women which in certain cases led to their being physically attacked. The other was the French attempt to introduce a civil marriage law in 1938. As well as being rejected by religious figures, because it allowed Muslim women to marry non-Muslim men, it was also used as a tool to oppose the French and improve national accord. These issues and disagreements all distracted from the fight for women’s rights. “Both nationalists and the French sacrificed these issues in order to gain cooperation with powerful politicians and religious patriarchs.” However, in 1949 educated women were given the right to vote, with all women gaining this right in 1951. This was a huge step but became effectively meaningless once the authoritarian regime came to power.

**Ba’ath politics and women**

The Ba’ath rhetoric of the 1960s called for modernity and development, the liberation of women was declared as integral to this. As president Hafez al-Assad said: “The progress of the woman in our country, the restoration of her rights, and the practising of her tasks, constitute a fundamental factor in pursuing and speeding up of our steps on the road of advancement and progress.”

Why then, when the Ba’ath party came to power claiming that women’s emancipation was integral to their socialist ideology, did they not change the religious nature of the family law system? Manea offers three reasons. Firstly, women’s issues were not a priority and women’s groups struggled to make it one as they were often divided and lacked political influence. Secondly, these religiously dominated laws were left alone in an attempt to placate the Sunni majority, especially after the repression of the Muslim Brothers. Lastly, religious and sectarian division is integral to the regime’s survival. As it stands, interfaith marriage is extremely difficult. This keeps people divided and highlights how women’s equality is not at the forefront of Syrian political interest. Manea draws on the view of one member of a women’s movement who states, “we have a large divergence between the Syrian National Constitution which gave women all their rights (equality in rights regardless of gender) and a personal status law that depends on Sharia provisions.”

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92 Ibid. 175.
93 Manea, *The Arab State and Women’s Rights*, 176.
94 Ibid, 177.
95 Galié, and Yildiz, *Development in Syria*, 53.
96 Ibid, 166-171.
97 Ibid, 165.
Galié and Yildiz's remark that, "generally the Party has promoted gender equality" and "the government has tried to include women in the political life since the Ba’ath came to power," ⁹⁸ is misleading. They go on to acknowledge inconsistencies, for example “females account for one fifth of government employees but mainly working as clerical staff." ⁹⁹ This draws on Manea's point that this representation is only figurative – they are 'token' women. "The high representation of women in leadership positions in the Syrian political sphere is not synonymous with a real ability to influence the decision making process." ¹⁰⁰ The quota for women is merely a formality, furthermore, in a system where politics, the army and the economy are run by a small number of men from the same sectarian background, "the whole parliament is a formality." ¹⁰¹ It is not only in government that women have little voice, even in parties not sanctioned by the government women are rarely able to hold positions of leadership or make decisions despite strong involvement. This lack of representation for women is not only about exclusion by men but is, in effect, an "authoritarian pattern shaped by cultural perceptions," a much wider cultural context enveloped in patriarchy. ¹⁰²

In terms of women's political involvement with the authoritarian regime, two issues are important. Firstly, regardless of sex, political activism has grave consequences in Syria such as arrest and torture. It is, therefore, a task that requires careful consideration especially when one holds family responsibilities. Secondly, groups in which women hold positions of leadership are generally exclusively for women, extremely religious and endorsed by Al-Assad. Consequently, women's activism is only permissible when in the government's best interests. As mentioned in the previous section, one of the Assad strategies of political survival was to support 'Societal Islam.' However, as Manea notes, Societal Islam holds a conservative view regarding the place of women which does not coincide with “the Ba’ath declared policy of gender emancipation." ¹⁰³ This is highlighted by the Assads' support of the Qubaisiat group, "an all-female controversial Islamist women's group" over the Committee of Social Initiative (COSI) who believe in gender equality and includes those from all sects, religions, social background and ideologies. ¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Galié, and Yildiz, Development in Syria, 60.
⁹⁹ Ibid, 60.
¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 179.
¹⁰¹ Manea, The Arab State and Women's Rights, 177-179.
¹⁰² Ibid.
¹⁰³ Ibid, 182.
**Women’s education and employment**

The Assad regime’s policies have encouraged women’s education and participation in the workforce. In 2007 women’s literacy was recorded at 74%, with men at 86%. However, whilst highlighting education as a symbol of modernity, the state’s curriculum continues to produce sexualised stereotypes. In addition, rural areas have a much lower degree of education, “in rural areas almost 80% of working women are either totally illiterate or have a minimum education.” This has a major impact on their ability to participate politically and in society.

Between 1981 and 2007 women’s labour participation rates increased from 12 to 31%. However, they are still very limited by law and cultural expectations; for example, a woman is meant to ask her husband for permission to work outside the home. Around 64% of women are housewives, agriculture and education are the main sectors for those who work outside the home. The situation for rural women is different, 70% work over 15 hours a day for no recognition and often no pay. Their ownership of land is only 3%. There are also high school drop-out rates for rural girls as they are expected to provide labour. Less education results in a lack of awareness about their legal rights. Kelly and Breslin point out that, “custom, as opposed to law, tends to be strongest in rural areas, compounding women’s disadvantages with respect to marriage, inheritance, and other matters.”

Since the uprising, opportunities to reject the control of the regime and cultural pressures have allowed women’s activism to flourish. The extent and methods in which they participate will help to identify whether the uprising has led to a change in patriarchal attitudes. For some women the fight against Assad and the confrontation of patriarchal culture are intertwined, others however, are not even aware that they have rights to demand.

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105 Ibid, 181.
106 Galić, and Yildiz, *Development in Syria*, 58.
108 Ibid, 473.
Chapter Five

Discussion – Women’s roles in the Syrian Uprising

“The Syrian protestor is one: Men, women, children, elders, they all stand equals facing bullets, tortures, imprisonment, aggressions and mainly their will for freedom.”¹⁰⁹ People from every sector in society have united to join the uprising and call for the downfall of the Assad regime. Women too, have suffered from high unemployment rates either personally or for their husbands and children, rising energy and food prices, corruption and violent authoritarian rule.¹¹⁰ Hence, they have every reason to partake in actions that they hope will bring positive change.

Women are integral to the uprising and have been actively involved since day one, “you see an incredible level of participation by women in the Syrian revolution,” states Syrian National Council Member (SNC), Afra Jalabi.¹¹¹ As a result, thousands of women have been killed, put in jail, or forced to flee the country.¹¹² Women are involved in political activism, coordinating different opposition groups, organising and attending protests, caring for the injured demonstrators and soldiers, feeding FSA fighters, and reporting on the uprising and human rights abuses through social media such as Facebook and YouTube.¹¹³

Although women are generally not those engaging in warfare with weapons, this revolution is theirs too and they have been crucial in shaping it. Syrian society is patriarchal in nature, but women’s actions have not simply ‘fit into’ a pre-existing system. Regarding the Arab Spring generally Wolf notes, “many commentators credited the great numbers of women and children with the remarkable overall peacefulness of the protesters in the face of grave provocations.”¹¹⁴ In Syria “Women have strengthened the civic side of the revolution adding a gracious side to it,”

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¹¹³ Alahdab Interview, Aqil Interview, J.D Interview.
¹¹⁴ Wolf, ‘The Middle East Feminist Revolution.’
says Human Rights activist Razan Zaitouneh. The revolution has been called female by some activists and movements, highlighting this gender connotation.

Analysing the significance of women’s participation in the uprising is important not only in terms of rising up against a militant dictatorship, but also in relation to confronting patriarchal attitudes. Women do not constitute one unitary category, as iterated by the reviewed authors. Some are continuing traditional or daily roles, others are embodying new ones. Some prominent figures will be looked at in more detail and roles will be analysed, from activist to mother. They are all intrinsic to the aim of the uprising, and affected by varying factors such as class or faith, resulting in differing relations with and effects on patriarchy.


115 Khoury, Rana, ‘Women of the revolution.’
Women in more visible roles

Demonstrations

Non-violent public demonstrations ignited the revolution and have continued in the face of increasing brutality and violence. Images of Syrians, united from all backgrounds, marching through the streets of towns all over the country epitomise the Syrian uprising. "Women", states one interviewee, Syrian Kurdish woman activist Heyam Aqil, "demonstrated against the brutal regime demanding the fall of it since start of revolution."\textsuperscript{117} Women from different classes and backgrounds have demonstrated alongside men and in their own marches.\textsuperscript{118} Demonstrating is dangerous; snipers or security forces shoot randomly into crowds and many are arrested and tortured not knowing when or if release will occur. Yet, men and women continue to march against the regime.

Anthias and Yuval-Davis note how state policies, often reinforced by patriarchy, help to construct women, with a particular focus of reproduction. However, they often find contradictions; "women are constituted through the state but are also often actively engaged in countering state processes."\textsuperscript{119} Although many would not see themselves as constructed by the state, all Syrians who demonstrate, men and women, are rejecting the identity of submission and fear that Assad has prescribed to them. For many women this act of rejection symbolises much more. They are rejecting the primary identity assigned to them of being simply domestic and reproductive, not only by the state but by older and more influential notions that predate Assad’s regime.

One interviewee states that at the beginning of the uprising women who participated in demonstrations were usually already active in society. For example, Marwa al-Ghamian inspired

\textsuperscript{117} Aqil interview.
\textsuperscript{118} Aqil interview.
\textsuperscript{119} Anthias, and Yuval-Davis, Women-Nation-State, 10,11.
by the Arab Spring, helped to organise the first protest in Damascus. For many less active women, overcoming patriarchal notions in order to demonstrate was a challenge. Looking at women in the Arab world Said-Foqahaa and Maziad note how they spend most of their time engaged in family life “by socialization and due to division of social roles (by choice or coercion) many women reach the conviction that self-actualization is achieved by perfecting the reproductive role, proper organization of the house, and the husband’s satisfaction (which is satisfaction to God).” However, many women who are conducive to these masculine defined roles joined protests, highlighting the effect of the uprising on women’s attitudes and what they see their roles to be; female interviewee, attorney and member of the law office of the Syrian National Council Alahdab states “women have been encouraged ... women are not afraid anymore.” Encouragement from other women to demonstrate was vital at the outset, as Magout highlights: when others see disobedience they may too dare to be subversive. Not only against the regime, as he suggests, but against their own husbands or fathers. As demonstrations spread and multiplied, more women began to march, “in some cities the demonstrations were very big and it included most of the population in that city which encouraged a lot of non-active women to join,” stated female interviewee J.D.

