
CONSTRUCTING THE NATION: GENDER BIAS AND MASCULINITY IN SYRIAN NATIONALISM

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ABSTRACT

This is a revisionist study of Syrian nationalism. At the heart of this intellectual enterprise is an examination of the inherent and ingrained masculinist bias. While teasing out this aspect, I enquire about the basis of this prejudice. The masculinist interpretation of nationalism and its dissemination across Syrian society is, I argue, a result of the ideological foundations that took place over half a century (from 1920 to 1970). I seek to explore the status of women through investigating the nexus between the constructions of masculinity and nationalism, grounded in the imaginative anticipation of the nation within its nationalist narrative.

The research paradigm underlying this study includes elements from perspectives of historical and comparative approaches, and critique of ideology. By philosophically engaging with the works of three key Ba'athist ideologues, I demonstrate the nature and character of that skewed nationalism. Consequently, this thesis documents the systematic masculinisation of conceptions of nationhood by Syria's three founding fathers: Sāṭi' al-Ḥuṣrī (1879–1968), Michel 'Aflaq (1910–89) and Zakī al-Arsūzī (1899–1968),¹ and how their ideologies impacted later national narratives in the political and cultural contexts. In critically analysing the philosophical origin of Syrian nationalism in the writings of these three Syrian thinkers, the thesis investigates how masculinism is constructed in its narrative, reinforcing boundaries that question national belonging and identity. The thesis uses the phases of Syrian cultural and political nationalism to see how masculinism was further constructed in the early state formation in both the constitutional and legal narratives. It also investigates how the perpetuation of a masculinist ethos, which defines national identity and belonging,

¹ Henceforth al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi, respectively.

was further reflected in the state-consolidation stage through conceptualising nationalist songs as political symbols that designate politics of gender exclusion and inclusion. In so doing, it highlights the role of early Ba'athist theoreticians in perpetuating an ideology based on idealising manhood, hegemony and hierarchy as the basis of national identity.

This dominance of masculinised national belonging and membership is intimately linked with the normalisation of militarism that configures men as patriarchal figures and political leaders of both the family and state. More importantly, investigating the process of nation formation in its three stages (theoretical, political and cultural) intersects with the missing representation of women, and this thesis highlights the overlap between this process and the rite of passage to manhood, as the realisation of national consciousness becomes juxtaposed with men's heroic achievements. Thus, this thesis is about investigating the construction and perpetuation of masculinism in Syrian nationalism.

DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this thesis is my own and has not been submitted either in whole or in part for the award of a higher degree elsewhere. Any sections of the thesis which have been published are clearly identified.

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وَفَوْقَ كُلِّ ذِي عِلْمٍ عَلِيمٌ

(... but over all those endowed with knowledge is the All-Knowing²)

It is often said that doing a PhD is for achieving the all-important title “Dr”, but in my case more than ten years ago I thought of getting a PhD as a life-saving card, a winning lottery card of dreams and an empowering tool, particularly for me as a woman. Dreaming of getting a scholarship in Syria meant that I had to get the highest GPA and go through an excruciating selection process, most of the time being questioned by the intelligence services. In Syria, it is not only your academic excellence that secures you the chance of getting a scholarship but, more importantly, it is your readiness to subjugate yourself to the Ba'athist regime. For these reasons in particular, this PhD journey has been empowering in many ways, but at the same time could not have been achieved without the support and encouragement of my family, friends and academic network.

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² QS 12: 76.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In a landmark speech before the heads and members of grass-roots organisations and parliamentarians on 26 July 2015, Bashar al-Assad, the current Syrian president, emphasised the relationship between sacrificial heroism, militarism, national membership and belonging. He said “[t]he fatherland is not for those who live in it or hold its nationality, but for those who defend and protect it”, pointing out that “the army, in order to be able to perform its duties and counter terrorism, must be supported by the human element” (*Al-Jazeera Mubasher*, 2015). Three major themes can be deduced from this speech. First, the conception of fatherland is intimately linked with the readiness to die for the nation. Second, this sacrifice requires martial ability and physical strength, by which both national membership and belonging are measured. Third, in this speech President Assad was praising the army and asking society to appreciate its accomplishments.

While this speech was given during the ongoing Syrian crisis, these perceptions of national identity and belonging are not an outcome of the Syrian war. Rather, President Assad’s definition of who deserves to be Syrian rings many bells from the past. In fact, his definition not only delineates boundaries on a national level between those who support his dictatorship or the opposition but, more importantly, it carries expectations and ideals of national identity. In other words, these notions of sacrificial heroism and readiness to die build an image of a martial man. However, such a construction is not very different from what any ordinary Syrian has experienced in the last four decades.

I was initially drawn to the subject of nationalism by the importance it played in reinforcing the cult of Ba'athism³ during my primary and secondary school education. An example rich in perpetuating masculinist belonging is the compulsory conscription to the two Ba'ath-affiliated organisations: the Syrian National Organisation for Childhood (*tala'e'e*) during the primary stage and the Revolutionary Youth Union (*al-shabibah*) in high school.⁴ These two organisations used to mobilise children through enforced training and membership in paramilitary groups that perpetuated ideals of masculinist militarism, conceptualising them as expressions of nationhood. More related to the cult of subjugation was a weekly compulsory session dedicated to teaching pupils about how to become an active Ba'athist through using a Kalashnikov, and how to show their love for both the nation and the leader, particularly through celebrating a physically strong body. This was accompanied by 15 days of compulsory summer camp that gave male students extra time to learn about the soldierly life, in an attempt to prepare them for compulsory army conscription when they finished high school. Meanwhile, female students would attend sessions that taught us about the glorious past of our nation as associated with the heroic deeds of men.

Moreover, during enforced mass marches to celebrate the “great leader” (Hafez al-Assad during my childhood) and his achievements, we learned by heart the slogan:

³ This is just to note that this thesis has not followed a particular transliteration style, yet I have depended in my transliteration on my Damascene accent.

⁴ These two organisations were created by the Ba'ath regime and affiliated with the Ba'ath Party in Syria. *Tal'e'e al-Ba'ath*, the Syrian National Organisation for Childhood, is a popular educational organisation that includes Syrian children from the first to the sixth grade of primary education. The organisation used to indoctrinate children and perpetuate Ba'athist ideals through enforcing them to practice extracurricular activities in the various avant-garde centres, such as summer camps and clubs. The organisation was founded in 1974 under the guidance of the late president, Hafez al-Assad. The Revolutionary Youth Union (*al-shabibah*) was founded in 1970. It includes Syrian youth from 13 to 35 years old and aims to reinforce the ethos of national struggle, revolution and defence. These two organisations used to include lessons about soldiering and militarism, with a special focus on the achievements of Hafez al-Assad and the Ba'ath Party.

“with blood and soul, we sacrifice ourselves for you, Hafez”,⁵ another example of how expressions of nationhood were identified with masculinist achievements. These nationalist songs celebrating the heroic deeds of men and their strength and bravery posit that the nation is an entity formed only by men’s accomplishments. In fact, these incidents used to affect my sense of belonging and identity, as if my existence was blurred by the leader’s physical strength, prowess and patriarchal authority (as Hafez al-Assad was portrayed as the father of the nation). This interplay between loving and belonging to the nation, measured by the readiness to sacrifice and die, constructed an image of the heroic man as the ideal citizen. Moreover, the dominating image of the heroic soldier perpetuates masculinity as the accepted norm in Syrian society. This masculinity, presented by the agglomeration of strong men, is subordinated by the portrayal of Hafez al-Assad as the father and leader of men. In turn, such a cult of masculinity and hegemonic masculinity obscures women’s belonging to the nation.⁶ Nonetheless, this perpetuation of masculinised belonging and identity also has a spatial dimension, as one must wonder while walking along the streets in Syria that the dominance of the colour khaki with the portrait of Hafez al-Assad is a symbol of man’s strength and heroism.

It must be noted, however, that these illustrations are just a few examples of how nationalism is essential to be conceived as an exclusivist ideology that ignites conflicts of belonging and identity. Hence, my having lived in a strong nationalist context, this thesis is guided by my personal enquiry of nationalism such as: What does “Syria” mean to me, an insider-outsider? To answer this question, I will start by providing a definition of Syrian nationalism in line with investigating the construction

⁵ This slogan was drummed into us in all the mass marches.

⁶ Definitions of masculinity, masculinism and hegemony will be explored in detail in Chapter Three.

of masculinism in its narrative. More specifically, I will investigate how the position of women in early national narratives is reflected in both Syrian politics and culture.

As a first step towards pursuing this argument, this thesis starts with the conception that the early formation of the nation-state in Syria includes an interaction with a national ideology imposed from above. To borrow Hinnebusch's words on the creation of Syria as a state, it is likened to "a 'Bonapartist' regime – a postrevolutionary authoritarian regime standing 'above' classes and presiding over the formation of a strong new state and the transition from a feudal order to a more, complex society" (1989: 302). Regarding the different historical trajectory taken by some post-colonial Middle Eastern nation-states, Wedeen comments on the enigma of understanding how nationalism is used in an artificially constructed space such as the Middle East:

In many areas of the Middle East, nationalism became a politically potent force before artificial borders were carved out of a weakened Ottoman Empire. ... Ethnic and regional diversities and loyalties to tribe, sect, or locale make the integrative task of many states in the Middle East difficult. (1999: 16)

Such difficulty is faced particularly by the Syrian state in its continuous attempt to adopt a national narrative that legitimises its circumscribed boundaries and justifies the need to manufacture a state-centred national consciousness. In this context, the modern creation of the Syrian state has appropriated a national ideology in an attempt to create a connection among its ethnically, religiously and racially heterogeneous subjects.

As such, in the aftermath of the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, Syria was created as a nation-state in the 20th century without a previously existing nationalist basis. This emerged nationalism is a manifestation of a state that is apparently very advanced and officially secular (Gilbert, 2013; Wedeen, 1999: 16). While nationalism has often been considered by scholars as a political ideology perpetuated and imposed from above (Gellner, 1983; Anderson, 2006) on "a certain kind of modern territorial

state” (Hobsbawm, 1990: 9), adopting Hobsbawm’s conception of how to approach the question of understanding the emergence of nationalism is that it “cannot be understood unless also analysed from below” (1990: 10). That view from below, i.e. the narrative, will be deconstructed in its early emergence in the writings of the three founding fathers of Syrian nationalism (al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi) and examined for its impact on the lives of half of Syrians (i.e. women). Hence, this thesis is about the historical production and lineages of nationalism and how it later becomes consolidated and perpetuated by the state in its political laws and popular culture.

The exceptional case for studying nationalism in Syria and its relation to the subordinate status of women in both state and society lies in the fact that nationalism is being formalised and established by a state that is officially secular. As such, what is astonishing is that, despite Syrian women officially having become enfranchised in 1949 – much earlier than Swiss women, who did not obtain the right to vote until 1971 – even when conceived as members of the political realm, their citizenship is somewhat hypothetical as they are in no way ensured equality with men. These early suffrage rights given to women in post-colonial states did not ensure women equal rights or justice. According to Manea, this early recognition of women’s right to vote in most post-colonial Arab states contradicts their reluctance to recognise women as equal citizens (except in Tunisia and Morocco) (2011: 1).

Nonetheless, one might think that, given the official secularity of the Syrian state, issues related to gender equality and women’s empowerment would have different outcomes compared to other Arab and Islamic countries. In other words, from an external perspective, Syria appears to be a highly modern state with a notion of nationalism that is unbiased in issues related to gender, ethnicity and religion. Yet, when secularity is applied to women’s rights, Syria proves to be no different from other

developing countries and ranks among the lowest when it comes to how women are portrayed, treated and constructed. This is reflected in The Global Gender Gap 2011, a report by the World Economic Forum, which states that Syria ranks 124 out of 135 countries in terms of the disparity in gender equality regarding fundamental categories related to basic rights, such as education, health, political empowerment and economic participation (Hausmann, Tyson & Zahidi, 2011: 149).

Some studies conducted on the gender gap in the Syrian context have attributed the subordinate position of Syrian women to the repressive political climate created by the authoritarian Ba'ath regime (Manea, 2011; Meininghaus, 2016) or to the patriarchal values invested in society (van Ejik, 2016). The fact that nationalism is overlooked from a gender perspective has impelled me to turn to the great works of the political founding fathers of modern Syrian nationalism, with two overarching questions in mind: first, how does Syrian nationalism construct women in its narratives? and second, how does the early emergence of nationalism in Syria impact women's status in both the political and cultural narratives? Indeed, the gender bias traced in the early theorisations of Syrian nationalism by its founding fathers is reflected in how women are perceived as less worthy than men in terms of citizenship rights in both the Constitution and legislation. Moreover, in the cultural narrative this thesis provides extensive analysis of dominant nationalist songs as symbols of the masculinisation of the nation. In pursuing this argument, the next section aims to review how the question of women's status has been tackled in both the Syrian and the Middle Eastern contexts, and whether nationalism was investigated as a national ideology imposed from above to sustain women's subordination.

1.2 Literature review

This section aims to highlight how the question of women, particularly in the Syrian context and generally in the Arabic one, has been tackled in historical and contemporary scholarship.⁷ Taking into account both English and Arabic sources, as a starting point it is necessary to illustrate that when I embarked on my research in 2013, scholarship on Syrian women was scattered and scant due to the years of dictatorship and despotism.⁸ No curricula have been developed to assess the situation of women in Syria and, moreover, even the opportunity to conduct a survey or gather ethnographic data is predominantly monitored and constricted (see Wedeen, 1999; El-Attrache, 1976; Hinnebusch, 2008).⁹ Yet, with few exceptions, the scholarship concerned with the subordinate status of Syrian women can be divided into two schools: historical, emerging in the early stage of state formation in Syria from the 1970s to the 1990s, and contemporary scholarship since the 1990s.

Starting with the first school, it seems that authors dealing with the question of women rather accept their normalised subordination and explore their secondary status more than its causes. This school encompasses three studies that generally demonstrate the situation of women in three fields: education, state policy and family. The first study, *an-Nisawīya fi'l-kītab as-Sūrī al-Madrasī 1967–1976 (Feminism in Syrian School*

⁷ It is necessary to note that this literature review is limited to the general background of the question of women in the Syrian context. It does not provide a critical overview of the literature dealing with gender, masculinism and nationalism, which will be dealt with in more detail in Chapter Three. Consequently, this review highlights that the association between nationalism and women is underexamined in the Arab world and further shows that it is not relevant in the Syrian context. Moreover, this oversight of studying Syrian nationalism is not confined to the lack of examining gender relations, but studies dealing with investigating the emergence of nationalism in Syria are also scant (as I will highlight in Chapter Two).

⁸ It is important to note that a plethora of studies on Syrian women have emerged since 2013. These studies range from approaching the refugee crisis from a gender-based approach, as in Freedman et al. (2017), or highlighting women's role in the Syrian uprising, as in Yazbek (2012).

⁹ It has also been noted that, in every piece of fieldwork done in Syria, the researchers have described their difficulty in carrying out the research due to the Syrian intelligence agencies (*Mukhabarāt*).

Textbooks 1967–1976) by Nabīl Sulaymān (1978), evaluates how women are perceived in Syrian textbooks in both the primary and secondary stages. His analysis is limited to the exploration of how textbooks both normalise traditional values and show traces of feminism at the same time. Nonetheless, this book evaluates how women are portrayed in school textbooks without offering a critical analysis of the role of the Ba'ath ideology in reinforcing their subordination. The second book, *al-Mar'a al-'Arabīya as-Surīya fī 'ahed al-Mar'a ad-dawlī, 1975–1985* (*The Syrian Arab Woman in the Woman's International Decade, 1975–1985*) by George Tarabishi (1985), is considered a government-conducted study concerned with scoring women's achievements in pursuit of their rights between 1975 and 1985. While this book chronicles women's achievements since the rise of Ba'ath in Syria, it ignores how masculinism is still maintained and how women continue to face challenges to empowerment. In the same vein is the third book, *Tarkīb al-a'ila al-'Arabīya wa Waza'ifūha* (*The Structure and Functions of the Arab Family*) by Mūhammad Safūh Akhras (1976). Akhras, a professor of sociology at the University of Damascus, examined 400 families and their treatment of women. According to his study, conducted in the late 1960s and early 1970s, religion and tradition are behind the slow pace of women's emancipation. Consequently, Akhras concluded that women's subordination is rooted in the Islamic practices followed by most Syrian families, although he used the terms “Islam”, “tradition” and “patriarchy” interchangeably. Hence, while the first two books carried out general assessments of women's status, the third incorporates a relatively critical analysis of the reasons for this subordination, attributing it to the association between religion and patriarchy, yet still without interrogating the dominance of nationalist practices.

This manifestation of critical analysis becomes apparent in the second school of scholarly literature, on Syrian women since 1990s. Among these is a so-called feminist

study by the Ba'athist apologist Bouthina Sha'aban. *Both Right and Left Handed* (1991) is a descriptive survey of women in the Arab world, including a chapter on Syrian women, which fails to examine the hindrances to women's emancipation or the reasons behind their subordinate role. Rather, her examination of women's status is confined to the association between patriarchy, tribalism and religion as sources of women subordination in the Syrian context (1991: 2-4). Sha'aban further examines the status of Syrian women in a chapter in the influential book, *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint* (2003), where she mainly argues that, despite the quota of women in the Syrian parliament, their position remains highly misrepresented and secondary to that of men. This patriarchy is attributed to the divergent nature of the social and religious differences of Syrian society. She explains that, as far as the question of women is concerned, their status cannot be approached separately from the culturally imposed identification of women shaped by religion, place, class, education and traditions (2003: 54). However, Sha'aban's observations in these two studies lack sustained analysis of the roots of this patriarchal system in the early formation of nationalism. At the same time, the disregard of how the Ba'ath ideology is manifested in the nationalist atmosphere in which people are indoctrinated and how it has contributed to the subordination of women stems from her position in the political spectrum as not only a supporter of the Ba'ath ideology, but also a minister.

Beyond the cultural and traditional points of view, another study by Salih J. Altoma investigates the situation of women in literary studies and demonstrates how feminism is a major theme in contemporary Syrian literature. Altoma harshly criticises what he calls the subscription to the Arab-Islamic heritage and the spiritual values of religion as the basis of women's subordination both in Syria and in Arab countries (1991: 81). More importantly, despite his analysis of women's secondary status, tracing

feminism in Syrian literature, his analysis shows a sustained criticism of traditions, religion and culture (1991: 82–91).

More relevant to feminist critical analysis is the study by Fiona Hill in 1997, concerned with demonstrating the advances of Syrian women in both the nationalist and religious discourses. Her analysis is focused on Sunni Muslim women and how they are mobilised within these two discourses (nationalist and Islamic). While she embarks on a neglected topic (nationalism), her perception of nationalist discourse is read in the rise of Islamist discourse in Syrian society and how women gain empowerment in that context. She also shares the view of previous scholarly works that it is from the position of women within their families that women's relationships to citizenship rights are defined (1997: 134–5). Hill's analysis also takes the veil, tradition and Islamic heritage as a measurement of women's status in both the family and state. This tendency to oversimplify the reasons for women's subordination reveals the way women's emancipation is measured through applying the Western model of women's life as the defined and long-term search for achievement (Altoma, 1991: 95).

Similar in nature to the early scholarly literature that was concerned with women's rights in Syria, other studies address the problems of authoritarianism as the main cause of women's subordination. Manea, in her book on the subordination of women in Yemen, Kuwait and Syria, used the birth of the post-colonial authoritarian state as the basis for her theoretical framework to evaluate women's rights in these three countries between 2006 and 2008 (2011: 1–12; see also Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 1999: 1). Manea demonstrates that the puzzle of women's secondary status in these post-colonial states emanates from their authoritarian style of governance. Her focus on the functions of state as a direct cause of gender bias in both the public and private sphere

is rather a top-down approach that disregards the basis or the roots of how the state perpetuates masculinism in its imposed narrative, i.e. nationalism.

Nonetheless, a plethora of other studies that approach the question of women in the Syrian context from a legal point of view highlight the need to reform the law and enact articles that ensure women's equal rights, especially those pertaining to the family and nationality. Such studies investigate the discrimination against women in the legalisation of patriarchy through enacting Sharia laws that emphasise male guardianship, polygamy and the failure to recognise women as full citizens, as they cannot pass their nationality on to their children. While these studies are necessary to highlight the misogynist perception against women inherent in the Syrian legal system, they are still confined to the mainstream in the scholarship on women that attribute religion, tradition and patriarchy as the main reasons for their secondary status in both the private and public spheres (see Manea, 2016; van Ejik, 2016: 85–8; Rabo, 2011: 213–35).

Perhaps the problem when dealing with the scholarly literature on Syrian women is that almost all studies attempt to be conclusive regarding the negative effect of tradition and religion in relegating women's status in state and society. Consequently, these assumptions that the domination of religion and traditional values exclude and relegate women to secondary status in both state and society are monolithic. They represent a narrow view of the reasons behind the subordination of women, which also stems from the lack of research conducted on women (Milton-Edwards, 2006: 200). Moreover, these studies, in their investigation of women's subordination, have adopted a "Eurocentric" perspective in setting the model of women's liberation (Milton-Edwards, 2006: 203). As Milton-Edwards notes, it is not only the lack of works on women in contemporary politics, but also the association of the subject of women with

narrow topics such as women and wearing the headscarf, equality of rights, or legal reform. The impression given from these books is, therefore, that when it comes to telling the story of politics in the Middle East the state, Islam, democracy and the military are all vital ingredients (ibid.).

However, an important study that critically approaches the subject of women's subordination in the Arab world through the lens of nationalism is Milton-Edwards' evaluation of women in contemporary Arab politics (2006). She argues that there is a universal claim regarding the secondary status of women in nationalist ideologies in the third world:

The history of the women's struggle during this period [post-colonial era], then, may be reflected through the lens of nationalism, be it Egyptian, Iraqi, Syrian or Palestinian. As such, the independence, development, progress, setbacks, concrete gains and perceived losses of the movement for women's rights can only be understood by understanding the political climate of the time, which dictated the role that such individuals and movements would have. (2006: 191)

While she highlights that nationalism can be a measurement tool that evaluates women's political and personal gains, instead of deconstructing the national narrative and its inherently historical biases against women, Milton-Edwards attributes the subordination of women to the political climate surrounding the rise of national movements, thereby citing authoritarianism and the predominance of men in the public sphere as the main causes. She conceptualised nationalism as an "expression of patriarchy" (2006: 191), yet there is no systematic examination of how women are marginalised in nationalist narratives. Moreover, she limited her scope to the practices of those who mobilise national ideology – men of power in politics – not to the early theoretical conceptualisation of nationalism in the writings of its philosophers.

Adopting this general scope of nationalism in the Middle East, the book *Social Constructions of Nationalism in the Middle East* (Gocek, 2002) introduces the nexus

between the construction of nationalism and gender from a social perspective. The volume's main argument lies in "arguing that the boundaries of nationalism take shape through a practice of constant negotiation that includes some groups, meanings, and practices and excludes others" (ibid.: 2). Moreover, the volume examines three sites that play significant roles in determining the boundaries of nationalism: narrative, gender and cultural representation (ibid.: 4). While not denying the importance of this book to my proposed study in terms of identifying narrative and gender as the basis for women's inclusion or exclusion in politics, this volume with its ten chapters does not include a case study on Syria that examines the intersection between women's subordination and Syrian nationalism, a gap which this thesis aims to fill.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that the topic of nationalism has been approached through the lens of gender in the context of Egypt. For example, Baron's study (2005) encompasses the nexus between women's subordination and the rise of nationalism as a movement. Baron further emphasises the "ambivalent attitudes" towards nationalism by early scholars of Middle Eastern women's history, while they recognise the absence of women in nationalist narratives, and the response to this oversight was to criticise these national movements (Baron, 2005: 8). Baron's pioneering study in investigating national narratives in the context of Egypt provides a theoretical framework of how the marginalisation of women in national discourse is a tool to evaluate the representation of women in both the private and public spheres. However, despite this study's central focus on both deconstruction of the language of the Egyptian national movement from the 19th century through the revolution of 1919 and into the 1940s, and chronicles the political activities of women nationalists, Baron does not attempt to analyse the construction of national narrative through its ideologues and theoretical founders, which this thesis attempts to do.

In light of the foregoing discussion, the question of women in both the Syrian and the Arab contexts lacks a systematic analysis of the interrelationship between nationalism and gender. Moreover, this general overview of the scholarly literature on the question of Syrian women in both historical and contemporary studies also shares with the Western context the oversight in terms of disregarding the emergence of nationalism as a tool in subjugating women. For example, dominant Western theorisations of the status of women have concluded that women's subordination is an outcome of the essentialist views of women as passive, emotional and weak (Eisenstein, 1985; Pateman, 1988; Lister, 1997: 69; Turner, 1990). Moreover, Suad Joseph (1997) suggests the domination of the kinship system on civil society and the public sphere explains women's subordination. Even when surveying the dominant literature on nationalism in the Western context, one cannot help but notice that gender relations have been considered unrelated (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Okin, 1980).

Consequently, it is not until the emergence of feminist scholarship that deconstruction of nationalist discourse revealed that gender relations are part of nation formation (see Eisenstein, 1979; Elshtain, 1981; Walby 1990; Enloe, 1990; 1993). However, despite this recognition of women's role, these scholars attribute the disregard in Western classical literature on gender about women in the Arab region to the failure to recognise their role in the struggle against colonial powers (see Badran, 1995; Milton-Edwards, 2006: 191; Jayawardena, 1986; Mohanty, 1991: 10; Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 1999: 1). In turn, these studies have concluded that women's hopes that nationalism will finally be their emancipatory tool for autonomy and equal citizenship were rather disappointing (Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 1999: 1). Thus, instead of liberating women, nationalism became a tool used by men in power to restrict them to the private sphere.

Nonetheless, feminist practices in uncovering gender blindness in dominant literature have focused exclusively on chronicling women's experience and contributions to the formation of nations, states and nationalism (Nagel, 1998: 243). An example of this practice can be traced in the introduction to *Feminist Nationalism*, which stresses that the book is a retelling of the historical nationalist movements from a women-centred point of view. The case studies covering nationalist movements from Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Central and East Asia, the Pacific Islands and the Americas provide a reconceptualisation and redefinition of nationalism, nations, states and politics as active participants, and central to the debate (West, 2013: xiii).

However, as Joane Nagel notes in her recognition of this limitation of feminist analyses of nationalism in their exclusive focus on women, the resulting studies failed to examine how masculinism is systematically constructed and perpetuated in "a structural, cultural or social sense" (1998: 244). Hence, this thesis aims to argue that this limited approach to recognising women's place in politics has missed the overarching questions of masculinism that continue to frame politics through the perpetuation of manliness, militarism and sacrifice. Notwithstanding this, ignoring how men and masculinism are constructed within these theorisations becomes problematic in the sense that the nation is composed of two different sexes and notions: males/females and masculine/feminine.

Moreover, it is important to realise from the beginning that the investigation and criticism of the political ideologues in the early part and second half of the 20th century is not an arcane academic pursuit, but an important means of comprehending and unearthing the assumptions behind the deeply rooted modes of thought that continue to affect women's lives in major ways. As previously mentioned, this thesis seeks to identify and understand the complex sources of this subordination by directing

particular attention to the views of the three founding fathers of Syrian nationalism – al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi – who either justify the subordination of women or completely neglect to point it out. The choice of these three thinkers becomes a preliminary step in order to identify the basic pillars of the evolutionary process of Syrian nationalism and its complementary cultural and political phases. In doing so, this thesis posits that nationalism is a male-centred doctrine and consists of writings about men, by men and for men (see section 3.2). McClintock states that “if nationalism is not transformed by an analysis of gender power, the nation-state will remain a repository of male hopes, male aspirations and male privileges” (1993: 77). Thus, this thesis aims to employ the lens of gender to investigate the construction of masculinist ideals in Syrian nationalism.¹⁰

However, accounts of Syrian politics have failed to address the question of how nationalism in Syria has perpetuated masculinism and maintained women’s subordination in state and society; indeed, most of the scholarship tends to ignore the role of nationalism and its implications for how women are portrayed in Syrian laws and culture. This thesis therefore goes beyond this in tackling the question of women in dominant literature and posits that women’s subordination and exclusion from national imagining is inherent in the early philosophical narrative of the Syrian founding fathers. More importantly, stemming from the strong nationalist context that was imposed on Syrians over the last 40 years, it is necessary to analyse systematically the origins of such a nationalist narrative and how women are situated within it. Consequently, this thesis is about investigating the construction of masculinism in the early writings of al-

¹⁰ Well-established volumes in the field of feminism, gender and women in the Middle East are engaged with the topic of nationalism; however, Syria is not one of the case studies. See Joseph, 2000; Meriwether & Tucker, 1999; Moghadam, 2003.

Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi, and the impact of their nationalist ideologies on implanting the subordination of women in both the political and the cultural contexts in Syria.

1.3 Aims and objectives

In light of the foregoing discussions, the main purpose of this thesis is to understand how women have been portrayed in both formal and informal nationalist thought and everyday politics, by investigating the writings of the three aforementioned Syrian thinkers. The role that their national ideologies plays in reinforcing women's subordination in the official national narrative of the Ba'ath regime is central to the investigation. The aim is then to use the analysis of these early philosophical theorisations of Syrian nationalism to present a contemporary understanding of how women are perceived in Syrian politics and culture, assess the importance of deconstructing the secular national narrative in Syria, and engage with other important concepts, such as identity, belonging and power on a theoretical level.

In terms of theory, this thesis will engage with the views of established theorists such as Benedict Anderson (2006) and Homi Bhabha (1990) in order to investigate women's absence in national imagining (see 3.4.1 and 3.4.2). Moreover, it also engages with the theory of Nira Yuval-Davis (1997), which conceptualises the intersection of women and nationalism, in order to assess Syrian nationalism in its early emergence (3.4.4). Thus, this thesis deals with three national narratives. First, the philosophical/historical narrative to investigate the origin of Syrian nationalism through identifying its national concepts with the early emergence of nationalism in the two universal schools of thought, Germanic and French. This interrogation of the origin of Syrian nationalism will then pave the way for a systematic analysis of the philosophical theorisations of the three Syrian thinkers and questioning about how women have been constructed in their national ideologies. Second is the political narrative to investigate

how Syrian nationalism with its gender biases persists in the first permanent Syrian Constitution and legislation. Third, the cultural narrative, taking nationalist songs as an arena that reflects the characteristics of Syrian nationalism and its masculinist nature, the construction of which is considered in theory not in practice.

The analysis of these narratives unearths the masculinist conceptions that disregard the cultural role of women, marginalise their historical struggle, and essentialise their existence as naturally inferior, which in turn has played an enormous part in reinforcing chauvinistic values in Syrian political and cultural narratives. Such perceptions are contextually linked with the elevation of militarism, which is measured by men's physical power, strength and masculinity. The importance of the army as an institution in state formation is not only a product of the regime's dictatorship, but is emphasised and incorporated in the dominant ideology of Syrian nationalism.¹¹ The examination of the construction of masculinism in these three narratives will be through investigating the manifestation of the cultural and political phases. The cultural phase is identified by conceptualising language, history and education (i.e. perpetuating militarism, as explained later in this thesis) as main components of the cultural formation of the nation. The political phase is identified by struggle, pain, sacrifice and the ideal man. These pillars of Syrian nationalism are full of masculinist connotations.

Furthermore, this thesis not only criticises the masculinist conceptions in the narratives of the founding fathers of Syrian nationalism, but also aims to establish three overarching themes. First, most theorisations of nation and nationalism have ignored or justified the subordination of women (Aldoughli, 2014; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Okin, 1980), and Syrian national thought – ideologically borrowed from the two European

¹¹ For more on the role of the army in the Syrian context, see Batatu (1981).

schools of thought (Germanic and French) – is no different (see Chapter Two). Second, the cultural conceptualisation of the nation as an extension of the family reinforces gender hierarchy in both the private and public spheres (Baron, 2005). Third, the construction of the ideal image of the Ba'athist man based on militarism and hierarchy in the political phase is juxtaposed with the lack of women's attainment of citizenship rights, which reinforces the masculinist conception of national membership and national belonging.

1.4 Hypothesis and rationale

I hypothesise that the analysis of Syrian national narratives in the writings of the three Syrian thinkers will enable us to grasp the production of gendered nationhood in Syria and to explore the politics of belonging and identity later reinforced in Syrian politics (Chapter Five) and culture (Chapter Six). In pursuit of identifying and understanding the complex sources of women's subordination, I directed my attention to the views of the Syrian nationalist ideologues in order to provide an answer to what Syrian nationalism is and how its narrative problematises women's national belonging and identity. In the process of examining their writings, it can be seen that these thinkers either ignored women's contributions to nation formation, justified their subordination, or completely neglected to address the issue. In so doing, we can conclude that political writings need reform and a complete rethinking of what defines national identity and belonging. Thus, this thesis grounds itself primarily in nationalism theory, the importance of which has so far been ignored by scholars conducting studies on gender in contemporary Syria. This has, no doubt, contributed to a failure to explain why women have subordinate status in both the state and society.

Given the above, since Syria is a mosaic of ethnicities, religions, sects and nationalities, the relationship between these divided identities has not always been easy.

The only glue that has kept them united is state-sponsored nationalism. This thesis is a critical assessment of that binding identity orchestrated by the state and imposed from above. The argument, which is systematically developed on this basis, is that nationalism is conceived as a perpetuated form of political behaviour, propagated, maintained and reinforced in the context of establishing and modernising the state. To conceptualise nationalism as a form of politics is to “relate nationalism to the objectives of obtaining and using state power” (Bruilly, 1993: 1). Power, in this context, is principally about “control of state” (ibid). In essence, this work examines the very basis of this nationalism and its exclusion of half of Syria (i.e. women). It proposes reasons for why Syrian nationalism is gender-specific and why women have been denied equality in the formation of national identity.

More importantly, the rationale of this thesis stems from the complex situation currently surrounding Syria, as it is a nation in the remaking. Consequently, the process of reconstructing and regenerating national identity prompts us to question how national identity has been defined and constituted in the second half of the 20th century to the present. This will lead to further reflections on how the reconstruction of the national narrative can be distanced from the entrenched masculinisation of Syrian national identity and belonging. Since national narratives are not fixed constructs but open to multiple interpretations, allowing for investing them with altered meanings, free of masculinist hierarchy and privilege, is a necessary step forward. This research will reveal that the national narratives that have dominated Syria and have been mobilised, practised and reinforced by the Ba'ath are in need of drastic revision. In other words, the deconstruction of what I might call the “official” story or narrative propagated by these three Syrian thinkers will help in generating a new theory as the investigation of the construction of masculinism in the Syrian context departs from existing analytical

perspectives. The aim is therefore to contribute to deciphering the complexity of Syrian nationalism and its masculinist character as well as to highlight new findings within what has so far been a neglected research area.

Moreover, the departure point of this thesis is that, despite scholars approaching nationalism in the Syrian context by debating its origins using different methodological approaches,¹² no study has investigated the construction of gender bias (Chapter Two) and how early national narratives in the writings of the Syrian founding fathers have implicated the secondary status of women in Ba'athist Syria (chapters Four, Five and Six).

However, before we turn to the outline and method of this thesis, it is important to emphasise what it does not cover. Theoretically speaking, the rise of Islamist narrative in Syrian society, although related to women's subordination, falls outside the scope of this thesis since the official narrative of the Ba'ath regime has been secular (see Khatib, 2011).¹³ In the same vein, despite the Ba'ath regime's mobilised religious rhetoric in order to garner legitimacy and support, the subject of religion in the Syrian context is simply too vast to include. When religion is referred to in Chapter Five in relation to legislation, it is made clear that it is used as a tool by the regime to garner legitimacy and control. Moreover, there is a need to emphasise that, although feminism as a movement in the Syrian context is in need of scholarly investigation, this thesis is not a feminist critique of the dominant theorisations of nation and nationalism. In the same vein, it does not aim to rethink nationalism from a feminist perspective. Rather, it

¹² Most scholarly literature has conceived nationalism in Syria as a variant of Arabism or Syrianism (the ideology of the Fertile Crescent). Further details of these conceptions will be outlined in Chapter Two, section 2.2.

¹³ For more on the rise of Islamist narrative in Syria during the Ba'ath regime and after the Syrian Uprising, see Imady (2016).

posits that having theorised the nation and national narrative in egalitarian terms, gender bias could have been avoided later.

This thesis is also limited to the sources available with respect to the writings of Syrian thinkers. In other words, it restricts its investigation to only the aforementioned three, as other nationalists – such as Qustantine Zurayk and Salah al-Bitar – did not publish their writings and, despite influencing the formation of Ba'athism in the 1940s, their impact on national narrative in contemporary Syria is rather narrow.

In the data used in Chapter Six, not all national symbols will be assessed. Instead, the focus will be on national songs, as their importance is most evident and effective in the Syrian context. By analysing national songs, we see how components of Syrian nationalism are reinforced in their narrative. Moreover, these songs are used as a propaganda tool by the Ba'ath party, which in turn demonstrates the importance of analysing the impact of early national narratives on women's status in Syria. It is important to note that in the Syrian context only two prominent studies have been generated to focus on Syrian national symbols, those by Wedeen (1999) and Gilbert (2013). However, these studies disregard gender or women's representation in their analysis. Hence, much research still needs to be done about the perpetuation of masculinism in Syrian national symbols, such as statues, national holidays, ceremonies and street names. Moreover, research should also be done about the reaction of women and how they challenge the masculinisation of Syrian culture (see Golley, 2007; Arenfeldt & Golley, 2012). It seems that there have been no concrete studies raising these questions, but they lie beyond the scope of this thesis, which aims to define masculinism as a group of actions signified by the celebration of physical strength, prowess and sacrifice (see 3.3.2).

The attempt to stress that this thesis is about the construction of masculinity rather than gender stems from my investigation of how Syrian nationalism evolves from reinforcing the message that creation of the nation-state is simultaneous with the passage from manhood to citizenship.¹⁴ In addition, this thesis is not about the nature of the Ba'ath Party, its history, ideology and policy, or about the Ba'ath regime particularly or about demonstrating its authoritarianism. Rather, it is about the conceptualisation of the nation and how this has been imagined in its philosophical, political and cultural narratives. However, despite these limitations, I seek to explore the status of women by investigating the nexus between the constructions of masculinity and nationalism, grounded in the imaginative anticipation of the nation within its nationalist narrative.

1.5 Method and outline

Implicit in the focus of this investigation is the assumption that nationalism in Syria has developed as a necessary component of the establishment and consolidation of the nation-state. As an ideology, nationalism takes its role in inventing national solidarities and in identifying gender roles. Seen as a means of perpetuating masculinity, it could be of great value to analyse how nationalism in Syria has constructed essentialist perceptions about women to legitimise their subordinate status in the state and society. Within the perspective of the thesis, I have asked, first, what is Syrian nationalism, and situated it historically by identifying the origins of its basic characteristics. This interrogation of its ideological basis requires a systematic exploration of the writings of three European thinkers: Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) and Ernest Renan (1823–92). Thus, interrogating the basis of Syrian

¹⁴ For more on the difference between gender and masculinity, see Chapter Three.

nationalism in the European tradition is necessary to provide the form of its official narrative and to identify its basic characteristics.

Related to the first enquiry, the second question is whether the early writings of Syrian nationalist thinkers have sustained the inclusion of women in their national theories, and if not, why. For if the works that form the basis of Syrian national thought continue to reflect, maintain and reinforce the unequal position of women, I must investigate how their conceptions are inherently connected with the idea that women are not equal to men and how such perceptions are reflected in the political and cultural narratives (chapters Five and Six). In this study, the political narrative encompasses the revisiting of the constitutional and legal narratives that question the concept of citizenship as it applies to women. The cultural realm is related to the question how the nation is symbolically constructed in Syrian nationalist songs.

Consequently, this thesis covers three stages of Syrian history which each stand for a narrative. The first stage, nation formation, ranges from 1920 to 1970. In this stage, the analysis is focused on deconstructing the philosophical narrative of Syrian nationalism through defining its origins, basic characteristics, phases and concepts. The second stage ranges from the 1970s to the 1990s and encompasses the state formation manifested by the ascendance of the Ba'ath party as the sole leading party in Syria, and its rule marks the birth of the Syrian state. In this stage, I will interrogate how women are perceived and constructed in the political narrative by analysing the first permanent Syrian Constitution (1973). Finally, the third stage signals state consolidation, which is achieved through reinforcing national symbols by the Ba'ath regime. In this cultural narrative, I will investigate the narrative of Syrian nationalist songs and how they reinforce the masculinist tenets of Syrian nationalism.

The research paradigm underlying this study includes elements from perspectives of historical and comparative approaches, and critique of ideology (Harvey, 1983). A historical approach has been chosen since, as mentioned above, the idea of nationalism in Syria can be traced back to the Germanic and French philosophical schools. As a starting point in this thesis, the historical approach will be used with a comparative to allow for an investigation of the origins and evolution of Syrian nationalism, as well as for interrogating how the comparison between the aforementioned European thinkers and al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi identifies the basic tenets of Syrian nationalism that will later be manifested in the Ba'athist political and cultural narratives.

Linked with the historical and comparative approaches, a critique of ideology can help to reveal the origin and the formation processes of the development of nationalism. The method of ideology critique allows for the fact that nationalism is not exclusively a product of society, rather an ideology generated from the ideas and thoughts of national theorists. The theoretical, historical and comparative methodological premises are therefore to contextualise and historicise the foundations of national narratives, to lay open their masculinist constructs and to criticise their ideological impact that manifest practically in Syrian politics.

The choice of thinkers examined in this study is a little more complicated. It involves a two-stage process. First, in order to investigate the construction of masculinism in Syrian national narratives, and in order to conceptualise the early emergence of nationalism in Syria with the dominant ideology of Ba'athism, one has to focus on how the idea of the nation and nationalism first emerged as a whole. This is reflected in the choice to investigate al-Husri's national ideology, as it forms the basis of the two founding fathers of Ba'athism (Aflaq and al-Arsuzi) in Syria. Second, in

order to reach a deeper understanding of the role played by national narratives in reinforcing masculinism, hegemony and hierarchy, these interrogations of the origins of Syrian nationalism are followed with an in-depth analysis of both language and national concepts. Moreover, these thinkers are explored because they represent different yet complementary paths to nationhood, in ways that are manifested later.

Generally speaking, these thinkers have been selected on the basis that together they illustrate the complexity of nation formation in the Syrian context and, more importantly, the perpetuation of masculinism in their theorisations. Moreover, in order to illuminate how deconstructing the masculinist narratives of the three Syrian thinkers is related to contemporary Syria, the Constitution is chosen as the political narrative that defines citizenship in Syria in relation to women. This has been enhanced by analysing the cultural narrative through using national songs as an arena that reflects the components of Syrian nationalism.

To support this argument, philosophical, historical and contemporary primary and secondary sources have been used. The methodological strategies will include an extensive literature review, and primary and secondary analysis. This selection will provide the best range of sources to understand the evolution of Syrian nationalism and the perpetuation of a masculinist ethos and values in its narratives. This method of inquiry is especially significant in providing solid information on the role of the Syrian founding fathers and their perceptions and viewpoint of nationalism on subordinating women in state and society. The literature review provided in Chapter Three provides an academic background to the exclusivist nature of nationalism and builds the theoretical framework and approaches for this study through identifying the two theoretical and analytical pillars of this investigation, i.e. nation as narrated and imagined construct (see sections 3.4.1 and 3.4.2).

The primary sources of this thesis are based on books written by the three Syrian thinkers, all published in Arabic. The importance of these sources is that no scholarly investigation has been made of their use of language and how they are gender-biased. Thus, analysing these thinkers' writings in Arabic is essential to provide a novel study of whether the subject of women is neglected in terms of the use of language and content (as in al-Husri and Aflaq), or if their language reflects gender essentialism (as in al-Arsuzi). Moreover, the use of these primary sources for analysing the constitution of nationalism in Syria is rather novel and pioneer.

Secondary sources have been collected from among the following origins: philosophical schools of thought, works on nationalism and masculinism, key documents for national theories, primary sources of al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi, key reports on the legal status of women, and YouTube channels for data. It is important to mention that, as the original works of the three Syrian thinkers are only published and available in Arabic, any quotes used from their works are translated by me, unless otherwise stated. Moreover, nationalist songs are also in Arabic and are translated into Arabic by me for the purpose of this analysis.¹⁵

1.6 Chapter schemes

I have already set out in this chapter the nature of the discussion in the thesis. The following summaries demonstrate each subsequent chapter's main points, structure and questions.

¹⁵ The songs chosen for this study are the most common and the ones used by the regime as part of the education stages. They were forced on us at primary and secondary school, and during national celebrations. I faced a difficulty in finding the exact dates of their release, but these songs were all created and broadcast since the rise of the Ba'ath regime in Syria. They have gained increasing popularity after the Syrian Uprising, as used by the regime to reinforce the cult of Ba'athism. As a response to the regime's practice and as evidence of the popularity of these songs in Syrian culture, the opposition reproduced these songs (keeping the same rhythm and music) with different words and themes to challenge the regime's authority. This reproduction proves the dominance of the songs and the internalisation of their ethos in general in the Syrian population.

1.6.1 Chapter Two

This chapter focuses on two interrelated questions. First, it asks: what does Syrian nationalism mean? To answer this, it engages with the contemporary debates surrounding the idea of nationalism in Syria. It contextualises its ideological borrowings from three European thinkers – Herder, Fichte and Renan – and examines how they influenced the emergence of the idea of nationalism in Syria through the writings of its founding fathers, al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi. This intellectual interrogation of the origins of Syrian national thought aims to place it in a broader historical context by critiquing previous literature that ties Syrian national thought to Arabism or Syrianism. It also highlights the limitations of previous approaches to Syrian national thought and explains why the idea of nationalism in Syria should be studied as a separate ideology. By examining these ideological borrowings, we move to the second question regarding the components of Syrian nationalism, which highlights how it is composed of two overlapping yet contradictory cultural and political phases. More importantly, this chapter will form the ideological basis for understanding the construction of masculinist national belonging and identity in the political and cultural narratives. I will employ the findings of this chapter as a starting point for investigating how masculinism is constructed in these two cultural and political phases.

1.6.2 Chapter Three

Chapter Three begins by exploring the relationship between gender and nationalism. It also examines the theoretical literature that discusses the exclusivist nature of nationalism in general. It sets out the approach and the theory employed to analyse the national ideologies of Syrian thinkers and later narratives. It also explores how masculinism is constructed in national narratives. Moreover, this chapter demonstrates the employment of two ground-breaking studies conceptualising the nation as an imagined entity and a narration (Anderson, 2006; Bhabha, 1990). More importantly, the

chapter provides theoretical definitions and related conceptions of the most-used terms in the thesis, such as masculinism, gender, hierarchy and hegemony. Thus, it sets the stage for a common understanding in reading the thesis.

1.6.3 Chapter Four

This chapter is a systematic analysis of the writings of the three Syrian founding fathers and their national ideologies. It reviews the main currents of Syrian national thought on the nation and nationalism in extensive detail, analysing and deconstructing the traces of masculinist conceptions in the national narrative in its first stage. It further investigates how women are constructed and portrayed in the early theorisations of Syrian nationalism. In this sense, the analysis takes into consideration the cultural and political phases of the evolution of Syrian nationalism. By deconstructing the language and national concepts of these three Syrian thinkers, not only do the two components of Syrian nationalism prevail, but also this investigation provides an overview of women's status in the early emergence of a Syrian national narrative. More importantly, this chapter sets the stage for later analysis of national narratives in both the political and cultural arenas. Having interrogated women's status in both the cultural and political phases of Syrian nationalism, the findings are closely linked to how women are constructed in the political narrative.