Whilst Anthias and Yuval Davis warn of the danger of completely isolating social factors from each other, class and religion influence the strength of patriarchy in women’s lives, thus affecting their participation. As in all religions, some are liberal and some are very conservative with deeper patriarchal attitudes. Douma, for example, “is one of the least open minded suburbs around Damascus” as female interviewee A.L describes it. Here Muslim women rarely participate in social activities, they live traditional lives dominated by family and led by men and many wear the niqab, a full-face

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120 Mousa, Sarah, ‘Tales from Café Tahrir: Syria’s Greater Revolution.’
122 Alahdab Interview.
123 Magout, Cultural Dynamics in the Syrian Uprising, 7.
124 J.D Interview.
125 Anthias and Yuval-Davis, Women-Nation-State, 2.
veil. However, even women from more conservative religious factions are taking on new roles as a result of the uprising. "They were in the demonstrations with men, they were wearing their hijabs of course but they were down in the street and I see this as amazing." Furthermore, whilst patriarchy is not limited to the poor, it often has a greater impact on women from lower classes, particularly as they generally receive less of an education, less employment opportunities and, therefore, have greater dependency on men; poorer women taking part in demonstrations is therefore significant. Aqil explains that it is not solely religion or sect that deprives women their rights or result in them having fewer roles than men, but a matter of culture. "All Syrian components share similar culture more or less of seeing women inferior." Consequently public or political discourse is normally dealt with by men in a patriarchal culture. Human Rights Activist Razan Zaitouneh states, "The revolution has given women the chance to be part of a real movement... but most importantly to be present within their own surrounding, which was not easy prior to the uprising."

Initially some men did not accept this, Syrian writer, Khawla Dunia states, "at first, our number in the streets was small as women were fighting within their own houses and their own families to protest outdoors." Not only has the uprising influenced women and the roles they play but as Zaitouneh's account reflects, perhaps too a change in male attitudes "At the beginning of the revolution, I heard young men shouting 'Al-Bayt lil neswan' (Women should stay home), and now I hear them say 'Hayyou 'alaeneswan' (Cheer for women)."

Changing attitudes are significant but will this manifest in lasting change for women's lives? When Alahdab states that women now "stand side by side with men," this may be more literal than representative of a fundamental change in gender equality and patriarchal attitudes on a deeper level. Several factors must be considered when analysing this, such as the why women are choosing to participate, for whom, and what this signifies?

There is evidence that women have a role in the physical realities of planning and executing demonstrations, however even when women are encouraged to participate from the outset, patriarchal attitudes persist with elements of male control.

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127 A.L Interview.
128 Aqil Interview.
129 Khoury, Rana, 'Women of the revolution.'
130 Khawla, Dunia, interviewed in Khoury, Rana, 'Women of the revolution.'
131 Zaitouneh, Razan, Khoury, interviewed in Rana, 'Women of the revolution.'
132 Alahdab Interview.
Documents such as *The Guide for the Syrian Protestor*, written by activists, include women in diagrams of how to demonstrate appropriately. Women, children and the elderly are represented by the purple dots, with men as the green dots in the diagram opposite. Haeri and Puechguirbal note how women’s continuous association with children deprives them of a sense of agency. This categorisation assumes that women and children are equally powerless and in need of protection. Here, the purple dots are surrounded by men as means of protection; the ‘vulnerable group’ are surrounded by the strong group. This detracts from the authority and power women yield in these protests and is based on masculine perceptions. There are clear responsibilities with regards to gender structure and protection in patriarchal culture. As male interviewee H.W states, “a man cannot leave a woman behind when we are running away from the security forces – he must protect her.” This protection would also be expected by many women. Not that it is wrong for people to offer protection to each other, especially in dangerous situations, however sometimes women are seen as detrimental to a protest because, as H.W continues, “women cannot run as fast as men... so they are seen as a hassle to men in demonstrations.” This again can have the effect of belittling women’s roles in protests in the eyes of men and many women themselves.

Haeri and Puechguirbal further this argument, “the essentialist myth that presents women as the weaker sex continues to situate women in a subordinate position to men,” this results in actions that control and dominate women. Some women have reacted to what H.W describes as, “apparently guys taking ‘too’ much care of girls in protests ... saying ‘go there, come here, do not come when it’s dangerous’,” for example in the picture below, the banner reads; “I am a free revolting female and it is my right to protest the way I want. No to oppressing free women of

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134 Haeri and Puechguirbal, *From Helplessness to Agency*, 105-109.

135 H.W Interview.

136 Ibid.

137 Ibid.
Aleppo and controlling our movements during protests. Freedom to free women of Aleppo." The notion of women as less capable and powerful is generally accepted, however the fact that this disempowers and discriminates against women is not. Men who feel they are being inclusive and protective may struggle to understand why women respond with anger. This highlights how engrained patriarchal notions are and how difficult it may be to alter them, although more women are starting to challenge them.

Some, mainly middle class, women are directly confronting notions of patriarchy and see the uprising as an opportunity to call for their liberation. "Middle class women are more knowledgeable of their rights due to the level of their education and the qualification they have," states Aqil.139 Similarly, Aqil highlights how Kurdish women view the uprising as a "historic opportunity for to protest against the discrimination she suffered over decades ... since the start of the uprising Kurdish women are more vocal and they determined not to return to status prior to March 2011."140 Whilst not wanting to simplify the situation, Aqil points out that "women from lower classes may well be taking part in protests without knowledge of their rights." Some women "have not specifically protested against the marginalisation they experience ... they call for the freedom which all Syrians call for however have limited knowledge about what might the awaiting freedom do for her."141 Therefore, although women’s actions may appear to reject the patriarchal constructions of their identity, the fact that many do not acknowledge it weakens the concept.

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139 Aqil Interview.
140 Ibid.
141 Ibid.
To further this, Walby raises the point that in many cases “a political opinion may be imputed on her (women) regardless of what she actually believes,” in many cases her view is assumed to be that of her male family members.\textsuperscript{142} Kumar reiterates this point when looking at women’s experiences in civil war in areas such as Georgia and Bosnia, “Women’s motives for joining war efforts were often the same as men’s, but some felt compelled to support the conflict because of their husbands’ positions or political pressure.”\textsuperscript{143} Dependence on male relations, typical in patriarchal cultures, often leaves a woman with no right to an autonomous opinion. Furthermore A.L says, “this is the one time that Syrian women were not marginalised completely – because they (men) need them.”\textsuperscript{144} This statement signifies that Syrian patriarchal society in general is perhaps willing to adjust views on the roles of women for the time being in order to achieve its over-riding aim of defeating the regime. This does not mean that changes that have occurred regarding women taking on new roles or changing a patriarchal attitude towards women are not real. Female interviewee M.L claims that “men actually are respecting women... doing her role bravely and doing stuff that men can do.”\textsuperscript{145} However, perhaps men would not have been so willing to bend social norms and support women taking on more public roles if they did not need support from all society and if the fight had been for a less self-serving interest. Alahdab suggests “Many Arab men still have a mentality that women may fight for freedom but she cannot be equal to men.”\textsuperscript{146}

\textsuperscript{142} Walby, \textit{Theorising Patriarchy}, 80. 
\textsuperscript{143} Kumar, \textit{Women and Civil War}, 6,7. 
\textsuperscript{144} A.L Interview. 
\textsuperscript{145} M.L Interview. 
\textsuperscript{146} Alahdab Interview.
Women and activism

As well as taking part in demonstrations other roles are essential to the uprising such as the organisation of demonstrations, formation of opposition groups and running of social media sites. A driving force behind many of these activities is a strong youth element in which women have been integral. J.D notes, “as for the awareness it began on Facebook and continued to become civil movements and campaigns and it was all managed by the educated class which contained a lot of female power.”

M.L gives an example of how women use their gender to their advantage in some situations. She highlights how girls are useful in helping to choose an adequate demonstration spot because the police will pay less attention to girls “seemingly walking and chatting about fashion and nails … while taking notes and maybe wearing a hidden camera to film the whereabouts of the police patrols.” Pfanner reiterates this point, ”The assumption that women are harmless and arouse fewer suspicions can make them the preferred choice when it comes to transporting munitions, gathering intelligence.”

Social media and gender

Means of communication such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter have been essential to the uprising, “they have been instrumental in organizing protest activities and reporting them to the world” explains Magout, especially as international media were banned from Syria by the government. This has led to a reliance on the famed ‘citizen journalist’; local activists who obtain information such as news, images and videos. M.L describes how many girls are responsible for filming and taking pictures of the demonstration and uploading them on YouTube and Facebook.

The Arab Social Media Report notes how social media is increasingly viewed as an important tool for Arab women’s empowerment, particularly during the Arab Spring it “allowed women to take on new forms of leadership focusing on utilising connections and networks.” As well as being a tool for organisation it has also been intrinsic to gain support for and educate and debate issues such as women’s rights. On Facebook there are popular women’s groups, that directly confront patriarchal notions and demand equality, such as “Women for Life - Women

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147 J.D Interview.
148 M.L Interview.
149 Pfanner, International Review of the Red Cross, 5.
150 Magout, Cultural Dynamics in the Syrian Uprising, 2.
151 M.L Interview.
for Syria," and "The Uprising of Women in the Arab World," to name two.\(^\text{153}\) Whilst most people surveyed in the above mentioned report felt "that social media could, in fact, enhance women's participation in the legal, political, economic, social and civic arenas," there was some hesitancy as to whether the empowering effects of social media are limited "in the absence of actual changes in gender equality legislation and rights on the ground."\(^\text{154}\)

**The Activists**\(^\text{155}\)

A number of women sacrificed a huge amount to be active in the uprising and by doing so they have established a female presence at this visible level.

In reference to Egypt, Wolf stresses that women did not just "join" the protests but that "they were a leading force behind the cultural evolution that made the protests inevitable." The same can be said for women in Syria. Key women activists, Suhair al-Atassi and Marwa al-Ghamyan who were involved in the organisation of and attended initial demonstrations in Syria affirmed that they started thinking of a revolution in Syria after being inspired by the model used to overthrow Ben Ali’s regime in Tunisia.\(^\text{156}\)

As has been seen in the chapter on women in Syria, these women did not come out of nowhere; they are a reflection of what already existed before the uprising. Atassi was involved in the Damascus Spring in 2000/2001 and has been calling for political reforms ever since. During the uprising she helped found one of the local networks organising demonstrations, documenting abuses and news.\(^\text{157}\) Similarly, Human Rights Lawyer Razan Zaitouneh who runs the Syrian Human Rights Information Link (SHRIL), one of the few sources for information on killings, arrests, and human rights violations by the regime, created the group in 2005. These women have all been targeted as a result of their activism. Ghamyan was detained and tortured, eventually fleeing to Qatar.\(^\text{158}\) Atassi was also arrested and later went into hiding, then fled to Paris. Zaitouneh’s husband was arrested, held for three months and repeatedly tortured. Her brother was also arrested and she is still thought to be in hiding.\(^\text{159}\) Despite these retributions

\(^{153}\) Facebook 'Women for Life - Women for Syria,' founded July 2012, [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/groups/151580498312038/members/), accessed 23/07/2012 and Facebook 'The Uprising of Women in the Arab World,' founded October 2011, [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/intifadat.almar2a), accessed 07/07/2012.

\(^{154}\) Arab Social Media Report, *The Role of Social Media in Arab Women's Empowerment*, 4, 11.

\(^{155}\) See appendix for a more detailed summary of the women mentioned in ‘Key Figures’.


\(^{158}\) Moussa, ' Tales from Café Tahrir. '

\(^{159}\) Radio Free Europe: Radio Liberty, *Syrian Activist In Hiding: If We Didn't Believe We Will Win, We Couldn't Bear All This*, 7 October 2011, [Radio Free Europe: Radio Liberty](http://www.rferl.org/content/syrian_activist_in_hiding_razan_zeitouneh_zaitouneh_syrria_assad/24352910.html),
they all continue to be active. These women’s actions instantly serve to contradict any patriarchal attitude that says the uprising is not a place for women.

Another female activist is Rima Dali. In April 2012 she stood in the road outside the Parliament in Damascus, causing traffic to go around her and held a huge banner saying “Stop the killing we want to build a country for all Syrians.”160 A.L believed this action was significant. Firstly, she highlighted that Parliament should be representing its people and insinuated it is not doing so. Secondly, she signalled that no killing is justified, regardless of the perpetrator. Lastly, A.L highlights the significance that “she was a woman, not veiled... in a short dress, I think she was wearing jeans underneath but the whole concept - I mean it’s huge, she went there, stood in the middle of the street, stopped... cars from passing.”161 Consequently she was detained. Many feel that her act of bravery became something much bigger; “they now call her the woman in the red dress.”162 Further actions also brought Dali attention. During demonstrations a common chant is “God you are our only refuge – God (Ya Allah, malna gherak ya Allah)” it rhymes in Arabic. Some non-religious activist changed the rhyme to “God we want to replace you – God (Ya Allah, Bedna nghayrak ya Allah),” explains A.L.163 In August Dali put this as her Facebook status, “she did this being a renowned activist...it was outrageous.”164 In a culture where religion is so important and entwined with the identity of many people, it is deemed unacceptable to publicly say such things. Pro and anti-regime groups threatened her. In A.L’s personal opinion “she did this for the sole reason of creating a dilemma.” A.L. believes that this action signifies a benchmark in the revolution as it tests what people are fighting for in the uprising. “Do we want freedom or do we want some freedom?”165 Whilst A.L’s opinion that, “the two things that she did made a big difference in the revolution,” may not be reflected by everybody, Dali does represent a strong female figure who is contributing to political dialogue. Not only is she taking on roles to support the uprising but she is also using the uprising as a vehicle to challenge patriarchal and religious notions.

The Artists

Some public figures have used their fame and visibility to rally support for the uprising.

161 A.L Interview.
162 Doucet, ‘Are moderate Syrians being heard?’
163 A.L Interview.
164 Ibid.
165 A.L Interview.
Fadwa Soliman, a famous Syrian actress became one of the most recognised faces of the revolution and has been an outspoken critic of the Assad regime. Famously, she went to one of the most conservative Sunni districts in Homs and chanted against the regime in front of hundreds of other anti-government protesters. Being an Alawite she wanted to show they are not all in support of the regime. Consequently she has been married a traitor to her sect and her brother disowned her on television. She has also recorded passionate speeches on camera calling for people to join peaceful protests that have gone viral on YouTube. She fled to France where she continues to be active. Author Samar Yazbek, is also an Alawite and has consequently been called a traitor and disowned by her family for joining the uprising and criticising the regime. She has also had to flee the country for her and her daughter’s safety. To date, Yazbek has written one of the only books about the uprising *A Woman in the Crossfire – Diaries of the Syrian Revolution*, which has become a valuable source of information regarding the first months of the revolution.166

Actress Louise Abdulkarim, Poet Lina Al-Tibi, writer Roula Al-Khesh and activist Salma al-Jazayerli started a hunger strike on 4 September 2012 calling for the need to take immediate action to stop the massacres in Syria not merely condemn them.168

The Politicians

Bassma Kodmani was the spokesperson, member of the Executive Bureau and head of Foreign Affairs for the Syrian National Congress (SNC); as a result she was the most influential Syrian woman in politics. Recently she quit the SNC, stating that it did not preserve the confidence that was given to it by the people, but she continues working to support the revolt.169 Afra Jalabi is Syrian-Canadian, a member of the SNC and a member of the ‘Day-After-Project’ working to develop a transition plan for the country. Rafif Jouejati is not a politician as such, but is also a

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167 Yazbek, Samar, *A Woman in the Crossfire*.


member of the ‘Day-After-Project’ and the English spokeswoman for the Local Coordinating Committees, one of Syria’s main activist networks. They all live outside of Syria.

The roles of some prominent female figures in the uprising have challenged patriarchy. For many younger activists like Al Ghayman and Dali the uprising has facilitated their entry into the public arena and been a microphone for female voices. H.W comments that the uprising has brought new actors into the public sphere; one is the ‘youth’, “it is new to have young people talking” and being seen as relevant actors. In addition, he highlights how, “women are among these new elements.” Regarding young female activists and women participants in general, HW highlights how “they exist in the public sphere in the ways that women have never existed before – as active participants.” Speaking of what Dali’s actions in front of the parliament represents, but equally applicable to other women activist, L.A states, “It’s saying that this revolution is made by the Syrian people and it’s made by empowered women. We are no more mothers and sisters and daughters. We are active and we are influential and this is how it is going to be.”

Whilst the uprising has offered opportunities for some women whose actions confront patriarchal attitudes there is no ground-moving change in regarding female leadership at higher levels. They now have the opportunity to be politically active, but women are still in the minority. Many of the women who are in leadership positions now already held positions as influential women before the uprising. W.P states this is “true to about ninety nine percent with almost no exceptions.” The actions of women described above shows that they can and should be in positions of leadership, but in the SNC as well as other opposition groups, the number of women is minute. The uprising has not resulted in changes to patriarchal attitudes in this context. As Aqil comments, it is “the nature of a patriarchal society to exclude women from many fields... women’s representation amongst the political opposition is very limited, both internally or externally.” Aqil continues, “the excuse for these limited numbers is that women are not putting themselves forward.” This may have some validity because the legacy of a patriarchal culture means there are fewer educated and experienced women than men. J.D adds, “the problem here is cumulative... women here have been left out for so long that they

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172 H.W Interview.
173 A.L Interview.
174 W.P Interview.
176 Aqil Interview.
stopped trying to be part of anything and most of them do not have the experiences they need to make a difference.”

Although the uprising has provided opportunities for some women to advance politically and professionally, it is still not possible for many women to take on these positions. It will take more than the uprising to bring about such changes.

**Women as Symbols**

The above women activists and artists have become symbols of powerful women. One of the ways that women participate in national processes highlighted by Anthias and Yuval-Davis is by constituting actual symbolic figurations of cultural and ideological traditions. They highlight how images of women as mothers who have lost children are often used as a call for men to fight. However, the actions of the women such as Soliman leading protests in Homs, or Dali stopping traffic in Damascus, challenges this use of women as reproducers. They have become symbols in different ways; for their political actions, as strong women who want their voices to be heard and will take risks to do so. Talking about Rima Dali, whom she knows, A.L highlights her independent and courageous attitude, “she always takes the consequences by herself.”

An article by Bayan Khatib, a young Syrian-Canadian, explains how the uprising has made al-Ghamyan, Soliman and Zaitouneh “female Syrian heroes,” positive new role models in contrast to growing up with women who “discuss how to steep the perfect cup of tea.” J.D too states, “I speak for myself when I say that hearing and watching a female success story makes me immediately feel like I can do anything.” Khatib’s point that these women are willing to risk “their lives and the safety of their own children” for a free Syria, is by no means a criticism of their parenting. But is significant in challenging the role of women as child carers, the notion that they would reject their maternal roles for a political one certainly represents a new idea of womanhood. The symbols women are starting to constitute are significant, their acceptance and use by the opposition signals a move towards social change with regards acceptable female roles. Pfanner notes how women are traditionally portrayed in association with children in conflict and “as vulnerable and helpless,” which leads to an absence from decision making bodies. The symbolisation of public and empowered women, not always associated with motherhood is a move away from this.

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177 J.D Interview.
179 A.L Interview.
181 J.D Interview.
182 Khatib, ’The Courageous Women of the Syrian Revolution,’
However the respect that these roles draw can create categories of women in the struggle. In reference to exile politics during the Pinochet rule in Chile, López Zarzosa, highlights how “masculine hegemony gave women special statuses... these were primarily related to women’s public behaviour.”  

This suggests that Soliman and Al Ghanyam’s public acts allowed them to become symbols because they were highlighting ‘male characteristics.’ This potential manipulation of what they represent actually reinforces patriarchal notions that female characteristics are not capable of this, when these women are demonstrating the exact opposite.  