1.6.4 Chapter Five

Following the investigation of the theoretical construction of nation and nationalism and how masculinism prevails as the main identifier of national identity and belonging, Chapter Five shows how the marginalisation of women in the philosophical narrative of the nation is reflected in the constitutional narrative. This chapter aims to question how the main tenets of Syrian national thought are planted in the political narrative and, as a result, how women are perceived as inferior citizens to men. Moreover, this chapter

highlights the dominance of hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy and hierarchy as incorporated in the perpetuation of militarism and sacrificial heroism as the basis of citizenship. In this sense, the chapter has three overarching themes: exploring the manifestation of Syrian nationalism in the constitutional narrative; investigating women's relationship to citizenship; and highlighting how militarism, masculinity and hierarchy are the main characteristics of national membership and the source of women's subordination in both the private and the public spheres. In the process of interrogating these three themes, this chapter will deconstruct the language used in the Syrian Constitution (1973) and the contradiction between constitutional rights and legislation related to personal, labour, penal and nationality issues.

1.6.5 Chapter Six

Chapter Six investigates how women are perceived in the symbolic construction of the nation. It examines national songs, the anthem and flag as integral parts of identity-making in this stage of state consolidation. Moreover, in investigating the relationship between the early emergence of Syrian nationalism and the construction of masculinist national identity in nationalist songs after the ascendance of the Ba'ath regime, this chapter will use nationalist songs as an arena that reflects the marginalisation of Syrian women in public culture. Hence, this chapter is concerned with the conceptualisation of the nation as an "imagined listening community" (Anderson, 2006) harnessed through aural production of nationalist songs as a means of political domination, while at the same time perpetuating symbols of hierarchy and masculinism.

1.6.6 Chapter Seven

I conclude the thesis in Chapter Seven, where I summarise the main contributions of the thesis, reflect on my position as a researcher, and highlight avenues for future research.

This thesis aims to answer five research questions; the following sets out these questions and where they will be answered.

RQ1: What is Syrian nationalism and how is it ideologically borrowed from the two European schools of thought: Germanic and French? (Chapter Two.)

RQ2: What role does nationalism play in marginalising women from national memory and imagining? (Chapter Three.)

RQ3: What role do the three Syrian thinkers play in perpetuating masculinism in national narratives? (Chapter Four.)

RQ4: How has masculinism in early national narratives influenced the construction of women in both constitutional and legal narratives? (Chapter Five.)

RQ5: Do nationalist songs contribute to the construction of masculinist nationalism or masculinist identities? (Chapter Six.)

CHAPTER TWO

INTERROGATING THE IDEOLOGICAL BORROWINGS IN THE SYRIAN NATIONALIST NARRATIVES: SATI AL-HUSRI, MICHEL AFLAQ AND ZAKI AL-ARSUZI

2.1 Introduction

Addressing the first theme of this thesis, this chapter aims to define Syrian nationalism before demonstrating the principal theory upon which this interrogation rests, i.e. construction of masculinism and hierarchy in Syrian national narratives. In this sense, it attempts to answer RQ1: What is Syrian nationalism and how is it ideologically borrowed from the two European schools of thought: Germanic and French? This chapter attempts to situate the question of Syrian nationalism within its historical context as it breaks new ground in academia by revisiting the national narrative of Syria's founding fathers, al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi.¹⁶

Interestingly, while Syrian nationalism evolved in the second half of the 20th century, the narratives surrounding it were based broadly on the specific interpretations of nationalism that emerged in Europe during 18th and 19th centuries. Moreover, it eschews the temptation to provide readers with a new insight into the understanding of the grounds for Syrian national thought as being ideologically borrowed from three

¹⁶ Studies in the field have focused on analysing the roots of the rise of nationalism in the Arab world, associating these thinkers as ideologues of Arab nationalism in general (see Salameh, 2010; Khalidi, 1991; al-Husri, 1966; Dawn, 1962; Haim, 1964; Watenpaugh, 1996). Moreover, there is an overwhelming body of research on these Syrian thinkers, much of which focuses primarily on how their ideologies paved the way for dictatorship, violence and racism in Syria and Iraq (see Salameh, 2010: 9–12, 23–5, 162–3; Chatterjee, 1986: 8–9; Liddell, 2015; Makiya, 1998: 206). However, in this chapter I propose to take a different approach, and trace the formulation of Syrian nationalist thought as something that emanates from the way these three Syrian nationalist thinkers view and conceptualise the definition of nation and nationalism.

European philosophers: Johann Gottfried Herder, Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Ernest Renan.

Suffice to say that understanding the origins of Syrian nationalism will help us conceptualise its components and pillars, which in turn is necessary for the interrogation of masculinism in later chapters. Given this framework, I argue there is a need to bring into the foreground two interrelated overarching questions. First, were these nationalist narratives original in their content and reflections? Second, how did these thinkers formulate their nationalist ideologies in relation to the European conceptions of nationalism? In order to answer these questions, the chapter firstly aims to review both historical and contemporary studies dealing with the emergence of nationalism in Syria (2.2), and highlights the intricate nature of the existing literature on the evolution of nationalism in contemporary Syria, which has been considered a variant of the two ideologies, pan-Arabism and pan-Syrianism. In turn, such a literature overview proves that contemporary and historical studies have failed to conceptualise Syrian national thought as an autonomously emerged practice in Syria. Second, in order to situate nationalism in a broader context, section 2.3 demonstrates the main characteristics and definitions of the two European schools of thought (Germanic and French) and explores the philosophical debate surrounding the origin of nationalism, whether it is a cultural/primordial or political/civic construct, in sections 2.4.1 and 2.4.2 respectively.

This chapter then moves to identify the ideological borrowings between the Syrian and European thinkers. In this context, a careful study of the literature on the emergence of nationalism in the thought of these three thinkers shows that the debate has primarily focused on identifying notions of nationalism in the Syrian context borrowed from one European tradition – German nationalist thought (cultural conception of the nation) – Herder and Fichte in particular. However, this study sets out

to examine the duality of sources (German and French traditions) that have influenced the development of nationalist thought in modern Syria (section 2.5). Thus, the chapter investigates the evolution of Syrian nationalism in its two phases, the cultural and political, as originating from the ideological borrowing from the Germanic and French schools of thought respectively. While doing so, this study will engage with the three Syrian thinkers in a combined framework and will suggest that their modes of nationalist thinking both introduced and consolidated the basic tenets of Syrian identity manifested in the Ba'ath ideology in Syria, with particular focus on al-Husri as he is the father of secular nationalism (section 2.6). In sections 2.7, 2.8 and 2.9, I shall examine the basic tenets of Syrian nationalist ideologies, as formulated by al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi – the most prominent Syrian thinkers in the 20th century (Saba', 2005: 270).¹⁷

In its largest part, this chapter seeks to examine the dimensions of these ideological borrowings and place them within a comparative theoretical framework. This intellectual exercise allows us to underscore how the undercurrents or basis of Syrian nationalist thought are a replica of the two European theories of nationalism. Hence, this interrogation of the origins of Syrian nationalism is the first step towards identifying its components, which will later be deconstructed and examined to measure women's inclusion in national imagining.

2.2 Literature overview

Scholarly literature dealing with the emergence of nationalism in Syria as a dominant and separate ideology is very limited.¹⁸ This scarce research should be measured not by its quantity but by its approach, which relates nationalism in Syria to other, more

¹⁷ Saba' called al-Arsuzi and Aflaq "The knights of the Ba'ath Party".

¹⁸ One can notice an increasing interest in raising questions pertaining to defining and investigating nationalism, national identity and belonging in Syria after 2011 (see Tokmajyan, 2013; Harmoon Centre for Contemporary Studies, 2016; Salameh, 2013).

predominant modes of thought – the ideologies of the Fertile Crescent and Arabism. However, this thesis aims to go beyond these two conceptualisations and use the term “Syrian nationalism” to trace its theoretical evolution as constructed in the narratives of the three Syrian founding fathers. Within this context, this section will review how the idea of nationalism in Syria has been approached in the last few decades and how this thesis departs thematically from the overall mainstream.

Despite the limited body of literature on Syria, there is a plethora of studies centred on the politics of the Ba'ath Party (see Devlin, 1976; Drysdale, 1981: 3–30; Jabbur, 1978; Abu Jaber, 1966), leaving other important topics such as nationalism underdeveloped. In reviewing the scholarly debates on the idea of nationalism in Syria, this section highlights the intricate nature of approaching the subject due to the argument that Syria has never had a uniquely Syrian territorial identity or entity as such. Salameh's account of the origin of Syrian national identity (2013) insists that, until 1946, Syrian national identity or a unique territorial identity did not exist in literature, historiography, or even popular expression. Even in his reference to the origin of the birth of a Syrian national consciousness in the early 20th century, his argument revolves around Antun Saadeh's ideology of Greater Syria, and again not the territorial Syria (2013). Such an argument has been supported and backed by almost all researchers in the field, shunning the investigation of the roots of the emergence of Syrian nationalism as distinct from Arabism or Syrianism. Moreover, the enigma of conceptualising Syrian nationalism is related to what is often said about the artificiality of Syria as the outcome of an Anglo-French colonial treaty, the Sykes–Picot Agreement. As Salameh importantly explores the difficulty of conceptualising the origin of the Syrian nation, he states:

In Syria (and for that matter Iraq), more so than in neighboring Lebanon and Egypt, there has never been a uniquely Syrian territorial identity nor a Syrian entity as such. Indeed, in what became Syria in 1936—out of the carved-out Ottoman *Vilayets* (or States) of Aleppo, Beirut, and Damascus—there was great difficulty accommodating the transition from distinct administrative units to a cohesive territorial state. Moreover, prior to Syrian independence in 1946, there had been very little in terms of national history, territorial attachment, Syrian identity and a distinct “Syrian” ethos associated with today’s modern Syrian Arab Republic. In fact, up until 1946, no such Syrian entity existed in literature, historiography or even popular expression. (2013)

Such a perspective is not distinct from the predominant conceptualisation of Syrians as Arabs. Sadowski argues that the evolution of the collective sense of being Syrian develops in parallel with the evolution of Arabism:

The 90 per cent of the Syrian population who can claim Arab ancestry (basically everyone except the Kurds, the Armenians, and the shrinking Jewish community) have not stopped thinking of themselves as Arabs—indeed, they continue to take great pride in that identity. But they are Arabs today in much the sense that the French are Europeans: the cultural identification is solid, but how much political collaboration that entails depends on changing circumstances. Syrian citizens can give their primary loyalty to their own state without ceasing to think of themselves as Arabs—indeed, they continue to think of themselves as exemplary Arabs. This sense of common Syrian identity has not yet developed into an articulate political ideology. It is still manifest mostly in rather subtle indicators, ... (2002: 147)

Such a claim of the predominance of Arabism in the formation of Syrian national identity in contemporary Syria is adopted by a group of scholars that conceive the rise of nationalism in Syria as an extension of the development of national consciousness in the Arab world. This group questions the extent to which Arab nationalism achieved hegemony over the formulation of Syrian national identity during the time of state formation (1970s–1980s). While these studies also debate the possibility of creating a political community distinct from the ideology of Arabism, what is indisputable is that the most successful movements and elites in Syria are those that conceptualised Syria as part of the Arab nation and, more importantly, as a temporary truncated state (Dawn, 1962; Muslih, 1991; Tauber, 1995). In this sense, Arab nationalism as an ideology in Syria was perceived as a filling ideology after the fall of the Ottoman Empire

(Hinnebusch, 2008: 264). Moreover, Hinnebusch argues that a formulation of Syrian national identity as distinct and distanced from Arab ideology is rather unreal: “[A] Syrian identity wholly distinct from Arabism has not emerged, with the content of Syrian identity remaining Arab, and the regime continuing to see its legitimacy as contingent on being seen to represent Arab causes” (2008: 265).

However, this favouring of Arab nationalism for the sake of regime legitimacy faded after the ascendance of Bashar al-Assad, who consolidated the sovereignty of the state (Gilbert, 2013: 42). A contemporary study that partly adopts this perspective can be found in Victoria Gilbert’s MA thesis on the development of nationalism in Syria, “Syria for the Syrians: The Rise of Syrian Nationalism, 1970–2013”. As one can see from the title, the reference to Syrian nationalism indicates the examination of nationalism as distinctively Syrian; however, despite that, this study has traces of conceptualising nationalism in Syria as an independent thought (Gilbert, 2013: 24), but she still conceives nationalism in Syria as a product of three dominant ideologies: Arab nationalism, state nationalism, and Greater Syrian nationalism (2013: 21–7). This illustrates how the field has long claimed that there has not been a distinctive Syrian national thought, but rather it is studied as part of Arabism or Syrianism.

Gilbert’s thesis on Syrian nationalism – which she terms “state nationalism” – deals with an abandoned topic, and her analysis of the gradual emergence of Syrian nationalism disregards the origins of its ideological characteristics that, most importantly, formulate the dominant national identity in Syria. Moreover, she fails to account for the historical origins of this dominant ideology in the broader context of universal nationalist theories. Rather, she illustrates the gradual evolution of nationalism in Syria by adopting the mainstream perspective that Arab nationalism has been the dominant ideology in Syria for decades. According to Gilbert, traces of a

distinctive Syrian national identity did not emerge until the 1990s under Hafez al-Assad's rule, yet were reconsolidated by his son Bashar al-Assad (2013: 46). She emphasises that Arabism and Syrianism, as two dominant ideologies in the formulation of contemporary Syrian politics, were mobilised by both Hafez and Bashar al-Assad to gain popular support (Gilbert, 2013: 35–40, 42, 46; see also Kienle, 1995: 61).

Another study that deals with the historicity of the idea of nationalism in Syria was conducted by James Gelvin, who explores the evolution of Syrian nationalism from the mid-19th through to the first decade of the 20th century (1994), but without clarifying that what he meant by portraying nationalism in Syria as part of Arab nationalism. The use of his title “Nationalism in Syria” proves that the article uses the term “nationalism” interchangeably with Arabism. According to Gelvin, in the post-Ottoman period, particularly during the mid-to-late 19th century, a populist political sociability emerged in Syria, which formed the origin of Arab nationalism that became the dominant ideology in the region by the early 20th century (1994: 657). His analysis of the origins of nationalism in Syria turns out to be an examination of the traces of Arab nationalism in the populist social movement (1994: 654, 659). Hence, Syria is composed of natural boundaries of the Syrian nation, and not the contemporary ones created by the Sykes–Picot Agreement.

What adds to the incongruent nature of the academic approach to the idea of Syrian nationalism is the difficulty in finding studies that investigate nationalism in Syria without transcending its national boundaries. Even after the Arab Spring and the resulting increased interests in questions about the role of nationalism in current political events, nationalism in Syria is still perceived as contingent on Arabism. Christopher Phillips' book *Everyday Arab Identity* aims to demonstrate that the ideology of Arabism is a living stream in the hearts of the inhabitants of the Arab region,

especially Syria. More importantly, he claims that Arabism is the domino behind the number of uprisings that have happened in the region. Phillips emphasises that Arabism overrides state nationalism in Syria and even suggests that Arabism as an ideology witnessed a rebirth in the wake of the Arab Spring (Phillips, 2013: 9).

While it is not within the scope of this thesis to argue against this claim, this conception limits the potential for exploring how nationalism in Syria has evolved under the Ba'ath. Moreover, this emphasises that scholars find it difficult to explore the idea of nationalism in Syria without associating it with Syrianism or Arabism, even in the best cases suggesting that it is a variant of them. In other words, Phillips considers Arabism as “supra-nationalist” because it is mobilised by the Syrian regime as a solid substance of their legitimacy (2013: 2). His study suggests that national ideology in Syria conceives Arabism not as a dying force, but rather as acting as an identity frame (ibid.). In the same vein, Khoury further contextualises Syrian nationalism in the post-Sykes–Picot era as a reflection of broad cultural, social and political changes (1987: 5). His investigation of the rise of nationalism in what he called “the newly created Syrian state” is a mere analysis of the rise of Arab ideology (1987: 7; see also Antoun & Quataert, 1991).

This leads us to the second group of literature that approaches nationalism in Syria as a variant of the long-lasting dream, the Fertile Crescent (*Bilad al-sham*). In fact, a quick search on Google about nationalism in Syria using the term “Syrian nationalism” points to the political movement founded in 1932 by Antun Sa’adeh, which became synonymous with Syrian nationalism as it advocates a smaller geographical entity of Arab nationalism, basically known today as the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). This party conceptualises Syria, or the region of Greater

Syria, as a cultural and political entity.¹⁹ This mode of thought believes that *Bilad al-Sham* – or the Levant composed of Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Palestine – forms a cultural nation. According to its ideologues, Syrian nationalism posits a common Syrian history, culture and nationality. However, like Arabism, its dream of unity and realising its cultural character and statehood is at a halt. As such, studies on pan-Syrianism such as *Greater Syria: The History of an Ambition* by Daniel Pipes (1992) aim to revive the dream of pan-Syrianism in an attempt to legitimise its historicity. He argues that this is a neglected topic and that in recent decades the focus by journalists and academics has been on manifestations of political life in the Middle East. Yet his argument omits that, while it is true that nationalism in Syria is an underexamined topic, the focus on state policies and the regime's politics has not covered how the idea of nationalism impacted later political narratives and perceptions.

In this context, we must refer to the most extensive analysis of the emergence of the ideology of Syrianism in Adel Beshara's book, *The Origins of Syrian Nationhood: Histories, Pioneers and Identity*. This book is particularly important as, from the start, Beshara recognises the complicated nature of the topic of nationalism in Syria as there is no consensus among historians and theorists on the exact date or event that signifies its emergence. Beshara, however, stretches the term "Syrian nationhood" to cover the ideological connotations of the Syrian nation as a natural entity composed of the Fertile Crescent. Moreover, the book traces the emergence of the idea of nationalism in the early 19th century, which was geared up by Ibrahim Pasha's invasion in 1825 (2011: 2). Beshara investigated the upsurge in national sentiment through its

¹⁹ However, this political ideology, which perceives the Levant as one nation, has its limitations and paradoxes that, even with the most dominant ideology of Arabism in the region, could not draw them closer. Such complexities in the relationships in the Levant have been most recently explored by Chaitani (2007).

intellectuals. However, the thinkers used for this thesis are distinguished from other Syrian intellectuals in the sense that their political involvement formed an important political party and movement in Syria²⁰ – the Ba'ath – so their national ideologies and perceptions have had a significant impact and manifestations on contemporary political and cultural narratives.²¹ More importantly, in all Beshara's 17 chapters, the idea of Syrian nationhood does not correlate with its emergence in the contemporary politics of the current state of Syria. Rather, the book interrogates the birth of the idea of Syria as a nation combining Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Palestine.

Consequently, in light of the burgeoning discussion on the use of the term “Syrian nationalism”, we find that it is rather used to imply Syrianism (the Levant), entailing the far-reaching goal of including broader geographical boundaries. With few exceptions, some authors have used the term “nationalism in Syria” and did not mean “Syrian nationalism”. For example, in Thomas Collelo's book *Syria: A Country Study* (1987) on the political history of Syria since ancient times, he argues in the chapter on nationalism in Syria that “nationalism is a controversial concept for Syrians” (1987: 1) due to what the term entails about its political borders. Some Syrians are still reluctant to accept the imposed artificial borders by colonial powers, and others aspire to challenge these artificial borders through Arab unity or a Greater Syria (Fertile

²⁰ It is important to note that a number of Syrian intellectuals have expressed ideas of nationhood in their writing, such as Butrus al-Bustani. In the mid-19th century, some considered al-Bustani the first Syrian nationalist due to the publication of the newspaper *Nafir Suria*, which began following the 1860 Mount Lebanon civil war. Al-Bustani (1819–83) was a Lebanese Maronite Christian, yet, as Beshara significantly comments on his role in the emergence of nationalism in Syria: “Unfortunately for Syria, Bustani was not a politician. He was an educator, whose significant efforts were confined to publishing, translating, and participating in societies that endeavoured to boost Syrian Arab awareness of their shared cultural identity beyond sectarian affiliation” (2011: 3). More importantly, al-Bustani's ideas did not shape the dominant ideology in Syria, i.e. the Ba'ath. In the early 20th century, a group of intellectuals emerged, but their political involvement did not form a political movement or party. Others, like Jurji Zaydan, Khalil al-Khuri and Rashid Rida, are portrayed as Syrian intellectuals in Adel Beshara's book (2011), but they are ideologues of the idea of Syrian nationhood as synonymous with what is currently referred to as Greater Syria, i.e. *Bilad al-Sham*.

²¹ This will be explored in chapters Four and Five.

Crescent). However, Collelo did not propose any statement of what Syrian nationalism entails apart from his argument that the current political situation in Syria, ruled by the Ba'ath regime, mobilised the two ideologies (Arabism and Syrianism) in an attempt to garner legitimacy.

Moreover, other studies, such as the US online PBS “NewsHour”, use the term “Syrian nationalism” to refer to the ideology of pan-Syrianism (2006).²² Nonetheless, an important study that sets the stage for further independent analysis of nationalism in Syria is Eyal Zisser’s article “Who’s Afraid of Syrian Nationalism?” (2006), which differs from other studies’ approach to the emergence of the idea of nationalism in Syria. From the start, Zisser blatantly emphasises that the birth of state nationalism in Syria is associated with the rule of Bashar al-Assad. Like Gilbert (2013), one may wonder what he means by the term “Syrian nationalism”. It must be noted that Zisser is the first to use this term conjointly in reference to the emergence of political thought in territorial Syria. His approach to understanding this emergence involves investigating the Syrian political elite, as he argues:

An understanding of the thinking of the Syrian political elite over time may help to reveal the sources of the Syrian consciousness or identity as a territorial state as it evolved during the last 150 years—an identity which the current Syrian regime seeks to entrench. (2006: 182)

Thus, Zisser surveyed the sources of Syrian national identity in history, which view it as a distinctive entity going back to the pre-Islamic and pre-Arab past. Such a perspective is an indication that there is a need to depart from the predominant mainstream. Moreover, Zisser is the first to be aware of the incongruent nature of the debate of the idea of nationalism in Syria as most literary scholarship struggles to

²² Other studies that focus on pan-Syrianism examine the history and challenges of the SSNP (Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party), founded in 1932 by the Lebanese-born Christian politician Antun Saadeh. See Lewis, 2011.

conceptualise Syrian national thought as separate from Arabism or Syrianism, as he notes:

Arabism and “Syrianism” signify the two poles between which Syrian identity oscillated throughout the twentieth century ... Not surprisingly, most Syrian leaders and thinkers tended to search for a middle ground that would integrate both Arabism and “Syrianism”. (2006: 183)

The importance of these words lies in the conceptualisation of the current debate on the origins of nationalism in Syria. Nonetheless, Zisser concludes that both these sources (Arabism and Syrianism) formulate a distinctive Syrian national identity as the tenets of Syrian nationhood. He states that the “strictly Syrian state identity, however, has not yet supplanted the initial Arabist or the Syrian identities, but coexists with them somewhat uncertainly” (2006: 196). Zisser’s study does not, therefore, go beyond the point of recognising the complicated nature of the approaches to nationalism in Syria despite retaining its pre-Islamic and Arabic origin, yet he fails to investigate and situate this origin in the universal understanding of nationalism as a Western construct that influenced the formulation of Syrian nationalism as an ideology. In other words, he does not develop an understanding of current political thought as it emerged within the theorisation of nationalism.

As a conclusion to these two groups of literature, it is important to note that this thesis does not claim that Syria has “sacrificed its Arab national identity” (Hinnebusch, 2008: 278), yet this adoption of Arabism has merely one function, that is, legitimising the rule of the al-Assad regime (Mufti, 1996: 90–1). Nonetheless, the two ideologies of Arabism and Syrianism, and what they stand for, are no longer conceivable as they undermine the sovereignty of current national boundaries (Beshara, 2011: 8). In other words, the problem with these two ideologies is that their ideals contradict the contemporary idea of nationalism and how it has developed in the last few decades after

the consolidation of state formation in Syria. Hence, the starting point of this thesis, copying Sadowski's words, is that Syrians are conceived not as "Arabs, Muslims, or socialists but as Syrians – citizens of a state called Syria, a country distinct from Lebanon and Iraq, who as a result share common interests and a common culture" (2002: 148). This so-called common interest and shared culture is the official narrative of nationalism propagated by the Ba'ath regime.

In other words, an understanding of how nationalism in Syria prevails cannot be achieved through conceptualising it as a product of Arab nationalism or Syrianism, but rather as an ideology theorised by the Syrian founders of Ba'athism whose national concepts were later adopted in the political and cultural narratives. This thesis also aims to emphasise that, in an ethnically divided state where religious and ethnic affiliations are intertwined, the state has reinforced a secular national ideology in an attempt to create a homogeneous sense of nationhood. The enigma of articulating a Syrian national identity stems from the various minority sects including Armenians, Assyrians, Druze, Palestinians, Kurds, Yazidi, Mhallami, Arab Christians, Mandaeans, Turkmens and Greeks. Given the mosaic nature of Syrian society, nationalism is considered the major force in shaping its structure and stability.

In an attempt to override this ethnic and sectarian identity of such groups for the constructed supranationalist one manifested in Ba'athism, a state-based nationalism determines the designation of people's sense of identity and belonging. Hence, this thesis takes as a starting point the national perceptions and ideologies of al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi and examines the manifestations of their narratives in Syria. Moreover, the term "Syrian nationalism" is problematic because of the lack of understanding that nationalism in Syria is a distinctive ideology that has evolved in the second part of the 20th century through being ideologically borrowed from the Germanic and French

traditions. In this sense, this thesis aims to survey the origins of national thought in Syria as distinct from the ideology of Arabism and, rather, traces its evolution since the fall of the Ottoman Empire (1920s) to the post-independence era (1950s–1960s) and state formation (1970s–1980s). The survey of the emergence of Syrian national thought during these events evolved in parallel in the writings of the three Syrian thinkers: al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi.

In light of the above arguments, reviewing the relevant literature on the idea of nationalism in Syria requires very extensive examination of the origins of nationalism in general in its Western context. This intellectual interrogation will help explore the evolution of the Ba'ath ideology in the narrative of the three Syrian thinkers in relation to the European schools of thought. Thus, this thesis seeks to provide: an analysis of the origins of nationalism in Syria as separate from the two ideologies of Arabism and Syrianism; an understanding of current political thought as it is later manifested in other political and cultural narratives; and a contextualisation of this distinctive Syrian national thought with the construction of masculinism that has affected the status of women in both the state and society.

Having set out the definition of how the term “Syrian nationalism” will be used in this thesis, the next section includes a brief introduction to the two contradictory schools of thought – Germanic and French – that are considered the universal schools of nationalism from which other variant schools of thought later emerged, such as primordialism, modernism and, more particularly, Syrian national thought (see Dawisha, 2002; Aldoughli, 2014).

2.3 Visions of nationalism

An overview of the theoretical debate around what constitutes nations and nationalism reveals the difficulty of producing a unitary definition of these two ideologically loaded

concepts (Calhoun, 1997: 7–8; Watson, 1977: 5; Smith, 1983 [1971]: 3–6). However, in terms of its genesis, it has been widely accepted that the 18th century was the age when the politicised notion of nation and nationalism came into being.²³ While the emergence of the politicised concept of nationalism is a complete Western construct (Hayes, 1949: 8–9; Kedourie, 1961: 9; Smith, 1983 [1971]: 7), these revolutionary²⁴ ideas proposed by European philosophers gradually spread to other parts of the world (Blom, Hagemann & Hall, 2000: 3).

The complicated nature of the field can be seen in the writings of the founding fathers Renan, Herder and Fichte that have laid the foundations for a dichotomised perception of the nation either as organic/natural or constructionist entity (Dawisha, 2002: 7–13; 2003: 60–5). Within this context, the most defining dichotomy between the two conceptions – organic/civic – can be seen in the way these thinkers envisaged the notion of belonging. Thus, one might ask how they theorise the sense of belonging to this newly emerged political notion. In order to answer this question, it is sufficient to illustrate what is meant by *voluntary* and *involuntary* belonging to the nation, and to consider how these conceptions have further laid the foundations for the main argument that nations are natural or invented. In other words, the nation's origin is primordial/natural or modernist/constructed (Miscevic, 2008: 85). For more exploration of the difference between the two conceptions, the following sections provide further details.

²³ For further reading on the emergence of the politicised concept of nation and nationalism, see Herb & Kaplan, 2008.

²⁴ The use of such revolutionary ideas facilitated the emergence of nationalism, particularly as a consequence of the French Revolution and the American Civil War.

2.4 Philosophical debate

2.4.1 Cultural/organic conception of nationalism

The philosophical and cultural movement of Romanticism, espoused especially by the Romantics who dominated German nationalist discourse in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, affirms the necessity of subjective and emotional characters of the nation, the concept of which is intensified by emphasising the centrality of language, culture, race, education, history and attachment “to the soil”. Belonging is defined as involuntary, and the nation is primarily perceived as an extension of the family.

The idea of German nationalism arose as a reaction to the Napoleonic Wars, as it advocated the idea of the cultural unity of Germany. The most notable contributor to the idea of Pan-Germanism was Herder and his later antagonist, Fichte (Motyl, 2001). Herder was particularly enthused by the restoration of German culture and language. He adopted a particular “constitutive approach to language” in which it becomes the manifestation of thinking and communication among people (ibid.). More importantly, for him language defines the distinctiveness of the nation. Although Herder used the element of blood relations as a constitutor of the German nation, his concept of racial superiority did not require him to consider Germany as superior to other nations. In this regard, he advocated the concept of particularity defined by the distinctive language, history and culture of each nation rather than racial superiority, as he further celebrated the notion of a diverse world (Herder, 2002: 379).

Fichte followed Herder’s perception of language as a defining characteristic of the nation, yet he supplemented this linguistic conception of nationalism with other elements. Given the Prussian defeat at the hands of Napoleon in 1806 at Jena, Fichte’s notion of the German nation promoted a more particular and politically nationalist conception that is different from Herder’s. Nonetheless, although Fichte and Herder

shared the same Romantic doctrine of the nation that humanity is divided naturally according to unique cultural and linguistic differences (Hutchinson, 1994: 124), Fichte differs from Herder in his notion of Germany's racial superiority over other nations (see Adamson, 1881: 37–9).

In addition, although Fichte contended that language and culture characterise the nation, he called for the need for the establishment of Germany as a state (Fichte: 1968). Within this essentially primordialist conception, this German Romantic version of nationalism experienced both cultural and political phases. Herder, representing the father of the cultural perception of the nation, had the idea that the nation is a cultural construct and that the world is distinctively divided into language groups. The second phase, developed by Fichte, anticipates that, after the realisation of the unique cultural character of the nation through unification of language and history, sovereignty of statehood should be achieved (Smith, 1983 [1971]:17). In this sense, Fichte went a step further than Herder in defining the continuous struggle of the nation not only to preserve its cultural character, but also to realise its political sovereignty. However, in all cases, the nation precedes the state, and only through the realisation of cultural identity of the nation can the political state be achieved (see Dawisha 2002: 7).

2.4.2 Civic/modernist perception of nationalism

This modernist school of thought flourished in France as an outcome of the French Revolution. As such, the 19th century witnessed flourishing nationalist sentiments provided by French thinkers. These liberal principles were an attempt to oppose the organic version of the nation elaborated by the German Romantics. The chief recognisable opposing characteristic is the belief that the essence of belonging to the nation is voluntary rather than a given or natural one. The Enlightenment encapsulated rationality and freedom of the individual, and envisaged the nation as a *sovereign*, which

in turn laid the first seeds of the notion of “civic” nations. Among the most remarkable advocates of the French idea of nationalism is Renan, whose political ideology was inspired by the defeat of France in the Franco–Prussian War (1871). In his influential article “What is a Nation?” (1882), Renan argued against the three defining factors enunciated by the Romantics: the notions that language, race and geographical particularities supply an adequate basis of the nation.

Substantively, Renan defied the Germanic assumption of “pure race”, suggesting instead that the constitution of the nation is based on the will and determination of the people. He further argued that communal pain, struggle and destiny are the main tools to construct national imagination. Renan insisted on selective history, so much so that “forgetting” certain parts of history is needed to foster national identity (Renan: 1882). This constructionist conception of the nation is grounded in the will of the people to “have many things in common” and the claim that the purity of race, language and culture is impossible, as most modern nations were historically affected by “its wars, its marriages, and its treaties” (1882).

Using another idea that distinctively opposes the German doctrine that the nation is a political construct and an entity grounded in its subjects’ consent, Renan proposes that the “will” of the people to be united supersedes ethno-linguistic unifications. He argues: “There is something in man which is superior to language, namely, the will” (1882). More importantly, unlike Fichte and Herder, Renan considered the state an end in itself and that it precedes the nation, which further highlights his notion of the nation as an invented/modernist entity and a “legitimate” political power and not as an ethnic natural entity realised by its cultural and linguistic identifications (1882).

Having explored the origins of the philosophical debate, the next section aims to contextualise the relationship between the three Syrian thinkers and the ideological influence of these European thinkers.

2.5 Contextualising the ideological borrowings in the Syrian context

Al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi, while belonging to different racial and religious denominations, have been depicted as ideologues of secular nationalism.²⁵ This section aims to argue that, since the early years of the 20th century, the Syrian national narrative traced in their writings relied heavily on the works of Herder, Fichte and Renan. While some notable thinkers demonstrate the relationship between the Syrian thinkers and these European thinkers, their conceptualisation of this relation is read in the context of Arabism rather than how such influence impacted the national narratives of contemporary Syria. Within this context, before investigating this ideological influence, we need to question the originality of nationalism in the writings of these Syrian thinkers. As Salem affirms, the concept of nationalism that emerged between the 1950s and 1960s shows a “devotion to the emanation in the spirit of modern Western nationalism” (1994: 49). Notably, when these Syrian thinkers borrowed these nationalist elements to theorise the definition of the nation between the 1920s and 1960s, their conceptions were anything but original. Their attempt to answer the question of what formulates the nation reveals predominant borrowings and encounters with the cultural and civic versions of European nationalism. Interestingly, while the basis of their conceptualisation of nation and nationalism was distinctively cultural,

²⁵ While such a label is an oversimplification of other pioneer Syrian intellectuals such as Qustantine Zurayk and Salah al-Bitar, these three nationalist theorists formulated the main aspects of a Syrian national identity under the Ba'ath. Moreover, it is important to note that neither al-Bitar nor Zurayk published their writings, so it was not possible to include their national ideologies in this study.

other politicised features borrowed from Renan's civic national ideology can also be traced.

These borrowed ideologies represented cultural and political manifestations of Syrian national thought. Aflaq and al-Arsuzi represented the emergence of the political ideology in Syria, in terms of the political institutionalisation of al-Husri's cultural conception of nationalism, through establishing the Ba'ath party (Ayubi, 2009: 140). As a starting point, the manifestation of this in the early phase of Syrian national thought can be attributed to what Frantz Fanon (1996) distinctively illuminates as the need of post-independent regions to affirm the legitimacy of their existence. Such emphasis on the idea of the nation as a cultural entity confronts the pre-colonial repressive practices of diminishing the cultural identity of colonised nations (1996: 236–7). In the Syrian context, like Herder and Fichte, al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi conceptualised the nation as a linguistically defined entity and a natural extension to the family (al-Husri, 1985a: 28–29; Aflaq, 1941; al-Arsuzi, 1973: 213–6). While the nation is a cultural entity that foregrounds language, culture and history as the basis for the inculcation of national identity, another political facet of Syrian encounters with the French idea relates to Renan's elements of “forgetting” the “will and determination” of the people and a “common destiny and suffering” (Renan, 1882).

There is no direct admission by these theorists of the adaption of European thought in their nationalist writings. In this sense, the question of their ideological borrowings varies between direct and obvious copying, as in al-Husri's (see al-Husri, 1928; 1951: 43–5, 65–78) and al-Arsuzi's (Watenpugh, 1996: 363–4) nationalist theorisation, and a firm rejection, as in Aflaq (Nordbruch, 2009: 163). Nonetheless, such propositions would have been vehemently denied by these thinkers, given the dilemma they experienced during the struggle against colonial powers and in the post-

independence era (1940s to 1960s), which made them uncomfortable with aligning their national ideologies with European ones.

Despite the thinkers' denial of these borrowings, some would argue that nationalist thought admired, and was particularly influenced by, Fichte and Herder (see Küntzel, 2007: 25). In this sense, Myhill illustrates the reaction of Arab nationalists towards the European schools of nationalism by stating that they rejected French conceptions of nationalism and turned to the German philosophers in an act of "conscious imitations" for national aspirations (2006: 144–5; see also Tibi, 1997: 117). In the same vein, Schumann's demonstration of the ideological origins of the concept of nationalism that emerged after the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire resulted from the "reception of primordial German nationalism rather than the republican French nationalism" (2010: 177; see also Khadduri, 1970: 24).

Yet the influence of the French conception of nationalism was established by Akhras, who stated:

Culturally, Western influence in general and the French influence in particular, left its mark – particularly on the minds of young intellectuals. This influence operated mainly through students who went abroad to study, and more importantly, through foreign private educational institutions established by different Western religious groups. (1972: 55)

Akhras' point is a reflection of these Syrian thinkers, who studied in France and were exposed to the French nationalist ideology. Such implicit attraction to the French national idea might also have been transmitted through the French language (see 'Ayubi, 2009: 138; Benewick & Green, 1988: 4; El-Attrache, 1976: 18, 22; Lewis, 2006). In the case of al-Husri, Cleveland argues that al-Husri's national concepts were

drawn mainly from nineteenth century European thinkers. His intellectual introduction to Europe had been through the medium of [the] French language, his first intellectual synthesis had centred around French ... and he himself was largely a man of French culture and outlook. (1971: 85)

A close reading of their texts and articles shows that the French idea of nationalism appealed and shaped their nationalist concepts. However, this is not to say that there were no other reasons for the adoption of French ideas, such as the depiction of Renan's definition of the nation as an entity constructed through its heroic past²⁶ (Dawisha, 2003: 61). Taking into consideration the tremulous situation of the Arab world in the post-independence era during the 1940s, there was an urgent need for these theorists to invent a sense of historical solidarity among people, and to make use of a glorious past (*majid*) to implement a unified image of history. This emphasis on *selecting* and implementing a certain way of teaching history is a French notion. Hence, in order to understand the origin of Syrian nationalism in the thought of these ideologues, there is a need to demonstrate the relationship between them. This in turn will highlight the influential role of al-Husri's national theorisation in the institutionalisation of Ba'athist ideology advocated by Aflaq and al-Arsuzi.

2.6 Al-Husri's impact on the formulation of Aflaq's and al-Arsuzi's nationalist ideologies

In terms of the relationship between the three thinkers, I have opted to devote considerable space to their views in order to present the content of their nationalist thought. I begin with al-Husri, as he has widely been considered as one of the "better known exponents" (Karpas, 1968: 28) of secular nationalism, and his nationalist legacy appealed to Aflaq and al-Arsuzi as Ba'athist ideologues. The influence of his writings cannot be underestimated in terms of the ideological construction of the Ba'ath Party. The historian Bassam Tibi argues that the co-founders of the Ba'ath Party were heavily

²⁶ This can be detected in Renan's words: "The nation, like the individual, is the outcome of a long past of efforts, sacrifices, and devotions. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate: our ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past with great men and glory ..." (1882).

influenced by them (1997: 203). Khadduri further claims that the Ba'ath ideology proposed by Aflaq and al-Arsuzi is a mere extension of al-Husri's nationalist thought (1970: 205; see also Dawisha, 2003: 3). More specifically, Adib-Moghaddam affirms that the role of al-Husri's nationalist thought did not just influence Aflaq and al-Arsuzi but rather his ideology was later "institutionalised" in the Ba'ath political party in Syria (2006: 18; see also Salem, 1994: 49). Such influence was even welcomed by al-Husri, who explicitly "allied himself with the Syrian Ba'ath Party ... The main source of the Party's ideology" (Moubayed, 2006: 439; see also Kazziha, 1979: 60; Nadhmi, 1985: 148; Taylor, 1988: 39).

It could be said that the three thinkers embraced different ideological standpoints, which subsequently affected the formulation of Syrian nationalist thought. Al-Husri, the father of the idea of secular nationalism in Syria, advocated the cultural conception of perceiving language and history as the driving elements of the nation, and this ideology was followed by Aflaq and al-Arsuzi. However, Aflaq can be considered the one who advocated the political conception of the nation through his writings on the formulation of the Ba'ath Party. Nonetheless, al-Arsuzi adopted the modernist dimension of nationalist thought by implementing, in addition to the main cultural notion of the nation, a statist understanding of Syrian national identity, and was the one who introduced the notion of citizenship in the Syrian context (as will be explored in chapters Four and Five).

2.7 Father of secular nationalism: Sati al-Husri (1882–1968)

The influence of al-Husri's theorisation on Syrian society can be traced back to his role in helping King Faisal of Syria during his brief reign in 1920, where he played an influential role in the newly established Syrian state after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. He became Dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of Baghdad. His ideas

were extraordinary and revolutionary for the period and made his nationalist ideology attractive to later Syrian ideologues (Moubayed, 2006: 437). He had an interest in the unity of national education and served as Minister of Education from March to July 1920 (Moubayed, 2006: 437–9). More importantly, al-Husri was the first to introduce the “core subject called *Qawmiyya* (Nationalism)” (Moubayed, 2006: 439). During the 1920s, he further advocated the role of history and education in raising national consciousness. He implemented his nationalist ideology by delivering numerous lectures and publishing more than twenty books on the same subject. His service as the Director General of Education until 1927 placed him in a perfect position to influence the curriculum under the mandate system. Moreover, al-Husri considered school to be the most influential place for implementing his nationalist ideology. His interest was in the way history was taught in schools he considered it to be a medium for raising national consciousness in the minds of young scholars (see Goode, 2007: 199).

In terms of al-Husri’s encounters with the European philosophy of nationalism, his attraction can be attributed to being caught up in the demise of the Ottoman Empire and the need to formulate a theoretical basis for the Arab world. Nonetheless, in an attempt to discover the grounds of nationalism, he was concerned to find an objective reasoning for the political transformation of the region, especially during the 1920s to 1950s.²⁷ Owing to the political situation, al-Husri’s preoccupation with constituting a national ideology that united the Arabs was realised by providing the reader with unlimited examples drawn from the West (see al-Husri: 1951: 43–5, 65–77, 78). His overwhelming desire to reach a wider audience made him propose his nationalist

²⁷ Due to the fall of the Ottoman Empire two years after the end of World War I, and in accordance with the Sykes–Picot Agreement signed between France and Britain, Syria and Lebanon fell under French mandate from 1923 to 1946.

premises through “a spare but forceful literary style” (Cleveland, 1971: 90; see also Hourani, 1970: 312).

Vigorously debated in his books was the question pertaining to the theoretical basis of the emergence of Western nationalism, especially Germanic and French, and how these sentiments are adapted in his nationalist ideology (al-Husri, 1964a: 15–16). The rhetorical questions asked at the beginning of most of his books were: “What is a nation?” “What are the main characteristics that distinguish nations from each other?” and “What are the main factors that make certain groups of people feel that they are one nation?” (al-Husri, 1959: 31; 1985a: 15–16).²⁸ Such propositions force us to evaluate the originality of al-Husri’s nationalist ideology, as many theorists have considerable doubts about it. For example, Haim considered it lacks originality (1964: 39; see also Zuwiyya-Yammak, 1966: 13). Nonetheless, most critics attributed al-Husri’s nationalist borrowings only to the Germanic school of thought, particularly Fichte and Herder (Safi, 1994: 142; Suleiman, 2003: 11–12; Tibi, 1997: 142; Cleveland, 1971: 85–6; Viereck, 2004: xxii–xxiii). In the course of such discussion, there is a need to analyse al-Husri’s ideological borrowings, which were not limited only to the Germanic conception but also the French idea of nationalism.

2.7.1 Al-Husri’s ideological encounters with Herder and Fichte

In al-Husri’s depictions of Fichte and Herder, he primarily advocated a romanticised conception of nation and nationalism, based on both linguistic and historical unity. His central idea of the origin of the nation is formulated through two stages: the nation comes into existence after recognising the particularity of its language and its history; and it preserves its existence through the will and determination of its subjects. In the

²⁸ Al-Husri answered these questions by providing a theoretical and objective analysis of the Western emergence of nationalism, following the nationalist sentiments of the three Western philosophers, Herder, Fichte and Renan.

course of his discussion of what constitutes the nation, al-Husri emphasised the construction of an ideal “national character” through implementing national education and enforcing army conscription (al-Husri, 1944: 50; 1985a: 450). As Al-Husri states:

The foundations for formulating nation and nationalism are unity of language and history. This is because unity in these two factors paves the way for unity of feelings and inclinations, unity of sufferings and hopes, unity of culture and traditions, thus making the people feel that they are the sons of one nation, distinguished from other nations. (1964a: 249)

This romanticised construction is not very distinct from Herder’s and Fichte’s notions of the origin of the nation. In a more explicit adaption of the romantic ideology, al-Husri defines the nation as “a living being, with life and feeling, life through its language and feeling through its history” (1985a: 63). In his influential lecture “*‘Awamil al-Qawmīya*” (Elements of Nationalism) (1928), the deep influence of Herder and Fichte prevailed. First, in his definition of the primacy of language, he followed Herder’s spiritual definition of language as a bond between subjects. Herder further asserts that an eternal national language will be achieved by the internalisation of language in the manner of thinking. Such formation of language is naturalised in that it is transmitted through the familial bond. Herder states:

[T]he formation of a familiar manner of thinking through the instruction of upbringing and since the instruction of the single soul is the parental language’s circle of ideas, the further formation of human instruction through the spirit of the family, through which spirit nature has united the whole species, becomes also the further formation of language. (Herder, 2002 : 141, emphasis original)

Moreover, this alliance between the formations of thought is internalised in the formation of language which, in return, constructs the particularity of each nation, as Herder states: “each nation speaks in accordance with its thought and thinks in accordance with its speech” (Herder, 2002: 50). Within this context, al-Husri clearly stated that “this section is taken from Herder and ... it is very influential to what we

believe in” (1959: 55). He also clearly quoted Herder’s words in describing the language as the “tribal core” and the “soul” for forming the “national thought” (1959: 56).²⁹ More importantly, Herder conceived language as the “soul and spirit of the nation” (quoted in Minogue, 1967: 60). It is the medium between the inner self and the consciousness of the individual. Illustratively, this Herderian notion of language is mimicked in al-Husri’s words:

Language is the most influential spiritual tie, which binds mankind together. First, it is the means of mutual understanding among individuals. In addition, it is the instrument of thought ... Finally, language is the means for transmission from ideas and acquired knowledge from fathers to sons, from ancestors to descendants. The language with which man grows up melds his thought in a special manner just as it deeply influences his sentiments as the language, which the individual listens to since childhood is the language of the mother, it is these childhood lyrics that influence his sentimental identity. Therefore, it is found that unity of language establishes a kind of unity of thought and feelings, which binds individuals with a long and interconnected series of intellectual and sentimental ties. Within this context, we can say that language is the strongest tie that binds individuals with other groups. (al-Husri, 1928)

This quote highlights al-Husri’s naturalised perception of the transmission of language through parental upbringing. Al-Husri also supports Herder’s idea of the ultimate role of language in sustaining and preserving the particularity of the nation during times of war (see al-Husri, 1928; Tibi, 1997: 129–30).

More distinctive encounters with Herder are grounded in having a particular national character constructed by revising history. Such a perception conceives that each individual is a folk character who is a reflection of national culture. Thus, it is essential that they preserve their national character and transmit it from generation to generation (Hayes, 1949: 29–30). In Herder’s own words:

As a mineral water derives its component parts, its operative powers, and its flavour from the soil through which it flows, so the ancient character of peoples arose from the family features, the climate, the way of life and education ... The manners of the fathers

²⁹ Al-Husri directly quoted these words from Herder (Herder, 2002: 143), without referencing him. Hence, it can be argued that Herder’s conception had been internalised.

took deep root and became the internal prototype of the race. (quoted in Hayes, 1949: 30; see also Barnard, 1965: 58)

While these words highlight the involuntary/naturalistic sense of belonging to the nation, Herder states that national identity is affirmed by the very natural features of each nation that are transmitted and intensified by both racial and environmental identifications. However, he disregarded the notion that pure race or environment are prerequisites for the formulation of the nation (al-Husri, 1928; El-Attrache, 1976: 26). In such an argument, al-Husri picked Renan's reactionary argument of the impossibility of constituting a homogeneous national identity based on race and environment (al-Husri, 1928).

Yet al-Husri's continued to use Herder's ideas in relation to the primacy of the role of language. In his *Letters on the Advancement of Humanity*, Herder masterfully associated belonging to the nation with speaking the original language: "whoever was raised in the same language, who poured his heart into it, and learned to express his soul in it, he belongs to the nation (*Volk*) of this language" (quoted in Patten, 2010: 667). This enforced belonging to the nation, mediated by speaking the same language, was also strongly emphasised by al-Husri:

Every Arab-speaking people is an Arab people. Every individual belonging to one of these Arabic-speaking peoples is an Arab. And if he does not recognize this, and if he is not proud of his Arabism, then we must look for the reasons that have made him take this stand ... But under no circumstances should we say: "As long as he does not wish to be an Arab, and as long as he is disdainful of his Arabness, then he is not an Arab." He is an Arab regardless of his own wishes. Whether ignorant, indifferent, undutiful, or disloyal, he is an Arab, but an Arab without consciousness or feeling, and perhaps even without conscience. (quoted in Dawisha 2003: 72)

This repetition of Herder's ideas was not an intellectual slip; a close reading of several of al-Husri's books confirms such repetition (al-Husri, 1951: 43–5, 66–78; 1959: 7–11, 14, 19, 23, 53). More importantly, al-Husri was conscious of this borrowing, yet this

did not stop him from claiming that these conceptualisations were his own. Tibi highlights this arrogance by al-Husri, suggesting that

[s]uch statements suggest a close relationship between the ideas of al-Husri and of Herder, which the former does not disavow. He gives a number of quotations from Herder's writings, and comes to the conclusion that he was a pioneer of the idea of the nation adopted by al-Husri himself. (Tibi, 1997: 146)

In terms of al-Husri's notion of unified history, his conceptualisation resembles Herder's construction of cultural identity (see Hutchinson, 1989: 13; 1994: 122; Meinecke, 1970: 29; Smith 1983 [1971]: 22). According to al-Husri, the nation needs memory:

Unity of history gives rise to shared feelings ... It leads to common memories of bygone exploits and past misfortunes, and to mutual faith in the awakening and to mutually shared hopes for the future ... Every nation feels its self-consciousness and creates its personality by means of its special history. (al-Husri, 1928)

The importance of history is conceptualised through its *particularity*. While al-Husri's constructivist approach to the conception of history conveys a deep encounter with Herder's notion of history as a "chain of traditions" (quoted in Tibi, 1997: 129) and Fichte's notion of creating a particular national identity through history (2008: 50–1), this definition mimicked Renan's notion of "forgetting" (1882). Al-Husri's conception of selective history emphasises the ideological encounters with Renan (al-Husri, 1985c: 23–33). Moreover, al-Husri clarifies what he means by history not as the one "recorded in books and buried between the pages of manuscripts" but, rather, the one "which lives in the minds and which possesses traditions" (1928).

This, in fact, highlights Anderson's notion of the nation as an "imagined community" in which history becomes a constructed narrative (2006). Nonetheless, this memory is constructed by selecting a particular history, one that is discursively imagined and invented. According to al-Husri, this belief in the nation is further initiated

through teaching the history of “our glorious past” (1944: 147). The notion of a heroic past is not, however, limited purely to Herder’s and Fichte’s exploration of patriotism (see Hutchinson, 1989: 13; Smith, 1983 [1971]: 21–2), and even Renan explicitly celebrated it. In this sense, while the conception of history can be perceived as a Germanic encounter, al-Husri’s emphasis on selecting and forgetting certain elements in the history of the nation highlights his ideological borrowings from Renan. Following on from this Renanian constructivist notion of history, al-Husri imitates the Frenchman’s conception of imagining a nation of “common destiny” (Renan, 1882). Thus, al-Husri adds to the cultural conception of the nation, a political one through conceiving national belonging as based on fostering a notion of common destiny (*al-maseer al-mushtaraq*).

Taking into consideration al-Husri’s aforementioned conceptualisation of language and history as a means of “cultural survival continuity” (Suleiman, 2003: 13), he further discusses the means of raising national consciousness and supplementing the ultimate aim of nationhood in individuals – unconditional sacrifice for the nation. This leads us to the ideological borrowings from Fichte, for whom al-Husri explicitly shows his admiration: “Fichte is an extremely enthusiastic nationalist thinker ... [and] the following quotes are what I want to include in my theorisation” (1959: 59, 61). According to Fichte, education can be a “moral agent” that sustains in individuals the will needed “to act in accordance with the unconditional duties that [they] have both as moral agents and as members of the German nation” (quoted in Hippler, 2006: 172). Fichte’s conception of national education encompasses two stages, the first of which “was characterised by disciplinarian submission and the second by the development of a sense of autonomous responsibility for the community” (Hippler, 2006: 159). While the first stage of education entails a “love for order that intensifies to an ideal” that is

realised by the incorporation of a system of punishment (Fichte, 1968: 28–9), this internalisation of order and submission to the rules will prepare individuals for the second stage, which is characterised by the ultimate readiness for sacrifice for the nation (Fichte, 1968: 148–50).

Al-Husri derived this conception of internalising submission and order through education from his study of Fichte. Al-Husri vigorously called for renovating national education to remove any element of selfishness and prepare individuals for unconditional sacrifice for the nation through army conscription. More specifically, because al-Husri contends that the gravest enemy to the nation is excessive love of oneself as opposed to “altruism” and “sacrifice”, he followed Fichte’s conception of education as a “moral agent” that defies “selfishness” (al-Husri, 1985a: 117). In his book, *‘Ārā wa ‘Ahādīth fī ‘l-Qawmīyah al-‘Arabīya (Speeches and Reflections upon Arab Nationalism)*, al-Husri considers national education as a strengthening tool that aims to instil a homogeneous national identity (1964b: 57). In his call for ultimate national devotion to and love of the nation, he proposed two stages for national education: school and military barracks.

According to him, school plays the most key role in a child’s life. For example, his book *‘Ahādīth fī ‘l-Tarbīya wa l-‘Ītimā’ (Speeches on Education and Society)* is a seminal account of the “right way” to educate children early in their life at school (1984: 15). Al-Husri affirms that school is the “big society” that incorporates the sense of “morality” and “order” in the personality of the child (1984: 20). In another book, *‘Ārā wa ‘Ahādīth fī ‘l-Tarbīya wal-T’alīm (Views and Discussions upon Pedagogy and Education)*, he provides a detailed discussion on how to cultivate the ideal characteristics of national identity through the promotion of “sociability”. According to al-Husri, there are certain features that need to be developed to realise nationhood. Two

of these are sociability and motivation (1944: 50). Hence, following Fichte's theoretical and practical stages, al-Husri relied on school for the internalisation of order, by idealism and submission, followed by the internalisation of love for the nation, when men are ready for the ultimate sacrifice through army conscription (1985a: 450).

2.7.2 Some traces of Al-Husri's ideological encounters with Renan

Although al-Husri defined a nation's borders in linguistic terms, his attraction to the French idea can be traced back to several of his works (al-Husri 1959; 1985a; 1985d). This borrowing, however, is not very clear or pronounced. There was a slight difference in the way he considered the nationalist instruments of the French idea of the state as only a contribution to the formulation of the nation, thereby advocating the will and determination of the people and common destiny as nationalist sentiments to an already culturally established nation (see Cleveland, 1971: 107).

In this sense, having defined language as the soul and history as the memory of the nation, al-Husri goes beyond this cultural definition of the German Romantic tradition, since he sees that the will and determination of the people is required after realising the cultural identity of the nation. Will and determination are perceived in this context as primarily political tools with a bearing on a political project. Not only are the aforementioned nationalist sentiments borrowed from Renan, but other solid arguments are also used by al-Husri. More specifically, he used Renan's argument to reason his disagreement with the ethnic origin of the nation provided by both Herder and Fichte. What Renan called the idea of purity of race as a "chimera" (Renan, 1882) is further supported by al-Husri (1928; 1959: 129). Al-Husri demonstrates that what binds the nation together is not so much its "physical kinship" but its "psychological and spiritual kinship" (1928). "The important thing in kinship [*qarābah*] and lineage [*nasab*] is not blood relations but rather the belief in this relationship" (ibid.). This further conveys the

deep influence on al-Husri of Renan's definition of the nation as a "spiritual family" (Renan, 1882).

In terms of al-Husri's national theorisation, he enacts two dialectic steps for the formulation of the nation. The first step is achieved through instilling the enforced cultural identity of the nation, while the second is expressed in realising the political borders of the nation, which is achieved through the "will" and "determination of people" (al-Husri, 1928). In discussing the conception of nation-state, Renan captured the essence of constituting the political form of nation that represents people through the state. Hence, as previously mentioned, the essence of his ideology is that the nation is a political entity realised by the consent of its subjects rather than a linguistic and cultural one: "It [nation] presupposes a past but is reiterated in the present by a tangible fact: consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life" (Renan, 1882).

In the course of al-Husri's conceptualisation of Renan's nationalist ideology, he initially disregards the notion of "will and determination" as introduced through consent or in its political context (see al-Husri, 1928). However, he could not hide his attraction to it, as he considers these sentiments to be implemented after the nation is culturally constructed. His conception of the state is that its formation cannot precede the realisation of the nation as a cultural entity (al-Husri 1985e: 31–5; see also 'Ayubi 2009: 138–9). This, on the other hand, does not mean that al-Husri's culturalist approach to the nation was not fused with the need to form a state; he clarified this position by stating that "every nation [*umma*] should aim to constitute a state of its own". Al-Husri is quite conscious of the advantages of having a political border that is identical to national borders. As he states, "What a beautiful nation, that achieved national unity, and completed its political identity, and that managed to make its political borders the same as its national ones" (1985d: 7). These words highlight al-Husri's recognition of

a unified cultural identity as a first step for forming the political realisation through people's will and determination.

Al-Husri's use of Renan's words without making reference to him can be attributed to how Arab intellectuals perceived French philosophers as standing for colonisation:

We might need to follow what a thinker [Renan] once said: "Every nation should forget some parts of its history". ... I do not doubt that this quote implies a great deal of truth. Because the true unity in any nation cannot be guaranteed unless it forgets some parts of its history. ... I declare clearly ... that what I mean is just ignoring these incidents ... and give precedence to common history. (1928)

This could be mainly to dispel the appearance of any close affinity between the two. Moreover, these words highlight the fact that al-Husri is not only calling for a blending of facts, but also imagining a culture based on invented solidarity, which is in turn reflected in Renan's nationalist theory.

Despite the influence of Renan, it is little wonder that al-Husri was deeply influenced by the German Romantics, and this is attributed to the similarity between cultural Germany in the 18th century and the Arab world of the early 20th century. Al-Husri was occupied with reasoning about the rejection of Islamic rule, calling for a unified nation based on cultural nationalism. The primary goal of his ideology was to convince Arabs of the legitimacy of his national philosophy that, in order to formulate a political state, there should exist a cultural entity that includes the different Arab countries in one nation. His conceptualisation of the notion of state was very limited due to his preoccupation with the question of cultural unity of the nation. Due to this emphasis on the concept of community rather than the state, al-Husri derived this distinction between nation and state from the German tradition (1928; 1985e). He

adopted the Germanic perception of people of the nation as a cultural homogeneous group (*Volk*), not as citizens.

Indeed, in taking one step further in this cultural ideology, Aflaq's cultural conception and theoretical stance form the basis for a later political mobilisation by his Ba'athist voice, which had institutionalised al-Husri's conception. Yet he also transcends the universality of al-Husri's cultural ideas to influence the political constitution of the Syrian state under the Ba'ath. Just as Herder is depicted as the father of cultural nationalism, al-Husri can be seen as the Herder of his time as he was the father of the cultural nationalism that emerged in Syria.

2.8 Michel Aflaq's political theorisation

Michel Aflaq (1910–1989) was a Syrian philosopher, sociologist and nationalist thinker, perceived to be the political founder of Ba'athist thought. He published various books during his lifetime; the most notable collection of his nationalist ideology is found in the five-volume work *Fī Sabīl al-Ba'ath (On the Way of Resurrection)*.³⁰ Born into a middle-class family in Damascus, he studied at the Sorbonne, where he was exposed to the European philosophers and especially the two Germanic and French nationalist traditions. He returned to Syria in 1932 equipped with his political ideas on the future. His influential role in constructing Syrian national thought can be traced back to 1947, when the first congress of the Ba'ath Party was held in Damascus (Rabinovich, 1972: 228), with him positioned as the “leader” of the party (Moubayed, 2006: 131). The basis of his nationalist ideology sprung from al-Husri's conception of nationalism and the two European schools of nationalist thought. He is often perceived as a figure whose

³⁰ This work includes most of Aflaq's lectures, articles, speeches and conferences roughly between the 1930s and the 1970s. Full access to this work can be found online at <http://albaath.online.fr/>. Any reference to Aflaq's work will be from this website, unless noted that it is from the printed version.

ideology forms a bridge between the cultural conception of the nation and the political realisation of its entity.

Given the political context around which Aflaq formulated his ideology, his authoritarian and pessimistic tone cannot be missed in his speeches. His numerous lectures on the formulation of national identity during his involvement in the political leadership of the Ba'ath Party between the 1940s and 1960s included a constant call for struggle and determination against imperialism. In fact, the striking difference between al-Husri and Aflaq is that, while the former did not hide the influence of European ideologues on him – translating their works and applying their nationalist concepts to the Arab nation – Aflaq rather disregarded any attraction to the European nationalist philosophy. Despite the influence of al-Husri's nationalist thought, Aflaq clearly contradicted al-Husri's objective debate and his analytical way of conceptualising nationalism. According to Aflaq, the very attempt to rationalise and objectify the idea of nationalism by drawing examples of Western nationalism should be rejected (al-Khalil, 1990: 190). Aflaq criticised the abstraction of the idea of nationalism as it “strips things of their flesh and blood, and robs them of colour and taste” (Aflaq, 1940). More specifically, Aflaq emphasised that nationalism is “faith” and “love”, which can be felt by the heart but not the mind, and such feeling of national sentiments precedes all knowledge and practical definitions (ibid.). In this sense, Aflaq proposed a different nationalist perspective to al-Husri of how to tackle a nation's formulation, based more on a profound “emotional basis” than on an objective analytical question (ibid.).

Aflaq's words are often flowery and passionate in style and were criticised for a lack of real substance (Ajami, 1982: 27; see also Makiya, 1998: 201). His mystical way of approaching the question of belonging to the nation is linked to how he defines his nationalist ideology. Aflaq demonstrates an obsession with the role of the Ba'ath

Party, preventing him from constituting a practical narrative. One can trace encounters between his ideas and Fichte, Herder and Renan, despite his emphasis on the “originality” of his Ba'athist ideology (see al-Khalil, 1990: 183). It is within his political theorisation that the meaning of Ba'ath, (“awakening” and “resurrection”) has become the most persistent theme in his nationalist ideology. In his pursuit of Ba'athism, he called on the “new generation” to renounce the “glory” (*majid*) of the old “past”. His words in an article entitled “*al-ma'raka bayn alwujūd al'şlī wa al-wujūd al-sathī*” (The Battle between Superficial and Genuine Existence) (1955) captured the essence of his nationalist message:

Life cannot be constantly based on inconsistency. It has to find a way to resolve it, either by deadening the urge for the mission and the genuine aims, by acquiescing to facile reality and surrendering to it, or by moving the forces that respond to the aspiration of the nation to realise the genuineness of its existence. (Aflaq, 1955)

Fundamentally, these words convey the ideas of enthusiasm and force for regenerating society through the Ba'ath message of rebirth. This message entails resurrection from weakness and oblivion to action and willingness for the sake of the nation. It is a movement that transfers the generation's aspiration from “the realm of sentimental and inactive wistfulness” to “a combative interaction with the will, forces and vital interests” (ibid.).

Nonetheless, for the realisation of such a message, Aflaq considered the question of language and history as the driving elements behind his ideology. He developed this view from the German Romantics and al-Husri's nationalist conception. However, more specifically, given the grim and pessimistic situation of his time, Aflaq's account of the subjective perception of nationalism shows the major influence of Fichte. The Syrian defeats during the 1948 Arab–Israeli War were the trigger for the tenets of his nationalist

ideology. Within this context, Aflaq's preoccupation with struggle towards unity echoes Fichte's words in his call for the constitution of a unified German state:

At most, a particular German state might aim to unite the entire German nation under its government ... Nevertheless, even in this worst of all cases it would still have been German who rules over Germans ... and if the characteristic German spirit had briefly gone astray, there would still have remained the hope that one day it would reawaken ... a German nation would still have remained in existence, governing itself, and it would not have sunk into an existence of a lower order. (2008: 115–6)

This very much resembles the messianic message propounded by Aflaq, as he followed Fichte's extreme call for unity and struggle against the enemy through the common passage of pain. In a speech delivered in 1950 entitled "*ma'na al-rīsalah al-khālidah*" (The Meaning of the Eternal Message), he stated:

Brethren, at times when waves of pessimism and defeatism increase as do calamities and disasters, the true Arabs feel that the day of salvation is approaching, for the road has been opened at last for the Arab psyche to be shaken, to be deeply moved so that it remembers itself, and its task and rises with alacrity, vitality and faith, finding all sufferings and sacrifice sweet for the sake of achieving its mission in existence ... the true faithful must emerge and true faith cannot be acquired except through experience and suffering. (Aflaq, 1950)

Another similarity with Fichte lies in the assertiveness of Aflaq's political tone. He addressed his audience in the hope of finding a way to renew the national spirit and inspire the creation of unity. Taking after Fichte, Aflaq emphasised the importance of the philosopher's voice. As Fiala points out, Fichte's conclusion in the *Addresses* (2008), stressed that "the philosopher's voice can inspire the German people [and] is thus centered around a claim about the spiritual nature of language and the creative spiritual and political power of the philosopher's voice" (Fiala, 2002: 107). Aflaq explicitly considered the philosopher's voice as part of the national idea. In his own words:

The leader, in times of weakness of the "idea" and its constriction, is not one to appeal to the majority or to a consensus, but to the opposition and enmity; he is not one to substitute numbers for the "idea", but to translate numbers into the "idea"; he is not the

ingatherer, but the unifier. In other words, he is the master of the singular “idea”. (Aflaq, 1944)³¹

This is further enhanced by his authoritarian voice and nationalist perception of correcting the mistakes of the past. Like Fichte, Aflaq used his nationalist message to renounce the glory of the past. An article entitled “*'ahd al-būtūla*” (Age of Heroism) (1935) reflects Aflaq’s proposal for a new era that would correct the mistakes of the past. Aflaq starts by saying: “Now we close a page of weakness from our history and open a new one ... A page full of patriotism and heroism” (Aflaq, 1935). In another speech, delivered in 1943, Aflaq stresses the necessity of renouncing the glorious past: “Our belonging to our patriot grandfathers ... We should remove barriers of inertia and decadence to restore our inherited glorious blood. We should purify our land and sky to elicit the souls of our heroic ancestors” (Aflaq, 1943).

Aflaq’s attraction to the ideals of the German Romantics prevails in his articulation of national belonging as conforming to destiny. His early essay “*al-qawmīyah hub qabl kul shay*” (Nationalism Is Love Before Anything Else) (1940) outlines the influence of Herder’s primordialist conception of the nation. In the course of Aflaq’s conception of the nation as a cultural entity, he assumes that nationalism is involuntary, and based on unconditional love of the nation. He further establishes a connection between the individual’s love of the family and of the nation. This ultimate recognition of the nation as a “big family” has spiritual connotations, which determine the forceful belonging to it (ibid.) and, more importantly, prepare individuals for the passive submission to the love of the nation through sacrifice and heroism. In his words:

Nationalism is like every love ... And as love is associated with sacrifice and thus nationalism, and the sacrifice for nationalism leads to heroism, for the one who

³¹ This glorification of the role of leader in his national ideology will later be translated into the association between realising nationhood and manhood (Chapter Six).

sacrifices for his nation and its glorious past and for the happiness of its future, is rather perfecting life in its highest image ... He who loves does not ask for reasons. (ibid.)

Another demonstration of Aflaq's conception of belonging can be explored in his assumption that love of the nation is transmitted like the inheritance of physical features. This illuminates his doctrine of sacrifice for the nation (Aflaq, 1940a), which initially appears in Fichte's conception of unconditional love for the fatherland. According to Fichte, the ultimate aim of such love is to inspire individuals to act in accordance with the unconditional commands of duty; however, such demands are only achieved through producing in individuals the moral will to die joyfully for the fatherland. Such a manifestation of active will to sacrifice oneself is employed to achieve unity (Fichte, 2008: 107).

Aflaq's cultural-based conception stresses that both language and history are the main driving elements that constitute the nation. In his 1946 article "*hawla al-rīsalah al-‘arabīyah*" (About the Arabic Message) Aflaq takes Herder's conception of the particularity of the nation through its language, history and culture and states that the nation can only renounce its particular position through the unity of its language, culture and history. Such preservation of unity of cultural elements is the chief constituent of a particular cultural identity, which will subsequently retrieve the recognisable rank and position of the nation that arose in the past (Aflaq, 1946). In another speech, "*al-‘alaqa bayn al-‘urūba wa al-taghīr al-jathrī*" (The Relation between Arabism and the Movement of Radical Change) (1950), Aflaq emphasises the central role of heritage as it stems from the "spirit of the nation", which acts as a driving force to strengthen the will to achieve unity (Aflaq, 1950a).

Even after more than ten years, Aflaq's conception of the role of heritage and culture as constituents of national identity had not changed. In a speech in 1966, he stated:

The doctrinal movement cannot grow if it ceases to have a bond with its heritage and its past. This does not mean that we should stand still with regard to the past, but that we should have a living and conscious link with it in a way that realises the unity of the party, its march and the soundness of its orientation. (Aflaq, 1966)

While this national spirit of unity may be seen in Fichte's nationalist ideology, Aflaq's call for unity is associated with his conceptualisation of the national journey from darkness to resurrection, through shared experience of pain and suffering. In a speech delivered on 1 February 1950 under the title "*al-Ba'ath al-'arabī hwa al-īnqilab*" (On the Meanings of Radical Change), Aflaq emphasised the notion of suffering as a unitary tool for the nation to transcend its weaknesses and barriers. According to him, believing in the Ba'ath movement was the only guarantee for experiencing true life. It is such "[a] tremendous, profound, genuine experience which is commensurate with the greatness of the Arab nation, equal to the depths of afflictions suffered by the Arabs, equal to the magnitude of the dangers threatening the survival of the nation" (Aflaq, 1950b). Renouncing the glorious past (*majid*) is linked with experiencing communal "pain" (*al-'alam*) and "suffering" (*m'uanāt*). Their conceptualisation as ideals for the promised "struggle" (*al-nīdāl*) against the enemy is depicted in Renan's nationalist ideology: "'Suffered together', I said, for shared suffering unites more than does joy. In fact, periods of mourning are worth more to national memory than triumphs because they impose duties and require a common effort" (Renan, 1882).

This notion of shared suffering can be detected in Aflaq's speech delivered in 1956, "*al-'Urūba and al-'Alam*" (Arabism and Suffering), in which he affirmed that the

process of resurrection can be achieved through experiencing communal “suffering”. Moreover, the concept of nationhood can be realised through “struggle and pain” (Aflaq, 1956). As Aflaq states: “*al-Ba'ath hwa ramz li m'uanāt al-ūmah*” (The Ba'ath is the Symbol of the Suffering of the Nation) (Aflaq, 1983). He stresses the “spiritual message” of the Ba'ath as the only guarantee of a glorious future. Such renouncing of the past can be achieved by remembering the sufferings of people, which will inspire them with the will to achieve the “humane message” of the Ba'ath (Aflaq, 1943b).

Another demonstration of the affinity between Aflaq and Renan is the role of national heritage in constructing the spiritual and psychological formation of national identity. On the one hand, he conceptualises the nation as having always lived in the minds of people, and on the other, demonstrates a constructivist approach to its formulation.³² In his own words:

We should not forget that Arab culture in the past was not possible and could not have been realised had it not been for that period of struggle that lasted for a few decades; but it was the spiritual yeast, the psychological and moral treasure which permitted the Arabs to expand, spread and intermingle with various nations who were in a luxurious cultural milieu. (Aflaq, 1949)

It seems that Aflaq fused the psychological phenomena of the formation of the nation with the primordial sentiments (language, culture and history), and illuminates traces of the constructivist approach that the nation is not limited to the natural extension of the family.

Examining the tenets of Aflaq's nationalist thought shows the deep influence of Herder, Fichte and Renan. While the ideological content of his theorisation is based on the commonality of language, history, culture and, most importantly, his revolutionary

³² Among the modernist nationalist thinkers that consider the nation a psychological formation are Anderson 2006; Kohn 1945: 16; Otto Bauer 1996: 63.

message (*Ba'ath*), his conception goes beyond the Romantic sentiments of the German thinkers and reflects Renan's notion of common experience of suffering and pain as constitutors of the nation. Despite being considered "awkward ... and very much not a soapbox politician" (Lund, 2014), his nationalist perception further lays down the theoretical basis of Hafez al-Assad's practical approach to the Ba'ath (Saba', 2005: 298). El-Attrache demonstrates how the basis of the Ba'ath Party can be found in the writings and ideas of Aflaq (1976: 1–2). However, one of the other philosophers who have influenced the emergence of modern nationalist thought in Syria is Zaki al-Arsuzi, who demonstrates the most prevailing unification of the republican and primordial traditions.

2.9 Zaki al-Arsuzi: Modernist and primordialist conceptions

Zaki al-Arsuzi was born to an Alawite family, marginalised during the reign of the Ottoman Empire. His father's political activism against the Ottomans shaped al-Arsuzi's political passion in nationalist ideologies (Watenpaugh, 1996: 365). During his stay in France between 1927 and 1930, he was exposed to both French culture and European philosophy (Choueiri, 2001: 144). This attraction to French ideals might be attributed to his excellence in speaking French and to studying at the Sorbonne. He returned to Syria in 1930 very influenced by the French Revolution and its principles. However, this later caused him trouble with the French authorities for teaching the principles of the French Revolution to his students in Syria. He grew in opposition to the repressive procedures of the French Mandate and the old Turkification policies carried out by the Ottomans. Al-Arsuzi, like other nationalists at that time, therefore developed a nationalist ideology based on centralising the Arabic language as the primary principle for formulating the nation. Calling Aflaq a "thief" of his nationalist ideology, the "Ba'ath" (see Curtis, 1977), al-Arsuzi was less popular than Aflaq and al-

Husri, perhaps because he lacked the conventional style of al-Husri's nationalist narrative and Aflaq's ardent voice in his speeches.

In terms of the reception for his national ideology, al-Arsuzi is considered an "icon" in the Arab world for his philosophy of the Arab language (Elamir, 2010: 66–7), yet is almost unknown to Western scholarship, which may be due to the close similarity between his thinking and that of Aflaq and al-Husri (ibid.). Despite such "superficial treatment" of his works and ideas (ibid.), al-Arsuzi – unlike both al-Husri and Aflaq – introduced novel elements to the formulation of nationalist thought in modern Syria.³³ His perceptions further flourished and shaped Syrian political thought, especially during Aflaq's exile in 1966 (Elamir, 2010: 66). Aflaq and al-Arsuzi both had an ideological influence in shaping Ba'athist thought under Assad's rule (Saba', 2005). Saba' argues that, despite Aflaq's "spiritual role" in preaching the Ba'athist message, he was marginalised in the aftermath of the 1963 coup led by Assad. In a deep revelation of the conflicting relationship between Aflaq and al-Assad, Saba' states:

The one who studies the historical evolution of the Ba'ath can envisage that Aflaq was the theorist and Assad is the one who applies this theorisation. However, neither the theorist accepted the applier nor the applier accepted the theorist. Therefore, one of them needed to disappear from the Ba'ath field and that was Aflaq. (Saba', 2005: 298)

However, because Assad needed an ideological preacher to further strengthen his rule over Ba'athist supporters, during al-Assad's appointment as Syrian Regional Commander after the 1963 coup and as Minister of Defence following the 1966 coup, he took al-Arsuzi with him to meet soldiers and military officers. Al-Assad's interest in al-Arsuzi enlivened the latter's ideological stance, and in return he wrote extensive

³³ This is connected to his conceptualisation of freedom, democracy and state.

ideological profiles on Assad in Ba'athist periodicals (Saba', 2005: 270).³⁴ Not surprisingly, such writings had a significant influence on Assad's development as a future ruler of the Ba'ath (ibid.). In a further demonstration of his ideological role in Syria, Elamir depicted al-Arsuzi's "complex role" as both the "spiritual founder of the Ba'ath" and the one who was marginalised by the party (2010: 67). Capturing such ambivalent treatment of al-Arsuzi's ideology, Elamir indicates that the uncertainty of the Ba'ath Party in dealing with his works can be attributed to "reasons of internal party history". After the party came to power in 1963, it needed him for purposes of its own legitimisation" (2010: 67).

The essence of al-Arsuzi's nationalist theory was in two phases. The first stage was during the early period of his writings, in which he aligned his national ideology with the German Romantics and adhered to the cultural principles, primarily language and history, to constitute the origin of the nation. However, in his later years, he revised his works drastically and showed explicit attraction to the French ideas, particularly in the conceptualisation of state, freedom and democracy as formulators of the nation. Such a change in his modes of thinking depicts the duality of the sources that influenced the emergence of his nationalist philosophy.

2.9.1 Al-Arsuzi's early writings: The nation as a cultural construct

In this phase, al-Arsuzi's manner of approaching the definition of the nation seldom varies from the Romantics' conception of language and culture as essential components. In this regard, his conceptualisation of language was deeply spiritual and philosophical. His early works demonstrated the link between the emergence of the nation and the etymology of the Arabic language. In essence, this phase captures al-Arsuzi's

³⁴ Al-Assad's interest in al-Arsuzi's national theory is not only important on the political level in the Syrian context, but also has massive implications for how women are imagined in Syrian society. This will be explored in Chapter Four.

ideological encounters with al-Husri's and Aflaq's cultural conception of the nation.

This cultural perception can clearly be reflected in his definition of the nation:

The terms nation ['*umma*] and mother ['*umm*] derived from the same root, and the mother is the living image of the nation, and like subjects of society is the mother with her sons, and above all the nation is the fountainhead of customs and public institutions. And we mean of public institutions: language, literature, art and other things that represent public life. (al-Arsuzi, 1973: 213)

This wording reflects the essentialist and primordialist conception of the nation. Al-Arsuzi clearly defines belonging to the nation as involuntary and cultural. More importantly, as previously mentioned, this definition of the nation signifies it as a kind of extended family.

Further encounters with the German Romantics prevail in his belief that the world is distinctively divided by language (1973: 213). In his attempt to define the origin of the nation in the particularity of its language, al-Arsuzi assumed genetic superiority of the Arab race. Unlike al-Husri's elimination of racial kinship (*qarābit al-nasab*) (1928), al-Arsuzi rather adopted the German Romantics' idea of the nation as premised on its blood relations. More specifically, giving race a primary role in identifying the greatness of the nation, al-Arsuzi adopted Fichte's proposition of the superiority of the German people. Fichte supported such a proposition and claimed that the German people were "destined for greatness" due to the purity of their race (Baradat, 2016: 248). In a similar manner, al-Arsuzi depicts the Arab race as genetically superior, and linked to its ancient origins, that it is "a myth reaching back to Adam and Eve" (1973: 214). In line with such beliefs, al-Arsuzi was very much against intermarriage with other races.³⁵

³⁵ Al-Arsuzi's views on intermarriage are reflected in the Syrian nationality law, which stipulates that women are not allowed to transmit their citizenship to their children if married to non-Syrians (see Chapter Five).

In his hopes of fighting the abuses of colonialism and corruption, al-Arsuzi relied on education as a means of raising national consciousness (1973: 284). Like Fichte, he was interested in the unification of language and national education (Watenpaugh, 1996: 365). Al-Arsuzi felt there was a need to construct an educational system that lifted society from its “condition of misery” (*al-wadi’ al-bali*) (al-Arsuzi, 1954: 15–33). He took it upon himself to write extensively about and introduce a national education that fought the backwardness of the Arab situation and implemented language and history as constituents of the nation. Suffice to say that such provisions explain encounters with Fichte’s and Herder’s work that espoused the consolidation of the foundation of the nation through education. However, al-Arsuzi’s political writings, which reflected his obsession with philosophising the origin of the Arab language as a tool for constructing Arab national identity, drastically changed after independence from the French colonisers and the rash military coups in Syria. The next section aims to capture this ideological shift in al-Arsuzi’s nationalist thought.

2.9.2 Al-Arsuzi’s later writings: The nation as a modernist construct

Following the break-up of the United Arab Republic in 1961, al-Arsuzi realised that constructing a homogeneous cultural identity was not enough to realise national unity. This led him to divert his way of thinking from the German essentialist version of nationalism to the French modernistic view, in which the nation was premised on common destiny, will and determination of the people. More specifically, al-Arsuzi’s definition of national unity no longer provided a basis for language and culture, but rather adopted the French idea of constituting a political state as a means to achieve not only Arab unity, but also to build a good society.

A close reading of his later works (1965; 1974; 1975) captures the essence of his modernistic views of the nation. One can clearly discern that al-Arsuzi is more

practical in terms of understanding the Arab situation and that Arab unity is just a myth (Elamir, 2010: 75). This led him to be attracted to Renan's ideology of the nation as a political entity, as Renan defined the nation's existence "a daily plebiscite" (Renan, 1882). In this way, the nation's existence becomes based on people's political consent and it is further defined by their collective will and determination to live together and form the nation. Such sentiments were proposed by Renan's insistence on the voluntary nature of belonging to the nation. A clear adoption of Renan's conception can be found in al-Arsuzi's words:

Because the state represents the identity of a mature society ... The task of the state is to take care of its citizens and make sure to raise their national consciousness to the level of freedom; this awareness will make the citizens participate voluntarily in the public affairs. (al-Arsuzi, 1974: 27)

These words represent a departure from al-Arsuzi's essentialist and naturalistic definition of the nation and capture the shift from the involuntary belonging to the nation manifested in his early writings. Another underlying message is that they stress the political notion of consent proposed by Renan (1882), which implies the free will of citizens to decide and determine their political representation of the state. This is clearly demonstrated by the use of the term "citizens"; unlike Aflaq, al-Husri and the German Romantics, "people" are no longer limited to the homogeneous cultural identification, but are envisaged as political citizens with will and determination. On another occasion, al-Arsuzi further assigned to the state the task of raising members of society not only to the level of freedom but also to an awareness of their collective will and determination to form the nation. He states:

The role of the state is to make members of society, who were driven by instincts, into individuals, each of whom determines his own and general fate in full freedom. The citizens have to be able to satisfy their needs within limits, which protect them from temptations that might lead their will astray. (1965: 188)

As we have seen, there was a general disregard of the state as a prerequisite for constituting the nation in al-Husri's nationalist thought. At the same time, Aflaq was preoccupied with politicising the Ba'ath Party by disseminating their principles and values. However, according to al-Arsuzi, no longer was the state considered an outcome of the realisation of the nation; rather it represented the essence of the nation's message: "The primary role of the state is to defend the true essence of the nation, its living space and its value system. Its primary task is to furnish the necessary means for the nation to realise its identity" (1974: 102).

Al-Arsuzi insisted that communal values and cultural identification needed to be featured in a political body, i.e. the state, whose role is in mobilising citizens politically and culturally. In this regard, al-Arsuzi viewed the state as a means to realise the nation and to manifest the relationship between citizens within society (al-Arsuzi, 1965: 182).

In terms of his notion of natural rather than forced belonging that requires passive submission to national duty, i.e. sacrifice, he attempts to make belonging stem from reason and love. He even put reason before love to highlight the necessity of citizens' will and determination. Al-Arsuzi significantly captured the shift in his thought by saying:

[Nationalism] is influenced in its development by two factors which lead to humanity ... The first factor is reason and the second is love. By "reason" we mean the connection between results and the principle ... Reason motivates human beings to gain control over the conditions of nature and make them subject to man's will ... As far as the role of love [for nationalism] is concerned, it brings together the various individuals and communities ... [for example] When I came back from Paris I had a racial³⁶ orientation in my feelings of brotherhood for the human race, which exists in all human beings ... When I reached this stage – the stage in which the divisive limits between individuals and communities fall – I became a refuge for all and strived for our highest ideal to establish a state which would guarantee its citizens freedom and dignity, be they Armenians, Kurds or Turks. (1975: 153–4)

³⁶ The term "racial" in this context refers to the Arab people.

These sentiments reflect al-Arsuzi's ideological shift and his emphasis on incorporating man's will in contrast to the conception of unconditional love for the nation that entails man's submission to physical sacrifice, and further demonstrate his adoption of the French modernist idea of the nation. They also illustrate the complex nature of al-Arsuzi's relationship with France, being caught between his attraction to the French idea of the nation as a political entity as represented by a cosmopolitan and humane message in his nationalist ideology in later years, and his hostility to France's colonial role in the Arab world.

This brings us to question whether al-Arsuzi's later works completely disregard his initial attraction to the German version of the nation. In his review of the idea of the genetic superiority of the Arab nation, al-Arsuzi added that such superiority – despite being attributed to the fact that the Arab race is descended from Adam and Eve – should include a consideration of territorial closeness (*jiwar*) encompassing communal interest and destiny. The manifestation of the two versions of nationalism (French and German) can be detected in his summary:

Nationalism ... is inveterate, and as ancient as the earliest human history, Arabs had a myth reaching back to Adam and Eve. It is believed that Arabs were all of one kin, and that this was the basis of their superiority and their high rank among nations ... And as for the principles of nationalism, it is based on:

1 – Fraternity and brotherhood by nature and the proximity of their descent [*qarābah bi-l-nasab*] ... This kinship [*qarābah*] is not restricted to racial kinship only, but there is kinship in culture and superiority. Therefore, nation is not only an extension of one family, but also a human construction.

2 – Common interests.

3 – Common solidarity.

(al-Arsuzi, 1973: 213–6)

The espousal of the two conflicting nationalist ideologies can be seen in this quote, in which al-Arsuzi clearly maintained the notion of racial superiority of the Arab nation

based on natural kinship (*rawabit tabi 'yīa*). However, it is also a civic entity that rests on the initialisation of a “realist” conception (*'aklīyah*). In this way, he insisted that this cultural and racial proximity is reinforced by experiencing communal solidarity, be it through forgetting or remembering certain memories of the nation (al-Arsuzi, 1958: 179).

In this sense, the role of al-Arsuzi is quite remarkable as he was the first to introduce the notions of democracy and state in his ideology (Elamir, 2010). He moved from the only cultural definition of the nation to include in his ideology the need for social justice (Elamir, 2010: 67). Moreover, he was ahead of his rivals in realising that shared language and culture are not enough for the political and social realisation of the nation (*'umma*) (ibid.). While al-Husri and Aflaq were preoccupied with the abstraction of the idea of the nation, al-Arsuzi's later works dealt with the social and political problems faced by citizens (Elamir, 2010: 68, 72).

Al-Arsuzi's nationalist perception transcended Aflaq's ardent political voice and his absorption with the national idea, and al-Husri's objective and cultural approach, and, more importantly, advocated a strategic and political standpoint based on the state as a means of constituting the nation. This perception is very much linked to his attraction to the French idea and its modernist principles. Al-Arsuzi brings us together to praise the introduction of modern political thought in his national doctrine. His nationalist thought embraced the application of state, democracy and free society, in contrast to al-Husri's and Aflaq's chief theorisation of the nation as a cultural and primordial entity. This notable awareness of the importance of deploying the state and the notion of freedom and democracy in order to constitute the nation is the result of his deep influencing by the French idea of the nation (1973: 321–3). However, one should bear in mind that, despite his ideological shift towards the civic notion of the nation, he

remained an advocate of the primary role of language and blood relations. Hence, it must be argued that the unpredictable nature of al-Arsuzi's political ideology is attributed to his attraction to the conflicting conceptions of nation and nationalism proposed by the German Romantics and French modernists.

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has so far investigated how the idea of nation and nationalism developed in Syria. It first clarified what constitutes a nation and nationalism, and further contextualised their emergence in the second half of the 20th century influenced by the German and French traditions. It has reviewed the main currents of Syrian national thought on nation and nationalism in detail, analysing and deconstructing the traces of ideological influences by the three European thinkers. It is worth noting that Syrian national thought has evolved around two overlapping yet contradictory themes: cultural identity and the political body of the nation.

In the writings of these three Syrian thinkers, the rise of the idea of nation and nationalism in its initial cultural phase emphasised primordial sentiments as prerequisites of nation formation. In this phase, they were concerned with the realisation of the cultural identity of the nation by focusing on unity of language, history, education and culture. While in this phase, the adoption of the German idea of nationalism was quite profound and explicit, relying on the idea of the natural and cultural formation of the nation, in this sense, perceiving national belonging as involuntary. However, despite this conscious borrowing of the basic idea of the nation as a primarily cultural entity from both Herder and Fichte, they supplemented their arguments with elements drawn from Renan. Al-Husri was conscious of his attraction to the German idea of nationalism, yet he disregarded the ethnic and environmental identifications to constitute the origin of the nation. In so doing, he was adopting Renan's reactionary argument to the German

doctrine. Al-Husri even augmented his notion of history as based on forgetting and selecting particular national events to construct a national memory of the nation that instilled a homogeneous national identity. In so doing, he was identifying with Renan's constructivist notion of the nation. At the same time Aflaq, while emphasising the primordial construction of the nation based on language and history, used Renan's conception of communal experience of struggle and suffering to constitute the nation. Al-Arsuzi's national ideology was, on the one hand, primarily concerned with dealing with the superiority of the Arab race, drawing such notions from the German doctrine (particularly Fichte) while, on the other hand, insisting on the idea of common destiny and interest in formulating the nation.

In the attempt to elucidate the elements of the civic notions in the Syrian context, al-Husri showed a limited consideration of the state in his theorisation, yet still argued in favour of achieving a political body of the nation. His reference to the necessity of constructing a sense of will and determination of people can be considered as laying the foundations for practical institutionalisation of his cultural thought in Aflaq's foundation of the Ba'ath Party. In this sense, Aflaq constitutes the development of Syrian national thought towards a civic phase in which theory becomes practised in a political body, i.e. the Ba'ath Party. However, the French idea of the state flourished in al-Arsuzi's later works, as he extensively discussed the tasks of the state in realising the nation. In this sense, he distanced himself from the German idea of constituting cultural entity before realising the state. More importantly, he called extensively for the autonomy of citizens, using this political term to define their autonomy, freedom, responsibility and duty, rather than the previous reference to homogeneous cultural groups.

Having established the main course of movement that led from the cultural version of nationalism to the constitution of the political nation and state in the Syrian context, this chapter has attempted to identify these three Syrian thinkers as manifesting the development of Syrian national thought in its early stages. The next chapter aims to theorise the intersection of gender and nationalism in general as a starting point for the investigation of how these thinkers' national ideologies have masculinised national belonging and identity. Hence, it is a philosophical and historical interrogation of the origins of Syrian nationalism in order to unearth the construction of masculinism in its cultural and political phases. After this, the next step is to interrogate the construction of gender bias and masculinism in the concepts and language reinforced by these thinkers and later perpetuated and imposed by the state.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORISING GENDER AND NATIONALISM

3.1 Introduction

Having investigated the origins of Syrian nationalism and its ideological borrowings from the European thinkers, this chapter aims to provide relevant theoretical studies of the relationship between the construction of masculinism and the subordination of women in nationalist narratives. This part of the thesis is helpful not only in exploring the gendered nature of nationalism, but also in understanding how masculinist nationalism involves other modes of construction, such as hegemony, hierarchy, militarism and patriarchy, to subjugate women. Attempting to answer RQ2 (“What role does nationalism play in marginalising women from national memory and imagining?”) entails analysing the intimate interaction between the perpetuation of manhood with the formulation of nationalist ideology. In this sense, this chapter aims to contextualise the missed representation of women in national narrative, due to the dominance of masculinism as the defining characteristic of nationhood.

This chapter consists of three main sections. The first (3.2) aims to explore the relationship between gender and nationalism by raising the question of how nationalism creates boundaries based on hierarchy and power relations. Section 3.3 sets the stage for a common understanding when reading the thesis by providing definitions of the overarching terms and concepts used in the thesis (subsections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2). Following this theoretical overview of the relationship between nationalism and gender bias, this chapter engages with four fundamental theoretical studies that form the basis of this thesis (subsections 3.4.1 to 3.4.4). This will be done by providing an extensive

examination of the literature debating the intersection of gender and masculinism with the construction of nation and nationalism. Hence, by illuminating that this thesis is in debt to four theoretical doctrines that shape both its content and framework, this chapter aims to demonstrate why it is necessary to provide new conceptual tools to address the subordination of women, through analysing national narratives.

3.2 Gender and nationalism: Theoretical departure

Since the 1980s, the gendered nature of the nation and nationalism has been revealed by a number of feminists who aim not only to reclaim women's role in nation formation (see Koonz, 1988: 21; McClintock, 1995: 2–6; de Grazia, 1992: 2, 5–6; Mayer, 1994: 1–15; Radhakrishnan, 1992: 78; Pateman, 1988: 4; Heuer, 2008: 43–7), but also to question women's exclusion from national narrative and imagining (Blom, Hagemann & Hall, 2000; Enloe, 1983; 2000; Mayer, 2000; McClintock, 1995; McClintock, Mufti & Shohat, 1997; Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989). However, some scholars have considered that feminist scholarship has overlooked the systematic construction of masculinism in many fields, not only nationalism (Messerschmidt, 1993; Nagel, 1998: 243). In this sense, in the process of examining the interrelationship between gender and nationalism, it can be seen that the gender bias traced in the dominant theorisations of nations and nationalism cannot be a “coincidence”; rather, it stems from a “male-defined” world where women are obscured by “brotherhood” (Okin, 1980: 14). This chauvinist nature of nationalism has been attributed to the privileges given to one gender over the other. As Mayer argues, the “empowerment of one gender, one nation or one sexuality virtually always occurs at the expense and disempowerment of another” (2000: 1). Pettman further concludes that nationalism is about “reconsolidating centralized control of authority...including gender privilege” (Pettman, 1996: 138) (Pettman, 1996: 138), which further turns nationalism into an “exercise of internal

hegemony” (Mayer, 2000: 1). In this sense, McClintock significantly indicates that “all nationalisms are gendered, all are invented, and all are dangerous” (1991). According to McClintock, nationalisms are dangerous in the sense that “they represent relations to political power and to the technologies of violence” (1991: 104–5). This manifestation of power relations is sustained through the construction of an imagined dichotomy between men and women that legitimises violence and coercion. Hence, this exclusivist nature of nationalism puts men at the highest level of the national spectrum, while relegating women as “the other”.