Furthermore, acts like being in prison or in hiding are respected. In regards to Chile, López Zarzosa reiterates “brave revolutionary women were revered by male militants and this appreciation empowered them,” such high-profile female models are seen as heroines rather than victims.  

This is also true of feminine figures in Syria. However, A.L states that “this is delusive representation of women in Syria.” She affirms the capability of these women and J.D highlights the importance of having such women as role models, as women in Syria “don’t see what we can do.” However whilst it is positive that these women are highlighting that they are capable of more than motherhood this puts women to whom motherhood is their primary identity in a lower category.

These women symbolise the female contribution to the uprising, illustrating this point is the painting of Fadwa Soliman entitled “The Revolution is Female” by artist Wissam Al Jazairy whose work on the Syrian uprising has become well-known. A result however, is that the contribution of other less visible women is seen as lesser, when there is much evidence that it is vital.

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185 López Zarzosa, *Chilean Voluntary Repatriation*, 147,148.

186 A.L Interview.

Women in less visible roles

The salience of motherhood in its various manifestations has been crucial to the uprising. The patriarchal attitude that a woman’s main role is that of reproduction is very limiting to her ability to make her own choices and participate equally in society. This is not to suggest however, that the reproductive role of women is less important than other roles, it is influential and powerful and many women in Syria are inextricably linked to family life and their children. Many women are not currently able to be political leaders, however their less visible roles supporting male relatives and raising children are fundamental in peace time and especially in wartime, yet as this role is seen as ‘natural’ it lacks recognition.

Men are attributed the role of the protector whilst women are those who need protecting. However women, especially in their roles as mothers have fiercely defended their children against the violence and brutality of the conflict. J.D highlights how ordinary women play a significant role in awareness campaigns insisting on the unity of Syrian people and keeping the uprising peaceful. "Since children are a big part of their life I heard lots of voices demanding to keep the children out of the struggle which is becoming a very difficult thing now." Many women have had a more physical relationship with the uprising, risking death to shield others from harm. For example, a mother in Dar’a whose twelve year old son was wanted by the security forces “kept her only child safe by moving every day from house to house like a ghost,” narrowly escaping raids by security forces several times. A similar example is that of the ‘Madres de Plaza de Mayo’ in Argentina. During the military dictatorship of 1976–1983, 30,000 people were estimated missing. As most mothers, were confined to the domestic sphere because of their gender, they "focused their energy and frustration into an organization whose purpose was to find their offspring," through public protest. H.M also highlighted that there was a story that when the children in Dara’a were arrested, the women would not allow their husbands home unless they brought their children with them, resulting in the demonstrations that first sparked the revolution.

As has been seen, throughout the Assad dynasty the state has not allowed a civil society or free thinking to flourish. Political or civil organisations were not allowed, education and media were controlled by the state. Only in the familial unit did the state take a step back, a sphere with

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188 J.D Interview.
189 Yazbek, ‘A Woman in the Crossfire,’ 97.
191 H.W Interview.
192 Magout, Cultural Dynamics in the Syrian Uprising, 2–6.
strong female influence. Anthias and Yuval Davis state that due to their influential role in the family, women are often responsible for transmitting beliefs and attitudes to the next generation. Women and mothers are also subject to the ideology prescribed by the state, however as evidenced by increasing support for the revolution, it appears that many are not revering the government behind closed doors. In the absence of uncensored information, knowledge about the atrocities committed by Hafez al Assad were passed on through families. With this “we also inherited their fear of the regime,” states H.W, "but I still went to protest.” He explained how his mother in particular tried to prevent him from going to protest for fear of what would happen to him, reiterating how women use their role as mothers to protect their children. However, the number of young people going onto the streets to protest and men joining the FSA, is evidence of women having raised generations with beliefs that do not result in love and loyalty to the regime. This seemingly invisible role is highly influential in the uprising. Aqil states, "the martyrs of this uprising are sons of great mothers whom sowed the love of land into their children's hearts.” The work of Lopez Zarzosa on Chilean exiles notes the role of ‘political mothers’ in manipulating family ideology, despite being criticised as passive by Western feminists. A.L too claims this passivity for Syrian women, particular the working class, “The government persecutes them, men persecute them, their class persecute them. So do not expect things from them... they are passive, they do not know how to say what they think and I wouldn't expect them to.” However the passivity of these women is not affirmed by the actions of many of their children.

Khatib uses the case of Hamza Al-Khatib, to highlight the strength of this role.

“Children like Hamza attended schools where they were brainwashed to love Bashar Al-Assad and nearly forced to worship his image. But at home, they were raised by a generation of women who lost their fathers, brothers and uncles during the violent rule of Hafiz Al-Asad; Bashar's father. And today, many of these women encourage their children to protest and support the revolution, even while they know that once their children walk out that door, they may never return.”

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194 H.W Interview.
195 Aqil Interview.
197 A.L Interview.
198 Khatib, 'The Courageous Women of the Syrian Revolution.'
Hamza was a thirteen year old boy who went to protest, was kidnapped, imprisoned, tortured and returned to his parents a corpse.\footnote{Ibid.}

As seen, intrinsic to the cultivation of ideologies of freedom is the notion of sacrifice, which is tumultuous with that of protection. Describing the roles that women are playing in the uprising Aqil states that “above all, women are mothers of the martyrs who have given their life for the sake of all Syrians freedom.”\footnote{J.D says, “I think these roles are the most difficult ones, fighting yourself is one thing but to watch your loved ones leave to an unfair war is a lot harder.”} Seale highlights how poor women are bearing much of this burden, “the foot-soldiers of the uprising are unemployed urban youth and impoverished peasants.”\footnote{Seale, ‘The Destruction of Syria.’}

As well as losing their children and husbands to fight, women are actively supporting the FSA themselves. There are few cases of women actually joining the FSA to fight. Butheina Kanafani a Syrian from Canada left her home to come join the FSA in Aleppo\footnote{Galpin, Richard, ‘Syria crisis: Turkey training rebels, says FSA fighter,’ 4 August 2012, BBC, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-19124810, accessed 22/09/2012.} and according to Atassi, there is a female brigade in Dara’a numbering around 1,000.\footnote{Atassi, ‘It’s every woman’s duty to participate in the revolution: women fighters in Syria,’ 13 September 2012, Daily News Egypt, http://thedailynewsEgypt.com/2012/09/13/its-every-womans-duty-to-participate-in-the-revolution-women-fighters-in-syria/, 18/07/2012.} Kumar highlights how in many places “women performed important roles in military operations, particularly in medical care, transportation, communications, and intelligence.”\footnote{Pfanner, International Review of the Red Cross, 5, and Kumar, Women and Civil War, 7.} An article in an Egyptian newspaper tells the story of Samar “I used to hide six Kalashnikovs... each time I crossed over [the border] under my abaya, (a loose full-body garment).”\footnote{Ali, Sherif, “It’s every woman’s duty to participate in the revolution.”}

\textbf{“The End of a Family”: the wife of a martyr and mother of three martyrs with the 4th son in prison.”}

attitudes of what women can do as Aqil states “this kind of jobs are known throughout the history to be exclusively conducted by men.”

Yet, in most cases women often assume support roles. Lopez Zarzosa exemplifies how in the Chilean context working-class women “were not expected to be militants or as politically active as the men, they were expected to support.” J.D highlights that also in the Syrian context these women are the less educated and states that in places like Homs or Hama “as the men ... fought with the free army their women took care of the children, helped with their food, clothes, and took care of the fugitives and the wounded.” M.L also says “I have friends who cook for them every day, who clothes them – even giving them money – it is highly risky.” The concept of ‘gendered roles’ is also exemplified with the women making the independence flag; women are using their gender specific skills to create a main symbol of the uprising. For women who live in a particularly patriarchal context their contributions to the uprising may only be seen as acceptable as long as they are still acting like women, however simply because they are performing gendered roles, they should not be seen as lesser. In many respects women are sustaining the uprising with these roles.

Yet, roles such as raising children and feeding and clothing men are often seen as intrinsic to womanhood. Said-Foqahaa and Maziad note that the ‘natural role’ of women “is one of the most deeply rooted interventions at the conscious and unconscious levels.” “Consequently, women’s fulfilment of their “natural role” associated with the reproductive process becomes compulsory and coercive.” It is not the aim to romanticize these roles, doing so would credit patriarchal notions that limit women to the roles of motherhood and reduce their choices. However many women are still very much within the constraints of a male dominated culture and the roles they play within the prescribed identity of domesticity are vital to the uprising. Yet as their contributions are ‘natural’ women’s roles they are less recognised as ‘real’ participation in the uprising. When asked what the main roles of women were in the uprising the majority of interviewees highlighted actions such as organising protests and political action, one interviewee stated “As I see it, there is three main roles: awareness, demonstrations, and

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207 Aqil Interview.
209 Interview M.L.
210 The Syrian flag is an important part of national identity and has changed various times in Syrian history. Under the Assad’s, the flag was used in a very symbolic manner, as Magout explains, “the image of Bashar al-Assad is habitually conflated with the...flag of Syria to indicate they are inseparable from each other.” Since about November 2011, protesters and opposition forces have been using the green, white and black flag that was used by Syria after its independence from France. One activist explains how there is little attachment to the red, white and black Syrian flag that is hung “on the tanks that killed us... it does not represent us anymore.” Women have been instrumental in the production of the ‘revolution’ flag. Magout, Cultural Dynamics in the Syrian Uprising, 5, and Daragahi, Borzou, “Syrian rebels raise a flag from the past” 30 December 2011, Financial Times, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/6c332676-32f4-11e1-8e0d-00144feabdc0.html#axzz252bkxoQ1, accessed 30/08/2012.
fighting.”\textsuperscript{211} Whilst many did later discuss such less visible roles it was only upon further questioning regarding the subject and not initial reaction.