Such conceptualisation of men and women in the discursive construction of the nation “posited a straightforward equation between male interests, masculinity and nationalism” (Bracewell, 2000: 566). Within this context, Enloe attributes the affinity between women’s subordination and the construction of nationalism to the fact that nationalism has “typically sprung from masculinized memory, masculinized humiliation and masculinized hope” (1990: 45). Moreover, Mosse argues that “nationalism had a special affinity for male society and together with the concept of respectability legitimised the dominance of men over women” (1985: 67).

Given the above discussion, I start with the notion that nationalism is an inherently gendered phenomenon.³⁷ As Gellner argues, “it is nationalism that engenders nations, and not the other way around” (1983: 49). Gendered, in this context, is contextualised with the perpetuation of men’s superiority over women in the national discourse. This conceptualisation of nationalism is intimately linked with the emphasis that nationalism is a male-dominated arena, which significantly explains why political writing is androcentric and thus “their subject matter reflects male concerns, deals with

³⁷ As will be explored in the next section, the term “gendered” will be used to highlight the privileges of men over women.

male activity and male ambitions and is directed away from issues involving or of concern to women” (Thiele, 1986: 30). The national narrative that perpetuates obsessive representation of the nation as a community of men, imagined and defended by men has modelled, in a wide variety of ways, the normalised masculine identity of the nation. There is no denying that this imposed masculine identification between the nation and men is manifested in the constructions of national belonging and identity – best expressed in what is called nationalism. These constructed gender stereotypes reinforce the notion that nation within these narratives is becoming “gendered and radicalized” (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1993: 127). This thesis therefore argues that nationalism becomes the language through which its narratives justify masculine prowess and heroic sacrifices defined in terms of hegemonic manliness.

Considering the above, conceptualising nationalism as a gendered ideology that perpetuates hierarchy and domination of one gender, much of the analysis of the construction of masculinism in Syrian national narratives is based on employing four ground-breaking theories, which will shape the framework and the analysis adopted in later chapters. Four pillars – imagination, narrative, origins and gender relations – manifest the analytical tools used in this thesis. However, before demonstrating the theoretical approach of the thesis, there is a need to provide definitions of the most important terms used, such as masculinism, masculinity and gender, and how these notions employ other supplementary categories such as patriarchy, hierarchy, hegemony and militarism in order to reinforce women’s subordination in the national narrative.

3.3 Setting the stage: Definitions and conceptions

Before embarking on analysing the construction of masculinism in the philosophical, political and cultural narratives of Syrian nationalism (chapters Four, Five and Six), the

following subsections aim to set the stage for discussion and provide a common language for reading thesis. In this sense, I shall provide some working definitions of the most used terms and how they are associated with nationalism in a system of interplaying power relations. As the chapters in this thesis argue, national belonging and identity are intertwined with what Bauer called “ego” (Bauer, 1996 [1924]: 36). Yet this ego is constructed as inseparable from the ethos of *masculinism*, *masculinity* and *patriarchy*. Because nationalism is the constructed ideology that invokes and perpetuates a particular group identity that interplays with hierarchy and authority, this intimacy between construction of the nation and creating the ideal image of the man in the national narrative is evidenced in the perpetuation of *masculinism*, *masculinity* and gender bias with which they are categories that reify national belonging and identity.

In order to understand how this intimate relationship between masculinity and the nation is perpetuated, there is a need to provide definitions of important categories that act as dominoes for constructing the identity frame of Syrians. In fact, this thesis employs two sets of categories – gender and masculinism, and militarism and hierarchy – as the bare bones of each of the chapters in this thesis. However, there are parallel subcategories across this set that will be measured by their relationship to the construction of national belonging and identity in national narratives.

3.3.1 Gender

With the increasing number of studies that employ gender theory to emphasise the ways women contribute to nation formation, as a starting point feminists emphasise that gender as a concept is best understood as “a category that was developed to explore what counts as ‘woman’ and as ‘man’” (Squires, 1999: 54). Moreover, the debating literature on gender reached a consensus on the distinction between “sex” and “gender”;

to put it simply, “sex” is used to refer to the physical/biological status, whereas “gender” signifies the social and cultural construction of identity. As Moi notes,

It has long been established usage to make “feminine” (and “masculine”) represent social constructs (patterns of sexuality and behaviour imposed by cultural and social norms), and to reserve “female” and “male” for the purely biological aspects of sexual difference. (2002: 64)

Consequently, when investigating the relationship between gender and the nation, we agree that the nation is composed of two constructed binary sets: male/female and feminine/masculine. In this sense, using Mayer’s definition of the nation and her approach to how gender and sexuality interact to construct it, she argues that

The nation is comprised of sexed subjects whose “performativity” constructs not only their own gender identity but the identity of the entire nation as well. Through repetition of accepted norms and behaviors ... members help to construct the privileged nation. (Mayer, 2000: 13)

Mayer’s definition illustrates the intersection between the creation of the “privileged nation” and the construction of gendered identity. More importantly, this association becomes a reflection of privileged gendered identity – in other words, superior identity. This interplay between gender and nation in the context of theorising nationalism raises the question of what the term “gendered nationalism” implies. In fact, feminists Peterson and Runyan define gendered nationalism as “the construction of a national identity and solidarity based on masculinist notions of self-determination and autonomy, which is at the expense of women’s self-definitions and solidarity” (1993: 190). In this sense, “gendered nation” implies the normalisation of masculinist notions as forming the main characteristics of national identity, solidarity and belonging. In other words, nationalism is gendered in terms that draw on socially and culturally

normalised ideals of femininity and masculinity.³⁸ However, the relationship between the two is signalled by power relations: one construction of gender dominates the other. This privileged construction becomes reflected in national narrative, imagining and memory.

In analysing gender relations, I would like to stress that the use of gender is not a synonym for men or women but, rather, constructed and ordered into a system of hierarchy and power “which reward[s] and encourage[s] some individuals and activities while punishing and suppressing others” (Rubin, 2007: 180). This definition of gender in the context of this thesis leads us to the need to explore the meaning of *masculinism* and *masculinity* as their models form the basis of Syrian nationalism.

3.3.2 Masculinism and masculinity

Following the previous discussion on the definition of gender and its relationship with the nation, we concluded that the term “gendered nationalism” is used to denote the construction of a “privileged” gender identity, which in turn becomes a representation of the identity of the nation. In this context, more detailed analysis is needed of what this hierarchical gender identity entails and how its ideals subscribe to other constructed modes in national narratives. In other words, while the title of this section appears confined to the exploration of the meanings of two terms – “masculinism” and “masculinity” – and their relationship to the construction of nation and nationalism, it is important to note from the beginning that this set will reveal other necessary categories, such as patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity, hierarchy and militarism.

Due to its wide variety and the fact that there has been no consensus on what constitutes being masculine because its meaning varies in relation to class, race and

³⁸ For further reading on gendered nationalism, see Blom, Hagemann & Hall, 2000; Enloe, 1990; 2000; Jayawardena, 1986; McClintock, 1991; 1995; Mayer, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 1997.

national setting, scholars have agreed that masculinity is about an identifiable characteristic that sets the ideals and norms for male demeanour (Bederman, 1995; Connell, 1995; Levant, 1997). At the same time, Jeffords describes masculinity as a “set of images, values, interests, and activities held important to the successful achievement of male adulthood” (1989: xiii). This thesis uses the notion “masculinity” as an analytical tool for investigating the subordinate position of women in Syrian national narratives. The use of this concept aims to encompass several dimensions, and this thesis will broaden “masculinity” as a corporeal domino for hierarchy, military and manliness. Thus, “masculinity” is the appropriation of certain sets of modes and practices that incite hierarchy and domination of one sex over the other. Moreover, within the framework of the overlapping relationship between gender and authority, Connell identifies the axis of power as a mere “connection of authority and masculinity”, which in turn complicates and affects the stability of the social order (1987: 109).

Conceptualising masculinity as culturally constructed is intimately linked with the formulation of nationalism. Balaji and Hughson concur that the “cultural production of masculinity has long been tied to nationalistic subtexts” (2014: 207). So, in this context, it is about the domination of certain traits over the other, which are connoted with strength, power, domination and sacrifice. Nonetheless, while this thesis is not about men per se, when analysing the relationship between masculinity and nationalism there is a need to understand the distinction between *men* and *masculinity*. Hooper argues that

men gain access to power and privilege not by virtue of their anatomy but through their cultural association with masculinity. It is the qualities of masculinity that are closely associated with power, rather than men per se, and the term masculinism, which implies a privileging masculinity, best captures this relationship. (2001: 33)

Hence, the internalisation of masculinity in the national narrative normalises hegemony and hierarchy, which significantly perpetuates notions of power relations and order. In this sense, the notion of hierarchy in this study carries two meanings. First, it highlights the superiority of masculinity in defining national identity and belonging, which in turn reinforces women's subordination. Second, hierarchy is connoted with the elevation of militarism, which also implies the glorification of man's heroism and physical strength. According to these two meanings, women are perceived as subordinate and their membership in national memory is obscured. In the Syrian context, hierarchy is manifested in the interaction between the creation of masculinity and the nation, which is enhanced by the perpetuation of militarised belonging and identity.

More importantly, the contextualisation of the relationship between militarism and masculinity is defined by the use of the term "masculinist", which implies that there is a homogeneous set of characteristics measured by the readiness to die for the nation (Ahlbäck, 2016: 9). Consequently, hierarchy and hegemony identify the standardised set of masculinist traits that create the ideal man in which the realisation of his manly image is the passage to national glory, belonging and identity. In other words, hierarchy signifies the incorporation of militarism in the national narrative.

This relationship between militarism and national narrative defines muscular nationalism, which is identified with the commemoration of the sacrificial heroism of men. This view of masculinity is reinforced in the construction of the ideal image of manhood juxtaposed with passive femininity. Banerjee defines muscular nationalism as

the intersection of a specific vision of masculinity with the political doctrine of nationalism. Examples of muscular nationalism center an adult male body poised to sacrifice and kill for the nation. Usually, this view of masculinity is juxtaposed with a chaste female body that both symbolizes national honor and provides a moral code for the lives of women in the nation. (2016: 2)

This constructed gendered binary will be reflected in the early theorisations of Syrian nationalism between the patriarchal father/heroic warrior and the passive woman/nation. Such gendered categorisation foregrounds the essentialist perceptions of women as passive followers in the private sphere and inadequate political personhoods in the public sphere (chapters Four, Five and Six). Moreover, these constructed ideals of chaste femininity will be reinforced in both the constitutional and the legal narratives, which fail to recognise women's rights and rather legitimise violence against women to ensure the dominance of the patriarchal figure in the family and the leader in the state (see sections 5.5; 5.5.1; 5.5.2). More importantly, this constructed dichotomy between the masculine and the feminine is further evidenced in the control over women's bodies in terms of criminalising abortion while legitimising rape by freeing the rapist if he marries his victim, and normalising honour killing by having a light penalty (5.5.1).

As Banerjee says, “muscular nationalism generally centres a gendered binary – martial man versus chaste woman” (2016: 2). Furthermore, this perception negotiation is further contextualised within the symbolic construction of the nation, which constructs the man as the heroic fighter who will protect the woman and the fatherland (6.4.2; 6.4.3; 6.4.4). This will be explored in the analysis of Syrian nationalist songs, which focuses on how Syrian nationalism prevails in its two contradictory yet complementary cultural and political phases.

The elaboration of this dualism underlies the construction of muscular national identity and its juxtaposition, with the configuration of women as a canvas of passivity and subordination. This leads us to the second subcategory of masculinity: hegemony. The use of hegemonic masculinity in the Syrian national context is best defined by Connell, as “the culturally idealised form of masculine character” (1990: 83), connected

to “toughness and competitiveness” and, more importantly, to “the subordination of women” (ibid.: 94). This notion of masculinity becomes hegemonic when its ethos and values become naturalised in a given culture. As Connell notes, a certain form of masculinity is hegemonic when “its exaltation stabilizes a structure of dominance and oppression in the gender order as a whole. To be culturally exalted, the pattern of masculinity must have exemplars who are celebrated as heroes” (ibid.: 94).

Such masculinised ideals are predominant in the Syrian national narrative in both the cultural and political phase as forms of identity and belonging become manifested in realising hegemonic masculinity which is “naturalised in the form of the hero” (4.2.3; 4.3.1; 4.3.2.2; 4.3.2.3; 5.5.2; 6.4.4; 6.4.5). The predominance of realising heroism in the writings of the Syrian founding fathers resides in constructing models of strong military men ready to sacrifice themselves for the nation, revive its glorious past and transmit its language and history (4.2.2; 4.3.2; 4.4.4; 5.2.1). These manifestations of hegemonic masculinities as national exemplars therefore constitute the basic tenets that identify Syrian nationalism in its cultural phase – language, history and education – and its political phase: the ideal Ba'athist, struggle, will and determination, and pain and suffering.

More importantly, *hegemonic masculinity* is about *competing masculinities*; in other words, it is a manifestation of hierarchical order and power relations among men themselves. Thus, it highlights the constructed boundaries between superior and inferior men based on physical strength (4.2.3; 4.3.1; 4.3.2.2; 4.3.2.3; 5.5.2; 6.4.4; 6.4.5). These nationalised versions of masculinity propagated in the Syrian national narratives (theoretical, political and cultural) have been employed to constitute a martialised definition of national identity and belonging that encompasses physical strength, prowess and bravery as sets of identifiers. These become the contours of a masculinised

nation that enforces the perpetuation of masculinised subjects. The version of muscular nationalism analysed in this thesis demonstrates the way achieving masculinity is an integral part of the birth of the nation-state. The idealisation of the active man as a symbol of the nation therefore delimits boundaries of exclusion and inclusion in its symbolic construction.

This complicated interaction among nationalism, manhood and militarism constitutes the hegemonic composition of national identity as the normalised set of male actions. Thus, the ethos of soldiery forms a vital component of Syrian hegemonic masculinity and nationhood. Nagel illuminates the intimate association between masculinity and nationalism:

By definition, nationalism is political and closely linked to the state and its institutions. Like the military, most state institutions have been historically and remain dominated by men. It is therefore no surprise that the culture and ideology of hegemonic masculinity go hand in hand with the culture and ideology of hegemonic nationalism. (1998: 248–9)

Hooper's conception of hegemonic masculinity encompasses considering soldiering as "characterised as a manly activity requiring the 'masculine' traits of physical strength, action, toughness, capacity for violence ... [and as] an important practice constitutive of masculinity" (2001: 47). These masculinist traits are further reinforced in the elevation of militarism, as Mayer's extensive analysis of the relationship between militarism and the construction of masculinist nationalism states:

[W]hen a nation cultivates its own myths of survival, recalls the struggle of its past, and celebrates its heroes, it perpetuates the intimate tie between *nation* and *male* and continually constructs the image of both its desired nationalism and its desired son. This son, in whose image the younger generation is socialised, is most dear to the nation when he takes up arms and willingly risks his life for the survival of the nation and when he wins military battles on the nation's behalf. (2000: 148–9)

This intersection between nationalism and masculinity through the perpetuation of militarism is not limited to Syrian nationalism (4.2.3; 4.3.2.3; 5.2.1; 6.4.3). Herzl, the father of Zionism, emphasised the nexus between militarism and creating the nation:

I must train the youth to be soldiers. But only a professional army. Strength: one tenth of the male population; less would not suffice internally. However, I educate one and all to be free and strong men, ready to serve as volunteers if necessary. (1956: 37)

This normalisation of militarism in national narratives not only creates gender hierarchy, but also fosters hegemonic masculinity. Consequently, the relationship between masculinity and militarism is further entrenched in the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity as “the relationships between hegemonic and subordinate masculinities play a key role in the gender order” (Hooper, 2001: 50). According to Donaldson,

through hegemonic masculinity most men benefit from having control of women; for a very few men, it delivers control of other men. To put it another way, the crucial difference between hegemonic masculinity and other masculinities is not the control of women, but the control of men and the representation of this as a “universal social advancement,” to paraphrase Gramsci. (1993: 655)

According to this definition, hegemonic masculinity is the manifestation of superior masculinity and subordinate ones in which the social order becomes composed of competing masculinities. Such characterisation of hierarchy questions the position of women and further highlights their intensified subordination as now their subjugation is tripled. In the Syrian context, this type of relationship between masculinities and hegemonic masculinity is characterised in the early theoretical narrative in the writings of the Syrian founding fathers – for example, in the cult of the ideal Ba'athist man in juxtaposition to those passive men who are ready to sacrifice their souls for the nation. Moreover, it will also manifest itself in the subordinate position of men in relation to

the ruler, as seen in the cult of Hafez and Bashar al-Assad, which will be in the symbolic construction of the nation (cultural narrative).

Thus, hegemonic masculinity and elevation of masculinist traits form the basis of Syrian national thought as the association between Syrian nationalism and hegemonic masculinity is identified by two ideal types that prevail in the three narratives – theoretical, political and cultural. First, the Ba'athist warrior model – the male warrior who is ready to sacrifice himself for the nation and is perceived as superior to other males who are not ready to do this. In this model, there is a hierarchical division among men cast as active versus passive males. This activism associated with militarism and soldierly values defines citizenship as based on the readiness to die for the nation. Second is the patriarchal model, which emphasises that language and history are defined by the heroic deeds of men. This is the more domesticated, patriarchal Ba'athi model that is rooted in the portrayal of Hafez al-Assad as the leader and father of the nation and further configures Bashar al-Assad as the masculine lover who allegorises the dominant relationship between the male and female in the private sphere.

In this sense, hegemonic masculinity promotes the identification of the ideals of the citizen-warrior and Ba'athi militant, which in turn underlies the juxtaposition between citizenship and Ba'athism on the one hand and physical power, strength and manliness on the other. Ahlbäck illustrates the definitions of the concepts of manhood and manliness, stating that manhood becomes normalised by soldiering, while “manliness became associated with discipline, heroism, death and sacrifice in battle” (2016: 9). At the same time, these models also shape the boundaries of citizenship, as will be explored in the constitutional narrative which centres on a version of the heroic

Ba'athi warrior who becomes a citizen only if he conforms to the ethos of militarism.³⁹ This discourse of masculinity is also evidenced in nationalist songs, which associate the sacrificial heroism of military men and the feminised land/women that needs men's protection, on the one hand, and the patriarchal configuration of the two Presidents Hafez and Bashar al-Assad on the other.

Other modes of subjugation that masculinity reinforces in its relationship to nationalism is *patriarchy*. Despite patriarchy coming in a variety of forms that can prevail in the public and private spheres (see Walby, 1990), for the purpose of this study the use of the notion of patriarchy is confined to the familial domain that symbolises the “father rule” (Bradley, 1989: 55). “Patriarchy” will therefore be used to refer to women's subordination in the family domain, in examples where the three Syrian thinkers emphasise the authority of the father and the husband over women in the family domain. This will be explored in Chapter Four in al-Arsuzi's and al-Husri's theorisations; Chapter Five in the analysis of Syrian laws, particularly matters related to penal law, honour killing, rape and nationality; and Chapter Six in the cult of the two presidents.

In this context, it is important to note that the muscular construction of nationalism in Syria is not an exceptional case. Banerjee (2016) made an extensive analysis of the construction of masculinist nationalism in both India and Ireland between 1914 and 2004. However, his work studies the contextualisation of hegemonic masculinity with the nation, by investigating the “social dynamics between masculinity and femininity” within the Irish and Indian cultural contexts (2016: 4). Banerjee points out that this muscular nationalism can be found in many contexts around the world.

³⁹ This will be explored in detail in Chapter Five.

Cases can be found in the construction of the ideal man in European nationalism. Mosse argues that “the manly ideal deserves to hold the centre of the stage as well, for it not only played a determining role in fashioning ideas of nationhood, respectability, and war, but it was present and influenced almost every aspect of modern history” (1996: 4). Mosse further states that the creation of modern masculinity is intimately linked with the evolution of political movements (ibid.). However, Mosse’s theorisation of the construction of masculinity centres more on the association between the modern emergence of masculinised ideals in European societies and their politics. Another example of muscular nationalism can be traced in Sofos’ analysis of the interethnic violence in the former Yugoslavia (1996). However, Sofos’ study is particularly concerned with the construction of masculinism in times of ethnic conflict where the nation falls victim to competing masculinities (1996: 73). Another example of muscular nationalism is reflected in Lake’s exploration of Australian nationalism (1992). In his observation of the construction of masculinities in the Australian context, his main analysis focuses on conceiving nation formation as based on the juxtaposition between feminised women, signalled by their reproductive role, and the masculinised citizens, who will become warriors (1992).

While these works differ in the context in which muscular nationalism is explored in this thesis, they share with my analysis the perception that nationalised masculinity elevates militarism, sacrifice and heroism, which are consistent with gender hierarchy, domination and exclusion. Enloe captures this intersection, arguing, “when a nationalist movement becomes militarized ... male privilege in the community usually becomes more entrenched” (1990: 56). Within this context, while this thesis does not aim to discuss the institutionalisation of the military as a reason for women’s subjugation and exclusion from national memory, the commemoration of masculinist

traits and what militarism entails in the national narrative is the mainstay of this argument. In fact, discussion on the role of militarism in the Arab world has been the subject of many studies (Sayigh, 2014; Saouli, 2012; Ayubi, 2009), some of which attempt to analyse the nature of the regimes by examining the role of the army in these states. There is no denying that the Ba'ath regime relied on the army in consolidating its dominance and control (Dawisha, 2003) but, as we will see, the ideology of the Ba'ath stems from the early theorisation of nation and nationalism in the writings of the three Syrian thinkers and later imposed by the state. For these thinkers, militarism is part of the educational process (4.2.3; 4.3.2.3) and therefore salient in the process of fostering nationhood and the ideal image of the Ba'athi as a mere reflection of manhood.

While both male and female students wear khaki at both primary and high school, the ethos and values of soldiery perpetuate masculinist characteristics, even if women were mobilised to conform to these militarist models (4.3.3). Moreover, militarism will be examined in this thesis to note the saliency of the army as an institution that conscripts men and women.⁴⁰ In this sense, Aflaq's writing about militarism as an arena that elevates masculinism in the Syrian context incorporated women. This was later used by Hafez al-Assad as a policy to mobilise them. However, this thesis argues that it is the normalisation of masculinist traits cherished by militarism that subsequently problematises national belonging and identity, as they become based on hegemony and hierarchy. As militarism is further associated with the readiness to die for the nation, this notion anchored the superiority of men as this is constitutionally related to the constructed internal hierarchy in Syrian nationalism (5.2; 5.2.1; 5.4; 5.5.2). Hence, understanding *masculinism* and *masculinity* as ideologies that shaped Syrian

⁴⁰ Syrian women can join the army for specified roles. However, compulsory army conscription is restricted to men.

nationalism will pave the way for deconstructing Syrian national, theoretical, political and cultural narratives.

3.4 Theoretical approaches to the thesis

3.4.1 Imagining the nation

Adopting Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as an "imagined community" implies questions about how individuals are constructed in this invented entity, and what sort of characteristics and norms are perpetuated to create the nation.⁴¹ This notion highlights the importance of nationalism as an ideology that legitimises the nation and later the state (Gellner, 1983: 1). Nationalism as an ideology is based on delineating boundaries on the domestic and international levels – or, to put it more accurately, it is "a political discourse founded upon and contributing to hierarchies within and outside its national space" (Anderson, 2006: 26). Defining hierarchy in this context is restricted to the alliance between nationalism and gender bias. Moreover, Anderson's conceptualisation of the nation as an imagined entity emphasises that national belonging and identity are constructed conceptions rather than a naturalised given.

Going beyond Anderson's conceptualisation of the nation as an imagined/invented entity has been particularly useful to understand how the "other" is framed in the Syrian national imagining: this construction of the nation delineates gendered boundaries in which both men and women are imagined differently. Such construction of imagined identity affects the sense of belonging to the nation and is based on inculcating a set masculinist ethos that defines men as superior to women. In this context, Anderson's conception of "imagined communities" can be extended in helping us to understand how nationalism perpetuates masculinist ethos and values.

⁴¹ Adopting Anderson's concept of "imagined communities" in this thesis is a first in academic scholarship related to Syria.

While Anderson did not specify in his study the masculinist nature of nationalism, he throws light on the inextricable relationship between belonging to the nation and becoming a man. He states: “Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for such limited imagining” (Anderson, 2006: 7).

In this study, I examine the conception that the masculinist imagination constructed in Syrian national narratives determines the theoretical (Chapter Four), political (Chapter Five) and symbolic (Chapter Six) roles and meanings associated with the membership of a collective identity, the nation. To understand the imagining of the manly nation in its theoretical, political and cultural narratives, this thesis engages with Anderson’s conceptualisation of the nation as a “deep horizontal comradeship” and as a “brotherhood” (2006: 106), which in turn raises the question of how women are constructed in this fraternity. Thus, in the early philosophical emergence of Syrian nationalism in the writings of al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi, the gendered construction of the nation in their narratives will be explored in both the cultural and the political phases to provide answers to women’s status in the theoretical narrative (Chapter Four). Then, in the political narrative the investigation of both the constitutional and legal narratives posits the nation as an imagined entity where masculinity, patriarchy and militarism define national membership (Chapter Five). Within this narrative, questions pertaining to how women are imagined in the constitutional narrative elucidate the relationship between citizenship and women as defined by the legislation. Finally, this thesis will engage with the cultural narrative in which the question of the symbolic construction of the nation will be examined using nationalist songs (Chapter Six). The analysis of these nationalist songs conceptualises the nation as an imagined construct in

which images of men as heroic soldiers, patriarchal fathers and political leaders define the characteristics of national identity measured by masculinity.

In addition, Anderson's study is influential in that, in this imagination, the ethos of manhood, soldiery and heroism will define how women are constructed in national narratives. This in turn raises the question of how imagining the nation is intimately linked to the construction of the national narrative. In this thesis, therefore, nation will be contextualised as both a narration and an imagined entity in which investigation of how women perceived in this imagined narration are positioned and constructed. The following section highlights the significance of studying the nation through its narrative in which the politics of language fosters masculinist boundaries within the imagined nation.

3.4.2 Nation as narration

Theorising the idea of the nation is bound up with how its narrative constructs its image and defines the contours of inclusion and exclusion. In depicting this relationship between the nation and narration through nationalism, Layoun concurs that nationalism "constructs and proffers a narrative of the 'nation' and of its relation to an already existing or potential state" (1991: 410–1). This constructed relationship between the nation and its narrative is that nationalism becomes a defining tool that measures national belonging and identity by appropriating idealised sets of values based on dichotomised gender binaries. In this sense, Bhabha's influential book *Nation and Narration* offers a new substantive tool for analysing the construction of the nation. He states:

Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation – or narration – might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west. (1990: 1)

The importance of these words lies in highlighting the association between construction of the nation and its narrative. In this sense, narrative can be conceptualised as a reflection of the distorted presentation of women (see Foster, 1998: 38).⁴² Bhabha's conception of the nation as a constructed narration forms the second theoretical basis of this study that opens the door for investigating how nation is imagined in its dominant narratives. This contributes to a vision of Syrian national narratives in which women are virtually absent and where men struggle to protect, build and sacrifice for the nation. Moreover, in the process of contextualising belonging in national narrative, the narrative reinforces ideals of manhood and bravery as definitive markers of national identity. As Mayer notes:

National narratives construct the ideal image of the nation ... In order to survive and to justify its existence, the nation must preserve its uniqueness; it does so by constructing myths about national creation by defining "proper behaviours" for members of the nation and for the nation itself. (2000: 15)

The power of national narrative in constructing imagined gendered boundaries through the perpetuation of "proper behaviour" becomes apparent and enhanced when one investigates how national narratives mobilise language. The excessively masculine language used in the narrative must not be underestimated: it reveals the "intense rejection" of women in history and reflects how they are trapped in a world constructed and represented predominantly by men (Rowbotham, 1972: 11). Hence, this "invisibility" underpins a distorted image of the nation confined to a masculinised

⁴² Roy Foster affirms the centrality of narrative in constructing nationality as it evolved over history. He states: "The idea of nationality as a narrative is becoming a cliché: but it is not a cliché of recent creation, fashionable as it has been in the work of various postmodern critics" (1998: 38). His article is a case study of Ireland.

propagation in a manner that consolidates “centralized control of authority ... including gender privilege” (Pettman, 1996: 138).

Thus, the importance of the language used portrays a form of “power”; hitherto the missing representation of women in the language of nationalist narrative further emphasises the deeply entrenched masculinist theorisation of nation (Okin, 1980: 4). However, since “the meanings of such concepts as ‘manhood’ or manliness are constructed through language[,] they are not fixed but unstable and contestable” (Ahlbäck, 2016: 20). Investigating how language constructs these notions by either reinforcing or defying their masculinist interpretations is therefore pivotal for understanding how women are conceived in national narratives. Rowbotham goes further to illuminate this exclusion in language as a reflection of women’s absent image and voice from history. In her own words, she explains:

As soon as we have learned words we find ourselves outside them. To some extent this is a shared exclusion. The word carries a sense of going beyond one’s self ... Language conveys a certain power. It is one of the instruments of domination. It is carefully guarded by the superior people because it is one of the means through which they conserve their supremacy. (Rowbotham, 1973a: 32; see also 1973b)

This fixity of masculine language in the writing of the nationalist narrative constitutes “the assignable difference between masculine and feminine” (Lyotard and Clarke, 1978: 9; see also Enloe, 1990: 45; Aldoughli, 2014; Mayer, 2000: 9–11), and further postulates the masculinised perception of how nation is or should be imagined.

Although linguistic bias can be traced in the writings of most contemporary theorists, by which their use of masculinist language has become a naturalised given (Scott, 1993: 397; Aldoughli, 2014), Scott contextualises the authority of masculinist writing infused with presenting one dimension of “experience” and excluding the “other”, which is in turn reflected in the production of national identity (Scott, 1993:

412; see also Connell, 1987: 109). Hence, this subjective “authority” reflected in the theorists’ nationalist language and perspectives has alienated the other (women) and, more importantly, produced a gender-biased mainstream (Scott, 1993: 403, 405). The conception of national identity can therefore be traced in the way the narrative of the nation is structured, which is a reflection of normative *masculinity*.

In this sense, national narrative is intimately the domain of an idealised *masculine* mainstream (Mayer, 2000: 11). As Lyotard and Clarke suggest, “writing is a fact of virility” (1978: 9). In this context, the politics of language as a form of representation will be examined in the analysis of Syrian nationalist narratives (chapters Four, Five and Six), in which the use of the generic term “man” is not hair-splitting but, rather, implies connotations of sacrificial heroism, militarism and masculinity. Berger, Wallis and Watson argue that “the formation of gender differences in language – that is, the ways in which categories of the masculine and the feminine are defined by and eventually ingrained in language – most often produces a rigid and fictive construction of reality” (1995: 3–4). This use of masculinist language in national narrative reveals the challenges of writing the history of the “other” – the history of “difference” (ibid.) – which has been disregarded, marginalised and, more importantly, substituted with the telling of the story of the man, i.e. the superior.

Hence, this notion of the nation as narration makes up the second theoretical basis of my analysis in which politics of language and national concepts will be examined in the three Syrian narratives: philosophical (Chapter Four), political (Chapter Five) and cultural (Chapter Six). Having established the two theoretical bases of this study that conceptualise the nation as an imagined narration, therefore, the following subsection illustrates the third theory that shapes the methodology of this thesis.

3.4.3 Origins of gender bias

As I have explored in section 1.2, surveying the dominant literature dealing with the question of women in both the Syrian and the Arab context has revealed that nationalism is an abandoned topic. However, this thesis benefits from the work of Susan Moller Okin, a prominent political theorist who attempted to challenge the philosophical canon and considered analysing the classical literature as a starting point to reveal gender bias in contemporary politics (see Okin, 1980: 3–5). Okin suggests that investigating the status of women in early political narratives will lay bare the assumptions of women's subordination in both the state and society. Her starting point is to assume that the use of masculinist language to imply generic purposes is gender-exclusive. Adopting Okin's theoretical methodology, this thesis posits that the roots of gender bias in contemporary politics can be attributed to the early writings of the national founding fathers.

The employment of Okin's theorisation will be through interrogating the use of masculinist language in the Syrian national narratives and in illuminating how the gender bias traced in the early emergence of Syrian nationalism can be reflected in the constitutional and legal narratives where women are perceived as less worthy than men in their citizenship rights (Chapter Five). However, while this study follows Okin's historical approach in unearthing the subordination of women in the classical narratives, the conclusions she reached are contradictory in nature to the Syrian context. According to Okin, she found out by analysing the works of Aristotle, Plato, Mill and Rousseau that the way women are placed in their political narratives as restricted to the familial sphere has in turn confined them to the private sphere and affected their citizenship rights. In other words, Okin proposes that women should not be confined to the familial sphere, and instead there is a need to reform the way the familial sphere is conceived as

separate from the public one. Okin concluded that the essentialist views of women traced in the classical political writings stem from the divide between the public and private spheres. Moreover, she demonstrates that, unless the divide between the public and private spheres is abolished, women's subordinate status will continue.

Thus, according to her, the linchpin of women's subordination is the confinement of their role in nation formation to that of the private sphere, which is in turn perceived as inferior. Despite this interrelationship between the recognition of women's biological, cultural and traditional roles limiting women's rights in the public sphere, in the Syrian case it is not only the confinement of women's roles to the private sphere that created hierarchy and perpetuated masculinism, but there is also a complete disregard for women's cultural and biological roles – an intentional absence of their cultural and political contribution to nation formation (Chapter Five) which has subsequently further reinforced their subordination (Chapter Six). Nonetheless, Okin's historical approach – which investigates the source of women's subordination by going back to the early writings of the nationalist founding fathers in order to reveal the reflection of their masculinist perception of women in contemporary politics – will be the way in which this thesis hypothesises its findings.

In light of the above, this discussion provides the third theoretical basis of my work, which is expounded by Okin's exegesis of the Western philosophers and the impact of inherent gender bias in the latter's theorisations. Hence, the next subsection is concerned with the fourth study that influenced my analysis, as it is the measuring tool of women's inclusion and exclusion in the Syrian national narratives.

3.4.4 Nation and gender relations

In order to assess how the Syrian founding fathers construct women in their national ideologies and to investigate whether women are included, this thesis engages with

Yuval-Davis's masterpiece on the contribution of women to nation formation (1997). In her ground-breaking study Yuval-Davis investigates the intersection of gender and nationalism through women's contributions, biologically, culturally and politically, to the formation of the nation. What is contradictory in the theoretical narrative of Syrian nationalism is its exclusivist nature, where women are caught up between being disregarded from the cultural formation of the nation in both al-Husri's and Aflaq's national ideologies, and later included in al-Arsuzi's conceptualisation of the nation, yet as subservient to men in both the private and the public spheres.

The exclusion of women is further perpetuated through reinforcing the dualism of militarism and nationalism, which consistently highlights forms of the idealised warrior as protector of the feminine/feminised object/other. Such notions are further enshrined by incorporating militarism in the three stages of the evolution of Syrian nationalism: the theoretical imagination of the nation (Chapter Two and Chapter Four), state formation (Chapter Five) and state consolidation (Chapter Six).

In line with the above argument, much of my analysis of the writings of al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi employs Yuval-Davis's understanding of the intersection between gender relations and the formulation of the nation. Yuval-Davis's important contribution suggests that, no matter what the characteristics of the nation are (whether it is a cultural or civic construction), gender relations are deeply embedded in national formations (1997: 21–5). She outlined five ways in which gender intersects with the construction of nationalism:

1. As biological producers of the nation

2. As cultural preservers that mark the nation's particular identity and reinforce cultural boundaries. Women are conceived as symbols and signifiers of national difference
3. As transmitters of cultural narratives (mothers, teachers)
4. As keepers of national boundaries by accepting or refusing marriage from outside the national community
5. As active participants in national movements (ibid.).

The following chapters will identify these five gender-differentiated dimensions in the theoretical, political and cultural narratives where Syrian women have been forcefully substituted by men in relation to nation formation. The employment of Yuval-Davis's analysis will also highlight how men are constructed as the main contributors to nation building, whether in its cultural or civic phase.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the dominant literature on the parallel between the construction of masculinism and the emergence of nationalism. It has sought to demonstrate that masculinism and nationalism are synonymous and subsequently relegated women in national imagining. Moreover, this chapter has set the stage for the main argument of this thesis by providing the necessary analytical tools that will be used in deconstructing masculinism in the three nationalist narratives: theoretical, political and cultural. It has brought to light how Syrian nationalism is implicated in the most dominant theories of masculinism. Thus, based on the findings of this chapter, three points can be summarised for later discussion in the thesis:

- First, despite the gendered nature of nationalism, Syrian nationalism obscures women's membership in its narrative and further conceives them as less worthy of belonging to the nation.
- Second, this failure to recognise the key role of women in the theoretical narrative (Chapter Four) will be echoed in both the political (Chapter Five) and cultural (Chapter Six) narratives, which explains how investigating the early national narrative is important to understanding why women are subordinate.
- Third, the muscular construction of nationalism in Syria is based on defining manhood and physical strength, as associated with militarism and the act of sacrifice.

In this sense, having provided the theoretical basis of how the question of women will be approached in the three national philosophical, political and cultural narratives in the Syrian context, the next chapter aims to interrogate the construction of masculinism in the early emergence of Syrian nationalism in the writings of the three founding fathers, by using the concepts and definitions that have prevailed in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

INTERROGATING THE CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINIST IDENTITY IN THE SYRIAN NATIONALIST NARRATIVE: AL-HUSRI, AFLAQ AND AL-ARSUZI

4.1 Introduction

Following the theoretical analysis of the relationship between gender, masculinism and nationalism, this chapter aims to answer RQ3 (“What role do the three Syrian thinkers play in perpetuating masculinism in the national narrative?”) by investigating how the nation is imagined. While it is accepted that nationalism is a gendered construct (Chapter Three), to go beyond this insight this chapter starts from a recognition that nationalism is a male-centred arena that is exposed through the deconstruction of its national narrative. Accepting that, the narratives of these three thinkers constitute the basis of Syrian national thought, which has evolved around two overlapping yet diffusionist conceptions of nation and nationalism: (a) emphasising the cultural identity of the nation and (b) achieving its political embodiment via the establishment of the Ba'ath Party. This chapter explores the politics of belonging and the alliance between the invisibility of women and the emergence of the concept of nationalism in Syria in the writings of its three founding fathers: al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi.

Analysing their nationalist theories, three interconnected themes emerge. First, the contextualisation of the concept of the nation as a natural extension of the family underlines the dominance of the father figure in both the nation and the family (see 3.3.2). This in turn constructs the nation as a patriarchal entity based on reinforcing gendered boundaries connoted with masculinist hierarchy and hegemony (3.3.1; 3.3.2).

Second, the use of universal terms to refer to “people” (*jamāhīr*; *sha‘b*) and their frequent substitution with masculine labels, “men” (*rijāl*) and “young men” (*shabāb*) excludes women from the national imagination (3.4.2). Third, the association between fostering national identity and the realisation of manhood through elevating militarism and soldiery perpetuates a hegemonic masculinist identity and a hierarchical national belonging that problematises the gains of women’s national membership (3.3.2). Moreover, this omission and exclusion of women generates an impression that men are ubiquitous in the Syrian nationalist narrative, and has maintained power relations and bolstered hierarchies in the national imagining. In this sense, throughout the present chapter, I intend to explore how masculinism is constructed in the theoretical narration of nation and nationalism by interrogating the language used by these thinkers and questioning the “absolute will” mediated by the male figure as a warrior and revolutionary in the nation and as the patriarch in the family (3.3.2). Such hierarchical symmetry between the private and public spheres has reinforced an essentialist conception of women’s role and has conceived men as occupying an all-encompassing role in family, society and the nation.

This chapter will start by interrogating the masculinist construction of nationalism in al-Husri’s theorisation (4.2), through identifying both the cultural and the political phases manifested in analysing his conception of language (4.2.1), history (4.2.2) and education (militarism) (4.2.3). It then moves to Aflaq’s national theorisation that illustrates both the cultural and the political construction of the nation (4.3) by deconstructing his narrative, which idealises men’s role in nation formation as cultural transmitters and political leaders. Finally, I will move to al-Arsuzi’s national ideology, which provides clear definitions of men’s and women’s role in nation-building (4.4). Suffice to say that much of my analysis of the writings of al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi

will employ Yuval-Davis's understanding of the intersection between gender relations and the formulation of the nation (3.4.4). Hence, the following discussion identifies her five gender-differentiated dimensions in which Syrian women have been forcefully substituted by men in relation to national formation. Each section will highlight how men are constructed as the main contributors to nation-building, whether in the cultural or civic phase.

4.2 Al-Husri and the masculinist construction of cultural nationalism: Men as social reproducers of cultural forms

As we explored in section 2.7, al-Husri is the father of secular nationalism who extensively debated the origin of the idea of nation and nationalism in his works (1959: 31; 1964a: 15–16; 1985a: 1516). His nationalist theory constitutes the basis of the Ba'ath ideology in Syria (2.6). While one might argue that al-Husri's nationalist ideology was so thorough that it hardly left anything out (see Cleveland, 1971: 148), this overview of his works will reveal his disregard for women's contribution to national formation. In this section, I intend to analyse al-Husri's nationalist ideas with particular reference to the role of women and family in fostering national consciousness. In this context, a close reading of his three national elements – *language*, *history* and *education* – displays forms of dominance and coercion in the construction of national identity in the cultural phase.

4.2.1 The “soul” of the patriarchal nation

In al-Husri's theorisation, language plays the most pivotal role in defining not only the political and cultural boundaries of the nation (2.7.1) but also the gendered boundaries of belonging. According to al-Husri, the nation is a cultural entity that has naturally extended from the family. This naturalised conception of nation formation reinforces involuntary belonging. Conceptualising language as the driving force behind fostering

national identity raises the question of how al-Husri constructed a gendered understanding of the role of language. His conceptualisation of national language can be summarised in four propositions: its role as the “soul of the nation”; as a tool that protects the nation from losing its cultural character during times of war; as a tool that determines the political and cultural boundaries of the nation and unites Arab countries by disseminating Standard Arabic and minimising the use of colloquial language; and as a preserver of national heritage in its capacity as the language of the *fathers* and *grandfathers* (*lūghit al- 'abā' wa al- 'ajdād*).

From the beginning, part of the formulation of al-Husri’s ideology is based on internalising a masculinist understanding of national love and belonging. His ideological methodology is to insist on how to define “love” for the nation (*ūmmah*) and the fatherland (*waṭan*), where he emphasises that national love is a substitute for familial love.⁴³ This primordial love is compared to a child’s love for *his* mother (1985a: 29). However, this definition of national love becomes part of an enforced and naturalistic sentiment that generates propaganda about how to produce an ideal image of the man. More importantly, national love constitutes a means of legitimising dying for the nation, which is in turn embedded with gendered interpretations of national belonging.

The deep correlation between defining patriotic belonging and masculinity is further intensified by al-Husri’s social construction of kinship (*qarābah*). Since this kinship and lineage (*nasab*) is not about blood relations, but rather the belief in this relationship (1928), Al-Husri confirms that “spiritual kinship” is socially constructed through unifying language, history and education (1985b: 105). However, despite

⁴³ The use of the masculine term is taken from al-Husri’s narrative.

disregarding the racial and ethnic origin of the nation, al-Husri argues that the nation is a “brotherhood” and a “fraternity of descendants from one father” (1985b: 35). He further argues that the reason behind the inefficacy of racial origin of the nation is backed up by his idea of intermarriage (1959: 129). While these notions suggest that the nation is culturally constructed and preserved through language and intermarriage, al-Husri disregards the role of women as custodians of the nation’s cultural identity through marriage.⁴⁴ Therefore, while intermarriage, in defining the racial belonging to the nation, highlights the role of women as producers of national boundaries, al-Husri defines the nation as a “fraternity” and a “brotherhood” that is based on solidarity *between brothers* (‘ikhwān) (ibid.).

Identifying language as the soul of the nation, which mediates and determines the mode of thinking among individuals,⁴⁵ al-Husri’s definition of the role of language in formulating the nation is juxtaposed against the fact that he refers to the national language as the language of “the fathers” (1959: 56). However, he never mentions women’s role in socially and culturally preserving the language (see Yuval-Davis, 1997; Peterson, 1998), instead considering it the language of the fathers only (1959: 56). Moreover, this definition is highly reflective of al-Husri’s paradoxical position towards women. While he highlights the naturalised acquisition of the language through mothers, he still considers language to be transmitted from fathers to sons. Giving language this patriarchal connotation, al-Husri disregards the influence of mothers in fostering the “sentimental” identity of the child. In other words, he denied women their cultural role in preserving the cultural identity of the nation.

⁴⁴ This is according to Yuval-Davis’s (1997) analysis of women’s role in national formation.

⁴⁵ See al-Husri’s definition of language in 2.7.1.

At the same time, the importance of having one national language is clarified in his own words as “a mere need for men in order to contribute politically to the nation” (1959: 67). These ideas imply the inseparability of language and nationalism as the former is indispensable to the modernisation of both political and social life (1959: 67). However, al-Husri understands this link as pertaining to the public sector (1959: 68). It is worth noting that he only gives importance to the use of language in the state apparatus to establish and disseminate the national language. However, he overlooks the role of the private sphere in reproducing language in the same effective manner. Paradoxically, while he ignores the role of women in enacting this preservation, he still affirms that the important aim is to promulgate the national language through the state apparatus (1959: 73).⁴⁶

Since language is such a driving element in his conceptualisation of nation formation, al-Husri adamantly shows his dissatisfaction with the use of colloquial Arabic (*al-‘arabīyah al-‘āmmīyah*). According to him, its widespread use has divided and weakened the sense of national unity among Arab countries. It must be discerned that his view on how to deploy Standard Arabic and curb the use of colloquial Arabic is to promote it through the state apparatus (1985f: 30). Yet he stresses that, in order to deploy Standard Arabic, there is a need to reinforce the role of “intellectual men” by adopting their language and style (1985f: 29, 32). What is omitted from his proposition is the fact that unless mothers at home minimise the use of colloquial Arabic, the attempt to enforce the use of Standard Arabic is ineffective. More importantly, this is a rather

⁴⁶ This is evidenced in his emphasis on the role public institutions play in maintaining the cultural language of the nation. He enlisted some tools to preserve language through the influence of schools and teachers, and men of religion (1959: 72).

biased perception of women's intellectual contribution to Arabic literature and the Arabic language in his time (Altoma, 1991: 79–91).

By employing Yuval-Davis's account of women's contribution to the construction of nation and nationalism (3.2.3), I will review al-Husri's theory on men's cultural, intellectual and heroic achievements. For example, he perceives language to be a part of the nation's heritage that is only fulfilled by fathers of the nation. Nonetheless, he disregards the role of women and the family in ingraining the national language and ignores the role of mothers in disseminating the standard language, suggesting this is the role of "men of letters". This biased perception against the role of women and the private sphere in the inculcation of a homogeneous cultural identity through language has perpetuated hierarchy, coercion and gender bias in the construction of national identity. This patriarchalisation of language through defining it by the rule of the father and the intellectual man in both the private and the public spheres constructs a hegemonic national identity. This is in no way confined to language; indeed, these views encompass how al-Husri perceives history. The following section will analyse how history is constructed in his national narrative.

4.2.2 Telling the masculinist narrative: Men as transmitters of history and active participants in political struggles

The second central feature in al-Husri's nationalist conception is to have a unified version of history (2.7.1). In his definition of the nation as "a human being, with life and feeling. Life through its language and feeling through its history" (1985g: 19), history is seen as encompassing the notion of *unity* through propagating shared experiences and feelings. In turn, al-Husri's notion of "special history" is a *selective* approach to history in which only particular events should be recorded in the national

imagining, to instil a patriotic identity.⁴⁷ This culturally constructed definition of history as based on certain imagined communal experiences of pain and joy (1985g: 19) raises the question of how this national imagining is discursively constructed, and whether women are included in it.

In the introduction to his book *Ṣafahāt min al-Māḍī al-Qarīb* (*Pages of the Recent Past*), al-Husri indicates that its re-publishing is “of great benefit to young men (*shabāb*) of the ‘present’ and to the mature men (*rijāl*) of the ‘recent future’” (1948: 7). These words reflect al-Husri’s intention of instilling a sense of collectivity through the use of masculine terms to refer to his audience. Using masculinised terminology in relation to the past and the future generates a misogynist position towards women’s place in nationalism (3.4.2). In the same vein, this grouping of masculine peoplehood reinforces boundary relationships in al-Husri’s narrative, which deems history a primarily male domain. Al-Husri proceeds in this book to call for a revival of the past through creating a glorious present. The problem is that his concept of a glorious present and future is identified with empowering men and urging them to generate the “spirit of sacrifice and victory” while, on the other hand, urging them not to spread the “spirit of discontent, despair and surrender” (1948: 70). Within this context, al-Husri vigorously urged “young men” (*shabāb*)⁴⁸ and “mature men” (*rijāl*)⁴⁹ to adhere to martial and spiritual forces. He viewed martial forces as determined by military power and physical strength, though he argued that military power was not enough for the constitution of national identity and the revival of a heroic past, and that men should have “spiritual” understanding of how to regain the glory of the nation (1948: 61–2). According to al-

⁴⁷ For al-Husri’s definition of history, see 2.7.1.

⁴⁸ This word is often used in Arabic to refer to young men, presumably from the age of 18 to their mid-thirties.

⁴⁹ This word is used to refer to mature men, between 35 and 55.

Husri, becoming a real man is defined by ingraining the perception of the “martial” and “spiritual” forces in the soul (1948: 63), in which “martial force” is measured by the military strength of men,⁵⁰ who need to also acquire spiritual force. “Spiritual force” (*al-rūh al-ma'anawīyah*) is propagated particularly by making “soldiers, officers and commanders train themselves to have the spirit of courage (*al-shaja'ah*) and sacrifice (*al-tadhīyah*) ... and, most especially, the spirit of patriotism” (1948: 63).

What follows in this book is an exaltation of death and sacrifice associated with the great deeds carried out by men. In his concluding words, al-Husri defines life as synonymous with courageous death, which reasserts manhood and challenges potency: “I must say without any hesitation that life is a struggle (*nidal*) and a fight (*qital*), in every sense of the word: this requires death and annihilation for a lot of things” (1948: 112). This celebration of men’s sacrifices attempts to measure national belonging by physical strength. This in turn exposes al-Husri’s construction of nationalism as intimately linked with constructing the ideal man of the nation. It becomes very clear to the reader that al-Husri conceptualises the nation’s realisation of glory with man’s own achievement of manhood and masculinity. He argues:

The man (*al-shāb*) loves the nation under the influence of nationalism, and his heart is strongly attached to it, and considers himself part of it, so he becomes happy whenever its glory increases, and suffers if its strength reduces. He aspires to see it strong and developed, and be proud of its glories (*amjād*) ... and tends to do whatever can be done to defend its existence and its dignity. Besides, the man loves his fatherland (*watan*)⁵¹ under the influence of patriotism ... and seeks to serve it, and does not delay sacrificing his soul for its sake. (1985a: 27)

⁵⁰ In this chapter, al-Husri refers to both “young men” (*shabad*) and “mature men” (*rijal*).

⁵¹ Al-Husri makes a clear distinction between fatherland (*watan*) and nation (*ūmmah*): for him the nation (*ūmmah*) is “a group of people”, while the notion of fatherland “basically, is a certain geographic land” (1985a: 23).

These words highlight the extreme identification of the nation's glory (*majd*) with man's love for the nation, which in turn masculinises the sense of national belonging. This masculinist construct is further evidenced as al-Husri declares that these patriotic and nationalistic feelings are not only connected by spiritual ties but even resemble maternal love (1985a: 27–9). This portrayal of national love reflects the patriarchalisation of the man–woman relationship that is based on subordination and coercion. According to al-Husri, it is this nationalistic and patriotic love that would awaken sentiments in people to struggle and sacrifice for national renewal and unity:

We must remember that the nationalist idea enjoys a self-motivating power; it is a driving impulse to action and struggle. When it enters the mind and dominates the soul, it is one of the forces that awakens the people (*al-sha'b*) and inspires them to sacrifice. (1951: 238–9)

From these words, we can derive a picture of an overwhelmingly masculinist representation that conceptualises national membership through physical sacrifice. It is related to the question of who are the “people” (*al-sha'b*) who may be connoted with the characteristics of “action” and “struggle”? Moreover, it must be recognised that al-Husri's use of the term *shubbān* (“young men”) is an affirmation of the superiority of men as the only national believers in the nation. Hence, this juxtaposition between the assertion of nationalistic faith and the ability to sacrifice for the national struggle subsequently defines the concept of belonging (1985g: 40).

Because of his belief in the intrinsic value of national faith and patriotism, al-Husri points out that the greatest possible task for patriots is to prioritise national love over love of the self as the greatest enemy to patriotism because “selfishness” (*al-'ananīyah*)

draws souls towards self-interest and pleasures ... While “patriotism” is, unlike so-called “altruism” and “sacrifice”, for the sake of the nation and nationalism. It asks

everyone to love their homeland, and served his nation with all his force and to sacrifice everything for its sake. (1985a: 117)

It is again from these words that we can notice the association between loving the fatherland and sacrificial heroism which masculinises national membership. In this sense, dying for the nation is not only measured by men's heroism but also constructs politics of national belonging. This is further entrenched by al-Husri's emphasis on "altruism" and "sacrifice" as the tools to defy the gravest enemy to the nation, which is "selfishness" (ibid.). It is, however, essential to examine the solution that al-Husri proposes to this "selfishness", as he suggests that the only means for raising, spreading and strengthening national consciousness is national education. He strongly believes in the role that national education can play in regenerating and creating a "generation" with national pride. In this sense, the following section aims to shed light on how education is a masculinist construct in Syrian national thought.

4.2.3 National education: Men as active participants in a militarised nation

In his consistent attempts to construe a secular perception of nationhood, al-Husri relies on education to foster a homogeneous national identity (1985g: 20). As elaborated earlier, according to al-Husri national ties among individuals are established through unified language and history. He further outlines education as a means of instilling communal solidarity and sacrifice among the men of the nation. These patriotic sentiments are extolled as essential for the inauguration of national identity. Education is used by al-Husri as a means to achieve a unified perception of nationhood among men through prioritising militarism and sacrifice as the ultimate goals that constitute the nation. Al-Husri classifies schools into two types: the natural school, the home that the child is born into; and the primary school, conceived as the real social institution that fosters the national identity of the child. Thus, according to al-Husri, formulation

of national identity goes through two stages. The first is during primary school, which is the social and educational institution that nurtures, constructs and prepares the child for the second stage, army conscription. It must be argued that considering militarism a part of the educational system which underpins the national upbringing of the child highlights the privileging of one sex over the other in the national consciousness. This narrative undoubtedly promotes the image of the male warrior as a representative of the nation. In al-Husri's own words:

If we notice the role of these two institutions [the school and the military] from a general social perspective, we will find that there are many similarities. The first [school] takes the child from the family, and makes him join his peers, and it pledges to bring up the individual nationally, socially [*tarbīyah*] and educationally [*ta'īm*] for the benefit of the nation. However, the second [military barracks] takes the young man from his environment, and makes him socialise with other men that are prepared to serve and defend their nation. (1985a: 450)

These words leave no room for doubt as to whom al-Husri is addressing his narrative. The persistent overlap between the concepts of social and national upbringing (*tarbīyah*) and militarism (*'askarīyah*) leaves no space for women in his narrative. Nonetheless, this conceptualisation of militarising men further promotes a hierarchical and hegemonic masculinist identity in the national community (3.3.2).

The insistence that militarism is complementary to schooling is short-sighted. On one level, al-Husri's perception of militarism as part of the educational system sustains an exclusionary narrative of female children on how they should be educated (as we will see later). Militarism effectively becomes a means of defining and maintaining group identity and affiliation: the army, as a representative of the nation, structures the politics of inclusion and exclusion in the national community (3.3.2). This belonging and membership is best understood in the readiness to die for the nation, fostering a commitment to "militarised and continuously politicised conception of life, a conception that is entirely masculinist" (Kateb, 2006: 8). The role of the family is

therefore disregarded and substituted with school and military barracks. Moreover, the glory of the nation, like the glory of a man, is measured in terms of heroism and militarism. Women therefore become non-integral in the national discourse, and their image is propagated as naturally passive while men are conceived as active participants in the national struggle.

Al-Husri further expresses his attraction to the military barracks, to the extent that he considers their role to outweigh that of the school because they are more effective at controlling the life of the individual. Moreover, military life is a life

of activity and fatigue, it strengthens the spirit of young men's activity and movement, and gets them familiar with the roughness of life and develops their endurance of hardship; more importantly, it develops their manhood [*rūjulathum*] ... and the spirit of leadership that the nation needs most. (1985a: 450)

In fact, by conceptualising military barracks as agencies for raising and strengthening national consciousness, al-Husri's theorisation of nationhood is based on casting men as a metonym for sacrifice and altruism. This consequently relegates women to an unknown place in the national discourse (1985a: 451).

The use of schools and military service as a means of raising national and patriotic consciousness disregards the role of the family as an educational institution and neglects women's cultural role (1984: 15, 35).⁵² And what he classifies as natural school, the family, is rather disregarded as playing an important role in inculcating national identity. In this sense, nationhood becomes reliant on men's realisation of heroism, manhood and aspirations. Al-Husri argues that militarism plays a special role in fostering, strengthening and forming nationhood:

⁵² It is worth noting that al-Husri's notions of education and school recur in many of his books, and are even occasionally repeated word-for-word. If anything, this confirms his strong views on the necessity of fostering a specific concept of nationhood, grounded first in schools and later in the military barracks.

The soldier lives – during military service – outside his personal circle, and away from his personal life ... He leaves his family ... He lives with a group of the sons of his fatherland who are from different towns and classes and who hold various beliefs and positions. He lives with them subject to a system in which they are included without discrimination. He does not live there with the intention of returning to his original personality or of being confined to his family and a life centred in his village. On the contrary, he works for a purpose which is loftier than all these, for a purpose which ensures the life of the fatherland and the welfare of the nation. Is there a need to clarify the seriousness of the psychological and educational effects that occur as a result of this life in these circumstances? I do not know anything comparable to the life of the soldier in its impact on the social qualities: military barracks as social schools connect the individual with the nation, involve him in the most important episode of the community, and make him feel the existence of the fatherland. He learns true sacrifice of blood and self in the cause of the nation and fatherland. We can therefore say that the system of military life is one of the most important and effective methods in social pedagogy. (1944: 65)

This extract emphasises the role of military life in strengthening ties among members of the nation, and perceives it as the source for producing and disseminating national consciousness. Leaving aside the conceptualisation of militarism as a prerequisite for constructing a consolidated community based on internal solidarity, the normalisation of militarism in national narrative projects men as active participants in nation formation. Ahlbäck highlights that the association between military conscription and the making of manhood as militarism is an arena that reinforces the detachment of men “from their traditional places in the social order” and further intensifies gender boundaries based on hierarchy and hegemony (2016: 10).

The essence of al-Husri’s concern is the utilisation of patriotic and nationalistic sentiments of a generation composed of men only. The use of schools and military service as means to raise national and patriotic consciousness is essentially incompatible with considering women as part of the nation. In the same vein, while he perceived the nation as extended from the family, the role of the private sphere is completely disregarded. His prevalent argument of the role of the military barracks to outweigh that of the school is a substantial basis of masculinist imagining of the nation (1985a: 452).

In his own words:

After the comparison between the two institutions, it must be clarified that both young men and children need to have patriotic and nationalistic education, yet educating men is far more important for their magnificent role in the nation ... and anyway, the way we should look at the role of compulsory military service is as an extension to the role of elementary school., There should therefore be strong ties between the school and the military barracks. For the school should prepare the children for their future military service, and the military barracks should complete what was already taught in the previous institution. (ibid.)

In light of the above, very little room is left for questioning al-Husri's masculinist and gender-biased language. The incursion of military matters into the educational system paved the way for the naturalisation of the military ethos in society. As such, the essence of al-Husri's theorisation lies in his emphasis on how to create a *true* generation of the nation. He advocated the notion that teaching in schools was the best means for cultivating national identity in young children. Nevertheless, in order to accommodate the realisation of a militarised manhood, al-Husri proposes special methods for male elementary-age children. This interest in schools sheds light on his gender bias against the role of mothers in raising the children of the nation. In other words, by assigning the school a pivotal role that exceeds the role of the mother, it subsequently silences them.

This idealised perception of military life undoubtedly generates a hierarchical social order. According to al-Husri, there are three main social classes that form the nation:

Every nation, from a social perspective, is composed of three basic social classes. The first is composed of general people [*sawād al-nās*], the public. The second is the upper class, the elite, composed of men [*rijāl*] that run the affairs of the nation and have great influence on conducting these affairs whether through enjoying official positions in the government or by virtue of enjoying a scientific, social or economic status – and whether this is in the administrative or political field – or in the literary, industrial or trading one. The third class is composed of men [*rijāl*] who occupy middle status in comparison with the general public and the upper class. They represent the link between the upper class and the general public. (1944: 77–8)

In this passage, there is a shift from the general use of *shabāb*, which signifies young men, to a more specific use of *rijāl*, which signifies mature men. This linguistic usage

reinforces an image of the nation as a community composed and based on men. The term *rijāl* connotes a privileged gender, masking a hierarchical perception of the nation. Within this context, there is an infused connotation between hierarchy and masculinism and those in the upper class are all men. Even the middle classes, those who enjoy higher scientific or financial status are specified as men only. The reader is left wondering where women fit into this social classification, and how the two fields of politics and education, represented respectively by the upper and middle classes, are restricted to men only. Women, in this sense, are not even part of these two classes that hold the most important national front. However, one might consider that women are positioned within the “general class” (*sawād/‘āmmat al-nās*), which is deemed the uneducated class (1944: 77–9).

Masculinism can be further traced in al-Husri’s extensive exploration of what men should choose for their future professions. Al-Husri asserts the importance of choosing entrepreneurship and investment for the growth of economy (1984). He urges young men to choose business and commerce for their significant benefit in modernising society, and in turn the nation. This deep consideration for how men should improve the nation and promote national consciousness through their professions demonstrates al-Husri’s misogynistic views on women’s role as mothers and individuals. This is evidenced, first, in his failure to advance a parallel perception of how women could become more effective contributors to society. Second, he asserts that mothers have a bad influence on their sons’ professional choices (1984: 73–82). It might be suggested that, because al-Husri was aware of the greater lack of education among women, he believed that they were bound to have a negative influence on determining the future of young men. However, he failed to raise awareness about the benefits of educating women. With men placed at the higher end of the social spectrum,

women, by comparison, are conceived as a metonym for intellectual rigidity in society and the nation (as we will explore later).

Al-Husri further masculinises the perception of the nation by highlighting the particular education that female students should receive in schools. Unlike men, according to al-Husri, women should receive *special* teaching of how to manage the household. In his own words: “Schools should adapt to the requirements of women’s education” (1944: 90). Al-Husri even deemed it necessary to establish special professional schools that catered to womanly professions and workshops, such as knitting and cooking (1944: 89–90). While al-Husri presents himself as an advocate of national education, it is suggested that female education is confined to the domestic sphere. Al-Husri’s proposition for special education for women emphasises the national boundaries of the feminine and the masculine. This trend of thought laid the foundation for gendered education in Syria, as skills such as cooking, sewing and embroidery later became mandatory subjects for girls in Syrian schools. Moreover, the disparity between the wider professional options offered to men and women (1944: 79–83) highlights the inferior position assigned to women in that national imagining.

Throughout al-Husri’s theorisation, his legacy in constructing a militarised conception of culture, history and education perpetuated hegemonic notions of masculinity based on physical strength. In other words, the connection made between militarism and nationalism throughout his national ideology appropriated shared solidarity among “brothers” (*Ikhwān*) of the nation. This masculinist construction expounded in al-Husri’s national ideology was later reinforced in the Ba’athist ideology (this will be explored in Chapter Five), which makes his doctrine essential to understanding how the legacy of masculinism in Syria has been ingrained.

4.3 Michel Aflaq's political philosophy

The political philosophy of Michel Aflaq has long been studied as the most attributive theory towards the establishment of the political system in Syria (see El-Attrache, 1976).⁵³ Aflaq's militant conception of nationalism is best examined by deconstructing the national concepts and language in his iconic work *Fī Sabīl al-Ba'ath* (*Towards the Resurrection*). The following account includes a fine-grained analysis of his public lectures, articles and speeches written between the 1930s and the 1980s. The examination of his work will also consider the perceived audience for his narrative. Accordingly, I will address the questions "how did Aflaq seek to position himself in relation to his audience?" and "what sort of political community did he wish to constitute?" In this sense, this section seeks to provide a systematic analysis of Aflaq's emphasis on the construction of national identity as measured by constructing the ideal image of the Ba'athist man. More importantly, as Smith highlights how the intelligentsia use language to mobilise the masses in order to spread their nationalist ideology (1998: 51), the power of language in acculturation and manipulation of the masses is evident in Aflaq's national narrative. Hence, the following seeks to illuminate how language is employed to reinforce an essentialist conception of women in his national narrative.

4.3.1 The construction of the ideal man in Aflaq's national narrative: Men as signifiers of national identity and group membership

Contextualising his conception of nationalism, Aflaq's speeches propose the image of manhood as the only representative of the ideal human being. This is exemplified in the

⁵³ A thorough study of Aflaq's political philosophy finds that it is almost the only study to dedicate so much attention to his national concepts, although it does not address the question of women. El-Attrache highlights the difficulty of conducting research related to the Ba'ath party. In his words: "The problems encountered in this research were the unavailability of documental materials and the scarcity of published Arabic books on the subject. In Syria, it is considered dangerous and often arouses suspicion to go to governmental offices and bureaus and ask for documents and papers" (1976: vi).

gender-exclusionary language of one of Aflaq's earliest articles (predating the establishment of the Ba'ath Party), entitled “*‘ahd al-butula*” (Age of Heroism) (1935). Aflaq celebrates heroism by associating it with strength.⁵⁴ These concepts of patriotism and heroism are addressed to “*great men*”, who will be ready for this new battle for the nation. In a more explicit encouragement of “young men” (*shabāb*) to join the Ba'ath, an article circulated the following year distinguishes between “revolutionary men” and men who are still outside the party. This distinction not only refers to the basic Ba'athist ideology as “a movement from dark to light” (which is exclusively defined by men's participation in the Ba'ath), but it is also a masculinist call for a particular type of men: those who show readiness for sacrifice. As the title, “*Tharwat al-Ḥayāt*” (Treasure of Life), makes very clear, this speech (1936) is addressed to men as the only ones who give life its meaning through their participation in the national struggle. This construction of a hierarchical order among men reinforces hegemonic masculinities based on empowering particular types of men over others. It delineates masculinist boundaries between active and passive men. This construction of hegemonic masculinity is a distinctive feature in the ideology of the Ba'ath that is reflected in its reliance on the activism and impulsion of young men (*indifā al-shabāb*).⁵⁵ In a separate article, Aflaq states that “between our nation and our men, there is chemistry, appointment, and a meeting”. In a more transparent articulation of his sentiments, he states that men's activism and impulsion is what the nation needs: “They are the rescuers” (1955a).

⁵⁴ See section 2.8.

⁵⁵ While the term *al-shabāb* is sometimes used colloquially to mean youth in general, in the context of Aflaq's narrative it is addressed to young men as it is associated with the readiness to die for the nation and being prepared militarily.

Nonetheless, Aflaq has a particular definition of manhood. For him, there are basic characteristics (*ṣifāt asāsīyah*) that define men's national belonging. Aflaq emphasises the special rank of the heroic past of the nation, bidding men to identify with the glorious past and implement it in their present and future. More importantly, Aflaq expects a certain national and moral disposition from these men towards their nation (1943a). Needless to say, these messages are selectively addressed to men; however, the definitive characteristics provided by Aflaq raise the question of how he conceptualises the sense of belonging and the moral disposition required by these men towards their nation (1943a). In order to highlight how these features enshrine a distinctive internalisation of masculinism in Aflaq's national propagation, the following section addresses his conceptions of national belonging and solidarity.

4.3.2 Men as cultural producers of the nation: Defining national love through construction of manhood

4.3.2.1 *National love and belonging*

Since the cultural construction of the nation epitomises notions of love for and belonging to the nation, questions pertaining to what characterises the definition of this emotional connection to the nation become intimately linked with one's position in society and how such a social and cultural relationship is produced in everyday life. In this context, Aflaq's contextualisation of national belonging emphasises the importance of preserving culture and tradition. In his speech "*al-tafkīr al-mujarad*" (Abstract Thinking) (1943b), Aflaq prioritises the role of men in preserving the heritage of the nation, overlooking women's contribution to the preservation of culture. Aflaq was also concerned with creating an emotional basis for the nation based on the love men have towards it. His essay "*al-Qawmīya hub qabla kul shi'ā*" (Nationalism is Love Before

Anything Else) (1940) drew parallels between national and familial love.⁵⁶ Notably, his definition of national love fuses notions of sacrifice, glory and masculinity in the national imagination, thereby placing men at the helm of the national arena (see Aflaq, 1977). This proposition of familial love and belonging has not prevented the exclusion of women from the national imagination. In fact, this sense of familial love that particularly binds “brothers” (*'ikhwān*) of the nation together in their party relegates women to the margins of national imagining. This primordial construction of national belonging in Aflaq’s theory is concerned with understanding its two fundamental principles: substitution of family, and life.

This subjective and involuntary belonging to the nation is juxtaposed with familial love (1940), whereby creating familial bonds among members of the nation is infused with patriarchy and coercion. Aflaq’s conceptualisation of the nation as a patriarchal family is intimately linked with heroic sacrifices achieved by men. In the course of presenting his argument, he uses the concept of the family as a substitute for the nation, which subsequently makes women invisible in both the private and public spheres. This substitution ascribes masculinist qualities to society and the nation as it is based on reinforcing martial power and physical strength. Katz points out the patriarchal side of Aflaq’s notion of national love and sums up its impact on the masculinisation of the nation:

[M]en could become lovers and heroes. Sacrifice ... entailed *shahada*, the imperative to die for a family and nation ... nationalists interpreted the nation to be a place in which (at least certain) men could consider themselves at home. Dignity at home would be unassailable or, if assailed, defended by brothers. Nationalism became a male affair through masculinised definitions of national community, freedom, dignity, economic opportunity, and security. (2003: 80–1)

⁵⁶ See quote in section 2.8.

Hence, conceiving the nation as a family based on those who are able to discern themselves as fighters for the nation capitalises on heroism as a prerequisite to inculcate national identity. In other words, while the definition of nationalism is demonstrated only through “love”, this love can only be accomplished in masculine terms where men are patriots and great soldiers of the nation. This in turn marginalises the role of women in the construction of the national community.

4.3.2.2 Reconstruction of a heroic past through pain, suffering and struggle

Aflaq’s politics of belonging entail submission to the scheme of a solidified life. He emphasises the image of the nation as a community born out of solidarity between patriots. According to him, the nation is composed only of those who embody the “national idea” (1944). The related question in this context is: how does the nation preserve its identity? Aflaq encourages a sense of belonging among those who internalise the national cause in their souls and are therefore committed to sacrifice and die for the nation; those “who are aware of themselves and their individuality, and not that distorted, abnormal minority who are in denial of their national role” (1950c). In fact, Aflaq specifies the membership of this imagined majority to be exclusively composed of male patriots. This implementation of struggle, sacrifice and suffering as national themes, which are ascribed with manhood and hegemonic masculinity, is central to Aflaq’s definition of national belonging. Even in the 1940s, by which time al-Ba’ath was established as a political party, Aflaq’s linguistic choices were no longer gender-inclusive. In a detailed article on the concept of national “*Īmān*” (Faith), Aflaq connects the concept of faith with national consciousness. He states that the value of having “faith in the Ba’ath” has been confined to our “Arab men” (*al-shabāb al-‘arabī*). Moreover, this faith is conceptualised as a means to “transcend partition through pain ... and struggle” (1943c).

Like al-Husri, Aflaq's primordial conception enforces an involuntary belonging on members of the nation, as is clear in his speech "*al-Qawmīyah qadar mujeeb*" (Nationalism is Destiny) (1940a):

Very rarely does a person [*mar'*] think of simple questions like his name and face. They are his destined features that are going to stick with him for the rest of his life. We belong to nationalism just in the very same way that we have our names since we were born, and like our facial features that we inherit from our fathers and grandfathers. Even though in adulthood we might dislike our names and we prefer if we were called other names, we are obliged to accept our name as well as our face ... Nationalism to people [*sha'b*] is like a name and a face to an individual, it is a destiny that cannot be avoided ... So, why does one bother himself in changing his destiny while he can fulfil every step in his life with patriotism? He should say, "if this is my destiny, then let it be heroic" ... However, what kind of "man" [*rajul*] is that who does not feel proud about his nationalism? (1940a)

Aflaq's excessive use of masculine terms has ranged from the term *mar'* (person), specified later in the text to include men only, to the use of *rajul*. These masculine terms effectively exclude women from the national imagining. Moreover, this language choice highlights an inherent paradox: while Aflaq's conception of belonging is naturalistic, he constructs a special definition of this belonging that is confined to the performativity of heroism and manliness. At the same time, Aflaq harshly condemns those who do not meet the ideal definition of *man* in his ideology:

Whenever I think about the conditions of such a man, I writhe with fear of the image of misery engulfing him and the frostbite of isolation keeping him aloof. What narrow horizons of his own, a poor soul and a silly, dull life! He goes through his life neither knowing that he is a bough of a tree which is deeply rooted in the past and whose branches grow up through ages ... nor understanding that he is one among millions who ... fought and died in wars. They strove for all that to write the history of their own nation, line by line, build it up, stone by stone, clarify and prove its genius and continue carrying out its mission. All those millions strove, fought, wrestled with storms and withstood disasters to lead him forth from the darkness of nonexistence into the light of life, give birth to him – the unmindful, the forgetful – enrich his life with the lives of millions, foster his actions with the efforts exerted by all generations, burden and honour him with the responsibility of the past, and let him get a name by which he is called and features with which he is distinguished from others, so that he is no more a "Zayd" or "Bakr" [John Doe]; rather, when it is time for every nation to vie in boasting with one another, he can say: "I am Arab". (1940a)

These words subscribe to a monolithic definition of belonging that is based on achieving masculine prowess as the normal status quo in the nation. The text also presents a clear-cut distinction between men who are classified as heroes and those who are considered cowards, depending on their readiness to defend and sacrifice themselves for the nation. Such a perception highlights the construction of hegemonic masculinity in Aflaq's national narrative, as identified with competing masculinities.⁵⁷ The key feature of this belonging in Aflaq's early manifestations of nationalism has been the denial of women's participation in formulating the nation (ibid.). Hence, the national narrative becomes embedded with power relations and hierarchy. Such a masculinist construction is further manifested in the emphasis on reviving the glorious past (*majd*) through appreciative men:

So cruel is such a destiny as we were destined to live in the age of weakness, disgrace, backwardness and division instead of living in the age of al-Walīd or that of al-Rashīd, when we were backed by a venerated and invincible state, an active and unified people and a golden civilisation that shone like the sun. Destiny may sometimes be cruel, but it is forever and ever just; it distributes heroism only according to difficulty and gives glory only according to effort. And, in its view, the heroism of those striving nowadays to liberate their countries from foreign occupation and the threat of division and to extract them from the abyss of ignorance and poverty is no less than the heroism of Qutaybah and Ibn Nuṣayr. As the age of al-Rashīd and al-Ma'mūn expanded to produce philosophies and literature, each of today's heroes will similarly be, in the view of future generations, a subject of an eternal epic, and his sacrifice will be the birth of a new philosophy. (1940a)

Not only is Aflaq's language gender-biased, his failure to recognise what women have achieved on the national level in the 1940s is another dimension of how his embodiment of the past is only represented by male fighters. Also essential to constructing the nation is advocating heroic history: Aflaq insists on the role of "history" in binding the nation together. However, his version of Arab history is confined to the heroic deeds of its

⁵⁷ A cross-reference to hegemonic masculinity in 3.3.2. This will be explored in the cult of leadership (Chapter Six).

men. This is evident in his invocation of Qutaybah, Ibn Nuṣayr, al-Rashīd and al-Ma'mūn as representatives of Arab history (1940a; 1950c).

The justification of women's subordination in the Aflaqian national narrative depends heavily on applying masculinist values to the roles of women in the nation. The pervasiveness of this gendered discourse completely dominates Aflaq's Ba'athist conception of the nation. It is not only about the symbolic male representation of the nation, but even the predominant understanding of the "glorious past" and the future to be delineated by men's achievements and sacrifices. In his Aflaq's words:

Dear Ba'athi fighters, our past, whether it is the past of the party or the nation, is written differently and distinctively every day. The glorious men [*monadelūn*] who are watering life with ... generosity, sacrifice and heroism, and writing the history of the nation with sweat and blood. (1983)

This emphasis on reviving the heroic past is deeply intertwined with the commemoration of the shared experience of struggle and pain by the "masses". Aflaq's insistence on realising a dialectical construction of the heroic past, rites of sacrifice and struggle tends to bring the past into the present. While the use of "the masses" denotes a gender-neutral perception, Aflaq cites once more the distinction between active and passive men, filtering out women from this national construction (1957). Another demonstration of the masculinism of Aflaq's narrative is his conception "young men" (*shabāb*) and "the people" (*al-sha'b*). This is another reference to how Aflaq conceives the "masses" (*jamāhīr*) as falling into either of two categories, "young men" or "people", leading to a masculinist construction of national identity. Even within this classification, Aflaq prioritises the role of young men in formulating and representing the nation, and bids *the people* (*al-sha'b*) to learn from them (1950d). It is not clear where women fit into Aflaq's hierarchical social differentiation. He states that this division cannot be avoided as "young men" are the ones who present the nation with

their sacrifices. The ambiguity of the term “young men” (*shabāb*), along with Aflaq’s masculinist-inflected version of patriotism, exudes a masculine definition of the nation (1957a).

Moreover, according to Aflaq, pain and suffering are not only connoted with constructing the heroic past, but are also conceived as the backbones of the nation. In his speech “*ūrūba wa l’alam*” (Arabism and Pain), he affirms that the process of “resurrection is through suffering” (1956). However, even these two national conceptions (suffering and struggle) are measured and identified with manliness. Along with defining “the great struggle” of the nation, Aflaq contextualised the meaning of struggle, through reaching the “perfection of manhood” (*rujūlah*) (ibid.).

This trope of sacrifice and struggle continues to structure the order of people in the national imagination. Aflaq clearly differentiates between active and passive men. In his theorisation, he considers sacrifice and struggle the definitive features of real Ba’thists. Indeed, the following passage not only illustrates Aflaq’s hierarchical categorisation of men in the nation, but even associates humanity with manhood:

When activists accept the hard-won struggle and bear the sacrifices and agonies ... they are hoping that their comrades will follow the road of national struggle in order to establish the nation for their sons ... However, there is a nexus between the eras of negative struggle and those of positive struggle. The achievements of positive struggle are the production of virtues, steadfastness ... and the production of deep human experience by which the fighter acquires through his experience of struggle and adversity ... this is what distinguishes him from the [passive] others ... So struggle is an indivisible unit with both its positive and negative halves ... Therefore, struggle is the true life and I would say its foundation is this active part ... it is the period when the fighter is absorbed and fused with principles, suffering and sacrifice ... It is the only period by which the identity of the fighter is determined alongside his destiny, merit and his originality. (1967)

Aflaq’s hierarchical construction of national identity must be understood in relation to the two dichotomised categorisations of men – passive vis-à-vis active. Such categorisation illuminates hegemonic masculinity, which further situates women in a

third category, effectively relegating them in the national imagining not only to the private sphere, but to an almost invisible one.

Another manifestation in Aflaq's national construction is based on invoking a unified concept of heritage. According to Yuval-Davis, heritage is transmitted through women (3.4.4), yet Aflaq associates national heritage with the great experience of men (Yuval-Davis, 1997). This masculine characterisation of heritage emphasises a monolithic perception with the appeal to the great deeds of men. According to Aflaq, "understanding heritage can only be through revolutionary thought and the suffering of struggle" (1967). In this sense, struggle and suffering – the twin sirens of Aflaq's masculinist composition of national narrative – also perpetuate the concept of heritage as based on those who suffer and struggle for the nation. This rhetoric of suffering and struggle is replete with images of men as representatives of the nation's heritage.

However, away from identifying struggle (*nidāl*) with men's heroic sacrifices, suffering and achievements, Aflaq employs other meanings, ranging from the struggle to realise the ultimate goal of man through sacrifice to the daily struggle in life and the struggle for education and knowledge (1956a). That is, his conception of daily struggle in this context has multiple manifestations in everyday life (*ibid.*). Thus, while he previously associated struggle with sacrifice, despite this change of tone Aflaq still excludes women from his conception. He even refers to men as *munāḍilīn* (fighters) of the nation and, further, warns them that, if they do not stand up to their role in everyday tasks, their "*rūjulatakum*" (manliness) is under threat (1956a).

Indeed, even the daily struggle for education and knowledge is associated with men's intellectual capacity only (1970). Aflaq was aware that the Arab nation was entering a "new era" that required a great level of "intellectuality" in order to keep up with modernisation and global change. In this speech "*hīzb al-thawrah al-ʿArabīyah*"

(The Party of Arab Revolution), delivered in 1970, he redefines the characteristics of the “ideal Ba'athist” and the “Ba'athi fighter”. Aflaq's conception of “struggle” (*nīdāl*) in the early inception of the Ba'ath ideology was associated with militancy, fighting and use of force. However, during the 1970s, there was a redefinition in his thought to mean the promotion of the “intellectual foundation” of the Ba'ath. The notions of “sacrifice” (*taḍḥīyah*), “struggle” (*nīdāl*) and “manhood” (*rujūla*), which define the ideal “Ba'athi fighter”, are substituted with the emphasis on education and intellectuality. However, this redefinition of the concept of “struggle” to encompass the field of education is still masculinist, through the emphasis of men's role in education, the disregard for women's achievements, and the need to promote men's chances in higher education (Aflaq, 1970).

4.3.2.3 The army: The ideal construction of the Ba'athist man

In light of the above, there is a need to illuminate how Aflaq understood the Ba'ath message, which is defined in his speech “*hawḷ al-risālah al-'arabīyah*” (About the Arab Message) (1946) as

a belief before anything else ... it precedes any practical knowledge ... It is the nation ... and it is the right of all individuals [*'afrād*] to aspire to chivalry [*al-murū'a*] and heroism [*al-butūla*] ... However, it should be noted that, although it is required that each one should aspire to heroism, not all people are heroic [*al'btāl*]. (1946)

While Aflaq's narrative appears to be inclusive in his reference to “all individuals” (*'afrād*) rather than using *shabāb* (“men”), the correlation between accomplishing one's individuality and one's national role can still only be achieved through heroism and chivalry and their juxtaposition with the construction of masculinity. As *al-murū'a* (“chivalry”) stands for “perfect manhood”, this further reinforces an essentialist correlation between manliness and the construction of ideal national identity. The construction of this companionship manifested in the two words “heroism” and

“chivalry” denotes a presumption of a masculinist national conception. Moreover, Aflaq introduces a new concept of Ba'ath – its revolutionary character – stressing that what society needs most is the revolutionary spirit of its “young men” (1950b). Indeed, he states that “in the achievement of man’s national identity, the identity of the nation will be achieved. And the realisation of his ambitions and dreams will contribute to public life” (1944). Aflaq insists that the nation comes into existence through the true embodiment of patriotism in its members’ souls. Another example that highlights his preoccupation with the construction of an ideal Ba'athist identity is a speech delivered in 1975 titled “*al-Ba'athi hwa al-surah al-haqiqīyah li lūmmah*” (Al-Ba'athi is the Living Image of the Nation). He stressed the reformulation of the Ba'athist national identity as the “only reflection of the New Arab” still based on the “activity” of its “militants/fighters” (*monadilīn*). In his definition of the “character of the Ba'athi”, he identifies ideal manhood through “sacrifice and patriotism”. In his own words: “the living image of the Ba'ath and the nation can only be embodied by the militant Ba'athi ... *he* is the living image of past and future ... of heritage, authenticity, progress and creativity” (1975, emphasis added). According to Aflaq, what determines the identity of an ideal Ba'athi is being a male active fighter. In the same speech, Aflaq went on to explore the role of the Ba'athi fighter:

My comrades, I have always considered our national cause to be based on three substantial elements: nation ... the party [Ba'ath] ...and the Ba'athist fighter. Nation is the origin, the party is deduced from the nation’s pain and sufferings ... and the Ba'athist fighter is the one who embodies the nation and the party in his thoughts, behaviour and morals. (1967)

This quote gives the male Ba'athi fighter a further masculinist dimension – being not only the only embodiment of the Ba'ath Party, but also summarising the nation in his manliness. This is a dangerous degradation in the conceptualisation of the “people” to

serve as a reinforcement of masculinist homogeneity, thereby excluding women from their national roles.

This proposition of a revolutionary Ba'athist identity raises the question of how Aflaq perceives the Ba'ath generation. Suffice to say that he conditions the realisation of the nation's identity on the masculine traits of heroism, strength and, more importantly, militarism. This identification between the man and the nation delineates a masculinist nationalist conception. By fostering a stratified, masculinist culture in the national imagination, Aflaq celebrates the role of army in his narrative. His speech "*al-jaish hwa jīz' min al-jamahīr al-monaḍilah*" (The Army is Part of the Fighting Masses) (1974) raises further questions about how women are conceptualised within these "fighting masses". Aflaq states, "I am here to confirm that the Party gives a primary position to the army. In the Ba'athist ideology and its theorisation, the army is very important" (1974). The army then becomes another place for idealising masculinity by epitomising concepts like heroism, bravery and sacrifice, which are recognised as masculine traits. The Ba'ath not only gives the army an important role; rather, it aims to normalise militarism in society:

The Ba'ath ideology should take care of those men who enter the army for a short period – the period of military service only – and those who remain in civilian life; we should enforce values of militarism into their lives ... This is for the upbringing of the new generation, whether in the military or in civilian life. (1974)

These words give the values of militarism a further dimension in society by configuring and extending hierarchy, patriarchy and bravery. Aflaq's normalisation of the military ethos highlights the hierarchical authority of male domination that resonates with enshrining a culture of masculinity. Moreover, Aflaq extends the naturalisation of militarism into the realms of civilian life. This naturalisation of patriarchal ideologies embedded in Aflaq's theorisation of the army conventionally depends on the capacity

for male authority, ranging from the militaristic to the domestic. Hence, his notion of the army as an ideological formation of society determines the increasingly reciprocal relationship between manhood and militarism. It further transmits the authority of men in a public institution – the army – to that of the private sphere – the family.

4.3.2.4 Mobilising women in the masculinised nation: Aflaq's writings after June 1967

This section aims to explore the legacy of heroism and sacrifice in Aflaq's writings after 1967. It aims to illustrate how women are mobilised in Aflaq's narrative to further legitimise masculinism. In a speech delivered in 1975, we can see a shift in his language to become gender-inclusive. In this speech, Aflaq addresses both men and women in his greetings. Perhaps this is because from 1975 his lectures are attended by both men and women – although the content of the definition of ideal Ba'athi is still identified with active men only. The related question in this context is how Aflaq contextualised the image of women in the construction of the ideal Ba'athist identity. However, it is soon clear that the nation can only be represented by men, for example in his concluding words, in which he affirms that having this “fighting” spirit is the one requirement. In his emphasis on the definition of “spirit” that the ideal Ba'athi should have, its meaning is espoused with manhood. He states:

my dear comrades and brothers, the Ba'athi fighter should convey *his* personality to the masses in order to inspire and encourage them ... to project the extraordinary power that was the basis of our glorious past, and to urge *each citizen* to participate in the making of our great future. (1975, emphasis)

This is not to deny that, despite the mention of women in this speech, Aflaq reinforced the definition of the Ba'athi as only defined by the fighting spirit of men. This monolithic formation of the Ba'athi character designates the nation as a place that celebrates rites of masculinity and manhood. Moreover, the words “each citizen” bring into question his conception of citizenship in the invented national grouping stimulated by the Ba'ath ideology and whether women are only hypothetically included. For more

on this theme, a striking shift in manner in Aflaq's narrative can be detected in his speech marking the 35th anniversary of the Ba'ath Party's establishment (1982). In this speech, he included women in his greeting and further encouraged them to instil in others the spirit of struggle and sacrifice. However, it must be noted that, despite referring to women at the end of his speech, the inclusion of women in his narrative only involves women to a very limited degree of nationalist appreciation, especially taking into account of the way Aflaq proposes the overlap of both "manhood" and "dignity of the nation", which again leaves women out of the national arena.⁵⁸ In another example, after a very long and extensive speech on the sacrifices, greatness and glorious deeds of heroic men, it is difficult to understand what Aflaq meant when he said that women are "facilitate the characteristics required for victory and promoting the values of heroism and martyrdom" (1982). It is clear that the mention of women is not fundamental, as he emphasised in the same speech that the "fighting heroes are the true image of the nation" (ibid.).

This inclusion of women in the 1970s is juxtaposed with his preoccupation with the notion of "fighting" as correlated with virility and manhood. In another speech that illustrates this association, titled "*qadurna 'an nuhārib ma'an*" (Our Destiny to Fight Together), Aflaq highlights a reinforced masculinist conception of the nation:

My dear comrades, young men are the spirit of the revolution ... The first thing the revolutionary movement does is attract the nation's youth. The revolutionary movement turns elderly people into young men [*shabāb*]. (1974a)

Nonetheless, it must be noted that the timing of this speech is highly important. Aflaq's redefinition of women's role in the nation first appears in the wake of the magnitude of the Arab defeat by Israel in 1973. The traumatising of political life around this time

⁵⁸ An example of Aflaq's masculinist usage in the Ba'ath anniversary appears in remarks at the 37th anniversary of the Ba'ath, when his language notes no difference. The excessive use of "brothers", "sons" and "fighters" characterises his speech. For another example of his excessive use of masculinist terms in addressing an audience, see Aflaq, 1977.

impressed on Aflaq the need to confer seemingly equal national spaces for the two sexes. In his words:

When the nation is exposed to great danger, its duty is to mobilise all its forces ... Yes, we should recruit children to face this imperialist Zionist attack. The nation and its men, women, elderly and children must be alert and present for fighting in this great battle. (1974a)

This shift in Aflaq's national theorisation redefines the position of women in the national imagining, but he proves to be no different from other nationalists who accepted the principle of women's contribution to the nation only in times of conflict. Hence, this inclusion of women does not reinforce a collective national identity, but rather exceptionally questions the hierarchical perpetuation of women in the nationalist process.

In the same vein, this very limited acknowledgment of women in Aflaq's narrative consolidates the essentialised image of women. While the inclusion of women in the passage quoted above reveals a degree of gender appreciation, it is an emergency inclusion of the national subjects, irrelevant to the wider consideration of women's potential and capacities. Moreover, this emphasis on militarising children and women further reinforces the idealisation of the ethos of solidified masculinity. Within this context, Heuer extends the discussion of the inclusion of women in tempestuous national moments and asks whether it "question[s] the validity of the long-term invisibility of women ... [and] the perpetuated gendered imagining of women that had been long practised before this period" (2008: 43). Within such a national context, it can be argued that Aflaq's nationalist definitions that identify members of the nation (men) and exclude women, coupled with the use of combative language, place men as morally superior and underestimate women as being socially, culturally and morally inferior. As such, this gender inclusion is temporary and subject to the subscription of a masculinist ethos that, according to Aflaq, identifies the nation and those (the heroic

men) who belong to it.

4.4 Zaki al-Arsuzi

4.4.1 The essentialist perceptions of women in al-Arsuzi's political theory: Nature versus culture

Al-Arsuzi brings us together to praise the introduction of liberal thought in his national doctrine, which embraces the application of state, democracy and free society, in contrast to al-Husri's and Aflaq's main theorisation of the nation as a cultural and primordial entity. Al-Arsuzi introduces the civic conception of the nation, based on highlighting the importance of achieving a political body for the nation, i.e. the state. His national theorisation further emphasises the need to adopt democracy and freedom in the process of nation-building.

Widely considered the father of the Ba'ath ideology in Syria, al-Arsuzi is deemed by Elamir to be the most important leader to introduce the concepts of liberalism and nationalism in the Middle East (2010: 66). It is therefore important to interrogate the perceptions of women in his theory. He is an advocate of the French civic construction of the nation, in which the idea of nation formation transcends the realisation of the cultural identity of the nation for the establishment of the state by applying democracy, free elections and freedom (1973: 321) (see 2.9.2). In light of this civic conception, the significance of al-Arsuzi's political writings lies in his preoccupation with constructing a theology of free society that is unprecedented in al-Husri and Aflaq's writings. The related question is, therefore: where do al-Arsuzi's primordialist and civic conceptions situate women in relation to the state and society?⁵⁹

⁵⁹ His proposition of national concepts – “will”, “determination”, “state” and “consent” – can be seen in al-Arsuzi, 1973: 321–3.

His overemphasis on the role of philology in constructing the nation makes the analysis of his national concepts and use of language highly important. Taking into account how he used philology to form his national theory, I shall examine al-Arsuzi's perception of women through a deconstruction of the language of his national theory, coupled with his insistence on state and democracy as the only viable means for constructing a national community. In other words, I aim to examine al-Arsuzi's ideas on women, particularly in relation to their nature, education, and place in the social and political order.

4.4.2 Masculinisation of the nation: Al-Arsuzi, women and society

In pursuit of an egalitarian political society and a constitution based on freedom and democracy, al-Arsuzi proposes a conflictual perception of the emergence of nation and nationalism. While his preoccupation with the idea of civic nationalism seemed paramount in his national narrative (1973: 47–8, 228–9), he could not transcend the romanticised idea of the nation. In light of such a perception, al-Arsuzi is no different from al-Husri or Aflaq in defining the nation as an extension of the family; however, his perceptions reflect more essentialist and misogynistic views on women. While Aflaq and al-Husri disregard the question of women in their cultural theorisations of the nation, al-Arsuzi devotes a substantial part of his writings to what defines a natural woman and a natural man. It may well be considered one of his most fundamental principles that nature is the source of the structural order in nation and society.

From the very beginning, al-Arsuzi's conceptualisation of the nation (*ūmmah*) takes us to how he perceived the role of the mother (*umm*). His preoccupation with philology – the roots of words – forms the basis of his ideological views on the roles of women in state and society. Al-Arsuzi identifies belonging to the nation with the naturalistic love born out of the mother–son relationship. This justification of national

love articulates both a cultural and primordialist conception (1973: 213). According to al-Arsuzi, the nation as a cultural entity is sustained by the love of its sons. However, perceiving the nation as a fraternity deprives women from equal representation and maintains patriarchal supremacy in both the family and the nation. In this sense, the emphasis on the role of grandfathers ('*ajdād*') and sons (*abnā'*) in preserving the cultural identity of the nation further complicates al-Arsuzi's perception of women.