Furthermore, in contrast to the image of women as vulnerable, considerable evidence shows that men are more susceptible to the major impacts of armed conflict.\textsuperscript{212} As a result women are the ones who are left to “pick up the pieces, support their families, raise their children on their own and keep their communities going despite the emotional, physical, and financial losses caused by the absence of their menfolk.”\textsuperscript{213} In further contrast to patriarchal notions of women needing men, Aqil highlights how in this context men assume the capability of their women, “When a man decides to take up arms and fight, he’s pretty assured by his mother/wife/sister that she will run the house while he’s away knowing that he may never return.”\textsuperscript{214} These women are sustaining life through war.

These women, often the poor, who are cooking, clothing, financing and curing the wounds of fighters, and mourning them as mothers, are performing perhaps the most powerful roles despite the fact that the public women are the ones who become the symbols of resistance and will be those who are respected and acknowledged during and after the conflict. They are both doing their bit in different spheres but because these women are not visible, attached to organisations, famous or attached to elite families their contributions are not as recognised. A.L affirms, “they are not Rima Dali or Samar Yazbek – they are not the activists who can be heard, they are people who do not have access to the media but we know they are the ones who are suffering the most.”\textsuperscript{215} Lack of recognition of their participation also signifies a lack of recognition in terms of what many women have been through. Hassan states that, “among the men who have died in the conflict, many will be honoured as martyrs. Those who have survived suffering at the hands of the regime will return to their homes as heroes. But women, including victims of sexual assault and refugees, will remain permanently stigmatised in conservative societies that simply do not see their suffering as equal.”\textsuperscript{216}

This highlights the necessity and obligation of all those in the opposition to recognise ‘all’ of the roles women are playing, so that they are all granted the recognition for the roles and sacrifices

\textsuperscript{211} J.D Interview.
\textsuperscript{212} Haeri and Puechguirbal, ‘From Helplessness to Agency,’ 106,107.
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{214} Aqil Interview.
\textsuperscript{215} A.L Interview.
they have made. Despite the fact that gender roles played at home have been downplayed, they have acquired a subversive dimension. The motherhood identity and roles attached to it, have been intrinsic in sustaining the uprising and life within it and according to my interviewee, having some part in the gestation of the revolution. As Aqil highlights, “what men are achieving in the uprising is reflection of their women.” 217

217 Aqil Interview.
Changing nature of the conflict

Although the regime has used violence against its citizens from the very beginning of the uprising, the movements of civil resistance that the population were using are now dominated by an armed uprising. Whilst demonstrations continue and types of civil resistance persist, the situation in Syria is now categorised as a civil war with the FSA on one side and the national army on the other side.

The situation of the conflict has created an inhospitable environment for many women to continue activist or demonstration roles. A.L gives the example of a suburb of Damascus that has been “shelled for a year now... they have no electricity, they have no water, they have no access to health services and they have no help.”210 L.A also highlighted that “what is happening in Syria now is systematic destruction of our infrastructure,” and highlights the notion of the ‘hunger trap’219 which claims that in virtually all societies women eat less, A.L associates this point to Syria, saying it can be generalised for almost all basic needs. She sees no change coming from the uprising in regards to this, stating “the ones who will suffer are women.”220 Furthermore, as a result of the hardship of losing family members, primarily breadwinners, active participation in the uprising may take a back seat as day to day survival becomes the priority, however as discussed above this sustenance of day to day life is intrinsic to the uprising. This is amplified for the thousands that are displaced as a result of the escalation of violence in Syria. Aqil explains,

“Women cannot decide their destiny in such circumstances because they are led by the events in the war zone. Human rights reports stated as many as hundreds of women have been raped by Shabiha thugs and security forces, therefore fleeing across the border was the only chance for keeping dignity, looking for survival and protecting the remaining children. As a consequence all these will affect women’s ability to perform. A traumatised displaced person will not be able to function properly be it man or women.”221

There are also cases of refugee women being exploited for marriage, Arab men are coming to camps mostly in Jordan and looking for Syrian wives for a price. Hassan highlights that this

210 A.L Interview.
220 A.L Interview
221 Aqil Interview.
shows, “misogynist attitudes persist despite the supposedly enlightened popular revolts across the region.”

On the other hand, although the violence and destruction is also hugely detrimental to Kurdish women, the acquisition of ”Kurdish liberated cities” as Aqil calls them, has allowed for new opportunities and freedoms. For example “young women in Qamishli and surroundings (mainly Kurdish cities) have turned their houses into classes for teaching the Kurdish language to young children as the Kurdish language was forbidden by Ba’ath ruling party.” This reiterates the intrinsic point of the variety of women's experiences. However, there is consensus amongst my interviewees that the development of a civil war situation has resulted in more restrictions for women and a lessening of their roles in the public sphere. M.L highlights that now there are fewer roles for all civilians, men and women. Particularly, ”demonstrations are decreasing as a result of the violence.” J.D affirms “female participation is becoming less active on the ground.” Men and women who choose not to take up arms are seeing their roles decrease – however for women this is not an option. For example, SNC member Yara Nseir, was told “it is war and women have no place in it,” when visiting Saraqeb, a north-western city ‘liberated’ by the FSA. Supporting military action is now a main role, however this brings women back to their gendered roles of ‘carers’ who cook and clean and look after the wounded. As discussed above, these roles are vital and are not sufficiently recognised, however it highlights how the militarisation of the situation is pushing women away from the public sphere in which they were so intrinsic at the outset of the uprising.

222 Hassan, ‘Online trafficking of Syrian women shames all involved.’
223 Aqil Interview.
Chapter Six

Conclusion

As this dissertation discussed, women were involved in the conception of the uprising and have been active throughout. Their instrumental role has challenged stereotypes about Arab women as docile and subservient. This research has found that among several roles that women have played the roles of protestor, activists and mother have all been fundamental to the strength and continuation of the uprising.

According to the literature reviewed, patriarchy is intrinsic in Syrian culture and affects different women to varying degrees. Yet, as discussed, factors such as class and religion influence the level of male dominance. In particular patriarchy often defines women’s roles as primarily reproductive. This research has found that the uprising has allowed women to take on roles that confront these patriarchal prescribed identities.

Many of my interviewees felt that the uprising had given more women an increasing opportunity to be active participants in society. Regarding demonstrations, interviewees highlighted the presence of poorer women and more conservatively religious women as particularly significant as they are often subject to overt male domination. Furthermore, women have taken on activist roles at all levels. Yet, the data provided in this study showed that these women are mainly middle class and educated, with access to social media that has in turn been significant in increasing the ability of women to participate. My discussion in Chapter Five demonstrates how women also play roles as symbols. These are women who have taken on more public roles in challenging the regime. My interviewees highlighted that they have become strong female role models thus signifying an acceptance and praise of women who do not conform to patriarchal norms.

My research also highlights that although the actions of these women contradict a patriarchal notion of themselves, this may not signify ‘real’ or lasting change. There are still attempts to control women’s movements in demonstrations based on the perception of their weakness. My data demonstrated that for many women, especially poorer ones, patriarchy is so engrained that they do not know their rights and therefore when they protest, are not marching against the marginalisation they face as women. Furthermore, showing that change for women may not be
lasting, interviewees suggested that, in this situation women are not been marginalised completely by men “because they need them.”\textsuperscript{224} This implies that they again may be marginalised when they are not needed.

Taking into consideration the roles of women before the uprising, discussed in Chapter Four, my findings highlight that as well as change there is evidence of continuity. In many respects the roles that women play in the revolution are representative of those they held before, generally the top stay at the top, whilst many poorer women are still trapped in more male dominated contexts and often suffer the most in this uprising. Whilst some took to the streets in demonstrations there is a continuation of their primary role of motherhood. This role is used however, in ways that are fundamentally important to the uprising. Some of these women have been intrinsic in transmitting certain ideologies to their children, they provide support for fighters, and keep life going when their menfolk are gone. This demonstrates that public roles are not the only ones of importance; private roles are just as significant, if not more. This discussion has signalled the strength of patriarchy and how the uprising has not changed it; as a result of the motherhood role being seen as natural, it results in little recognition for these women’s contributions. Furthermore, this dissertation has found that a double standard is set that reveres the women who take on public roles, perhaps because this is associated with perceived masculine tendencies, whilst those confined to their female ‘gendered roles’ due to the patriarchal view of their menfolk, are given little recognition for their contribution despite its unprecedented value.

The development of the conflict into a civil war situation is now characterised by two patriarchal forces confronting each other through militarised violence. A.L reflects the resounding voice of all my interviewees as she states, “with more violence the less roles women have.” Whilst visiting Saraqeb, a northwestern city ‘liberated’ by the FSA in August 2012, SNC member, Yara Nseir, was told “Women belong in the houses and the streets are for men.”\textsuperscript{225} Significantly, this is a place which has a famous graffiti mural that says “the revolution is female,” as seen at the beginning of Chapter Five. This study highlights how the militarisation of the conflict is now challenging what this dissertation has discussed regarding the uprising providing an opportunity for women to take on new roles as political actors, and may even reverse the situation and further limit women.

\textsuperscript{224} A.L Interview and J.D Interview.
\textsuperscript{225} Nseir Yara, \textit{Will the masculinity of weapons defeat the femininity of peace in Syria?}
Perfectly articulating the situation, are the words of Diala Haider, who started the Facebook page 'The Uprising of Women in the Arab World:' “deposing a dictator is much easier then deposing patriarchy. Women still have a long way to go.”226 A.L affirms that women will be seen as the weaker sex for a long time to come. My study concludes that as of yet, the uprising and women’s roles within it, have not changed the deeply engrained patriarchal values of the culture.

Although the increasing violence is overshadowing the uprising, the experience of women in the uprising should not be ignored. A.L, the most realist of all my interviewees, highlights the significance of the uprising in giving many women the opportunity to participate in public life in a way they never have before, "they walked onto the streets, they participated in every way possible and they actually stood and raised their voices... This was not going to happen gradually, it’s taken revolutionary measures rather than evolutionary measures!”227

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227 A.L Interview.
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- Nseir, Yara, ‘Will the masculinity of weapons defeat the femininity of peace in Syria?’ 21 August 2012, Now Lebanon,


Appendices

Interviewees

**Full interviews**

J.D is a Syrian woman from Damascus.

M.L is a young Syrian women activist in Damascus.