Al-Arsuzi stresses that the nation is based on the "natural sympathy among brothers in the same way that the creation of the family is based on affection among kin" (1973: 247). Following Aflaq and al-Husri, al-Arsuzi conceptualises national belonging as preceding any philosophical or theoretical knowledge (1973: 341), which means that national love is unconditional and uncontrolled. According to al-Arsuzi, the nation is not only an extension of the family from "a spiritual perspective", but the resemblance between the family and the nation also lies in the duties assigned to the "brothers" ('*ikhwān*') of the nation (1973: 344). This suggests that, in both the family and the nation, men are considered sovereign, leaders and, therefore, superior. This patriarchalisation of nation and family creates a hierarchical order between men and women (3.3.2). More importantly, this politicisation of the cultural and familial sphere warrants an examination of how al-Arsuzi conceives the relationship between men and women.

In a dedicated chapter titled "*al-'Usrah*" (Family) in the second volume of his book *al-Mu'allafāt al-Kāmilah* (The Full Works), al-Arsuzi outlines the importance of integrating the role of the family in the formation of the nation. This is strikingly different from how al-Husri and Aflaq conceived the notion of family in their theorisations. Al-Arsuzi defines the family as held together by bonds of fraternal love.

In the course of expressing the role of the family, we are reminded of his sexist perceptions attributed to men and women:

The family [*'usrah*] as a unit is based on men and women. The man [*al-rajul*] in this natural entity symbolises the ideal figure, as he becomes the role model for his sons. The mother, overflowing with emotions, fuels her sons with emotions. The gentleness of women, and the tendency of men to control and show mutual sympathy between brothers is what formulates a family environment that is full of life. In such an atmosphere, the people are trained to carry out public duties ... In such an atmosphere, the mother blooms with tenderness and mercy, and the father practices what he is naturally born into; that is his inclination for sovereignty and the administration of justice ... In such an atmosphere, all members enjoy freedom, the freedom to tackle the duties and problems of life. (1973: 304)

Al-Arsuzi's words stress that each sex is assigned a different role that is suited to their nature. A closer analysis of the linguistic labels used by al-Arsuzi reveals his gendered conceptions (3.3.1).⁶⁰ Al-Arsuzi refers overtly to both men and women, which subsequently asserts the prevalent assumptions about the different functions of the two sexes. Despite this clear reference to gender, it is openly asserted that man is responsible for administering justice. This hierarchical and patriarchal understanding of the family subsequently incites a hegemonic perception of the nation.

Al-Arsuzi conceives the nation as an arena that regulates relations between rulers and ruled. This hierarchical conception is exemplified by his reference to the terms “mother” (*umm*) and “leader” (*'imām*). On the one hand, the mother is deemed by al-Arsuzi not only to be the origin of life in the family – inasmuch as she produces the sons of the nation – but also to symbolise “the image of the nation”. On the other, al-Arsuzi emphasises that the “leader” is the one who leads and rules the nation and the family (1973: 333). According to al-Arsuzi, a man *naturally* symbolises sovereignty and justice, while a woman is *naturally* defined by her *function* in relation to the man.

⁶⁰ The use of “gendered” here implies that in this context al-Arsuzi assigns different gender roles to both men and women based on sex. This is different from the use of “masculinist” as this term signifies the reinforcement of hierarchy and hegemony in association with masculinist qualities.

In such an argument, al-Arsuzi determines the distinctive moral standards of men in applying reason and justice to both the private and the public spheres. Nonetheless, qualities such as tenderness and submissiveness, which are ascribed to women, establish a certain emotional superiority. This is evident in the justification that such a differentiation of gender roles contributes to the realisation of freedom. This leads us to question the gender-inclusivity of the concept of freedom in al-Arsuzi's doctrine (see next subsection).⁶¹

4.4.3 Women as producers of national boundaries: Curtailing women's choices

According to al-Arsuzi, the family has a significant role in nation formation, and for this reason he considers it synonymous with "humanity". However, the "evolution of the family towards superior humanity" (1973: 305) is based on controlling women's choices of their future husbands. In this context, al-Arsuzi considers controlling who a woman marries as essential for formulating a nation of a superior race. In spite of his claim that his doctrine is not a racial one, when it comes to a woman's freedom to choose her partner al-Arsuzi adamantly justifies full control over her choices (1973: 305).⁶² In this sense, while al-Arsuzi seems conscious of women's role as markers of national boundaries, this recognition is accompanied with depriving women of their freedom of choice.

One might wonder whether al-Arsuzi's opposition to mixed-race marriages encompassed both men and women. Significantly, the overt reference to the "danger" of mixed marriages only pertains to women. Given the hierarchical structure of al-Arsuzi's conception of family and the nation, it can be discerned that the chastity of the woman is another masculinist construction used and justified to control women's

⁶¹ Al-Arsuzi's conception of freedom will be described in the constitutional narrative (Chapter Five).

⁶² This will be reflected in 5.5.1.

choices. Using somewhat racist language, al-Arsuzi articulates his view that the child born to such mixed-race marriages is a “disgusting” (*muqrif*) “half-caste” (*hajīn*) (1973: 307). This proposal for the regulation of marriage and breeding reflects the priority of maintaining the purity of the race in constituting the natural boundaries of the nation.

Such notions instil aggression and racism in the Syrian context. Yet beyond this enforced naturalness, al-Arsuzi furthers his argument in the course of constructing an ideal national identity by claiming that any marriage to a foreign man will lead to physical and psychological deficiencies in the cross-bred child (1973: 305–6). He argues that this child is doomed to fail culturally and socially, and even compares him to “parasites” (*ṭufaylīyāt*) in a bid to affirm that this child will never be able to be independent or responsible. In the course of this argument, the woman is regarded solely as a means for breeding a superior race only if married to local men. In this sense, it is only logical to presume that al-Arsuzi’s anti-miscegenetic views are at the root of the deprivation of Syrian women of the right to pass citizenship to their children if they marry non-Syrians (5.5.1).

Such an argument is advocated by al-Arsuzi in pursuit of the highest convention of the nation, which is a “pure” family of superior race. In his emphasis on the significance of painting the ideal “image of the Arab family”, al-Arsuzi resorts to the conceptualisation of the hierarchical order within it (1973: 307). By conceiving that the family is natural, al-Arsuzi implies that its existence is pivotal for the satisfaction of the man. This is reflected in his argument that the man is naturally “superior to the woman” in the formation of the family (*ibid.*). Interestingly, al-Arsuzi further attributes the superiority of the father in the family to the philological source of the term “*‘ābb*” (father) and its similarity to the pronunciation of the English word “up”, and therefore concludes that the word “father” in Arabic symbolises “highness” (*i‘tilā’*) and

“eruption” (*haijān*) (1973: 308). Al-Arsuzi justifies this linguistic association with the superior role of the man in controlling the private sphere.

Al-Arsuzi identifies the central role of the female as attracting the man to perform her function in producing sons for the nation. In another chapter titled “*al-Mar’ah*” (Woman), al-Arsuzi subjects women to what he claimed were natural constraints. Again supporting his argument with philology, he claims that the term “*saīyd*” (master) originates from “*asad*” (lion), highlighting the sovereignty of the man. This is also in line with the man’s natural function to be the breadwinner of his house. Al-Arsuzi even associates the linguistic meaning of the term “*saīyd*” with the man’s inclination to “protect his house”. On the other hand, the woman is inclined by her nature to “stay in her sacred (*al-muqaddas*) home” (1973: 311). This association between sacredness and the home sustains an essentialist conceptualisation of women’s role. Furthermore, the potential of the woman is seen in her nature to arouse the man sexually, which in turn secures a well-ordered moral and intellectual life for the man (1973: 311–2). This is evidently to be contrasted with how al-Arsuzi examines the philological meaning of the term “femininity” (*unūthah*), associating it with “stillness and silence” (*sukūn*), which in turn symbolises her natural love for “stability and settlement” (*istiqrār*) (ibid.).

Even though this essentialist view gives women a national function in producing a well-ordered “image of the Arab family” (1973: 307), regarding the family as a natural and pivotal institution in the nation defined women by their sexual functions. In this context, al-Arsuzi concludes that the woman is defined by her role in arousing the man sexually, so that she may fulfil her natural function of producing sons for the nation (1973: 309–10). Perceiving the woman as the guardian of chastity and morality is

reflected in her function to preserve her purity for the man, so that society sustains its moral standards. According to al-Arsuzi, in such a

historic moment, the woman completes the terms of her function ... if she helped the man to do his public responsibilities. She would ingrain in him the sense of chivalry and prevent those who represent politics from shabbiness and villainy. (1973: 312)

Al-Arsuzi considers the sexual purity of women the sole means of helping male politicians preserve the characteristics of manhood. He also insists that women are made for “love” (*ḥubb*) and “docility” (*wadā‘ah*) (1973: 308, 311, 310). In accordance with such essentialist features assigned to women, men are conversely perceived to possess limitless potential. Al-Arsuzi conceptualises women’s functional potential of “sensuality” that would “fire the man and fill in him ‘imagination’, which subsequently would turn the man into an ‘artist’ (*fannān*) and a ‘hero’ (*baṭal*)” (1973: 312–3).

4.4.4 Women as transmitters of masculinist culture and traditions

Al-Arsuzi, the Syrian writer of freedom and equality, has hardly considered man and woman to share the same human values. Nonetheless, his notions implicitly assumed the origin of inequality between man and woman by their hierarchical categorisation to represent the dichotomised spheres, public and private, respectively. In entrenching patriarchal privileges, al-Arsuzi argued that the

practical duties of the woman ... in which she completes her function and accomplishes her identity are through being a housewife. She should organise everything about [the] house to make it a perfect place for the man to rest after accomplishing his tiring duties in public life. (1973: 313)

He continues that “the woman does her duties through turning the house to a national fireplace around which children learn about the heritage of grandfathers” (ibid.). It is important here to refer to al-Arsuzi as, unlike Aflaq and al-Husari, he is conscious of the woman’s cultural role in preserving the culture, tradition and the heritage of the

nation. However, this recognition is limited to the essentialist perception of women. This is evident in his argument that the mother, by using her motherhood instincts, will ingrain the cultural identity of the generation without the least focus on how to improve her role to extend the confinement of the private sphere. Put more simply, al-Arsuzi asserts that woman's "happiness" is achieved through "preserving her feminine nature and cooperating with the man to achieve what her nature entails from art and virtue" (ibid.). It is very clear in this context that al-Arsuzi considered the essential character of woman as determined by being the servant of man's needs, whether in fulfilling his sexual needs, producing the next generation, or easing his tiring days of public life.

However, it should be noted that, even in the context of investigating the impact of nationalist discourses on women, some scholars argue that conceptualising them as part of the familial production of the nation has gained their inclusion in the nation (see Blom, Hagemann & Hall, 2000). Others note that, despite this emphasis on the gendered nature of nationalism through women's biological, cultural and historical contribution, women are still considered less than full citizens in the state. Yet Baron finds that there is a middle position between those two perceptions that "sees gendered nationalist discourses as 'Janus-faced,' facilitating women's political participation and at the same time constricting their roles and restricting their emancipation" (2005: 2). The next section will investigate whether women are perceived as citizens in al-Arsuzi's theorisation, despite recognising their "natural" roles in nation formation.

4.4.5 Are women citizens?

The interesting thing about al-Arsuzi's views on women is their inherent contradiction. While he extensively defines the woman by what he claims is her natural function, he simultaneously expresses the need to integrate the woman in state affairs (1973: 314–6). However, al-Arsuzi's encouragement of women's participation in the national

construction is at odds with his earlier emphasis on the functionalist character of women. More importantly, women's participation in the public sphere is conditional on conforming to al-Arsuzi's perceptions of modern, secular dress. He openly attacked women's choice to don the headscarf (*ḥijāb*) and considered wearing it a reactionary act (ibid.). It later becomes clear that stressing the need for women to receive education and participate in public life is bound by al-Arsuzi's ideological motives. His aggressive attack on the *ḥijāb* is no doubt a manipulation of what a large religious sect of Syrian women believes (ibid.).⁶³

What may appear to be the seeds of liberal views on women become totally misogynistic again when al-Arsuzi claims that the "ingenious man" (*al-'abqarī*) is quite independent and does not need the woman in his life (ibid.). According to al-Arsuzi, this ingenious man is superior to both what he calls normal men and women who have an average level of intelligence. This hierarchical categorisation of men resonates with both al-Husri's and Aflaq's earlier representations, but the relevant point here is that al-Arsuzi, even after claiming the need for participation in the public sphere by a particular type of women, still hardly regards them as intellectuals. He further contends that this "ingenious man masterfully administers the rules that build the national society, whereas the women reproduce sons so that life continues" (ibid.). These words, which follow al-Arsuzi's seemingly modernistic views on women, again positions them as inferior to men.

Another demonstration of al-Arsuzi's perception of the subordinate status of women is reflected in his conclusive remarks on marriage. In the course of emphasising

⁶³ This condition on women's participation in the public sphere is echoed in some articles of the Constitution, where only those who adhere to the Ba'ath ideology are given a voice and a place in the Ba'athist state. This will be explored in 5.5.2.

the superiority of the “ingenious man”, he furthers a hierarchical assumption by claiming that this ingenious man is better off not marrying the woman, as his superior nature encompasses the dichotomised characteristics of males and females. However, al-Arsuzi continues to stigmatise women by stating that “the woman cannot live without the man” (ibid.).

In this context, it seems that al-Arsuzi fell short of advocating true equality and freedom for women. It becomes clear that his writings on women are covertly concerned with men’s preferences rather than women’s social and political choices. Thus, even though women are included in al-Arsuzi’s theorisation, their role is restricted in both the private and public spheres. At the private level, al-Arsuzi advocates the regulation of a woman’s sexuality and breeding and stresses that her natural role is to serve the man. At the public level, he confines his modernistic views to those women who conform to his ideological perceptions (5.5.2).⁶⁴

Throughout al-Arsuzi’s argument, the nation is conceived as a brotherhood. Suffice to say that he considers the creation of the ideal family central to ingraining national solidarity and sympathy among brothers. In other words, al-Arsuzi is preoccupied with constructing an ideal family based on realising the satisfaction of the brothers of the nation. This satisfaction is supposed to be the responsibility of the woman in the family where her submissive function ensures the fulfilment of the man’s role in the public sphere.

In al-Arsuzi’s liberal notion of the state and in his conception of how to rule, he affirms that the administration of the state is based on cooperation among men. In his words:

⁶⁴ Later in the political narrative, this conformation will be with the Ba’ath ideology.

Why should the *human being* [*insān*] not have the right to rule his state, as a *citizen* [*muwāṭin*] to cooperate with brothers [*'ikhwān*] to practice their right in fighting against despotism ... thereby confirming their determination to live. (1973: 323, emphasis added)

The significance of al-Arsuzi's linguistic choices must not be overlooked: while the terms "human being" and "citizen" are gender-neutral, they are paradoxically equated with the masculine term "brothers". This argument cannot be understood in isolation from al-Arsuzi's cultural conception where the democratic state can only be achieved through the "brothers of the nation" (*'ikhwān al-ūmmah*) (1973: 324). More importantly, according to al-Arsuzi, this cultural construction is realised through reviving the heritage of the nation, but this relies on a monolithic perception based on commemorating the heroic past of fathers and grandfathers (*ibid.*) (see 4.4.4).

On the practical level, the impact of al-Arsuzi's Ba'athist perceptions on Hafez al-Assad outweighed that of Aflaq due to reasons pertaining to the ethnic origin of both (al-Assad and al-Arsuzi), and this influence will prevail in Chapter Five (Seale, 1989: 27). Such preferences for al-Arsuzi's national ideology by al-Assad foregrounds the misogynistic conceptions of women's potential in both the private and the public spheres. Thus, the reader soon realises that the inclusion of women in the public sphere in al-Arsuzi's ideology is merely hypothetical. For, in order to make a real effort to emancipate women in the public sphere, there must be major changes in the way women are envisaged as naturally born to serve men's needs. Women become fated to fulfil their functions in the private sphere, which in turn becomes their most defining feature.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the considerable neglect of women's contribution to nation formation in the early theorisations of three Syrian pioneers. It has reviewed the main currents of Syrian national thought on nation and nationalism in extensive detail,

analysing and deconstructing the traces of masculinist ideologies in national narrative. Conceptualising Syrian national narrative, one can discern three distinct positions that define the cultural phase. The first concentrates on the notion that nations are natural extensions of *family*; however, the paradoxical nature of conceptualising the nation as a “national family of man” is that such a notion reinforces gender hierarchy. It naturalises the supremacy of the male patriarch within both family and nation (McClintock, 1993: 63).

More importantly, this correlation legitimated the transmission of patriarchy from the sphere of the family to that of the public (Wedeen, 1999: 52; Baron, 2005: 6). Although the three thinkers articulated this correlation between family and the nation, each of them conceptualised its impact on constructing cultural identity differently. For example, al-Husri considered the family a marginal institution in the nation. His disregard for the private sphere is evidenced by the way he perceived language, history and education. He relied on the public sphere to ingrain national sentiments and substituted the role of family with schools and later military barracks. In the same vein, Aflaq stressed that love for the nation starts in the family, but disregarded the role of mothers in his theorisation and reinforced the construction of physical strength as a definer of the nation and the Ba'ath. On the other hand, al-Arsuzi took a strikingly different approach and he extensively considered the family a necessary institution in the nation. However, this conscious inclusion of the family in his national doctrine only reinforced the subordinate position of women in both spheres. By including the question of women in his theory, al-Arsuzi justified their subordinate position in both state and society by objectifying women as men's possessions. Al-Arsuzi perceived women as sexual objects and servants to the man in both the private and the public space. This essentialist view of women is in line with the process of normalising militarism and

sacrificial heroism in the Syrian national narrative as expounded by al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi. Moreover, al-Arsuzi's conscious appreciation of the role of mothers as cultural producers reinforced coercion and hegemony over women's choices.

The second key notion in the three thinkers' work is concerned with the construction of a unified conception of history. Suffice to say that this narrative has been saturated with references to men. The social construction of memory in these narratives was focused on masculinist discourses through which memories are shaped to formulate the imagination of the fatherland. While, in general, the narrative of a national past aims to present a homogeneous conceptualisation of the nationalist struggle that is embedded with myths to bind the collective together, Baron states "[f]or purposes of promoting unity behind a particular leader or group, counternarratives are silenced, marginalized" (2005: 2). However, this marginalisation or act of selection in national history not only creates oppositional groups but, more importantly, is exclusivist over women's contributions as well. In fact, this glorification of sacrifice is associated with prototyping militarised men, thereby accumulating a selective history defined by the heroic deeds of men only. Hence, the narratives of al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi masculinised time by projecting men as embodiments of the nation's glorious past and continuing to project them as having autonomous, revolutionary and infinite impacts on the nation's present and future.

The third notion is defining national belonging as involuntary, as this naturalised belonging reinforces the ethos of masculinised patriotism, sacrifice and heroism. In this regard, the espoused interplay between these three notions has created a hierarchical symbolisation of the nation by their sole representatives, "men".

At the same time, however, the civic phase expounded by Aflaq and al-Arsuzi provided different characteristics for the political embodiment of the nation, i.e. the

state. On the one hand, Aflaq constituted heroism, masculinity and militarism as the basis of his political ideology. Moreover, he asserted that the construction of the Ba'ath Party was synonymous with constructing the ideal Ba'athist fighter. Al-Arsuzi, on the other hand, introduced concepts of free society and democracy as essential for constructing the national state. He conceptualised the “people” as political citizens, but conceived women as inferior to men. Although civic notions can be traced in the narratives of the two thinkers, they both subscribe to a legacy of domination and perpetuation through internalising militarism, patriarchy and masculinism in the construction of their nationalist concepts.

This phase defines the will and determination of its men and their shared pain and suffering as markers of communal experience, which subsequently act as a delineation of power relations. More importantly, these concepts are perceived to be measured by masculinist identifications, which in turn politicise national boundaries around the heroic deeds of men only. In this regard, the emphasis on constructing communal experience serves as a trace of men's historical national experience, thereby creating a hierarchical symbolisation of the nation (see 5.2.1). This national experience has been identified and measured by the twinned nexus of love of country and men's readiness to sacrifice themselves. Such notions highlight the reasoning behind defining the nation as a fraternity, which is intimately linked with how women's relationship to citizenship will later be conceptualised (Badran, 1995).

This construction of idealised femininity and masculinity in national narratives defines “love of country” as a male arena in which only “he” is allegedly capable of defending the fatherland. Thus, nationalism is reconciled with hegemonic masculinity and feminine exclusion; women are once more relegated to being passive subordinate agents who require an active dominant mobiliser. In these two phases, therefore, the

Syrian national narrative perpetuates an obsessive representation of the nation as a community of men, imagined and defended by men. There is no denying that this empowered masculine identification between the nation and men is a reflection of a hegemonic muscular nationalism.

This analysis has also employed Yuval-Davis's five identifications of women's contribution to nation-building. However, al-Husri and Aflaq substituted women's cultural, social and political contribution to the nation by considering men to be guardians and markers of cultural group membership. Al-Arsuzi, on the other hand, included women in his theorisation, but with essentialist, sexist views of their role. While women are conceived as transmitters of traditions and culture, these traditions are channelled through a masculinist prism to retell the ethos and ideals of the heroic deeds of men. Hence, despite this gendered construction of nationalism in their writing, these notions are embedded with masculinism, hegemony and hierarchy.

To this end, having interrogated the early emergence of the idea of nation and nationalism in Syria, this chapter has paved the way for reconceptualising the construction of masculinism in the national narrative. Uncovering its dominant national concepts is the first step towards discovering how the concepts of citizenship, rights and responsibilities are constructed in the Syrian Constitution (1973). Consequently, how women are constituted in these two phases is central to the question of their recognition as fully-fledged citizens.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERROGATING THE CONSTRUCTIONS OF GENDER BIAS AND MASCULINISM IN THE SYRIAN CONSTITUTION AND SYRIAN LAWS

5.1 Introduction

Building on the deconstruction of the early emergence of Syrian national narratives in Chapter Four, this chapter attempts to answer RQ4: “How has masculinism in early national narratives influenced the construction of women in both constitutional and legal narratives?” This will be achieved by illustrating that the construction of masculinism in the early formation of the nation-state in Syria is inherent within the very conception of nationalism in its theoretical narrative. We will see that, when the state uses nationalism as a hegemonic ideology that marginalises the “other”, it becomes an embodiment of masculinism (see Mohsin, 2004). This stage (state formation) of Syrian history, the 1970s, marks the ascendance of the Ba'ath regime with its primary focus on the process of developing state institutions as the best way to modernise Syria (Trentin, 2009: 497; Kienle, 1995: 67). This interest in promoting state institutions by the Ba'ath regime “increased the degree to which citizens interacted and identified with their state” (Gilbert, 2013: 32). Thus, in an epoch concerned with strengthening the localisation of Syria as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson, 2006: 6), the shift from the cultural theorisation of the nation to the political one is through acknowledging Syria as a *watan* (state) rather than a cultural nation.

This evolution of Syrian nationalism resulted in the realisation of Syria’s political sovereignty, through which the state strove to legitimise its existence by

drafting the first permanent Constitution of Syria in 1973.⁶⁵ In this sense, this chapter's primary focus is on investigating how the state uses nationalism as its hegemonic ideology. The examination of this use will be by assessing how women are perceived in the 1973 Constitution compared to legislation. Hence, this chapter aims to answer two overarching questions: first, how does the ideology of nationalism prevail in the political narrative under the Ba'ath regime?; and second, are women citizens?

Answering the first question takes us back to Chapter Two, in which we defined nationalism in Syria as composed of two contradictory yet overlapping cultural and political phases. In the political narrative, traces of national elements of the two phases of Syrian nationalism are paramount in both the preamble and the main text of the Constitution (sections 5.2.1; 5.3; 5.4). More importantly, this chapter starts by showing how gender boundaries are constructed in the Syrian Constitution by analysing the use of language that refers to the basic characteristics of Syrian nationalism (5.2 and 5.2.1). While investigating the manifestation of the two phases of Syrian nationalism in the Constitution, we note that elements of it are full of references to realising the ideal image of Ba'athi man. In the political narrative, these manifestations encompass the dominance of the patriarchal Ba'athi, leading the private sphere and preserving the cultural identity of the nation by masculinising history, language and militarising education; or the dominance of the Ba'athi leader in the public sphere, in which militarism and sacrifice become the primary identifications of the ideal citizen. These two models of the ideal Ba'athi (a patriarch and a warrior) (3.3.2) will prevail in the constitutional narrative and, more importantly, the perpetuation of these masculinist

⁶⁵ The English-language version of the 1973 Syrian Constitution referenced in this thesis is retrieved from the website of the Carnegie Middle East Center: <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/50255?lang=en>. References to extracts from this version will be cited as "(SC)". As a native speaker I would like to stress that the content and spirit of the Arabic version of the Constitution are maintained in this version.

elements of Syrian nationalism in the Constitution will impact how women are perceived and situated in legislation such as penal, personal, labour and nationality laws.

This leads us to the second question of whether women are citizens. This will be answered through interrogating the masculinist and patriarchal features embedded in the Syrian constitutional narrative along four principled dimensions (see sections 5.3; 5.4; 5.5): the reinforcement of a militant national identity in the Constitution (5.2.1); freedom and equality, and how they are measured by manliness (5.4); issues related to the private dimension, such as investigating the constitutional provisions on family, violence and nationality (5.5.1); and women's participation in the public sphere and how their political personhood has been constituted in the state (5.5.2). By surveying these four dimensions, it can be seen that they interact and intersect. For example, the hegemonic reinforcement of a militant national identity in the preamble constructs an ideal image of constitutional membership based on masculinism and hierarchy. This construction subsequently creates an inferior proposition of women in both the private and the public spheres (see sections 5.5, 5.5.1 and 5.5.2). Thus, this chapter illustrates the complexity of the concept of constitutional membership in the Syrian political narrative that is reflected by hypothetically portraying women as fully-fledged citizens.

Finally, this chapter analyses the language of the Constitution in order to assess women's subordination in its narrative. This language delineates the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (3.4.2). Hence, depending on analysing the degree of linguistic precision (5.2), we will highlight how Syrian women are written out of the constitutional community.

5.2. Negotiating gender boundaries in the Syrian Constitution: Construction of militant identity

The development of Syrian national identity is framed with the emergence of Syria as a nation-state (Wedeen, 1999: 14). The importance of the constitutional narrative, and how it either incorporates hierarchy and hegemony or synthesises equality and freedom, in turn leads us to question the extent to which the Constitution establishes a definition of how men and women are constructed in national imagining. In this sense, the analysis of the constitutional narrative aims to provide an understanding of distinct elements of identity. As Rosenfeld suggests, the construction of constitutional identity is based on “dynamic interaction between projections of sameness and images of selfhood ... and at other times contradiction” (2012: 757). In the Syrian context, the question of gender in the construction of constitutional identity combines textual sameness that is evidenced by using generic terms in substitution for human being. However, the construction of a distinctive macho identity by perpetuating a narrative of struggle, heroism and sacrifice establishes a contrasting sense of selfhood derived from maleness. This contrast regarding the constructions of “self” and the “other” parallels the dichotomised meanings of masculine and feminine. Hence, in the conceptualisation of the state as an “imagined community”, the constitutional narrative can be perceived as a tool for the institutionalisation of the “self” and the “other”.

The “self” in this narrative is conceived as the normalised manliness, while the “other” is the subservient feminine. Such hierarchical division of gender roles is substituted with the authorial invocation of “people”, “masses” and “citizens” in the Constitution, which provokes questions of how these terms supposedly create an abstract homogeneous identity. However, while on the one hand this constructed general will of the “people” is imagined rather than performative, it leaves little doubt

about the consistency between the imagined will of the people in the Constitution and the performativity of law. In this sense, the primary question is whether the use of these generic terms encompasses (or not) the hierarchical division of gendered identities, based on hegemony, masculinity and militarism. Moreover, in questioning how these terms invoke will and authority, the second question pertains to whether women's will is visible in the constitutional narrative. Hence, such investigation of the construction of national identity in the Constitution demands that the two conceptions of what defines women's membership and how it is measured by masculinist definitions are somehow reinforced.

These questions need to be asked since the Constitution plays a pivotal role in defining the political and legal principles of the state; it also acts as a powerful and authoritative voice and source of power, and provides structure to the country. The Constitution further reinforces particular sets of roles in the national community. It must be borne in mind, however, that the way this political framework is linguistically structured has a powerful function in either perpetuating hierarchy or establishing gender equality. The following sub-section aims to analyse the language and the concepts introduced in the preamble as associated with the reinforcement of a masculinist national identity.

5.2.1 Preamble

The preamble of a constitution is often designed to frame the general spirit of the constitutional community by enacting the major principles that define members of the state. Analysing the preamble of the Syrian Constitution has two overarching objectives: it aims to contextualise the manifestation of the main components of Syrian nationalism in its narrative, and to interrogate the construction of masculinism in its major principles. In this sense, starting with the preamble of the Constitution is

necessary to understand how the major principles of Syrian national identity have been framed and structured. Thus, the preamble is another arena that reflects the dominance of Syrian national thought propagated by its three founding fathers. National elements of the political phase, such as will and determination, struggle and sacrificial heroism, are paramount in the preamble. As these notions signify the evolution of Syrian nationalism from the cultural construction of the nation to the political establishment of the state, the constitutional narrative is connoted with constructing the ideal image of the Ba'athi man. Nonetheless, elements of the cultural phase, such as reviving the glorious past and history, can be also traced in the preamble.

The first dominant notion in the preamble is struggle, which will be used as a tool that delineates gender boundaries in the national imagination and further reinforces the masculinisation of popular will. This raises the question of whether the invocation of popular struggle in the preamble is a characterisation of men's heroic deeds only. Moreover, as a popular construct it further questions whether the use of seemingly gender-neutral terms such as "citizens" and "people" includes women in the constitutional community. To answer these questions, we need to interrogate both the use of language in the preamble and whether the notion of struggle is connoted with masculinist traits and ethos (3.4.2).

An overview of the theoretical debate around what constitutes masculinist language reveals the role of language in defining the boundaries of constitutional community and further sets out the framework of women's national membership. The use in the preamble of generic terms such as "people", "citizens" and "masses" (*al-sha'ab*) brings us to look at Irving's question: "Are Women People?" (2008: 47). Indeed, Syria is not a special case; Irving masterfully highlights the universal assumption of the use of masculine language to demonstrate gender-inclusive

connotations (2008: 40). In her comparative study of various constitutions around the world, she demonstrates the complexity of assuming masculine language as universally feminine-inclusive:

Probably the majority of the world's constitutions use masculine language in their reference to people, either individually or collectively. This might be dismissed as insignificant because it is often assumed that masculine specific language in law is actually gender neutral in both its "real" meaning and in practice and, therefore, that no gender-disparate consequences flow from the decision, for example, to refer to people as "men" or individuals as "he" in a legal instrument. (2008: 40–1)

Following the same argument, assumed neutral nouns such as "people" and "masses" are often used in preambles, but this apparent neutrality proves to be sexist when used in legal forms. As Petersson notes, "even at the basic level of vocabulary, legal language may lack the neutrality attributed to it" (1998: 86). Indeed, Pateman emphasises that universalising the use of "man" as a substitution for human being has a great impact in writing women out of the political sphere (Carver & Chambers, 2011: 67). MacKinnon goes further, stressing that this apparently neutral use of generic terms is implicitly synonymous with "manliness". In her words: "Gendered language pervades constitutions, including in seemingly habitual use of the masculine generic, such as usage of 'his' or 'he' in reference to rights-bearers, impliedly equating citizenship with maleness" (MacKinnon, 2012: 398).

In this sense, the claim that masculinised language is gender-neutral is rather misleading. Berns argues that "[i]n linguistics, the male gender is known as the 'unmarked term'" but "even putatively universal nouns 'markers'" (Berns, 1999: 201). In this context, it is important to recognise that language has been historically employed purportedly to represent men. The use of the generic term "people" significantly coincided with the subordination of women and reflected the historical privilege of men over women. Consequently, we can conclude that, because language is a form of

representation, one cannot be complacent about the power of words even if used ambiguously to assume gender inclusion, as Irving demonstrates:

[the] purported neutrality of the masculine pronoun, or the “universality” of the masculine collective, has served as a cloak for the historical invisibility of women, as well as reinforced stereotypes in which political and constitutional actors are presumed to be male. (2008: 42)

In the Syrian context, more subtly – but even more remarkably – the repeated use of generic terms such as “people” and “masses” not only extends women’s exclusion from the constitutional community, but also coincides with the embeddedness of manhood and militarism. In fact, the origins of a distinctive national image in the Constitution depends on “negation” of women (MacKinnon, 2012: 407).

This generic and abstracted narrative of communal struggle and sacrifice is intimately linked with the construction of a distinct and sufficiently differentiated community of men. The preamble, as an “executive summary” of what the founding fathers were hoping to do through the Constitution (Irving, 2008: 15), also acts as a preliminary statement of the general goals of the Constitution. This brings us to the overwhelming emphasis of the three Syrian thinkers on employing a narrative that is premised on heroism, manliness and struggle as the basis for constituting the Syrian national identity. In this sense, surveying the language and the underlying themes employed in the preamble is important in order to highlight the incorporation of manhood and heroism in the reference to communal struggle. Such primacy of idealising manhood and struggle in the opening statement of the Constitution brings us to question how Syrian women are symbolically conceived within it. The preamble of the Constitution reads:

With the close of the first half of this century, the Arab people’s struggle has been expanding and assuming greater importance in various countries to achieve liberation from direct colonialism. The Arab masses did not regard independence as their goal

and the end of their sacrifices, but as a means to consolidate their struggle, and as an advanced phase in their continuing battle against the forces of imperialism, Zionism, and exploitation under the leadership of their patriotic and progressive forces in order to achieve the Arab nation's goals of unity, freedom, and socialism. (SC)

It can be deduced from this introduction to the preamble that the repeated use of the generic terms “people” and “masses” continues to situate women outside the national realm. This is further consolidated in the association between the notion of “struggle” and the “sacrifice” of the “people” and “masses”. This identification of heroic sacrifice and struggle continues to maintain the idealist construction of masculinist and militarist values in the Syrian nationalist narrative. More importantly, these masculinist measures were further perpetuated in the emphasis on the “glorious past” as a definitive element of the cultural construction of national identity. What facilitates such provisions is the emphasis placed in the preamble on the “party’s militant struggle”. This emphasis on the militaristic values can be reflected in the following words from the preamble:

In the Syrian Arab region, *the masses (jamahīr) of our people (sha'ab) continued their struggle after independence. Through their progressive march they were able to achieve their big victory by setting off the revolution of 8 March 1963 under the leadership of the Socialist Arab Baath Party, which has made authority an instrument to serve the struggle for the construction of the United Socialist Arab society.* The Socialist Arab Baath Party is the first movement in the Arab homeland which gives Arab unity its sound *revolutionary meaning*, connects the nationalist with the socialist struggle, and represents the Arab nation's will and aspirations for a future that will bind the Arab nation *with its glorious past* and will enable it to carry out its role in achieving victory for the cause of *freedom of all the peoples*. (SC, emphasis added)

This wording highlights some of the fundamental values and chief principles on which the Constitution of Syria is based. An important national element in the political phase of Syrian nationalism, such as will and determination, is clearly invoked in these words. Thus, the inference of the popular will of “the people” at the beginning of the preamble expands the sovereignty of the Constitution. However, this invocation of the popular will is rather ambiguous in the Syrian context as “people” is conceptualised in association with measures of masculine prowess. This in turn questions the precise

definitions of who are the “people”. In fact, this use of a generic term symbolically establishes women’s consent to the Constitution. In turn, it must be stated that the concept of “struggle” (*Kifah*) and “will” (*'iradat*) in the Syrian nationalist thought have been designated to contextualise gender boundaries of the national imagination. The preamble reinforces a commitment to the construction of ideal heroism and virility, and follows the founding fathers’ interpretation of history as a male construct (Chapter Four).

More importantly, while this quote from the preamble expresses a transcendent authority by invoking that “the masses of our people” in Syria have authorised the leadership of the Socialist Arab Ba'ath Party, the irony of such a declaration is that the so-called revolution of 8 March 1963 was a military coup, and so questions the genuine inclusion of women. In this sense, this wording binds the concept of “revolutionary” struggle with the renunciation of the glorious past. Nonetheless, such contextualisation is rather a continuation of the virile narrative traced in the writings of the Ba'ath founding fathers (Chapter Four). This reference to glorious past in the preamble is not distinct from the implicit symbolisation of masculinist virility. Furthermore, it involves selective appropriation of a certain masculinist courage. Hence, history is given further legal and political authority through the invocations of masculinised heroic glory in the first permanent Constitution in Syria. One might therefore ask how this popular struggle is intimately linked with the attainment of “*freedom of all the peoples*” (*SC*, emphasis added) rather than the equality of all people including women.

The preamble further justifies the end means of militant struggle and claims that the party’s militant struggle is a reflection of popular demands and aspirations:

Through the *party's militant struggle*, the 16 Nov 1970 corrective movement responded to our *people's demands and aspirations*. This corrective movement was an important

qualitative development and a faithful reflection of the party's spirit, principles, and objectives. (SC, emphasis added)

These words highlight the shift from conceptualising the struggle as derived from the “people” to be only represented by the party’s achievement. In this context, one needs to question the party’s achievements in promoting gender equality and enhancing women’s empowerment in both the Syrian state and society (this will be explored in 5.4). Moreover, Article 8 affirms that the Socialist Ba'ath Party is the sole leading party of the state and society. This gives the party the exclusive right to exercise supreme judicial, legislative and executive power in Syria. It denotes the absence of any plural and democratic system that can enhance women’s political mobilisation towards promoting equal rights and representation.

Contextualising “struggle”, “sacrifice” and “glorious past”, which are reinforced in the preamble, constructs a constitutional identity associated with manhood and constantly strives to create a sustainable image of a militant identity. More importantly, this declaration of the militant struggle, made very early in the Constitution, invariably excludes women’s struggle against colonial and imperial domination. As Enloe declares, that “militarisation puts a premium on communal unity in the name of national survival, a priority which can silence women critical of patriarchal practices and attitudes; in so doing, nationalist militarisation can privilege men” (1990: 57–8).

The ambiguity of how women are conceived in the Constitution can be detected in the major principles outlined in the preamble. Clause 4 of the preamble declares that

[f]reedom is a sacred right and popular democracy is the ideal formulation which insures for the citizen the exercise of his freedom which makes him a dignified human being capable of giving and building, defending the homeland in which he lives, and making sacrifices for the sake of the nation to which he belongs. The homeland’s freedom can only be preserved by its free citizens. The citizen’s freedom can be completed only by his economic and social liberation. (SC)

As previously argued, the preamble constitutes the general framework of the national identity subjected to the legalisation of this constitution. While these words virtually support freedom and democracy equally, the use of some apparently gender-neutral nouns still questions women's inclusion. This linguistically obscure use of the masculine reference is juxtaposed with the concept of sacredness. This juxtaposition between masculinist language and sacredness is somewhat restricted to the association between sacrifice and belonging that incorporates the militarisation of society and often intensifies the existing notions of privileging masculinity and manhood. In other words, this "sacred" right of freedom is intimately linked with "defending the homeland", and within this context one might ask whether this call is at all gender-inclusive.

This leads us to Article 11 of the Constitution, which declares that only "[t]he armed forces and other defense organisations are responsible for the defense of the homeland's territory and for the protection of the revolution's objectives of unity, freedom, and socialism" (SC). It is worth noting that the military forces of Syria are composed of the Syrian Arab Army, Syrian Arab Navy, Syrian Arab Air Force, Syrian Arab Air Defense Force, and other paramilitary forces. Moreover, in Syria the military is a conscripted force; males serve two years upon reaching the age of 18. This glorification of manliness that is intimately linked with citizenship, and directly connected to both militarism and hegemony, is highlighted by Hooper:

The associations between military service, masculinity, and citizenship have been strong in the modern era. Soldiering is characterised as a manly activity requiring the "masculine" traits of physical strength, action, toughness [and] capacity for violence. (2001: 36–7)

This revelation further sustains an ambiguous status of women in respect of their right to freedom and democracy and whether they will ever realise their humanity and full citizenship. It again complements the extensive naturalisation of military and manhood

in the Syrian nationalist narrative. In the same vein, the conceptualisation of freedom and humanity is discursively constructed by stressing sacrifice through socialising militarism. The interrelationship between freedom and the ability to defend the nation invites the question of whether the term “citizen” at all entitles women to full national membership. It is important to make clear that the preamble establishes a juxtaposed nexus between freedom and humanity, when it states that the “citizen” exercises “freedom which makes him a dignified human being capable of ... defending the homeland ... and making sacrifices for the sake of nation to which he belongs” (SC). This construction of a unified perception of citizenship consolidates the overlap between freedom, humanity and manhood.

This overlap between constitutional membership, sacrificial heroism and militarism is further stressed in Article 40 in Part 4 (Freedom, Rights, Duties) of Chapter 1 (Basic Principles), which constitutes two sacred rights:

(1) *All citizens* have the sacred duty to defend the homeland’s security, to respect its Constitution and socialist unionist system.

(2) *Military service* is compulsory and regulated by law.

(SC, emphasis added)

More remarkably, defining the defence of the homeland as a “sacred duty” for “all citizens” refers to the ambiguity of the choice of terms in specifying the gender of these citizens. Adding to the subtlety of this article, the second paragraph limits the presumed gender-inclusive duty of *all citizens* in defending the homeland to only men in compulsory military service. This constitutes an overlap between the construction of masculinism and the perception of equality in constitutional membership between men and women alike. In this context, the contextualisation of men’s privilege to defend the homeland with sacredness consecrates a symbolic hierarchy and domination of one

gender at the expense of the other. Pettman further points out that exclusion of women in the state may be related to the “close associations of citizenship with bearing arms and being prepared to kill or die for the state” (1996: 17). Moreover, Elshtain refers to the “militarisation of citizenship” where women are depicted as “weeper[s] over the tragedies” of war, and men as protectors and guardians of the dependent and submissive women (1985: 42).

In light of the foregoing, surveying the preamble sets out the general national narrative of the Constitution which has designated the concept of struggle, will and heroic sacrifice as the most definitive features of constitutional membership. Thus, the characterisation of women perpetuates conceptions of their lack of suitability to become full citizens of the state. Such early reinforcement of masculinised identity in the Constitution questions presumed gender-inclusive terms such as “people” and “masses” to be further juxtaposed with the enforced military conscription. The problem lies not in military conscription per se, but in the ambiguous use of “citizens” to refer to men in the military and to the conceptualisation of defending the homeland as sacred and associated with human dignity. This link between military service and citizenship constructs a hierarchical categorisation in the Constitution that further perpetuates gender boundaries in both the public and private spheres (as we will see in 5.5.1 and 5.5.2).

5.3. Cultural enforcement: The perpetuation of masculinism

In the process of politicising cultural identity in the constitutional narrative, the Constitution begins in Article 1 by confirming the cultural conceptualisation of the nation through emphasising the role of language:

(1) The Syrian Arab Republic is a democratic, popular, socialist, and sovereign state. No part of its territory can be ceded. Syria is a member of the Union of the Arab Republics.

(2) The Syrian Arab region is a part of the Arab homeland.

(3) The people in the Syrian Arab region are a part of the Arab nation. (SC)

Article 1 firmly prioritises the cultural belonging to the nation by emphasising that Arabism is the mainstay ideology that defines national membership. This belonging, conceptualised as enforced, naturalised and given, is juxtaposed with the ambiguity of how the Constitution defines who is Arab. In other words, nowhere in the Constitution is there a reference to “Syrian people”. Rather, any reference made to the people is termed as “people in the Syrian region”. This highlights that in the Constitution the “people” are like “*Volk*”, given a cultural rather than a political identification. This takes us to the primordialist notion of belonging, in which “people” are conceived as a homogeneous cultural group (2.4.1). Such identification goes in parallel with the first phase of Syrian nationalism that defines national identity as a naturalised given, and national belonging as involuntary. However, despite this cultural enforcement very early in the Constitution, Article 2 clearly stipulates the political identity of Syria by conceptualising it as a sovereign state:

(2) Sovereignty is vested in the people, who exercise it in accordance with this Constitution. (SC)

This illustrates the political constitution of Syria as a nation-state and further confirms that Syrian nationalism is a dominant ideology in the Constitution and a combination of two contradictory yet overlapping phases, cultural and political. As we explored (4.2.1; 4.3.2; 4.4.1), the cultural identity is further intensified by emphasising language as the main defining factor of both nation and identity formations. However, the notion of language in national narrative is a masculinist construct as it is identified as the language of fathers and transmitted through the paternal side only (Chapter Four). Suffice to say that, for the purpose of investigating whether Article 2 implies any masculinist

connotations, we need to start with the notion that national membership and belonging is subject to the acquisition of language.

Since language is the main indication of the cultural identity of the nation, such a notion, when read in the political narrative, provokes the need to investigate how national membership is measured. In the theoretical/philosophical narrative, we saw that fathers are the ones that transmit and preserve the language. This patriarchalisation of the national language was subject to the sacrificial heroism of strong men, which further masculinises national love and belonging. Thus, national membership is still paternal, as Syrian nationality law stipulates that Syrian nationality can only be passed on by fathers, which prevents women married to foreign nationals from passing their nationality to their children.⁶⁶ Consequently, we can say that, since language defines national membership and enforced belonging, this is somewhat masculinist as membership is determined by the patriarchal figure.

The politicisation of cultural enforcement in the constitutional narrative is further reflected in Article 21, which is about history, culture and education. It leads us to question whether these cultural elements of Syrian nationalism are embedded with masculinist connotations:

The educational and cultural system aims at creating a socialist nationalist Arab generation which is scientifically minded and attached to its history and land, proud of its heritage, and filled with the spirit of struggle to achieve its nation's objectives of unity, freedom, and socialism, and to serve humanity and its progress. (SC)

This wording leaves little doubt whether this construction of the cultural system is premised on gender equality when the creation of the next generation is associated with “struggle”, which follows the ideals of heroic sacrifices of military men as demonstrated

⁶⁶ Syrian nationality law will be further explored in 5.5.1.

in the preamble. This heightened enforcement of constructing a “cultural system” is intimately linked to how the Syrian founding fathers interpreted culture as masculinist and subject to male prowess. Moreover, the role of culture in subjugating women and further perpetuating construction of a militant national identity is evinced by the emphasis on heritage. The idealisation of socialist heritage is important to the construction of masculinist national identity because it serves to connect the idea of the heroic past to the present by incorporating the militant struggle of the Ba'ath. Thus, this article highlights the continuation of constructing a masculinist cultural heritage based on idealising the struggle of men.

Further preoccupation with the construction of masculinist features in the Constitution is evidenced in the first and third paragraphs of Article 23, where further perpetuations of notions such as manhood, equality and culture are evident. The first paragraph states:

(1) The nationalist socialist education is the basis for building the unified socialist Arab society. It seeks to strengthen moral values, to achieve the higher ideals of the Arab nation, to develop the society, and to serve the causes of humanity. The state undertakes to encourage and to protect this education. (SC)

As we explored in the theoretical narrative of nation and nationalism, education is part of the cultural phase. According to al-Husri, education is a means to instil a militaristic national ideology based on elevating manliness (4.2.3). In this Article, culture and education are viewed as complementary to each other. This is apparent in the emphasis on constructing a monolithic perception of “culture” that is identified with the promotion of only socialist education. Interestingly, this paragraph stipulates that a particular type of education is pivotal to “serve the causes of humanity”, yet this enforced perception of “socialist education” limits women’s opportunities to choose different forms of culture that support their political and national rights.

Furthermore, the third paragraph of the same article emphasises the association of the role of education with building a physically strong body:

(3) Physical education is a foundation for the building of society. The state encourages physical education to form a physically, mentally, and morally strong generation. (SC)

This notion of education is a continuation of the Syrian founding fathers' conceptualisation of education as an arena for glorifying militarism. The recognition of the vital role of youth in nation-building promotes the inculcation of patriotism and heroism. The primacy of forming a physically strong generation cannot but be attributed to Article 11, where the role of defending the homeland is restricted to military forces. In the same vein, it must be noted that the word order is highly reflective of the privilege given to physical strength as superior to mental and moral strength. It is justifiable to ask why forming a physically strong generation is stressed, rather than referring to a healthy generation mentally, morally and physically. In fact, the choice of the adjective "strong" (*qawi*) is in line with the masculinist construction of the concept of citizenship. One can say that the concept of citizenship reinforced in the Constitution relies heavily on physical strength; in turn, militarism is intimately linked with realising the ideal image of Ba'athi man. In other words, this continuation of sanctifying physical strength to sharpen the image of the Syrian warrior becomes intertwined with national belonging. The prevalent cultural elements in the Constitution are thus full of references to masculinism, patriarchy and militarism.

5.4 Politicising membership

As we explored in the previous section, the cultural conception of nationalism is remarkably prevalent in the constitutional narrative. However, this construction of cultural identity in the political narrative is still interwoven with the political phase. This section aims to illustrate the shift from the cultural conceptualisation of national identity

and belonging in the Constitution to the political one. Nonetheless, as we said in Chapter One, the political phase is ideologically borrowed from the French school of thought, which is premised on conceiving national belonging as voluntary and based on will, determination and consent (2.4.2). In other words, the French national thought, manifested in the writings of Renan, incorporates sovereignty with the conceptualisation of national membership. In this sense, the configuration of “people” (*al-sha'ab*) or *Volk* is no longer perceived as a homogeneous group based on cultural identifications, but as political citizens with a distinctive personhood of will and determination.

In this sense, citizenship will be conceptualised as a “political imaginary” rather than a set of practices (Yuval-Davis & Werbner, 1999: 28). The constitutional narrative, employing the theoretical narrative of Syrian nationalism in its early emergence, is full of elements from the political phase. This is apparent in the articles that demonstrate the rights and freedom of citizens (as we will explore later). By highlighting the discrepancies between the virtual rights given to women in the constitutional narrative and legislation, this section aims to answer the second question: Are women citizens?

Identifying this political constitution of membership is intimately linked with interrogating women’s relationship to citizenship. This leads us to question the role of the Ba'ath Party in enhancing women’s rights and equality. The need to investigate this role stems from Article 8, which stipulates that “The leading party in the society and the state is the Socialist Arab Baath Party” (SC). This article underlines the authority of the Ba'ath Party in both the state and society. In this sense, according to the Constitution of the Ba'ath Party, promulgated on 4 April 1947, the party claims that its revolutionary character will combat any discrimination against women. In an attempt to eliminate reactionary setbacks to women’s subordinate status in society and the state, Article 12

of the Ba'ath Party Constitution stipulates: “The Arab woman still enjoys the full rights of a citizen, and the party is struggling to raise her level so that she may deserve to enjoy these rights” (The Ba'ath Constitution, 1947).⁶⁷

These words, however, reflect the embedded chauvinistic and misogynistic attitude of the Ba'ath Party. On the one hand, there is an implicit assumption that a woman's ability to deserve these rights as a citizen is doubted. It questions women's capability and fails to perceive women as equal to men. More importantly, it not only questions women's potential, but also sets out prerequisites to deserve full citizenship, and further constructs an ideal perception of a citizen as naturally a man. Moreover, these words obviously reflect the chauvinistic patriarchy of the Ba'ath philosophy, particularly when perceiving women “as a category or a special-needs group” (Pettman, 1996: 14). Such wording and provisions significantly assume that citizenship for women is not naturally acquired, but rather the woman requires effort to be worthy of her full rights. This takes us to Tilly's notion of citizenship as a concept that “causes confusion” (1996: 7). Tilly argues that citizenship highlights the reciprocated relationship between citizens and a particular state (1996: 8). According to Tilly, this relationship is of priority and difference that identifies privileged citizens in relation to a particular state. He further elaborates that citizenship is an experience of representation and “transaction” that varies from “thin to thick”: “thin where it entails few transactions, rights and obligations; thick where it occupies a significant share of all transactions, rights and obligations sustained by state agents and people living under their jurisdiction” (1996: 8).

⁶⁷ Online version of the Constitution of the Ba'ath Party (in Arabic) can be found at: http://www.albasrah.net/ar_articles_2007/0307/dstor-b3th_070307.htm

It becomes evident that, in order to exercise their rights as members of the state, women need to reach a level worthy of attaining this citizenship. In other words, the politicisation of those who are included in the political community vis-à-vis those who are excluded renders women inferior to men, whose legal relationship to citizenship is not questioned. Such provision permits us to trace the effects of this notion of citizenship on Syrian women and how their identities have been conceived and constructed within both the Constitution and the laws. In order to investigate women's relationship to the state, as a starting point there is a need to survey how the basic rights are defined in the Syrian Constitution, before contextualising them with different Syrian laws.

Theoretically, the Syrian Constitution guarantees equal opportunities to *all citizens*. Assessing the articles on rights and equality in the Constitution superficially indicates a celebration of equal rights for both men and women. Article 25 (in Part 4, "Freedom, Rights, Duties") states that:

- (1) Freedom is a sacred right. The state protects the personal freedom of the citizens and safeguards their dignity and security.
- (2) The supremacy of law is a fundamental principle in the society and the state.
- (3) The citizens are equal before the law in their rights and duties.
- (4) The state [e]nsures the principle of equal opportunities for citizens. (SC)

While this article affirms non-discriminatory statements against women and the supremacy of law in both the state and society, the equality of "citizens" before the law is vague and ambiguous in respect of the subordinate position of Syrian women in the personal status law. Moreover, the authority and responsibility given to the patriarchs in society to preserve the cultural and religious identity of the community in turn puts more pressure on women. A report by Syrian Women for Democracy concludes that "all rights that women enjoy, theoretically, are subjected to the will of men in the

families to which they belong” (Zakzak, Hjeieh & Al Rahabi, 2014: 19). This renders women:

will-alienated, oppressed, for in order to obtain safety they have to give up freedom. And even if they are working outside, the balance of power in the family remains a key issue, often leading them to sacrifice their work for its sake. (Dr Viuliet Dagher, as quoted in Zakzak, Hjeieh & Al Rahabi, 2014: 18)

Furthermore, the first and third paragraphs of Article 25 confirm the state’s role in protecting women’s freedom and dignity. More particularly, the third paragraph refers to the supremacy of law in both state and society. However, there is a need to investigate whether Syrian laws or the state’s policies consider women equal to men. It must be recognised that the question of women’s equality is not a private issue. Rather, achieving it is a societal matter that is related and reflected in the level of the progress legally, nationally and constitutionally. There is a dialectic relationship between developing the legal system to ensure equality and the improvement of women’s status in society and state.

Other articles that indicate equality in the constitutional narrative are Articles 28 and 29:

Article 28

(3) No one may be tortured physically or mentally or be treated in a humiliating manner. The law defines the punishment of whoever commits such an act.

Article 29

What constitutes a crime or penalty can only be determined by law.

(SC).

The importance of these articles is that they invite us to investigate whether these equal and humanitarian sentiments are gender-inclusive. In this context, the following sections (5.5; 5.5.1; 5.5.2) attempt to investigate the discrepancies between the constitutional rights and legislation. This investigation will be through analysis of some

of the constitutional articles compared with related personal, penal, labour and nationality laws. This will articulate how women are situated in both the private and the public spheres by measuring the dominance of the two Ba'athi models – a patriarch in the private sphere and a warrior/leader in the public sphere.

5.5 Contextualisation of Syrian nationalism in the private and political spheres

Using Anderson's (2006) conception of imagined communities evokes the illusionary representation of women in the Constitution and subsequently explains their subordinate status in Syrian law. In essence, the dominance of patriarchy and masculinity in the national imagining includes the appropriation of the two Ba'athi models, the male warrior and the patriarch, propagated by the three early Syrian thinkers (3.3.2). The very act of locating the concept of imagined community in the constitutional narrative implies the investigation of the overriding principles that define the construction of Syrian national identity. In this sense, identifying the two phases of Syrian nationalism in the political narrative requires a crucial preliminary step to be outlined. In the cultural phase, the mobilisation of familial rhetoric normalises patriarchy in the private sphere (rule of fathers and husbands) and perpetuates masculinism in the public sphere by delineating national membership as based on manhood, sacrificial heroism and militarism.

Conceptualising the nation in Syrian national narrative in this way as an extension of the family encapsulates the use of familial metaphors, which perpetuates hierarchies based on gender (see Baron, 2005: 6). When the nation is “envisioned as a family, the concept of family honor could be easily appropriated as the basis of national honor” (Baron, 2005: 7). Such configuration of the nation as a woman is often closely linked with the emphasis on the role of the man as defending and protecting both women

and the nation. This connotation between *'ird* (honour) and *'ārd* (land/nation) consolidates notions of manhood and masculinity. Katz explores how “feminising and eroticising the land as passive object of men’s active love and sacrifice” identifies the “people” as a masculinist construct composed of men only (1996: 89–90). This overlap between the personal and political spheres is utilised by reinforcing masculinist ethos, such as bravery, militarism and physical strength.

However, this feminisation of the nation supplanted the authority of the man in both the state and society, which is not limited to the philosophical narrative but is prevalent in Syrian legislation. In other words, this feminisation is juxtaposed with nationalising women’s sexuality, and imposing men’s authority on their bodies by controlling women’s fertility and legalising violence against women in the name of preserving honour (women’s purity).⁶⁸ Nonetheless, this imposition of patriarchy and militarism in the theoretical narrative has planted a hierarchy in the legal narratives by perceiving women as in need of male guardians. Moreover, this authority of militant patriarchy enhances the subordination of women and constructs them as inferior citizens. This is reflected in the Syrian nationality law by which women are prevented from passing their citizenship to their children.

In the political phase, the question is often asked: Why are women less worthy than men when it comes to citizenship? Yuval-Davis and Werbner argue that

The denial of women’s role as equal citizens in the public sphere arises not only from their relegation to the familial sphere but also from their simultaneous elevation as reproducers of the nation. Theoretically there can be a clear disjunction ... between the nation, defined in narrowly cultural terms, and the state – the latter being the political community which both governs and grants its members citizenship. (1999: 12)

⁶⁸ This will be explored in 5.5.1.

In fact, this disjunction between conceptualising the nation as a cultural construct and the denial of recognising women as equal citizens is inherent in the early theorisations of the nation in the writings of al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi. More saliently, this early masculinist construction of national belonging and identity impacted women's place in relation to citizenship. As already explored in Chapter Four, there is a considerable ambiguity apparent in the Syrian nationalist discourse when it comes to the cultural phase. While insisting on the cultural construction of the nation, this disregard of women's role in nation formation lead to the denial of equal citizenship. As Yuval-Davis and Werbner argue:

The nationalist discourse of women as “mother of the nation” banishes them, as indeed did bourgeois civic discourse: it fostered women's education while denying their rationality and hence their right to act as autonomous agents in the public sphere. The familial space is one where important aspects of the biological and cultural reproduction of collectivities take place. Making a home includes fostering relations across generations, cooking and nurturing, playing and educating. Familial relations thus seem to constitute the “essence” of national culture, a way of life to be passed from generation to generation. Equally, however, training to be a citizen, to respect the rights of others, begins at home. Women thus bear a double burden of representation: as national cultural icons and as mothers of citizens. (1999: 14)

This quote highlights the association between the significance of recognising women's cultural role in nationalism and the later impact on their citizenship rights. The implications of these early legacies problematise women's place in the reconstruction of citizenship in the state formation stage (see Vogel, 1991: 63). More importantly, within this phase, the dominance of the Ba'athi model of warrior and leader constructs a subordinate status for women in the public sphere. In order to evaluate how the disregard of women's cultural role has impacted their relationship to citizenship, the following sub-sections aim to contextualise this relationship by identifying the contradiction between provisional constitutional rights and the application of laws in both the private and public spheres.

5.5.1 Private sphere

To illustrate the dominance of patriarchy (the patriarchal Ba'athi model) in this sphere, this section aims to tackle six matters that are part of the private sphere. These are: work, familial guardianship, education, marriage, violence and abuse, and reproduction rights. These matters will be considered as they are closely related, in the Constitution, to the personal, labour, penal and nationality law(s). First, there is a need to highlight two gender-inclusive Articles that specifically address women – 44 and 45. This positive discrimination in the permanent Constitution (1973) guarantees women equal rights, yet the order of these articles still questions the importance of the state's commitment to women's equality. Article 45 states:

The state guarantees women all opportunities enabling them to fully and effectively participate in the political, social, cultural, and economic life. The state removes the restrictions that prevent women's development and participation in building the socialist Arab society. (SC)

This article sets out the state's role in promoting women's participation in different aspects of life: political, cultural and social. However, this positive discrimination towards women is restricted to the construction of a socialist Arab society, which means that women have very limited opportunities towards building the society. Moreover, it emphasises that women's inclusion in these fields is determined by a certain ideological construction of national identity. Thus, women are not given the freedom to mobilise themselves in ways that differ from socialism. More importantly, while it indicates that the state is responsible for women to “effectively and fully participate” in different fields, there is no statement ensuring gender equality. In fact, nowhere in the Constitution is the term “equality” used to ensure gender equality, but rather it vaguely presumes to encompass citizens without discrimination (see Article 25(3)). Moreover, it is important to note that the word “must” does not appear, which indicates the

affirmative provision to enhance women's equality by the state. In the same vein, as illustrated earlier (5.2), the use of the term "citizens" is quite obscure and does not effectively ensure women's inclusion. In particular, Article 25 gives equality its meaning before the law, but very shortly we will see how the law discriminates against women.

Another article that refers to the state's commitments to the family reveals the political weakness of such provisions as they contradict the legislation on work, insurance and nationality. In Article 36, the Constitution refers to the right to work of every citizen:

- (1) Work is a right and duty of every citizen. The state undertakes to provide work for all citizens.
- (2) Every citizen has the right to earn his wage according to the nature and yield of the work. The state must guarantee this.
- (3) The state fixes working hours, guarantees social security, and regulates rest and leave rights and various compensations and rewards for workers.

(SC)

Although it might seem that this article is genuinely gender-inclusive and that the use of the term neutral "citizen" refers to men and women, in order to assess the level to which this article incorporates the equal rights of women workers, we need to look at the various legislation in Syrian labour law. Articles 89 and 90 of the Social Insurance Law (1959) indicate that, in the event of the death of a pensioner who is entitled to payment of pensions, his wife continues to receive her husband's pension unless she remarries or has a job.⁶⁹ However, in the case of a woman worker, if she dies her husband would continue to receive her pension unconditionally. Thus, despite the

⁶⁹ The Social Insurance Law can be found (in Arabic) at: http://parliament.gov.sy/laws/Law/1959/work_05.htm

protection of the Constitution and Syrian women's right to work and exercise various economic positions, there is direct discrimination in some laws that privileges men over women.

Moreover, Article 53 of the Social Insurance Law, which deals with the working mother, stipulates that she has the right to 120 days' maternity leave for her first pregnancy; 90 days for the second; and 75 days for the third. Subtly, this goes counter to the Constitution, as the state should be committed to protect motherhood equally, regardless of the number of children a woman decides to bear. According to the labour law, under Legislative Decrees No. 4/1972 and No. 32/1972 the working woman has the right to receive family allowance, 1) if she is a widow; 2) if she is divorced; 3) if her husband does not receive family allowance from the state or any other public institution. Thus, the discrepancy in these laws is that the working woman will be deprived of her right of family allowance if she remarries after divorce or the death of her husband. This further demonstrates that the law reinforces and perpetuates the inequality and dependence of women (Jaber, 2015).

This right to work leads us to another important article in the Constitution that deals directly with motherhood and marriage. Article 44 emphasises the state's commitment to protect and support women in the family. The family, as a backbone of culture and tradition, emerges as a place where women's position in society is shaped. More importantly, family becomes a place of contested patriarchal order and value. One must therefore question how the Constitution perceives the relationship between members of the family. According to Article 44:

(1) The family is the basic unit of society and is protected by the state.

(2) ... The state protects mothers and infants and extends care to adolescents and youths and provides them with the suitable circumstances to develop their faculties.

(SC)

The state recognises the sanctity of the family as a unit that strengthens and promotes the patriotic sentiments in the national community. The Constitution identifies the family as the basic unit of society, stating the authority of the state to preserve the family structure and protect motherhood, without regard to considering equality between the family members. This notion of family (*al-ūsra*) resonates with constructing patriarchal hierarchy in the private domain as the lack of mention of the notion of equality illustrates the dominant status of men in the private sphere.

Suffice to say that Article 44 raises questions such as whether relations among members of the family are of domination or equality. The first paragraph fails to express that the family should be founded on full equality. In this sense, the concept of marriage conceived in the Constitution underlines the state's commitment to protect it and preserve the traditional understanding of family (El-Attrache, 1976: 297–9). But investigation of some provisions in the Penal Code shows that the law legitimises marriage based on coercion and violence.⁷⁰ Under Article 489 of the Penal Code, a rapist will be imprisoned for 21 years if the victim was under 15 years old and only five years if the victim was older than 15. More related to the legitimisation of violence based on gender are Articles 490–508, which deal with the crimes of kidnap, rape, violent attack and sexual manipulation of females (less and more than 15 years old). Despite these articles indicating that the sentence upon conviction ranges from five to 15 years, under Article 508 a rapist can escape punishment if he marries his victim. This is an absolute disregard of women's rights and a stigmatisation of women, even though the Constitution pledges to stand up for women's rights and equality before the law.

⁷⁰ Online version of the Penal Code (in Arabic) can be found at:
http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/text.jsp?file_id=243237

Suffice to say that Articles 489 and 508 lead us to question the concept of marriage in Syrian laws and how such a deficiency in the law determines the inferiority of women in marriage and effectively licences violence against them.

Nonetheless, these are not the only laws that discriminate against women in the private sphere. Another detail pertaining to the Constitution's commitment to protect family and motherhood is somewhat contradicted by Articles 523 and 524 of the Penal Code, which respectively criminalise women for using contraceptive pills and vendors selling or advertising them in public. This hegemonic control over women's right to control her reproductivity highlights a particular construction of the national narrative. More importantly, despite these regulations on women's choices, the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, a governmental body enjoying the status of a legal and administrative entity, issued a new policy in 2008 that encourages limiting the number of children in the family (Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, 2008). This regulation of women's fertility contradicts the state's commitments to women's rights in childbearing. Moreover, it is surely contradictory to penalise the use and sale of contraception while encouraging birth control through official means.

This new policy aims to regulate the high birth rate in Syria. According to the *First National Primary Policy Report on the State of Population in Syria* (Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, 2008), the regulation of the increase in population in Syria depends on pushing women towards marrying later and less childbearing. While this is important in order to enhance the development of women's education and to work on promoting their contribution to decision-making in the public sphere, mobilising women's rights of child-bearing and considering it a governmental goal to decrease the rate of population growth in Syria contradicts Article 45 of the Constitution. The study goes on to suggest "direct policy intervention" to decrease the rate of fertility of every

woman through possible governmental intervention to regulate women's fertility (2008: 17). The study emphasised the need for a population policy that promotes women's rights and productivity in society. As the study indicates:

The national population programme suggested should be based on achieving integration between direct tools (reducing child bearing demand, increase demand on reproductive health service and new family planning tools) and indirect tools (improve population characteristics), which impact on reducing childbearing. Such characteristics include literacy, eliminating school dropout and child labour, early marriage, encouraging higher marriage age, giving incentive to more women through the education system to complete secondary education at least and integrating the highest number possible of females into the labour market given the great importance this has for reducing women fertility, delaying marriage age and having the awareness of the advantages of a smaller family) to reduce population growth rate in the less developed governorates and shantytowns. (Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, 2008: 52)

This contradiction in the state's initiative to protect motherhood and further control women's rights to bear children is a sign of the lack of women's choice in the private sphere. More importantly, this policy encourages the use of contraceptive tools, which are in direct contravention of the Syrian Penal Code (Articles 523 and 524). Moreover, such policing of women's sexuality indicates the state's paternalism. In other words, these actions indicate the state's hegemonic and repressive policies to subordinate women's choices, whether in using contraceptive pills or in bearing children. This contradiction between the Penal Code and the 2008 state project emphasises how women become primary targets of hegemony and mobilisation. In turn, this paternalism of the state curtails women's rights and freedom. Dwyer argues that this intervention in controlling women's sexuality and reproductivity has constituted women within "networks of highly contested and volatile discourses of nationalism ... For these women, their sexuality and how they do or do not control it is deeply implicated in practices of citizenship and transitional power" (Dwyer, 2000: 33).

In line with the above revelation, the state's 2008 family planning project is assumed to encourage female education. This takes us to Article 37 of the Constitution,

which stipulates free education for *all citizens*. Starting with the right to free education, we can find another contradiction between the Constitution's commitment to women's rights and the legislation. According to Article 37,

Education is a right guaranteed by the state. Elementary education is compulsory and all education is free. The state undertakes to extend compulsory education to other levels and to supervise and guide education in a manner consistent with the requirements of society and of production. (SC)

In principle, while the Constitution reserves equal rights to education for both males and females, a Syrian report submitted to UNESCO (2009) shows a striking discrepancy in illiteracy rates in the Syrian governorates and distribution between males and females for those aged over 15 years (i.e. at the secondary stage of education). The following table shows illiteracy rates (in percentages) for these groups at the end of 2008:

Governorate	Male	Female	Total
Damascus	4.2	10.2	7.2
Aleppo	16.8	30.9	23.7
Damascus-countryside	6.9	15.2	10.9
Homs	7.8	19.8	13.6
Hamah	9.4	24.1	16.5
Lattakia	7.6	18.3	12.9
Deir Ezzor	23.1	46.8	34.8
Idleb	11.7	29.4	20.4
Alhasakeh	23.3	47.1	35.1
Alraqah	26.2	51.4	38.3
Alswiada	5.3	18	11.8
Dara'a	7.1	20.4	13.7
Tartous	6.9	19.3	13
Alqunaitara	8.2	23.2	15.5
Total	12.1	26.1	19

Source: UNESCO, 2009

This data indicates that, irrespective of location, the illiteracy rate among Syrian women fell far less than that of men in 2008. Females traditionally get married at a young age. While there are different reasons for this, such as tradition, tribalism or some fundamental interpretation of religion, the state – despite its encouragement of free education – has failed to make the secondary stage of education mandatory, as figures show that females drop out of school after primary school (Zakzak, Hjeieh and Al Rahabi, 2008). This failure of the state to make the secondary stage compulsory is rather evident in the Constitution’s choice of words. For example, in Article 37, the word “undertake” (*takful*) does not have the same meaning as “do”, “guarantee” or “pledge” (*tadmun*).

More importantly, the failure of the state to protect females’ rights to education can be seen in the reservations made against CEDAW.⁷¹ In 2003, Syria acceded to the CEDAW with reservations against several articles that guarantee women’s equal rights, particularly in the family domain (UN Women, n.d.). The reservation against restricting early marriage and making it subject to the family’s wishes demonstrates the failure of the state in its commitment to ensure female education. Suffice to say that early marriage will discourage women from proceeding to higher education. Rather, this reservation contradicts the state policy of family planning (Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, 2008) that aims to encourage women’s education. According to Zakzak, Hjeieh and Al Rahabi’s study about the building of a gendered Constitution in Syria, this refusal to restrict the age of marriage has resulted in the high dropout rate in education among females and is further manifested in the illiteracy rate among females, which exceeded 25% in 2006 (2014: 21). Further implications in the context of

⁷¹ The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is an international treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly.

education relate to the role of the educational curriculum, which has emphasised the subordinate position of women. On this level, state policy has not reacted to the stereotypical presentation of women in the curriculum texts as mothers and wives. There is a need to combat the stereotyping of women in education, which ingrains and consecrates an identity that feeds on submission and passivity. This symbolic dispossession of women in the national curriculum incorporates the dichotomised division between the private and the public spheres, which further excludes them (ibid.).

More related revelations on how women have been conceived within the private sphere can be found in the Penal Code, which fails to outlaw physical violence against women committed in the family. Recent studies conducted to evaluate violence in Syrian society and the Penal Code have shown that domestic violence is common throughout Syria (Kelly & Breslin, 2010: 461). More importantly, this domestic abuse is not specifically outlawed; for example, spousal rape is excluded as a punishable offence under the legal definition of rape. Article 489 of the Penal Code stipulates that:

- 1) The man who violently threatened a woman other than his wife to have intercourse with him will be punished for 15 years with hard labour.
- 2) The punishment will be not less than 21 years if the victim was less than 15 years old.

By omitting any reference to rape within the marital relationship, this article clearly licences violence against women in the family sphere and shows the dominance of patriarchy in state practices as a result of using nationalism as a hegemonic ideology.

More related to violence against women is the law dealing with adultery. While the Constitution confirms that citizens are equal before the law in their rights and duties (Article 25(3)), the Penal Code discriminates against women in matters related to adultery. According to Article 473, the woman, in the event of her conviction, faces a sentence ranging from three months to two years, while the man (only if he is married)

faces a sentence of one month to one year. Moreover, the following Article 474 stipulates that the convicted husband will receive a sentence of one month to one year if he commits adultery in his spousal home. Nonetheless, this discrimination against women is not restricted to the sentence upon conviction, but even extended in terms of showing how adultery is viewed differently between men and women. Under Articles 473(3) and Article 475, men and women receive disparate treatment for gender-based violence. The man can present any kind of evidence before the judge to prove his case, whereas the woman must present written evidence only, such as a written confession by the husband.

Despite both Articles 28 and 29 of the Constitution stipulating that citizens are equal before the law in duties and obligations, some of the Penal Law provisions discriminate against women in particular. This can be found explicitly in Article 548, which stipulates that men can be exempted from punishment if they hurt or kill their spouse, sister, or any of their descendants in cases where they unexpectedly discover any of these committing adultery or extra-marital sexual relations with another man. This act of honour killing is justified by the law and considered permissible on the pretext that the crime was committed under extreme anger or excitement or without premeditation. The second paragraph of the same article gives the man the right to kill or hurt his spouse, sister or any of his descendants if he catches them in a “suspicious situation”. The use of the term “suspicious” (*mashkūk*) is very vague as it gives the man unlimited grounds for attack.

Suffice to say that Article 548 justified violence against women in the private sphere from 1949 until 2009, when it was amended to raise the punishment of the man who kills or hurts his spouse or any of his descendants to (only) two years’ imprisonment (Khaizaran, 2009). This article was amended due to the rise in the number

of honour killings in Syria (533 cases in 2007). However, two years' imprisonment does not stand up to scrutiny as a punishment for killing a woman, and rather normalises a culture of gender-based violence.

One can say that, as a result of imposing the ideology of nationalism that perpetuates masculinism and patriarchy in its narrative, women became caught between the Constitution and legislation. More evidence of this subjugation of women is the failure to perceive them as legal citizens equal to men. Again, the Constitution fails in its commitment to perceive women as political persons endowed with rights guaranteed by the state. This is quite evident in Article 43 of the Constitution, which states: "The law regulates Syrian Arab citizenship and guarantees special facilities for the Syrian Arab expatriates and their sons and for the citizens of the Arab countries".

Under this provision, the law is responsible for regulating citizenship; however, this regulation has been proved to act against Syrian women. The Syrian Nationality Act entered into force in November 1969, just after the ascent of the Ba'ath regime to power.⁷² The legislation for these regulations was issued in 1976, since when there have been no amendments. Moreover, this legislation proves how much the state discriminates against women, as Syrian women cannot transfer their citizenship to their children or spouses if they marry a non-Syrian. This contradicts what the Constitution implies in Articles 44, 45 and 25. Furthermore, it explains the misogynist views expressed in Article 8 of the Ba'ath Party Constitution. This male-centric view of citizenship implies that women are not recognised as political persons, but rather as dependants of the men in their families. Denying the children of a Syrian mother and a

⁷² Online version of the Syrian Nationality Act (in Arabic) can be found at: <http://www.cdf-sy.org/low/mrsom%20276.htm>

foreigner the right to attain Syrian citizenship complicates women's legal status. This legislation also emphasises that the notion of Syrian nationality is based on blood kinship measured only through the Syrian father (see 4.4.5).⁷³

In light of the aforementioned, by addressing the issues of family, domestic violence, education, and marriage, one can notice the discrepancies between the constitutional rights given to women and how the law normalises women's subjugation and further reinforces patriarchy in the private sphere. Much like the private sphere, the next section will explore how the Ba'ath regime has controlled women's representation and participation in the public domain through idealising the model of the Ba'athi leader propagated in the national narrative.

5.5.2 Public sphere

When speaking about the political nature of the Ba'ath regime in Syria, we must state that participation in both political and civic affairs does not exclude only women. The despotism of the regime imposes restrictions on the whole of society, as the political rights of all Syrian citizens have been curtailed as a result of the imposition of the State of Emergency since 1963.⁷⁴ Further restrictions on the activities of Syrian citizens have been led by agents of the intelligence services, appointed by the government, who have been given wide authority. Yet women have paid doubly for these repressive policies of the Ba'ath regime, as the dominance of a masculinist national narrative subjugates women in the public sphere. In this sense, the Ba'ath regime prevents women from operating freely to advocate women's rights by establishing various political organisations. This enforced and repressive policy of the Syrian regime is contrary to

⁷³ These misogynistic perceptions are reflected in al-Arsuzi's national ideology (see Chapter Four).

⁷⁴ Although the State of Emergency was lifted in April 2011, the regime's violent crackdown on peaceful demonstrations that started in March 2011 reinforces its despotic and autocratic nature.

Article 26 of the Constitution: “Every citizen has the right to participate in the political, economic, social, and cultural life. The law regulates this participation” (SC).

The irony of this article cannot be lost – the notion of “rights” and the discriminatory legislation that obstructs such rights. More importantly, the paradox of this article is the fact that the Emergency Law enacted in 1963 has curtailed many of the legal protections offered by the Constitution (see Kelly & Breslin, 2010).

The political structure of Syria can provide us with a clearer picture of women’s status in the public sphere. Syria has been an independent state since 1949, and has been led by the Ba'ath Party since 1963. While the ruling coalition is made up of several parties, Syria remains effectively a one-party state. This structure has its impact on women’s participation in the political sphere. Suffice to say that women lack the status and rights of full citizens in the private sphere, and this is also reflected in the political dimension. More importantly, understanding the status of women in the political sphere leads us to question the ideology of the state as perpetuated in the Constitution. The term “Ba'ath Party” appears five times in the Constitution, with no reference to a multi-party system or political pluralism. This enforcement of the Ba'ath has limited both men’s and women’s access to different political parties that might empower them in both the state and society.

The complication of the status of women in the public sphere can be reflected in Article 2(2) of the Constitution, which stipulates that “Sovereignty is vested in the people, who exercise it in accordance with this Constitution”. This provision refers to the social contract and the notion of consent by the people. However, while one might think that it gives popular sovereignty ultimate authority in society, this sovereignty is only expressed and enacted by the Ba'ath Party and its socialist ideology. This invocation of popular consent is contradicted by Article 8, which states that the Ba'ath

Party is the leading party in the state and society. (There is no provision for any other.) Moreover, Article 23 defines the political identity of the nation and underlines that the nationalist socialist culture is the basis for building a unified socialist society. This contradiction between the two articles prevents any ideology that works to promote women's rights, and other political parties and organisations being formed to initiate gender equality. This is further emphasised in the substitution of the people's sovereignty with the rule of the Socialist Arab Ba'ath Party of the society and state in Article 8 of the Constitution.

It is not surprising that, although women in Syria won the franchise in 1949 – much earlier than in many other countries – their presence in political structures has been marginal and limited to Ba'ath-affiliated women, and female participation at local government level has never been more than 12%. To use Pettman's words, "If women are overwhelmingly absent from state power, and state political constructs are masculinist, where are women in relation to citizenship? How do women experience citizenship?" (1996: 15). In this context, it is necessary to highlight that, despite Article 12 of the Ba'ath Party Constitution and the two others that contain positive gender discrimination towards women (Articles 44 and 45), they remain underrepresented in decision-making positions in the structure of the ruling party. Suffice to say that the few women who have successfully contested and found a place in the political process have done so as a result of their support of the Ba'ath ideology and regime.

This empowerment of women by the Ba'ath Party in order to silence claims of the marginalisation of Syrian women includes the appointment of Dr Najah Attar as the first female in the Arab world to hold the post of Vice President; and the appointment of Ms Shahinaz Fakoush as the first female in the Executive Bureau of the ruling Ba'ath Party local leadership in 2005. In addition, since 1976, there have been three female

ministers of culture; four female ministers of social affairs and labour; one female minister of higher education, and one female minister of expatriates. In addition, in 2009 Samira Almasalmeh became the first female editor-in-chief of the state newspaper *Tishreen*. However, despite the appointment of these women in decision-making positions, they are all not only supporters of but also active members of the Ba'ath Party (see EUROMED, 2010). This empowerment of a few Syrian women needs to be compared with the restriction most have in terms of their political representation in governmental or non-governmental organisations.

As a legal framework, the Constitution is supposed to provide equality, freedom and democracy for all citizens. As Article 12 stipulates, the state's "establishments seek to protect the fundamental rights of the citizens and develop their lives" (SC). It also seeks to support political organisations. One organisation, the General Women's Union (GWU), was established in 1967 to work on behalf of other women's organisations. Its objectives and aspirations are identical to those of the Ba'ath regime. More importantly, the GWU is an affiliation of the Ba'ath and is financially dependent on state funds:

According to party philosophy, the GWU represents all Syrian women, obviating the need for independent women's groups. In practice, this monopoly excludes dissenting views on government policies and delays action on specific problems, since initiatives and complaints have to filter up through the unwieldy, multi-layered administrative structure of the Ba'ath Party. (Kelly & Breslin, 2010: 464)

Although it is a civil society institution, the GWU has failed in its duty to put pressure on the government to enact laws in favour of advancing women's equality and justice. The other governmental body that represents Syrian women is the Syrian Commission for Family Affairs, which was established only in 2003. Despite working hard on women's equality, it has failed to get Syria's reservations on CEDAW articles lifted.

Another provision in the Constitution that obstructs and limits women's political choices is Article 49:

The popular organizations by law effectively participate in the various sectors and councils to realize the following:

(1) Building the socialist Arab society and defending the system.

(2) Planning and guiding of the socialist economy. ...

(SC)

Suffice to say that the restrictions imposed on the scope of these organisations in order to be within the boundaries of socialist ideology have confined women's rights to advocate gender equality and justice by initiating organisational institutions and bodies that hold different ideological standpoints. It is therefore the function of these organisations to achieve gender equality from the government's socialist perspectives and motives.

Another illustration of the gendered nature of the Constitution can be seen in the two clauses of basic principles in Article 3, the Arabic version of which states that the president must be a man, and that legal decisions are based on Islamic jurisprudence. This excludes women in general and non-Muslims in particular. More importantly, one might question how Islamic jurisprudence is interpreted and employed discriminately in the Personal Status Law and the Penal Code. The *Shari'a* law applied in Syria lacks any modern interpretations of women's rights, which questions its validity in working towards eliminating all forms of discrimination against women. Despite the fact that Syrian society is already conservative, the interpretation of *Shari'a* law was left to the patriarchs of society who further enhanced these discriminatory interpretations in the Penal Code. The personal status law depends on *Shari'a*, despite it never being mentioned that the religion of the state is Islam, as in all Arab countries except Lebanon.

The Constitution does not specify the religion of the state, as it is secular, except when it comes to the rights of women.

The state chooses to define women as members of religious communities, which are governed by patriarchal authority only. By so doing, women are not perceived as equal to men. Fiona Hill explains the perception of Syrian women as citizens:

In Syria, it would be reasonable to suggest that women experience their “rights” in terms of their place in a family, and in a co-local, and often confessional, community rather than in terms of their positions as citizens of the state. Since Syrian families and communities of all ethnic and confessional backgrounds are acutely patriarchal, the rights of women within these communities are, for the most part, defined accordingly. (1997: 130)

Failing to perceive women as equal to men has its impact on their representation in the Syrian parliament (People’s Council). The following data demonstrates the number of women appointed in the parliament (*Majlis al-Sha'ab*) after the corrective movement. From 1973 to 2011, the parliament had nine legislative sessions; the following table shows the percentage of women members in successive sessions:

Legislative Session	Year	Number of Seats	Number of women	Percentage
1	1973–1977	186	5	2%
2	1977–1981	195	6	3%
3	1981–1985	195	12	6%
4	1986–1990	195	16	8%
5	1990–1994	250	21	8%
6	1994–1998	250	24	9%
7	1998–2002	250	26	10%
8	2003–2007	250	30	12%
9	2007–2011	250	31	12%

Source: World Bank

While the above numbers confirm the increase of women’s participation in the parliament, this is limited to those enrolled in the Ba'ath Party. For example, in the seventh legislative session, only two women out of 26 belonged to parties in the

governing National Progressive Front coalition, and two were independent. In the eighth, there was only one independent woman (see al-Rahbi, 2005). Furthermore, between 2010 and 2014, women's participation did not exceed 12%. However, this should be assessed against the manner in which the legislative elections take place – the success of Ba'athi women is planned, as in every electoral cycle 90% of these candidates are listed in advance (ibid.).

This suggests that the “high” rate of women's representation in parliament (12% in the last session) was a political decision, rather than a reflection of a social situation that encourages the entry of women into politics (ibid.). At the same time, the Coalition of Syrian Women for Democracy affirms that this percentage of women's participation in the parliament is lower than that in most other Arab countries (Zakzak, Hjeieh & Al Rahabi, 2014: 11). More importantly, the assumed increase in women's representation in decision-making positions in Syria can be considered as a form of silent representation. Hence, despite this relatively increased participation in the parliament (albeit 90% Ba'ath members), women still have very limited representation in the judiciary and the executive branch, which in turn confine their potential in decision-making positions (ibid.). Consequently, men dominate the national political scene and hold the majority of decision-making positions within the executive branch, which has a history of military influence.

5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has engaged with the concept of national identity in the Constitution and Syrian law, as both represent discourses of hierarchy and hegemony. Because so much of Syrian nationalism has, since the beginning of the 20th century, revolved around defence and militarism, this militant construction of nationalism has elevated men to much more central roles – while women have remained marginal to the Syrian national

discourse. Militarism has also been central in defining membership of the constitutional community. In other words, the concept of male sacrifice for the nation and the subjugation of women in both the private and public spheres symbolises a system based on privileging men and disempowering women. More importantly, in this chapter, women's bodies became markers of national boundaries. The normalisation of violence in Syrian penal laws reproduces a narrative of exclusion and marginalisation. In addition, the state's control over women's sexuality imposes a complicated perception on the rights of motherhood. This policing of women's sexuality evokes narratives of nationalism premised on hierarchy and patriarchy. These patriarchal hierarchies can be seen in legislation, and evidenced in the Nationality Law, where women married to non-Syrians are prevented from transferring their citizenship to their children. This restriction on women's rights to pass on their nationality employs a privileged conception of national membership.

This chapter has also explored the perpetuation of the two Ba'athi models in both the private and public spheres that are prevalent as a consequence of employing nationalism as a dominant state ideology. In this sense, the intimate connection between manhood and nationhood through the construction of patriotism and exalted popular struggle sees them become icons of constitutional membership. This gender chauvinism seen in the gap between the theoretical rights given to women in the Constitution and the practice of laws has relegated women to a minor position in both the state and society. More importantly, the conception of the nation as a family in the Syrian national narrative has continued to designate essentialist gendered roles for both men and women in the Constitution. The fact that women are given symbolic roles as mothers in the constitutional narrative shows that the state fails to consider them as political persons.

In turn, this lack of political personhood in the private sphere has legitimised women's marginalisation in the political domain.

In the same vein, understanding the intricate nature of the link between nationalism, masculinity and militarism that prevailed in the preamble of the Constitution, and in the national narratives of the three Syrian thinkers, reflects the hegemonic patriarchy in the state-formation stage. Such construction of virile manliness explains why Ba'athism failed, despite its secularity, to break with tradition when it comes to women's rights. More importantly, the Ba'ath regime compensated women's rights to legitimise its rule, especially when it comes to the Personal Status Law and the Penal Code. Thus, in the constitutional and legislative discourses, the analysis of the state's response to gender equality is concerned with the way in which national identity is constructed in the two dichotomised spheres, public and private. This is evidenced in the ambiguity of constitutional language that underlines the subjugation of women in Syrian law.

Consequently, it must be said that the birth of the nation-state in Syria has been identified by a dominant nationalist narrative that homogenises a definitive construction of virile manliness. This subscription of political authority given to militarism at the beginning of the Constitution structurally burdens women in terms of their incomplete political personhood. The elevation of a militant identity in both the early emergence of nationalism in the writings of the Syrian founding fathers and the constitutional and legislative narratives foreshadowed the intricate ways in which popular culture reproduces women's national identity (as we will see in Chapter Six).

To this end, having focused on three themes –

- (a) How the national narrative identifies the main tenets of Syrian national identity and belonging (Chapter Two);
- (b) How the nation is conceptualised as a masculinist construct in both its cultural and civic characterisations (Chapter Four); and
- (c) How the writings of the Syrian founding fathers have produced a masculinist national identity in the Constitution and Syrian laws (Chapter Five),

the fundamental relationship between the national narrative and the symbolic construction of the nation will be addressed by deconstructing the constructions of women in the most predominant nationalist songs, as symbols that generate hierarchy and masculinism. In other words, the following chapter aims to investigate how nationalism is constructed in these songs and subsequently how women are conceived in the cultural narrative.

CHAPTER SIX

THE SYMBOLIC CONSTRUCTION OF THE NATION: NATIONAL NARRATIVES AND NATIONALIST SONGS

6.1 Introduction

While this thesis starts by investigating the early theorisations of nation and nationalism in the writings of the Syrian founding fathers, this chapter moves from how these abstracted national concepts were institutionalised in the Syrian Constitution and legislation to examine the symbolic construction of the nation. Since the state is the political embodiment of the nation, national symbols are particularly crucial in the process of transforming the nation into a state (Geisler, 2005: xv). In this sense, I aim to develop further the analysis of state-based nationalism by bringing into sharper focus the various ways in which state actors deploy symbols to reinforce a masculinist national identity. To do this, in defining national symbols, this study examines national songs, the national anthem and flag as integral parts of identity –making, and agents of, gender boundaries.

North Korea's forceful policy of employing patriotic songs as an agent for indoctrinating the young (Fisher, 2013) has arguably been adopted in Syrian nationalist songs that are used as methods to regenerate domination, masculinity and hierarchy. In the process of identifying the intersection of masculinism and nationalism in the state-consolidation stage, this chapter will use nationalist songs as an arena that reflects the missing representation of Syrian women in public culture. Moreover, while a number of studies have analysed the role of nationalist songs and their relevance to nation-building projects (Vaughan Williams, 1963; Brincker, 2014; Oettinger, 2016 [2001];

Bohlman, 2004), I seek to add to this literature by showing how nationalist songs reflect the masculinism of the early Syrian nationalist narrative. More importantly, since no study has contemplated the exclusion of women from the culture of nationalist songs,⁷⁵ such explicit omission of women shows that this discourse is a fundamentally male-centric construction (see Morra, 2014; McDonald, 2013; Bassiouney, 2008). Asking the question “Do nationalist songs contribute to the construction of masculinist nationalism or masculinist identities?” (RQ5) entails investigating the relationship between the national narratives of the Syrian founding fathers and the construction of masculinism in Syrian public culture. Hence, this chapter is concerned with the conceptualisation of nation as an “imagined listening community” (Anderson, 2006: 149) harnessed through aural production of nationalist songs as a means of persuasion and coercion.

In light of the foregoing, this chapter will be divided into two parts. The first is theoretical. I shall define the types and functions of national symbols, focusing on the important role they play in identifying the politics of belonging and identity (6.2). Then I shall highlight how national symbols are agents employed by the state to reinforce

⁷⁵ In the Syrian context, Wedeen’s study (1999) of the symbolic production of political culture analysed auditory, written and visual symbols. Despite her study encompassing a great variety of cultural and political symbolism, such as ceremonies, marches, monuments, newspaper, plays, TV series, slogans and caricatures, it did not consider nationalist songs as part of the official cult used by the Ba’ath regime. More importantly, her study disregarded the important role of Syrian political symbolism in producing gendered national identity. This chapter’s point of departure is to consider nationalist songs as an important part of Syrian oral culture. This is because nationalist songs are premeditated to construct a particular perception of national belonging and identity. At the same time, Gilbert’s recent study (2013) of the role of national symbols in marking the political transition of Syria before and after the 2011 uprising omitted the role of national symbols, particularly nationalist songs, in reinforcing masculinism in Syrian public culture. Thus, the scholarly literature that tackled national symbolism in Syria such as Wedeen’s (1999) and Gilbert’s (2013) ignored nationalist songs and, more importantly, did not investigate their role in reinforcing masculinism and gender bias. While in the final stages of writing this thesis, the publication of Miriam Cooke’s book *Dancing in Damascus* (2017) brought a novel approach to the role of symbolism in creating Syria as a nation. Despite her book tackling Syria during the revolution, the fact that a considerable part of it discusses popular music is a starting point for advancing the studies on song in Syrian culture and its role in formulating the sense of national identity. However, Cooke did not approach these songs from a gendered perspective and whether women were visible in their narrative.

domination (6.3), and masculinism and patriarchy (6.4). In so doing, the second part aims to contextualise the manifestation of Syrian nationalism in its cultural and political phases and how it is reflected in Syrian nationalist songs. This part will extensively analyse 11 nationalist songs categorised according to the predominant theme of each (6.4.1 to 6.4.5). Closely related to the political construction of the nation, the Syrian national anthem as a political symbol will be analysed in section 6.5 to show that its ethos and ties are a reflection of Syrian nationalism. Finally, this chapter aims to interrogate the language and national concepts that prevail in these songs as a means to unearth the masculinist construction of national identity.