A.L is a Syrian woman studying abroad but still active.

H.W is a Syrian man studying abroad but still active.

Hayem Aqil is a Syrian Kurdish Women's Activist who now resides in London.

Rasha Alahdab is a Syrian woman and founding partner of Syrian Women for Syria, a founding board member of Syrian Expatriates for Democracy and an attorney and member of the law office of the Syrian National Council.

**Shorter discussions**

W.P is a Syrian male activist in Syria.
Major Events in the Syrian Uprising

2011

15 March  ‘Day of Rage’ Protests in Damascus and Deraa demanding the release of political prisoners. At least 35 people are arrested.

March  Protests spread throughout the country and increase in size – more and more people are arrested. Security forces kill a number of protesters particularly in Derra where, a week into the protests, activists report the deaths of at least 100 people.

22 April  The country experienced its bloodiest day so far as tens of thousands of people demonstrate in the cities of Deraa and Damascus amongst others, activists report at least a 100 people were killed by security forces firing into the crowds.

3-6 June  Syrian government announced that 120 soldiers were killed in the north-western town of Jisr al-Shughour. State television said it was in an ambush by "armed gangs however, resident’s claim the soldiers were executed by security forces for refusing to fire on protesters. Others claim that although the numbers may have been exaggerated it shows the government was facing an armed uprising.

12 June  Armed forces take control of Jisr al-Shughour. More than 12,000 people flee to neighbouring Turkey in the following week. Marking the beginning of an enormous refugees flow out of the country.

29 June  At least 500,000 people protest in the central city of Hama in the single largest rally since the uprising began.

7 August  The Arab League condemns the actions of the Syrian Government.

18 August  The EU and Barack Obama call on Assad to step down.

3 October  Opposition groups come together to form the Syrian National Council in

58
Turkey and pledge to over throw the President.

4 October  China and Russia collaborate and veto a European-drafted UN Security Council resolution condemning Syria.

12 November  The Arab League voted to suspend Syria and imposed sanctions.

19-20 December  A massacre of army defectors occurred in the area of Jabal al-Zawiya.

2012  

28 January  The Arab League suspends its monitoring mission due to the rising violence.

4 February  China and Russia vetoed a UN Security Council resolution on the violence in Syria.

4 February  Syrian forces began shelling Homs. It became a month-long bombardment where scores of people have been killed.

21 March  The UN Security Council backed UN-Arab League envoy Kofi Annan's plan for ending the violence, providing humanitarian relief and securing a peaceful transition of power. The Syrian government accepted the plan six days later.

10 April  Assad fails to meet the deadline to withdraw troops from residential areas.

12-13 April  There is relative calm – Protesters demonstrate in large numbers

16 April  The first UN observers began their work to monitor the situation. Over the following weeks their numbers increase to nearly 300 however with the escalation in violence their operations were suspended on 16 June.

10 May  An explosion hits near the military intelligence complex in Damascus.

25 May  A massacre is witnessed in a village in the Houla region near Homs. Of the 108 that were killed most were women and children – some killed by shell fire but most shot or stabbed at close range. Survivors and human rights groups said the army and shabiha.

6 June  Scores of people killed in al-Qubayr, a village in Hama province. Shabiha are
blamed.

12 June The situation in Syria is described as a "full-scale civil war" by the head of the UN peacekeeping operations.

6 July Manaf Tlas, a general and long-time ally of the Assad’s, defects. A high profile defection.

12 July Activists report 100-200 people are killed in the village of Tremseh.

18 July Defence Minister General Rajha and his deputy, Assef Shawkat, the brother-in-law of President Bashar al-Assad, are killed in a suicide attack at the National Security building in Damascus.

July The government launches an offensive to recapture the city.

6 August Syrian Prime Minister Riad Hijab defected.

August Heavy fighting continues in Aleppo killing hundreds.228

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228 Aljazeera, ‘Interactive: Timeline of Syria Unrest,’ 15 July 2012, Aljazeera
Death Toll

A widely cited London-based opposition group that tracks the violence, The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, puts the total number of recorded deaths until 14 September 2012, both civilian and military, at 26,000. Twenty percent of these deaths occurred in August 2012, making it more deadly for civilians than the bloodiest months in recent conflicts such as Iraq and Afghanistan.\(^\text{229}\)

Prominent Women in the Uprising

Marwa Al Ghaniam

Marwa al-Ghaniam is a young woman from Damascus, she was one of the first to be demonstrating against the regime. She helped to organise and attended the first protest in Damascus on 15 March. Along with other protesters she was detained for 10 days where she was questioned and tortured. This was not enough to dissuade her and she continued to organise and attend protests in Damascus, including large demonstrations in the busy neighbourhoods of al-Midan and Kafr Souseh. As a result she became a target of the regime, she was closely watched and security forces surrounded her home. With life becoming ever more arduous she attempted to leave for Qatar, however she was arrested at the airport and detained. In a second attempt to leave the country in October – she was successful. She continues to work for the revolution and is an outspoken critic of the regime.230

Suhair Atassi

Suhair Atassi is a divorced mother, and has been a leading figure in the uprising. She was born to a prominent political family from Homs and she was involved in the Damascus Spring and has been active since Bashar al-Assad came to power in 2000. Before the uprising she ran the Jamal Atassi Forum group on Facebook, an extension of the banned Jamal Atassi Forum – which called for political reforms, the cancellation of the emergency law in Syria and the reinstatement of civil rights. Even before the uprising she called for marches in support of the Tunisians, the Egyptians and the Libyans; as well as appealing for demonstrations against corruption and for the release of political prisoners. She was arrested on 16 March 2011 after protests broke out in Syria. After her release she helped found one of the local networks that have been organising demonstrations, documenting abuses and relaying the story of the uprising, she also went into hiding for eight months and eventually fled to Paris in November. She is still very politically active and in communication with activists in Syria.231

Fadwa Suleiman

Fadwa has become one of the most recognised faces of the revolution and has been an outspoken critic of Assad’s regime since the beginning of the uprising. She is a famous actress in

Syria, born in Aleppo, and raised as an Alawite - the same sect as Assad. She went to one of the most conservative Sunni districts in Homs and stood on a high platform chanting against the regime in front of hundreds of other anti-government protesters. As a result her bother appeared in Syrian state TV and said that his family disown her. Soliman knew this action would put her life under threat, "I came to Homs knowing that my fate is either death of prison." But she wanted to participate in the demonstration to show that not all Alawite’s support the government and she wanted to dispel the government line that those who participate in protests are Islamists or armed terrorists. She has also recorded passionate speeches on camera that have gone viral on YouTube, calling for people to join peaceful protests and continue them across the country until Assad is overthrown. She also said security forces were searching Homs neighbourhoods for her and beating people to force them to reveal her hiding place. She is now in France after escaping the country and continues her work as an activist there.232

Samar Yazbek

Samar Yazbek is a Syrian writer and journalist. She has been very involved in the uprising, as a result of her outspoken criticism against the regime she was taken to a detentions centre to witness what happened to men from demonstrations, she saw young men tortured, covered in blood an excrement, and was threatened that she would join them if she did not stop speaking out against the regime. Yazbek comes from an affluent and influential family, she is also an Alawite, another reason for her targeting. Her parents disowned her and she has been called a traitor to her sect. She visited dangerous places, recording how the people resisted and took as many testimonies as possible. She was forced to leave in July 2012 fearing for her daughter’s life and became exiled in France. Her book "A Women in the Crossfire –Diaries of the Syrian Revolution” was published in 2012 and is a highly personal account of her experience during the first months of the revolution – it also contains many testimonies of activists and people who had witnessed the atrocities committed by Assad government.233

Razan Zaitouneh

Razan Zaitouneh is a Human Rights Lawyer who helped compile figures of the victims of the government crackdown on demonstrators and defied the government-imposed media blackout

233 Yazbek, Samar, The Woman in the Crossfire.
for months. Zeitouneh also runs the ‘Syrian Human Rights Information Link (SHRIL), one of the main sources of information on the violations committed by the regime.’ After reporting the massacre at the Omari mosque in Dera’a on March 23, Syrian state television claimed she was a foreign agent-as a result she had to go into hiding with her husband. On 12 May 2011 her husband was arrested, held for three months and repeatedly tortured, her brother was also arrested. She is still thought to be in hiding. For her reporting on the internet and to foreign media daily accounts of the atrocities against civilians in Syria she received the Anna Politkovskaya Award from the British rights Group RAW in War (Reach All Women In War) on 6 October 2011.234

**Rosa Yaseen Hassan**

Rosa Yaseen Hassan is a Syrian writer and activist. She is part of the Executive Office of The National Coordination Body for Democratic Change in Syria which declare freedom, democracy, non-sectarianism and non-violence.235

**Bassma Kodmani**

Bassma Kodmani was the spokesperson, a member of the executive bureau and head of foreign affair for the Syrian National Council - the principle opposition group to the regime. In this she was the most influential Syrian woman on a political level. She left Syria in 1968 for France and has held various high profile positions such as heading the International Cooperation program for the Middle East and North Africa at the Ford Foundation, and published several books. Kodmani has recently quit the SNC, stating it did not preserve the confidence that was given to it by the people. Kodmani said she will continue working to support the revolt.236

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Afra Jalabi

Afra Jalabi is Arab-Canadian and a member of the Syrian National Council. She was born in Damascus in 1970 and raised in Germany and Saudi Arabia. She is a journalist and peace advocate and is on the board of the Journal of Law and Religion at Hamline University.237

Rafif Jouejati

“Rafif Jouejati is the English spokeswoman for the Local Coordinating Committees in Syria, a network of activists. She is also the director of FREE-Syria, a non-profit humanitarian organization that focuses on women’s empowerment, and a member of the Day After Project, which is developing a transition plan for the country.”238

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<th><strong>Questions</strong></th>
<th><strong>General response</strong></th>
<th><strong>How does the patriarchal nature of society affect women?</strong></th>
<th><strong>How does your class affect what you can/want to do in the uprising?</strong></th>
<th><strong>If you come from a very conservative or very religious family how does it affect your role?</strong></th>
<th><strong>How does your sect/ethnic group affect your roles? Opportunities/restrictions?</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Has the uprising provided more opportunities for women to participate in civil society?</td>
<td>Yes - Positive Change</td>
<td>Alahdab “We want equality with men. We want more freedom than before. We want the rules to be changed. They want their daughters to be equal to boys at school.”</td>
<td>Alahdab “There is no freedom of speech. Now we can talk. Using things like Facebook.”</td>
<td>Alahdab “Myself and many Syrian women want a separation from law and religion.”</td>
<td>Aqil “I can confirm that in some Kurdish liberated cities women have already started establishing women/children/human rights organisations in order to raise awareness about these issues that were absent from daily life before the uprising. Also, young women in Qamishli and surroundings (mainly Kurdish cities) have turned their houses into classes for teaching the Kurdish language to young children as the Kurdish language was forbidden by Ba’ath ruling party.”</td>
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<td>A.L “The major incidents made social change and I believe this is what is going to happen in Syria.”</td>
<td>Reduction in patriarchal attitudes</td>
<td>Alahdab “We cannot deny that there are mosques praising women who are going out into the streets.”</td>
<td>Alahdab “These women in higher positions are the ones who were in this position before who have links, already the ones in these positions – so they are the ones staying there I don’t think it’s a huge change or not.”</td>
<td>Alahdab “Most women in Syria are Muslims ...women are divided. There are the very liberal and there are the Salafi’s. Muslim women want Islam to be free from any limits – they want the freedom to practise their religion.”</td>
<td>Aqil “The Kurdish society is a secular one and women have more liberty and freedom.”</td>
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<td>A.L “Their capability can be improved and it did improve very very fast in the Syrian context.”</td>
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<td>J.D “I have to say I’ve never seen the men and women in my country so close to each other in the parts they’re playing in the uprising, I believe they counted so much on each other that they actually stood and raised their voices and this was not going to happen gradually it’s taken revolutionary measures rather than evolutionary measure.”</td>
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<td>J.D “probably the minority women have less chances and opportunities to participate”</td>
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<td>Alahdab</td>
<td>&quot;Yes – they have been encouraged ... One and a half years ago nobody was free to say anything in Syria. Women are not afraid anymore. They stand side by side with men.”</td>
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<td>Alahdab</td>
<td>“There was no freedom of speech. Now we can talk. Using things like Facebook.”</td>
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<td>Alahdab</td>
<td>&quot;Women – you have the chance – this is the time for your ideas – to make speeches – if we do not seize this chance there won’t be another one - we must make the most of this opportunity.”</td>
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<td>J.D</td>
<td>&quot;Yes, I believe it did. a lot of the women I knew had lots of ideas but not enough courage or resources to make it a real project, but after a while of hearing and seeing what’s happening in our country no matter who you are and what you do or did in life, you start to feel that you have a responsibility to do something, anything. And that’s when the participation begins, whether it was the lack of courage or the lack of resources that was stopping you it doesn’t matter; in this situation no matter</td>
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<td>M.L</td>
<td>they forgot about the restrictions and bounds of our society. So I guess yeah the conflict did change our society.”</td>
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<td>M.L</td>
<td>“But for the women of course they are overcoming the masculinity bit by bit. And the men actually are respecting women for that, they are not upset with it now a man is looking highly at a woman who is going out there – doing her role bravely and doing stuff that men can do. So men is looking up to her he is respecting her.”</td>
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<td>M.L</td>
<td>“Of course a traditional background limits the women. But now the women are rebelling against this traditional background... So yes we rebel against the traditional backgrounds because they are limiting us. They say that we are girls – our place is in the house, our place is in the</td>
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<td>unless they’re willing to live outside their familiar circles and have enough strength and courage to stand against what they knew their whole life, it’s not that easy to believe in something most the people you know sees it as a betrayal Most the minorities that I know who stand with the revolution lived an open life, and they have a lot of friends and family members from the majorities.”</td>
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where you look you find an opportunity to be part of the civil movements.”

J.D “In some cities the demonstrations were very big and it included most of the population in that city which encouraged a lot of non-active women to join.”

M.L “Before the revolution women were not playing so many roles in society and in the political situations. They were playing a role but it was small and not effective. But after the revolution things started to get a bit exciting for women.”

M.L “Bit my bit women are overcoming this masculinity. Right now women are trying to overcome this masculinity and they are succeeding in it but of course you need some time, we need some time so we can overcome it completely. Yes of course it changed with the conflict – like I told you before the revolution women didn’t play barley any part. But right now women – we have a major role.”

M.L “This revolution taught us kitchen. Most of the girls they rebelled against this.”

Continuation of patriarchal attitude

A.L “This is the one time that Syrian women were not marginalised completely – because they need them.”

Alahdab “Arab men have mentality that women can fight for freedom but she will not be equal to man.”

Aqil “Yes, it became the nature of a patriarchal society to exclude women from many fields. For instance, it is obvious that the women’s representation amongst the political opposition is very limited, both internally or externally. Opposition leaders give only limited role/space to women and their excuses of these limited numbers is that women are not putting themselves forward.”
how to do everything. I was a simple girls who didn’t know how to trust anyone – didn’t know how to collect trash but now with the revolution I get to learn all this new stuff. I get to get more involved with society and more attached to people – we are all like a big family now.”

No - Negative Change

A.L. “However, unfortunately they always have this women who goes and talks for show... who goes there and talks so they can say “we have women” see “these are women.”

Aqil “The fear of the rape, kidnapping and violence conducted by regime thugs makes women fear visibly taking part in a lot of community work. In certain towns across the country women are afraid to leave their houses without a man escort because of the Shabiha thugs.”

Women are not included in the Free Syrian Army as this kind of jobs are known throughout the history to be exclusively conducted by men.

J.D “Even so I still think if our environment was more open the female role would be much bigger, and I don't mean that somebody didn't allow his daughter or sister or wife to participate, the effect of our masculinity of the society is cumulative, even if the men in our community is becoming more open each day, a lot of women is not experienced enough to be part of a big movement in the society.”

J.D “The problem here is cumulative -as I mentioned in the previous questions- women here was left out for so long that they stopped trying to be part of anything and
| **What roles are women playing in the uprising?** | **Aql** “Women played several roles although weren’t as visible as men. They demonstrated against the brutal regime demanding the fall of it since start of revolution. According to some Amnesty International reports, professional women such as nurses and doctors have actively worked undercover to cure injuries that peaceful protesters sustained as result of live ammunition used by the regime. Syrian women artists have sung for the revolution, such as the well-known singer Assala Nasri, other actresses condemned the regime crackdown and many ran charity/fundraising campaigns to help the victims of the violence. Although very few but women activists took also part in the political opposition without fear. Above all, women are mothers of the martyrs whom given their life for the sake of all Syrians freedom.”  
Aalahad “They have many | **A.L.** “50% of Arab women cannot read and write. I they could read and write – just that – I think a lot of difference would be made.”  
**A.L.** “Your education and family/culture make a big difference – and financial status  
Aalahad “Class plays a very important role. A lot of women want to participate and help but don’t have the money to do it.”  
Aalahad “However if they have the money – although they are trapped inside they have things such as Facebook.”  
Aql “Level of education/Academic degree, position she holds in community, | **J.D.** “I can say that I have seen women from the most traditional areas in Syria participate in every part of the uprising from the demonstrations to helping the Free Army. As I said before I saw a lot of boundaries disappear and all the things which was holding the women back were gone, because now we need every hand we can get to achieve the ultimate goal.”  
**J.D.** “minority groups are under a lot of pressure but yes they have an easier social life”  
Aql “I cannot make a swipe generalisation but perhaps women from some minority backgrounds such as Christian, Kurds or Druze may enjoy more freedom because the above mentioned communities are more secular than perhaps Sunni sect.”  
Aql “It isn't always about religion or sect that women are deprived from their rights or they aren't performing as much as men, it's also the matter of culture. All Syrian components share similar culture- more or less- of seeing women inferior.”  
**A.L.** “If the minority is pro-regime and the women activist is against she has intersectional discrimination. She is treated as a traitor –
| important roles; preparing food for fighters, making material things such as the independence flag, they are using Facebook and YouTube to do things such as upload videos, they are demonstrating outside” Alahdab “All the credit should go to the Syrian women inside the country. Syrian women outside the country also work very hard, on things like the media but the real credit is to those in the country. I am supporting with money, I went to visit refugees in Turkey – but I am still supporting from outside – the credit is for those inside.”  
J.D “I did see lots of women participating in the demonstrations against the Syrian regime from the early stages (relatively early) of the uprising. I also know women who played a big role in the awareness campaigns which insisted on the unity of the Syrian people and the peaceful path that the uprising should keep following. And since children are a big part of their life I heard lots of voices | her family’s influence in community and their background and above all connections also play great role.”  
J.D “As I see it, there are three main roles: awareness, demonstrations, and fighting. As for the awareness it began on Facebook and continued to become civil movements and campaigns and it was all managed by the educated class which contained a lot of female power, so you can say the biggest part played by the active women was awareness, and then followed by demonstrations which started in some way as an awareness campaign to let the people know their rights, as the reaction of the government became more and more aggressive the female participation was becoming less | these women are tortured more – more sexual abuse in detention. – most notoriously Alawite…”  
J.D 3 There is often a lot of respect for minority people who are with the uprising “it takes a lot of courage to do anything to help the uprising (if you’re a minority), the woman or man who take such action is probably considered a traitor or an idiot.”  
Alahdab “Christians play the same role as muslims. Christians are seen to be supporting Assad – they are scared of Salafi’s – and Assad is playing on this role. However there are Alawi’s, Christians, Druze etc fighting |
| demanding to keep the children out of the struggle which is becoming a very difficult thing now.”
| J.D "Even though a lot of the women I know want to keep the peaceful voices alive, I did hear of some women who volunteered with the Free Army to defend the civilians and fight the government, I think lots of them went through a tragic death of a loved one which made them choose to fight. I don’t know much about the countryside but where I’m staying -Damascus (the capital)- women now play a big part in the logistic help for migrating families from the damaged areas, they help making them food and distributing it along with the other essential materials they need such as clothes, medicines etc.”
| M.L “I have friends who cook for them (FSA) everyday, who clothes them – it is highly risky – even giving them money.”
| W.P “Women are playing certainly an essential role in this uprising on all levels. But active on the ground and more active on the cyber space. Since the government started a war on each territory which an activist lived in a lot of people who live in the same area were killed or arrested which made them the most people affected by the suppression of the government and these people were the first ones who demanded to face the army with weapons and most of them were the less educated class (most of them -men and women- didn’t finish high school) as the men in these areas fought with the free army their women took care of the children, helped with their food, clothes, and took care of the fugitives and the wounded.”
| M.L “The poor women in the poor neighbourhoods are for the opposition all together.”
| Ağıl “Kurdish women have never been appointed high level positions in Syria.”
| Ağıl “Kurdish woman have experienced double discrimination. Firstly because she is a Kurd and secondly a woman. Therefore she finds this uprising a historic opportunity for her to protest against the discrimination she suffered from over decades whether at workplaces or education institutions (school, uni etc...) Since the start of the uprising Kurdish women are more vocal and they determined not to return to status prior to Mar 2011 although the outcomes of revolution in other Arab countries are not promising in terms of women rights issues. Because our mothers couldn’t change our present we are determined to change our daughters’ future.”
| M.L “Women from different sects (she assumes Alawite) Their roles are very small –
<p>| Which women are in the demonstrations? | Aqil “That's correct. (women are participating from all sectors of society). Despite the active participation of women from different backgrounds and classes in demonstrations, they have not specifically protested against the marginalisation they experience, nor they demanded improvement of women rights. They are/were calling for the same demands of the society as a whole.” | Aqil “Women are still not fully aware of the basic rights which they should call for. Domestic violence, honour killing, women poverty, children protection are all issues that revolution must address.” | A.L “Demonstrations in Duma – not only impressive because they have nothing left – class issues but it is very conservative here - they wear hijab etc but still demonstrating with men.” | Alahdh “It must be noted that Muslim women are most of the women who are on the street and fighting- basically what she wants is safety, dignity and freedom of |</p>
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<tr>
<th>Who are the women in positions of leadership and influence? Why?</th>
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<td><strong>Aqil</strong> “Although very few but women activists took also part in the political opposition without fear.”</td>
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<td>Alahdab “Bassma Kodmani - Leadership is represented by her... She is in the Syrian National Council as a representative of women – however many women feel that she does not represent them. There are a lot of females in the media – they are not representative either.”</td>
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<td>Alahdab “We also have some women who are more...”</td>
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<td>A.L. “they are constrained by sex – religion doesn’t really matter – in a conflict like the Syrian conflict having to wear the veil or not is not the issue. The restrictions are from your sex and women of minorities have them just like women of majority, (Sahrazad Aljafari ) did not attack her political decisions they attacked her personal life...Which is what a lower classes may well be taking part in protests without knowledge of their rights. They call for the freedom which all Syrians call for however have limited knowledge about what might the awaiting freedom do for her. Whereas middle class women are more knowledgeable of their rights due to the level of their education and the qualification the have.”</td>
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<td>A.L. “Mostly they are women of minorities which is very nice and mostly upper middle class educated women who are fighting.”</td>
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<td>A.L. “if you look at all the activists they are upper middle class who do not come from very religious backgrounds. It makes all the difference - without all the restrictions that a girl who is expected to get married at 14 and be veiled has.”</td>
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<td>A.L. “Mostly they are women of minorities”</td>
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| What roles are poorer women playing? | A.L. “They need to provide for the family when the men go to war or die or get detained.”
A.L. “They have suffered the most e.g poor suburbs of Damascus shelled a lot – no | representative of Syrian women.”
A.L. “If you look at all the activists they are upper middle class who do not come from very religious background”
A.L. “Some women are persecuted from every angle – “So do not expect things from them… and they are passive, they do not know how to say what they think and I wouldn’t expect them to.”
A.L. “Demonstrations in Duma – not only impressive because they have nothing left – class issues but it is very conservative here – they wear hijab etc but still demonstrating |
services.”

A.L. “In Syria now there is a systematic destruction of our infrastructure. Women are the ones who will pay for that” Hunger trap – women last to eat always now there is nothing they will get even less…”

A.L. “They are not Rima Dali or Samar Yezbek - they are not the activists who can be heard, they are people who do not have access to the media but we know they are the ones who are suffering the most.”

Aqil “Participating in protest and upbringing/educating their children. They could also use arms against the regime if required, although this role is restricted to men.”

J.D. “Since the government started a war on each territory which an activist lived in a lot of people who live in the same area were killed or arrested which made them the most people affected by the suppression of the government and these people were the first ones who demanded to face the army with weapons and
most of them were the less educated class (most of them - men and women - didn’t finish high school) as the men in these areas fought with the free army their women took care of the children, helped with their food, clothes, and took care of the fugitives and the wounded.”

J.D “They mainly participate in feeding and clothing those in need around them, or maybe take care of someone homeless staying in their home. And of course they did participate in the early stages of the uprising, in the demonstrations, and making the signs and the flags”

M.L 3 “The poor women in the poor neighbourhoods are targeted by the regime more than others. So all the poor women and the poorer class now are refugees and it’s hard for them right now to do any part. They’ve done their part and because of this they are now refugees.”

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<th>Investigating less visible roles - are they recognised?</th>
<th>Aqil “These roles (Such as - supporting male fighters, raising children with certain views, letting children or</th>
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<td><strong>Seen as important?</strong></td>
<td><strong>Husbands fight</strong></td>
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<td>are of great significance that people hardly realise it. The martyrs of this uprising are sons of great mothers whom sowed the love of land into their children’s hearts. The renown Arab poet Hafez Ibrahim said &quot;mother is a school, if educated properly she would educate the entire human race&quot;. What men are achieving in the uprising is reflection of their women. When man decides to take up arm and fight, he’s pretty assured by his mother/wife/sister that she will run the house while he’s away knowing that he may never return.”</td>
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| How is the media portraying women? | Alahdab “the media generally doesn’t show women as weak they show what is really going on – when they show a women is crying it is not to make her look weak but what is real life.”

Aqil “Most of the way women portrayed in media is factual. During peace women were victims of the patriarchal society let alone during war. Forced to become a refugee with many children to bring up is the typical image of the syrian woman during this uprising.”

J.D “I speak for myself when I say that hearing and watching a female success story makes me immediately feel like I can do anything. | A.L “Women are definitely thought of as the weaker sex in Syria. Their capability can be improved and it did improve very very fast in the Syrian context. Yes they are still portrayed as mothers and sisters and daughters and wives but if your focus is poorer women – as mothers etc they were confined to this role.” |
| Are refugees still active? | Aqil “I don't think that the women refugees have necessarily opposed to the regime to be obliged to leaves their homeland and seek refuge in neighbouring country. They fled as a result of the continuous shelling and random killing. Many lost their husbands and breadwinners so they had to protect their children.”
Alahdab “Yes – I have visited camps - they have suffered a lot but still their spirits are high- they have said “if we go back we want to fight.” They send their kids back to fight and in some cases if they can they they are doing things like uploading videos of Facebook” | Aqil “Women from cities under continuous shelling, female members of detained activists or martyrs, victims of physical and sexual violence. That may include women from any society or class.”
M.I “So the refugee women are from all types of classes because the regime doesn’t differentiate.”
M.I “Women refugees - They are from all classes. Yesterday I went to that school and I saw a family from Homs – they were a
| How has the changing nature of the conflict affected what women can do? | M.L. “So demonstrations are decreasing because right now it’s a military war – it’s not that peaceful stage anymore... We need to take care of them (refugees), we need to take care of the wounded – we are in a war.” | A.L. “It seems to be going violent and with more violence the less role women have. So if | J.D. “Of course they did participate in the early stages of the uprising, in the demonstrations, and making the signs and the flags, but as you can see I’m focusing a lot on the stage we’re living now which made the roles very different and tide down a lot of the | Aqil “As far as media reports concerned FSA is more affiliated by Islamists, I think that is perhaps the reason to why women are not very visible in those places.” |
M.L. “You can see women sewing the flags, you can see women who write the signs (that you lift up protesting), you can see them having so many roles. But the most roles that they are doing right now is that they are taking care of the refugees (IDPs).”

M.L. “In this stage there is nothing left to do – the Syrian regime is in a war against us so we don’t have anything to do right now at this stage because all of the military... So the roles now for women and men are decreasing because now we are counting on the free Syrian army. We cannot deal with guns, we cannot do anything.”

M.L. “At this stage there are very few roles for women and men civilians – it’s a war. Like yesterday I couldn’t get out of the house because there was bombing and shooting so I couldn’t go out of the house to do anything. SO the roles right now are decreasing because all the work is for the FSA. SO I am like a normal person I cannot just take a gun and go out. So I movements that started about a year ago because in these times we have to make the lives of the people our first priority, so the only thing we think about is how to provide food and shelter to those who had to leave their homes or even lost them.”

M.L. “Actually the first months of the uprising the poorer classes – they were the most effective in the demonstrations and in the revolution. So what the regime tried to do was quench the uprising by military arms. They (poor neighbourhoods) were under siege for weeks and they actually are devastated right now. Much of the women have lost their children and it’s actually so devastating.”

M.L. “There’s nothing left to do actually for them because they
hope that this war ends very very shortly because I miss my role actually. I miss my roles going out in the street and protesting and doing peaceful stuff without any guns, blood... Us civilians now we cannot do anything because it’s between the two army’s the Syrian army and the FSA.”

J.D “demonstrations ... as the reaction of the government became more and more aggressive the female participation was becoming less active on the ground and more active on the cyber space.”

M.L “Now we are trying as much as we can to keep our role going for peaceful protestors and doing like we were doing about 6 months ago. So right now we are just sitting and waiting and reporting news about what is happening out there.”

Alahdab “There has been a lack of support for those (poor) women, combined with rape, beatings etc – now they are afraid to even go out to the street.”

have done their part already. So it’s now our part – the middle classes – it’s now our part to help them and to make them feel at home here in Damascus.”

Alahdab “However if they have the money – although they are trapped inside they have things such as Facebook.”