6.2 National symbols and nation-building

Over the past three decades, scholarly literature has taken an increasing interest in investigating the role of national symbols in the production of national identities (Edensor, 2002; Elgenius, 2011). Smith's conception of national identity as constructed by the "continuous reproduction and reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths and traditions that compose the distinctive heritage of nations" (2001: 18) draws our attention to the role of national symbols as particularly useful agents for shaping and identifying the nation. That national identity is subject to a constant process of reinvention and reconstruction is synonymous with the conceptualisation of the nation as an "imagined community" (Anderson, 2006). As Elgenius demonstrates, symbols "provide short cuts to the group they represent and symbolism is by nature referential, subjective and boundary-creating" (2011: 13). This overlapping relationship between the construction of national identity and the dissemination of national symbols is intimately linked with the process of fusing the ideological construction of the nation into a state (Geisler, 2005: xv). This relationship between symbols and the realisation of the nation-state is best explored by Ellis M. West, who argues that symbols are a

set of beliefs and attitudes that explain the meaning and purpose of any given political society in terms of its relationship to a transcendent spiritual reality ... expressed in public rituals, myths, and symbols. (1980: 39)

This is further reflected by Stuart Hall, who states that nations are “symbolic communities” (quoted in Wodak et al., 2009: 22–3) emblematised and created by its symbols. In the same vein, Geisler highlights the importance of national symbols in creating the nation:

[N]ational symbols are located in the crossover region where the nation as an “imagined community” (Benedict Anderson) meets the state as a collective institution acting in empirical reality. Through the ubiquitous display of national symbols, the state legitimises itself vis-à-vis the concept of the nation that undergirds it; on the other hand, the state also makes use of these same symbols to communicate its authority as a hegemonic power structure. This is yet another, far more concrete way in which national symbols fuse the state with the nation. (2005: xix–xx)

As noted in the quote, this symbolic conceptualisation of the nation takes us to Anderson’s idea of an imagined entity in which he demonstrates that the transition from imagining the nation to realising it, culturally and politically, requires enhancing a set of social and political practices that formulate a sense of collectivity and nationhood. Nonetheless, McClintock has a rather more elaborate conception of the term “imagined communities”, as she states that nations cannot be limited to fictitious connotations of sentiments and experiences but, rather, they “are elaborate social practices enacted through time, laboriously fabricated through the media ... [and] the myriad forms of popular culture” (1991: 104). Yet it is nationalism that “invents nations where they do not exist” and creates social cohesion or difference (Gellner, 1964: 168). Hence, nationalism reinforces this difference or uniformity through a set of national symbols wherein they become tools for formulating people’s identities.

Imbued by a particular nationalist project in a given state, national symbols can also become culturally and traditionally accepted by repetition. Such a notion is

supported by Hobsbawm, who conceptualised national symbolism as an “invented tradition” mobilised to inculcate and normalise particular values and behaviours (1983: 1). More importantly, national symbolism can be used as a political tool to emphasise social cohesion and recreate one’s membership in the nation (1983: 9). However, the function of national symbols is not limited to the consolidation of state; they also act as a “belief system” that induces legitimacy and authority of an objectified idea of nationalism (ibid.). They are therefore necessary for “the establishment of social cohesion, the legitimisation of institutions and of political authority, and the inculcation of beliefs and conventions of behavior” (ibid.).

Thus, national symbolism comes in different shapes, forms and practices. For example, symbols that are frequently seen as part of everyday life, such as “holy flames, flags and songs”, integrate the abstract idea of the nation into the daily life of the people (Mosse, 1975: 20). Moreover, Hobsbawm identifies two forms of symbolic idioms; first, “theatrical idiom” such as public ceremonies, parades and ritualised mass gatherings; and second, “traditional allegory and symbolism” manifested in statues, monuments and buildings (1983: 304). However, such typology is conventionally limited and narrow, given the significant impact national symbols play in conditioning and recruiting individuals in a political society (Mosse, 1975: 8). Smith further extends this list by emphasising that anything can become a symbol, whether it is a feeling or an experience shared among members of a community (1991: 77). Hence, one can say that any articulation of a hegemonic national narrative that becomes traditionally accepted by a given community is considered a national symbol (Geisler, 2005: xxi). I will use auditory media articulated in nationalist songs, the flag and national anthem as national symbols that maintain power relations and reflect the masculinist national narrative propagated by the Syrian founding fathers.

That said, it is not enough to highlight that the nation is a constructed entity based on some sort of fictitious shared past and present; rather, it is a dynamic creation that changes through time (Bauer, 1996 [1924]), so symbols are updated regularly to reflect this change. This understanding of the nation is as a product of an imaginative ordering of experiences selectively reconstructed through the symbolism that denotes them. The related questions are how such emphasis on particular experiences emblematised in national symbols produces specific narratives of national belonging and identity, and whether this selectivity in recreating national experiences is geared to the promotion of particular nationalist conceptions full of references to masculinism, patriarchy and hierarchy.

Answering these questions is closely linked with throwing light on the role of national symbols in creating boundaries. As Cohen argues, the community is “a boundary expressing symbol” that is uniquely constructed through the manipulation of its symbols (1995: 16). Symbols allow for the possibility to create meaning and further emphasise that collective identity is not static, but rather can be connoted with different meanings through the employment of symbols. It can be deduced from Cohen’s argument that, while these symbols are important for creating a flexible national belonging, they can also express gender bias and the inferior positions of certain groups within the national community. This brings us to question whether symbols impose meanings on the community or construct experiences outside the line of the culture and traditions of that community. In this context, Cohen demonstrates that symbols of community are “mental constructs: they provide people with the means to make meaning” (1995: 19). So, these symbols can give members of the community the sense of who they are and define their relationship to the nation. These symbols create boundaries that in the Syrian case not only politicise national belonging and identity but

also reinforce gender hierarchy by epitomising masculinist ethos and values. Hence, the next two sections aim to investigate how nationalist songs are agents of domination used by the Ba'athist state (6.3) and agents that reinforce gender hierarchy in the cultural narrative (6.4).

6.3 Perpetuating the nation through nationalist songs

Syria is an especially interesting case to study the role of national symbolism in revealing the politics of domination, authority and coercion (Wedeen, 1999; Gilbert, 2013). While nation and state are not synonymous, in Syria's self-prescribed Ba'ath regime they have been conflated, and supporting the Ba'ath Party and belonging to the nation are understood to be the same. Moreover, given the prominence of emphasising the cultural identity of the nation in the Syrian narrative, nation-building has been symbolised in the rhetoric of these nationalist songs. Thus, nationalist songs not only symbolise the nation (Curtis, 2008: 22; 25), but are also "responsible for propagating and inculcating the national culture" (2008: 26). Such imposition of meanings on culture is most commonly guided by a nationalist party or movement as its official propaganda.

In this sense, being an integral part of the Ba'athist state's agency to institute modes of cultural and political communication, Syrian symbolism ensures the reification of the abstracted nation. As Wedeen significantly notes, "[t]he power of the Syrian state resides not only in its ability to control material resources and to construct institutions of punishment, but also in its ability to manage the symbolic world" (1999: 32). In addition, Syrian nationalist songs as a form of oral media employed by the Ba'ath regime have always been a powerful tool in inculcating a strong sense of national consciousness. They form the core of self-perception and how one is positioned in relation to the nation. Playing a pivotal role in indoctrinating the young generation, nationalist songs are considered a normal part of the educational process in schools,

wherein children are forced to memorise them to be sung on national holidays. The Ba'ath Party, with its nationalistic project, confuses the abstracted conception of the nation with the state. Syrian nationalism is therefore reiterated through these songs, which act as a medium to deliver Ba'athist propaganda. As Birdsall argues, “nationalistic songs and national anthems ... are particularly useful for propaganda, given their ability to harness feelings of optimism and belonging” (2012: 42; see also Hung, 1996: 903–5; Revill, 2000; Frolova-Walker, 2007).

While this chapter is not concerned with delineating the rhetoric of domination propagated by the Ba'ath regime, there is a need to question why the regime has incorporated the use of these patriotic songs as a form of hegemonic propaganda. To borrow the question posed by Buch, Zubillaga and Silva: “Why did the State produce these works, then? What were they for?” The answer is that new rulers must “construct their political power and social legitimacy simultaneously” (2016: 9). Moreover, these kinds of song were propagated and mobilised by the state regime to reflect its “political use of the past, and project it onto the present and the future”, through which such a construction of culture reinforces a particular narrative of nationalism (*ibid.*). These institutionalised songs therefore form the “foundational myth” of the past and celebrates “the foundation of the regime” (2016: 10). Suffice to say that reference to the Ba'ath Party in this context stems from the fact that it is conceived as representative of the nation and its application in the real world, nationalism. In fact, it is not that unusual for a political party to use music as propaganda to invoke popular support and unity. Hung demonstrates the politics of the Communist Party in China in using songs to create “emotional force” (1996: 902). Moreover, the Communists conceptualised music as a “political tool” and an “institutional legitimacy” to incite popular unity (1996: 903).

In Syria, by organising commemorative events where these songs are played repetitively, the Ba'ath Party promotes the use of propaganda songs as part of its manipulation methods to control and disseminate its political ideology. Choosing to analyse nationalist songs as a reflection of Syrian national identity is related to the fact that construction of identity in these edited and planned songs is premeditated. Syrian nationalism during the rule of the Ba'ath regime was, to a great extent, appropriated through symbols that induce domination and control (Wedeen, 1999: 10).⁷⁶ Wedeen's pioneering study of Syrian symbolism and how symbols act as political propaganda to dominate the public is a great example of how Syrian national identity is a cultural product. Birdsall's investigation of Nazi strategies in "keeping the people acoustically under control" (2012: 11) detects an atmosphere similar to the Ba'ath Party's cultural, social and political practices in dominating people's perception of their national belonging. At the same time, Mosse argues, "ritual, songs, and national symbols were used to shape the crowd into a disciplined mass in order to give it direction and maintain control" (1975: 2).

Such conceptions of nationalist songs as a political tool reinforces their function as propaganda (Oettinger: 2016 [2001]). One of the illustrative definitions of propaganda as not simply a "lie" but a "persuasion" that is "socially constructed" constitutes the valid reflection of reality (O'Shaughnessy, 2004: vi). It is also defined as an art of manipulation used by the political state to mobilise its people for a particular set of means and conceptions (2004: 20). This will be taken, along with considering these songs, as "Party propaganda", which is intimately linked with the "affirmation of values" (2004: 158). According to O'Shaughnessy, propaganda is the "synthesis and

⁷⁶ After the Syrian Uprising, the regime produced a list of new songs that celebrate obedience and sacrifice to the Ba'ath and the leader (see Cooke, 2017: 10–14).

manipulation” of three salient concepts: “rhetoric”, “symbolism” and “myth” (2004: 4). Defining these three concepts is essential as they will be employed in the analysis of Syrian nationalist songs.

In terms of “rhetoric”, these songs can be conceived as “rhetorical forms of persuasion” that function to perpetuate masculinist construction of the nation as propagated by the founding fathers of Syrian nationalism (O’Shaughnessy, 2004: 4; see also Denisoff, 1966: 582). Conceptualised as a rhetorical form that “feeds off ideology”, its language becomes determined by the “ideology it champions” (O’Shaughnessy, 2004: 111). Thus, the domination of male figures in these songs authenticates men’s national struggle and omits women from national memory. In terms of the definition of “myth”, O’Shaughnessy argues that the “core methodology of propaganda has been the creation and sustenance of myths” (2004: 5). In the context of Syrian nationalist songs, this myth is the story of the Syrian militant created as a feisty male protecting the nation. At the same time, these propaganda songs resurrect symbolism and, in the Syrian context, this is exemplified by reinventing historical figures as national symbols of a glorious past (2004: 6). Moreover, the flag is configured in these songs as a national symbol, not only to represent the nation on the international level but also to define who is worthy of this belonging. In this sense, having examined the use of these songs as political propaganda that legitimises authority and hierarchy, the following section aims to address how they perpetuate a masculinist construction of the nation by recreating an image of the man as a fighter, leader and father.

6.4 Nationalist songs as agents of masculinism and patriarchy

Considering the above, the power in imposing this particular set of symbols was the Ba'ath regime, which popularised nationalist songs in order to mythicise shared experiences of national members, emphasise legitimacy and control, and recreate

national memory. What concerns us here is two questions. First, how did these songs construct the notion of “people” in their narrative and were women part of this group identity? And second, what role did these songs play in the creation of a masculinist national identity in the Syrian culture as a whole? The attempt to answer these questions will further our understanding of the relationship between identity, nationalism and patriotic songs in general and also yield insights into the intricate ways in which patriotic songs reinforce the shaping of a masculinist national identity.

By the same token, these nationalist songs were also part of the dominant culture in Syria that regenerates history in its narrative. In fact, while it is common among all nations to be products of conflict and struggle, the Ba'ath regime chooses to recreate the nation within these songs by reinforcing its glorious past, struggle and sacrifice. However, such an act of remembering the past carries with it the mythicising of heroic deeds of men and celebrating their sacrifices. At the same time, the conception of the nation as an “imagined sound” (Anderson, 2006: 149) that cherishes militarised ethos and masculinist values will unmask the omission of Syrian women from both nationalist songs and narratives. As Geisler states, “patriotic and revolutionary songs ... are used to reinforce the idea of blood sacrifice in the name of the nation” (2005: xxiv). Conceptualising songs as symbols loaded with emotional meanings denotes the shared experience of members of the community; they are instruments of both communication and control as their rhetoric chooses particular narratives to be mythicised and remembered.

Because these songs form the ideological position that reflects the politics of power and dominance, the investigation examines how women are perceived in patriotic songs and the corresponding impact on the construction of national membership; and aims to negotiate the constructed gendered boundaries between “us” and “them”.

McClintock states that women as “figurative representations symbolically define the limits of national difference and power between men. ... women are subsumed symbolically into the national body politic as its boundary and metaphoric limit” (1993: 62). Given that Syria is depicted in these songs as in a state of danger and in need of protection, such configuration of the man as defender and warrior subsequently portrays the nation as a woman. In this symbolic construction of the nation, Peterson argues that:

... Motherland is a woman’s body and as such is ever in danger of violation – by “foreign” males ... Clearly, the nation/woman is being denied agency. Rather, “she” is man’s possession, and like other enabling vessels (boats, planes) is valued as a means for achieving male-defined ends: the sovereign/man drives the ship of state. Thus, the motherland is female but the state and its citizen-warriors are male. The homogenizing identity of the group/state is one of fraternal bonding in the literal sense of “liberty, fraternity, equality.” Excluded intentionally from the public domain, women are not agents in their own right but instruments for the realisation of male defined agendas. (1998: 44)

This quote from Peterson suggests that such construction of dichotomised conceptions of nation/woman versus state/male citizens relegates women in both the private and the public spheres and further objectifies their identities, and measures their belonging in masculinist terms.

In addition, interrogating the construction of masculinism in Syrian nationalist songs enables us to understand the role of the flag in these songs and how it represents the symbolic visual tools of national identity. Moreover, as an emblematic identification it is employed to signify national unity and distinctiveness. It is also used to denote statehood and sovereignty, particularly when flown from flagpoles. This study is not concerned with the historical use of the Syrian flag but, rather, how any reference to it in these songs perpetuates particular definitions of belonging and identity to those who host it. Thus, since these songs are conceived as an imagined space in which national experiences are recreated to produce collective identity, the reference to the flag as a representative of men’s heroic deeds problematises women’s national belonging. In

other words, the use of the flag in these songs raises the questions of who is worthy of national love and belonging, and how notions of national representation and belonging become associated with one gender over the other. The flag and the honour of carrying it are seen as a marker of national membership and identity gained only through men's bravery and sacrifices.

In this sense, the understanding of the ways in which these nationalist songs reflect the gendered division in Syrian national narrative is pivotal. In attempting to illustrate how they manifest the main characteristics of Syrian nationalism and their relationship to women's subordinate status in the cultural narrative, the analysis of these songs will therefore take into consideration the evolution of Syrian national thought in its cultural and political phases. The cultural tenets of Syrian nationalism encompass constructions of national love and belonging, identity, history and education (militarism) (6.4.1; 6.4.2; 6.4.3). However, the political phase deals with the construction of an ideal image of the man as a leader, father and lover as the basic prerequisite for the consolidation of the state (6.4.4; 6.4.5).

6.4.1 Masculinising national love and belonging in the Syrian songs

Conceptualising the nation as a cultural construct naturalises national love and belonging. Within this primordial conception of the nation, national love is conceived as a substitute for familial love in which it is compared to a child's love for his mother (al-Husri, 1985a: 29). However, this definition of national love becomes part of an enforced and naturalistic sentiment that generates propaganda of an ideal image of the man (see Chapter Four). More importantly, national love constitutes a means of legitimising dying for the nation, which is in turn embedded with gendered interpretations of national belonging. The normalisation of militarism, masculinity and physical power in these songs is intimately linked with the sense of identity. In school,

they were thrust on us every morning and during break time. Presumably, the Ba'ath regime thought that by forcing students to memorise these songs they were inculcating and strengthening our sense of nationhood. However, to me, they were in fact consolidating gendered boundaries within the national community, its power relations based on masculinism and hierarchy.

In other words, defining patriotic belonging and masculinity is manifested by conceptualising the nation as a fraternity, descending from one father and solidarity between the “brothers” (al-Husri, 1985b: 35). The paradoxical nature of considering the nation as a family is that such a notion perpetuates gender hierarchy by reinforcing supremacy of the male patriarch within both family and nation (McClintock, 1993: 63). At the same time, this national belonging is identified by men’s physical sacrifices and strengths. Moreover, men are depicted as the ones that guard and preserve the nation, thereby intimately linking the conception of the nation with constructing physically strong men. As we explored in Chapter Five, what defines citizenship is men’s readiness to die for the nation and a commitment to a masculinist conception of national membership based on militarism and chivalry. The dominance of such a notion situates women as inferior and outside national memory. Hence, while the definition of nationalism is demonstrated only through familial love, this love can only be accomplished in masculine terms where men are patriots and great soldiers of the nation. In line with the foregoing, the following songs will capture the main tenets of the cultural phase manifested in defining national belonging and love, identity, history and education (militarism) as prerequisites for nation formation.

Rāyatik bil-’Āli ya Sourīya (Your Flags Are Forever High, Oh Syria)⁷⁷

Your flags are forever high, oh Syria.

⁷⁷ Sources for these songs are provided in the Bibliography.

Your dear earth is always guarded and protected, oh Syria.
Your dignity ['īzk], glory [*majdik*], flag ['alamik] and name ['īsmik]
Are symbols of eternity, oh Syria.

From the title of this song, one can discern the function of the flag as a marker of the nation's glory. Nonetheless, this glory is closely linked to men's ability to guard and preserve the nation. This action of protecting and guarding the fatherland is defined by the highness of the Syrian flag, which subsequently patriarchalises belonging and identity.

You are my land and my country, oh the best of countries.
You are my eternal love, oh the sun that shines tenderness.
It is we who have used to protect you, our fatherland,
Against all the betrayals and stabs of the time.

The metaphor of the “sun that shines tenderness” associates the mother's love with “eternal love” for the fatherland. The nation is constructed as a mother that pours tenderness upon those who protect the fatherland, the heroic fighters. Such a notion of a mother-son relationship underscores enforced belonging, and military sacrifice as a prerequisite for such national love and belonging. Moreover, the use of the pronoun “we” is associated with the readiness to die, so this song is addressed to a community exclusively of men.

The following words illustrate the comparison of familial love and national love that stresses the primordial belonging to the nation:

We opened our eyes learning to love and build you.
We have grown up learning to be proud of you.
We raised our flags so high, oh Syria,
And for you we sang and composed poetry, oh Syria.

National love becomes exemplified in the journey of growing up and the primordial sensations first experienced between mother and son. The naturalness of this love is accompanied by the sense of action in building the fatherland, which is associated with

action, strength and dignity, all masculinist traits. The mother–son metaphor underlying the concept of nation appears in fraternal guise as a union of fighters effectively forming the basis of collective solidarity. Hence, the close association between carrying the Syrian flag with dignity and glory is measured by men’s readiness to protect the nation.

Biktub 'Īsmik ya Blādi (I Engrave Your Name, Oh My Country)

On the sun that never sets,
I engrave your name, oh my country.
Neither my love for money nor it for my children
Would exceed my love for you.

The metaphor of engraving the name of the fatherland on the sun once again emphasises its everlasting glory and is an expression of love for the nation, yet this love is measured by the man’s readiness to sacrifice both his money and his children. The final line of the verse expresses deep love for the nation that is incomparable to any other sort of love. This metaphor resembles the man–woman love relationship, which is based on coercion and hierarchy. The patriarchalisation of national love is further intensified in the following excerpt:

Oh, my country, the most faithful of all countries,
Poems are written for you, and you deserve them.
May you eternally be shining and planted with glory and laureate.⁷⁸
... With their swords glowing, while your sun never sets.
No love like your love

The romanticisation of national love is exemplified in writing poems to the fatherland. However, this expression of love is identified with the masculine: the “glory and laureate” of men fighters, and the glowing swords as an allegory of men’s physical strength. In fact, this allegory goes beyond the expression of national love, constructing man as the only representative of the nation and the only one that deserves national

⁷⁸ “Laureate” is a symbol of victory.

membership. Moreover, the depiction of the sun (as never setting) to refer to the glorious deeds of men and their physical strength (with their swords glowing) conceptualises a nation composed of hierarchical order. The song ends by reaffirming the superiority of national love and the impossibility of comparing it to any other form of love. It is as if women are not only overlooked in this song, but also not even conceived as members of the nation. Hence, nation becomes a fraternity composed of brotherly solidarity.

Sourīya yā Habeebatī (Oh, My Beloved Syria)

From the title of this song, one can discern a powerful personification of fatherland as a female lover. As the first verse reads:

(Oh, my Beloved Syria)
You have brought me back my dignity.
You have brought me back my identity,
Oh, my beloved Syria.
By war and struggle [*kifāh*], by the blazing fore of the wounds,
The way towards freedom is lighted,
Oh, my beloved.

Syria is portrayed as a mistress, which in turn conceives the speaker as a male with authority and domination over his lover. This shift from portraying the nation as a mother to a female lover still reflects the transmission of patriarchy and coercion from the private to the public sphere. According to the second line, there is an association between this expression of love towards the fatherland and the retrieving of “dignity” and “identity”, which is associated with sharing the experience of war, struggle and suffering. In this sense, the process of identity construction is synonymous with active participation in war. These three notions of war, suffering and struggle are major tenets in the construction of Syrian nationalism that recur in this song to reinforce how national dignity and identity are bound to masculinist connotations.

The second excerpt enhances this masculinist construction of national belonging and identity through the celebration of men's heroic actions:

Our ... sky and land
Are all sacrificed for and protected.
Our blood is sacrificed for them all,
And our heroes protect them all.
Our Ba'ath goes on forward
To achieve its great glory,
Auguring well for my return,
Preserving my great dignity,
And renewing my identity.

These lines establish a profound association between dignity, identity and physical prowess, by emphasising the sacrifices of male heroes, and enhanced by achieving the ideal image of the Ba'athist man. As in the following lines, the reference to the Ba'ath Party that will lead the country forward depends on men's achievements. This is in line with Aflaq's national theorisation, which considers the party's achievement synonymous with constructing an ideal image of the man. The party's realisation of great glory will be the only way to ensure the preservation of dignity and the renewal of identity, exclusively to men fighters. This furthers the symbolic elevation of the Ba'ath ideology, wherein "heroes" are prototyped as representatives and guardians of the nation.

This exclusiveness of national belonging to encompass only heroic men can be traced in the following lines:

Now, now and only now I am an Arab,
I have the right to my father's name.
"Who is your father?" I may be asked.
"Who is your father?"
He is the bullet of a gun,
That achieves freedom for the proud nation,
Oh, my beloved.

These lines clearly associate heroism with national belonging and identity. As the first line indicates, the grateful expression that "only now" can the fighter reclaim the name

of his father after his heroic deeds is connected with the question of who deserves the name of his father. This fraternity can only be realised by the bullet of a gun, which in turn stands for action and militarism. Moreover, this repetition of “who is my father?” is doubly significant as it emphasises the paternal lineage of both the nation and the family, and consequently legitimises patriarchal authority and domination in the national imagining. More importantly, the expression “now I have the right to my father’s name” indicates the right of citizenship. This in turn reflects the prejudice of Syrian laws against women, as they are not permitted to pass their nationality to foreign spouses, or to the children of such a marriage. In this cultural spectrum, belonging and membership are correlated not only primarily with heroism and chivalry, but also with patriarchy.

The following lines continue to associate national identity and belonging with masculinist values, and the extensive use of masculinist and militaristic references is evidenced in the creation of an image of sensational action:

The course of action has not yet finished, oh our nation
Till our usurped land is returned.
The orphaned daughter of the exodus is living in tents,⁷⁹
Calling, “Oh, beloved Syria”

The vocabulary used, such as “action”, “now” and “bullets”, is consonant with constructing a masculinist ethos that defines national belonging and identity. This convergence between action and freeing the land inculcates a monolithic perception of national struggle as measured by men’s sacrifices and actions. More importantly, the dominant image of the orphaned daughter in exodus captures the loss of patriarchal leadership in both the family and the nation; her suffering is doubled as she has lost her

⁷⁹ “daughter of the exodus” means the Palestinian people or Palestine. The exodus refers to the time when more than 700,000 Palestinian Arabs fled or were forced to leave their homes during the 1948 Palestine war.

land and her father, her home and her nation. The feminisation of the nation captured in the image of the helpless daughter in the tent portrays male fighters as heroic. Such a symbiotic relationship between helplessness and heroism naturalises the dominant binary opposition of passive females/active males. This will further create a god-like image of those male warriors who, by their militant actions to protect this daughter, are rescuing both the familial and the national spheres. Hence, this juxtaposition of active men and passive women reinforces an essentialist perception of women's roles in both the private and the public spheres.

6.4.2 The masculinisation of identity, memory and history

This subsection aims to highlight the manifestation of the cultural construction of national identity, memory and history as conceptualised in the writings of the three Syrian thinkers. The emphasis in the Syrian national narrative on constructing a unified version of history is based on perpetuating a masculinist narrative of history wherein men are conceived as transmitters of history and active participants in political struggles. This *selective* approach to history, based on certain imagined communal experiences of pain and suffering (al-Husri, 1985g: 19), has discursively created national imagining exclusive of women's role in history.

As already explored, national symbols are utilised to convey particular nationalist myths or morals. They may be derived from a variety of sources, be they materialistic/physical or natural/cultural characteristics of the fatherland (Smith, 1991: 65–6). In the Syrian context, the narrative of nationalist songs is derived from the early writings of the Syrian founding fathers. This can be seen in the re-emphasis on history as a marker of national identity and definer of national belonging and boundaries. As Suleiman points out,

... for the nationalists, the past is the storehouse of old glories, common suffering, dim memories and other distant and authenticating voices which are imagined to have left their imprint on a variety of cultural products – including language – whose significance in the present varies from nation to nation, and, in the history of the same nation, from time to time. (2003: 28)

The use of the past reinforces legitimacy and emphasises the existence of national identity over time. In this sense, history becomes a constructed entity that bestows particular meanings. As we have seen, according to the Syrian founding fathers, national memory is full of references to male heroes as representatives of national history. The social construction of memory in these narratives focused on masculinist discourses through which memories are shaped to glorify the sacrifices of men. The image of the man in this narrative becomes associated with reinforcing militarism, physical strength and chivalry, thereby accumulating a selective history defined by the heroic deeds of men only. Hence, the narratives of al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi masculinised time by projecting men as embodiments of the nation's glorious past and continuing to project them as having autonomous, revolutionary and infinite impacts on nation's present and future. In this sense, history becomes a grouping of masculine peoplehood that reinforces boundary relations and deems history a primarily male domain. In light of the foregoing, the conceptions of memory, history and identity are reinforced in the Syrian public discourse as manifested in the following two songs.

'Ana Sourī w 'Ārdī 'Arābīya (I Am Syrian and My Fatherland is Arab)

This song reinforces the masculinist construction of language and identity by subjecting them to the definition of glorious past (*majd*). While the construction of the glorious past is premised on contextualising the man as the ideal representative of the nation, women are overlooked from national struggle and their sacrifices are written out of national memory. In the first excerpt, the song affirms the identity of the fatherland by emphasising its Arabic language:

I am Syrian and my Fatherland is Arab
My sky, my fatherland, and my water are glorious ...

We can see from the first line the emphasis on the importance of language in formulating the cultural identity of the nation. This emphasis on conceptualising language as the main definer of the nation begs the question whether the first pronoun is gender-inclusive. The second excerpt answers this:

I swear and my pledge will be witnessed that I will sacrifice myself for the glory of my flag
The eagle is still flying high hugging your glory, oh Syria

First, the legitimacy of this belonging is stressed by a religious pledge that is accommodated by realising national glory through physical sacrifice. In fact, the use of this normalises and rationalises gender hierarchy. The inclusion of religion in inculcating national identity blocks any questioning of this masculinist belonging and further legitimises men's authority in both the private and the public sphere. This construction of enforced belonging is coupled with the image of the eagle hugging the glory of the nation. While this emphasises the glory of the nation, it also creates a hallowed image of the male hero that preserves and defends this glory. More importantly, the reference to the flag as a symbol of the nation's glory is intimately linked with men's readiness to die for the fatherland.

The following excerpt reconnects the glorious past with the creation of the glorious present and future through men's sacrifices:

Our past will ever be glorious and we will always be the defenders of our land
In peace, we are basil and in the battlefield our blood will spread aroma

The combination of the past and the future masculinises time by projecting men as embodiments of the nation's glorious past and continuing to project them as having autonomous, revolutionary and infinite impacts on its present and future. The image of

blood in the battlefield therefore glorifies men's heroism and places them at the helm of the national struggle.

'Ana Sourī 'āah yā Nīyāālī (I Am Syrian, Oh How Blessed I Am)

In this song, the two national symbols of the flag and coat of arms recur as both an image on high and one that is protective.

Wave, oh our flag, wave up high
Precious is your eagle, oh our precious fatherland
Under its wings I get shade, I am Syrian, oh how blessed I am

First, the reference to the flag and the eagle symbolises power and dominance. As the flag marks the sacrifices of men's glorious actions in Syrian history, at the same time, the eagle celebrates an image of patriotism. These two most overt and powerful symbols expressing affinity with power, hegemony and dominance create a narrative of masculinism. The power of these two national symbols is enhanced by the words "high" and "precious", whose use is dedicated to those who are defined as Syrians. The eagle and the flag become embodiments of compulsory nationalist intersection between masculinity and nationalism. This promotion of national identity is enhanced by the title of the poem, but the words show it is not gender-inclusive:

These heroes are the men of the revolution, when the sun shines, it is still not reachable
Forced France to go away, my soul and money are a sacrifice to Arabs
They fought France with slingshot, and said "oh invaders get out"

The image of shining sun in this context stands for the motherland in need of these heroes to free her from the coloniser. More importantly, the words "it is still not reachable" imply the call for men to free their mother. This patriarchalisation of national identity is enhanced with the emphasis on how these revolutionary men forced France to leave through their physical strength.

This interplay between masculinity and nationalism is evidenced in the use of “slingshot”, an analogy for men’s physical strength. In fact, the retelling of the national struggle against France in this song highlights the selective approach towards history wherein only men are conceived as its transmitters and participants in national struggle.

While the convergence between masculinity and nationalism is perpetuated by propagating a narrative that glorifies men’s actions and sacrifices, this interplay further asserts that national belonging is somewhat patriarchal. This is evidenced by the reference to the authoritarian voice of fathers and grandfathers in the following lines:

My father and grandfather said “listen, the sand of the country is precious to the soul”
All the Arabs call to the boys, I am the strong one, may God protect you

These words imply the sacredness of the role of fathers and grandfathers. The reference to grandfathers’ advice to the men of the present indicates the transcendence of time and strength, and constructs the nation as a brotherhood and fraternity defined and formed by male ancestors. Once again, such notions not only masculinise national belonging but also promote an image of heroic men whose strength and chivalry transcends time, where men are conceived as infinite, revolutionary and courageous. Moreover, by emphasising the grandfather’s advice to young men to protect the nation, it is as if the motherland is a property passed from one male generation to another. This leads us to consider the resonation between conceptualising the nation as a woman in which both become conceived as an inheritance passed from one male generation to another and in turn implies men’s authority over both women and nation.

6.4.3 Education: Perpetuating militarism

As discussed in chapters Three and Four, militarism was conceived as part of the educational system as a means of maintaining group identity and affiliation: the army, as a representative of the nation, structures the politics of inclusion and exclusion in the

national community. While the association between militarism, masculinity and nationalism marks the interplay of male authority and dominance, the incorporation of such notions in Syrian public discourse socialises the image of the male soldier as part of the predominant mainstream in Syrian culture. This in turn reinforces hierarchy and hegemonic masculinity as measured by men's physical strength. This normalisation of militarism in Syrian national narrative is reflected in the following two songs.

Sāff al-ʿĀskar (The Line of Soldiers)

The conceptualisation of the army as an extension of the education system promotes national ideology based on coercion and hegemony. This normalisation of militarism in the Syrian context is reflected in the title of this song, which celebrates an image of strength and activity. As the first excerpt reads:

Teach [ʿālemnī] me to fight [nharib], oh soldiers [ʿāsqar]
Using the gun and the cannon.
Here I am, my land of grandfathers
If duty once called upon.
So witness and hear, oh mountains;
Here I am, ready! my land of grandfathers.

While the use of the verb “teach” reinforces the conceptualisation of the army as an extension of the education process, the question lies in understanding to whom this song is addressed. In fact, the identity of the speaker is revealed through the word “duty”, which stands for military conscription. This is an ordinary man asking the soldiers to teach him how to fight, indicating how the ethos of militarism is transmitted to the private sphere in the process of constructing the ideal man. This manufacturing of manhood is enhanced in this song by the reference to both gun and cannon, which celebrate a scarified image of the battlefield as a result of men's readiness to die for the nation. The patriarchalisation of society is further reflected in considering the nation as

the land of fathers, which obscures women's national belonging and membership in the national community.

The idealisation of the military ethos is further reflected in drawing an image of tireless soldiers who stay awake to defend their fatherland:

The line of troops will stay up all night
With soldiers, on the mountains, spending the night.
With their hands, their fatherland they've built,
And willingly they have got ready to kilt.
They've early gone to the threshing floor
To plant it all with men ready for war.

The permeation of bellicose language and imagery is expanded in these lines as they metaphorically conceptualise soldiers as active, autonomous and revolutionary. This image of men being planted like trees masculinises the public space and militarises the politics of inclusion and exclusion in the national imagining. The fulfilment of conceptualising men as ready for war and action is consistent with emergent demands for male power. While the image of planting men in "the threshing floor" assumes an picture of infinite brotherly solidarity, this construction of masculinised space of men is juxtaposed with the reference to finite national boundaries:

At your borders, my fatherland, here I am
On full alert to be a faithful guardian.
To be a guardian I would not cease,
That all the clod of land enjoys peace
Thus, you will be a legend, my fatherland,
With your doors, so invincible and with dignity crowned.

This juxtaposition of an open space of men planted ready for war and the finite borders of the fatherland perpetuates an encompassing dominant picture of heroic men. The metaphor of men guarding the nation's borders marks them as legendary and revolutionary. This constructed image of the fatherland as unchallenged and dignified simultaneously perpetuates hegemony and hierarchy. Men's presentation as both guarding the nation at the borders and planted inside it emphasises their control over

both the private and the public spheres, marking soldiers as protectors of women and the fatherland.

Another expression of internalised masculinity is emphasised in the following lines, in which men are conceived as planted in the mountains with “agility”:

My dear fatherland, marked by strife [*nidhal*] and dignity,
Your mountains are planted with men and fire.
Here I am, my land of grandfathers.

There is an association between fire and men that constructs an image of active and miraculous manhood. This bonding configures the fatherland as a domain encompassing only militarised men. Such images of men associated with activity and agility determine who belongs to the nation and who does not; they also construct a code of particular behaviour for members of the nation, which defines the boundaries of national community.

Shaddīt al-Hijīn (I've Saddled the Horse)

This song draws an analogy between construction of manhood and nationalism by signifying motion, physical activity and militarism as defining attributes of those who belong to the nation. From the beginning, images that imply masculinist attributes are predominant:

I've saddled the horse for the trip.
Like wheels, its legs are moving quickly.
If you choose war [*harb*] our enemy, then be ready for our bullets,
As they are ready waiting to be fired by soldiers.

In fact, the first two lines of the song imply motion and activity as the image drawn from saddling the horse and its quick movement constructs a picture of a mighty knight ready for war. The image of men moving quickly shows them in control of both space and culture, conceptualising them as autonomous, free and active. Their mobility breaks

the confinement of the private sphere and reinforces men's authority and dominance over women. This activity is espoused by the reference to military weapons such as "bullets", which extends the superiority of men in national imagining.

Other lines that reinforce the physical strength of soldiers are:

Beware of attacking the lions,⁸⁰
For you won't face but death.

"Lions" signifies quasi-mythical, larger-than-life soldiers. Moreover, the warning to beware portrays men as strong, courageous and fearless. This is to create a god-like image of them.

Oh God, you are the One who drives worries away,
So please shoot our enemies accurately, so that the goal is hit precisely.

The incorporation of religion in this context gives soldiers a sacred and dignified status as unstoppable, unbreakable and infinite.

Oh, young men, let's put on our *kaffiyehs*⁸¹ [*koufīyah*],
And be ready to guard and secure our homeland, our beloved ones.

The use of *koufīyah* asserts the cultural belonging of these soldiers to the nation and their role in preserving the culture and traditions, thus excluding women from this role. Their role as guardians extends the cultural arena to the national one that conceives soldiers as patriarchs that save women in both the private and the public spheres.

At the same time, this transcendence in both the cultural and militaristic level is reflected in configuring the nation's need for the heroic deeds of these soldiers:

Oh, our nation, once you call us,
We are ready, and your wishes are our commands.
With our guns, we are ready for your sake.
Once you call us, each one of us fights as a hundred soldiers.

⁸⁰ "Lions" refers to al-Assad and his people, as *assad* means "lion".

⁸¹ A *kaffiyeh* is a scarf worn by men as a headdress.

The readiness of soldiers to take part in war portrays them as courageous, autonomous and unstoppable. The expression that each fights like a hundred implies their infinite strength. In this sense, soldiers are prototyped as magnificent and miraculous. They are as God on earth, able to guard and preserve the identity of the nation. This constructed holiness of their physical strength delineates the boundary between feminine and masculine. It normalises militarism in public culture and gives it a superior position in constructing national identity. Moreover, it stresses the indispensability of militarism's role in both the private and the public spheres. This superiority given to the ideology of militarism is reflected in how national belonging is consistent with masculinist attributes such as mobility, speed, activity and physical strength. Above all, the incorporation of religion in aiding their heroic deeds legitimises their superiority and inscribes the ethos of masculinity and patriarchy in Syrian public culture.

6.4.4 Construction of the ideal man: The leader, father and lover

In the civic phase, both Aflaq and al-Arsuzi propagated the need to realise statehood. In the course of their theorisations of how the state could be realised, they emphasised the role of heroic men, as their realisation of manhood is juxtaposed with the nation's realisation of its statehood. In this sense, this phase is manifested in the construction of the ideal man as a signifier of national identity and group membership in the national community. Aflaq determines the reciprocal relationship between manhood and nationalism, transmitted through the authority of men in public institutions. This personification of man and the Ba'ath reinforces the masculinist construction of the Ba'ath ideology. In the same vein, al-Arsuzi emphasised that the construction of an ideal manhood is essential to the realisation of the political identity of state and society. Arsuzi overtly patriarchalises the construction of both society and the state by conceptualising man's authority in the private and public spheres – the main features of

the nation's political construction. According to al-Arsuzi, the nation is not only an extension of the family from "a spiritual perspective", but the resemblance between the family and the nation also lies in the duties assigned to the "brothers" (*'ikhwān*) of the nation (1973: 344). Thus, the man is considered the sovereign, the leader and the superior.

This propagation of ideal Ba'athist man is reinforced by the contrast with those who are less heroic and not ready for physical sacrifice. This hierarchical order, seen in the writings of al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi, reinforces hegemonic masculinity as manifested in delimiting superior and inferior men. This notion of competing masculinities is further expounded in nationalist songs, but this time by introducing the cult of the leader as a representative of the creation of statehood, and also as a superior leader of the men of the nation, which further excludes women. The construction of the ideal image of the man in the cult of leadership is akin to interpretations of hegemonic masculinity and hierarchy.

The cult of Hafez al-Assad centred on willpower, patriotism, courage and valorous manliness. The narrative of these songs emphasises the "normative ideals of manhood" within the Syrian culture (Ahlbäck, 2016: 20). In Hafez al-Assad's cult, the reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity demonstrates the hierarchical relationships between him and other men "where certain ways of being a man are considered superior and 'manlier' than others" (ibid.: 22). In other words, the cult of leadership exemplifies patriarchy, hegemonic masculinity and hierarchy.

Such notions of inherent patriarchy are demonstrated in nationalist songs through glorifying the role of Hafez al-Assad and his son, Bashar al-Assad. Some works have demonstrated the conflation of the creations of Hafez al-Assad's cult with the nation. In fact, this resonance between the celebration of the leader and the formulation

of the nation was demonstrated in Wedeen's study (1999) of how al-Assad's cult works to "personify the state ... [and] to identify the mortal body of the leader with the immortal body of the realm" (1999: 16–17; see also Kraidy, 2010: 27). While Wedeen's conception of the role of al-Assad's cult is addressed in the context of developing state institutions based on domination and transgression by idealising the conflation of party and leader (1999), Gilbert's conception of Bashar al-Assad's leadership cult is read within the narrative of the shifting national ideology from Arabism to statism (2013). However, Gilbert agreed that the leadership cult is seen as a marker of the birth of the nation (Hafez al-Assad) or the consolidation of local nationalism (Bashar al-Assad). Despite this interest in the leadership cult as an evolutionary process towards the creation of a nation-state, in the Syrian context there has been no study that investigates the role of this cult in reinforcing masculinism.

Moreover, this dominance of the father figure is intimately linked to what Sharabi called a modernised phenomenon of patriarchy – that is, "neo-patriarchy" (Sharabi, 1988: 7). More saliently, Hill notes that there is an association between the presidential cult that is reinforced and reproduced in the public domain and this inherent patriarchy in the family domain (1997: 129). However, this reinforcement of patriarchy in the cult of Hafez al-Assad is further supplanted in that of his son, Bashar al-Assad who is portrayed as a romantic lover. This symbolisation of his relationship with the people is emphasised by recurring images of him as a young, modern and thriving leader. Such depiction is reflected in how nationalist songs portray him as a god-like figure.

This section explores the origin of the leadership cult as a reflection of the early Ba'ath ideology propagated in Aflaq's and al-Arsuzi's narratives. Moreover, this symbolic creation of the president as father, military leader and lover in these nationalist

songs exemplifies the regime's vision of representation and belonging and reflects the masculinisation of both the private and public spheres. This will be shown by demonstrating how both presidents have been configured and represented as definers of the identity of the Ba'ath Party and the fatherland. Within these songs dealing with the cult of leadership, their symbolic content that mythicises both Hafez and Bashar al-Assad as national heroes provides expressions of shared worship among members of the community. The conflation of both Hafez and Bashar al-Assad with the state therefore serves as a marker of national unity and belonging, meaning that subscribing to this worship determines who you are as a citizen.

6.4.4.1 Hafez al-Assad as a heroic leader and a father

'Abu Bāssel Qa'idna (Abu Bāssel, Our Leader)

The title of this song overtly identifies Hafez al-Assad as a father. While such customary identification is predominant in Arabic culture, the attempt to identify Hafez al-Assad by the name of his first son (*Abu Bassel*) implies the integrity of his personage as both a political leader and family figure. It asserts loyalty and belonging to the family and that the nation is a paternalist construct. Moreover, it configures the masses as sons of the father, which in turn gives him sacredness and legitimacy. Hafez al-Assad has been considered the driving force behind the establishment of party and state (Wedeen, 1999: 20–5), but this consideration was greatly extended to encompass the private sphere. Hafez al-Assad is recognised as the family patriarch, as reflected in the following excerpt, which demonstrates the overlap between his political leadership and patriarchal governance:

Abu Bāssel, our leader, with his forehead always uplifted,
May you always be endowed with safety,
That for the fatherland's safety you fight
Against all the stabs of the evil night.

His political leadership is bestowed with heroism, chivalry and physical strength. His chivalric actions are further given a religious connotation by implying that his deeds are protected and guided by God. This association of religion with his cult produces a culture based on coercion and hierarchy. Moreover, Hafez al-Assad's militaristic character is emphasised through the use of the word "sword" to refer to his physical strength, which also symbolises his manliness and further glorifies his heroism:

'Abu Bāssel is our hero across the land,
With the sword of justice in his right hand.

This holy depiction of Hafez al-Assad is further reinforced in the following lines:

The light of his faith on us has shined,
And in his eyes, God's gravity we always find.
From our high mountains and their might
His forehead has taken its pride and height.
Our hopes have been shown on his forehead.

The political manifestation of hope and faith is embodied in his physical features, which further prototype him as a god-like figure. This omniscient configuration of his presence brings glorious victory to the fatherland. In turn, this creates an image of naturalised superiority that depicts Hafez al-Assad as a victorious leader gifted with mysterious power.

This mystification of his personality is further celebrated and indulged by nature. Not only is he the patriarch of the people, but also worshipped by the birds and flowers, thus extending his hegemony. The exaggeration in indulging his figure cannot be excluded from furthering the production of a hegemonic patriarchy based on enforcing submission and passivity:

Oh, birds of sky, do sing for him.
About the chants of victory [*alhan al-bashayir*], do tell him.
Do tell him before sunrise, ...
Oh, flowers of the land show him your smiles,
And do endow him with your precious scent,

And do prove that to him it has been really sent.

These lines also reflect the process of mythicising Hafez al-Assad and conceptualising him as a holy figure. At the same time, this veneration of his unique accomplishments and abilities is guided by the supreme power of God:

Oh God, please on Assad bestow your assistance,
So that his den is marked with firm resistance [*samid*],
And that he stays safe and protects our land,
With the signs of peace in his right hand ...
And his forehead would keep for long uplifted.
With his words, we would be guided
To sublimity and of it be reminded.

Within these lines, his actions and words are projected as sacred and unmistakable since they stem from God's guidance. This sacredness is further intensified by embodying him as a war hero and a peacemaker at the same time. This ability to manage such unlimited and conflicting roles explains the god-like glorification that is accompanied by public mass-worship.

In this song, Hafez al-Assad is not only conceptualised as a great political leader, but also as the father of the nation; and masculinism and heroism as major characteristics of national belonging. This construction articulates a particular perception of national community that is masculinised and empowered only if it subscribes to traits of the heroic male fighter and patriarchal orders. In this sense, the masculinisation of national membership flows from the patriarchalisation of the presidential role that perpetuates manliness and heroism. In line with such analysis, the next song explores the legitimisation of the masculinist cult that venerates the symbolisation of Hafez al-Assad as the father of men (*rijaāl*), in turn reinforcing the masculinisation of the masses.

'Abu 'Ar-rījāl (The Father of Men)

In line with what was discussed in the previous song, the name *Abu*⁸² (father) is important as it emphasises Hafez al-Assad's patriarchal role as a father to his first son (Basel), but more importantly, as the father of men (*'Abu al-rījāl*), which extends the masculinisation of the cult. This leads us to question whether such a configuration of his role as the father of men masculinises belonging and conceptualises the national community as an aggregation of men only – as the following lines explore:

Love has unified people.
Long live Syria, forever.
Long live Hafez Al-Assad, forever.
He is the father of men and competence.

These lines draw a parallel between the glorification of the fatherland and the configuration of Hafez al-Assad as the father of men (*rījāl*). In such a parallel the leader personifies the nation. Moreover, the configuration of men as his sons is associated with national victory and dignity:

With flags and dignity.
It is always sublime protected
With strong hands and awaken eyes ...
Our days are full of cheerfulness and victory,
And our dignity has emerged from his steps.

Another symbol that perpetuates a masculinist conception of national community and membership is the use of the word “hands” to represent men's deeds in building the country. This configuring of al-Assad as the sole patriarch and political leader of both the private and the public spheres implies that the nation is an arena composed of a father and his sons and excludes women. Moreover, once again in this song the reference to the flag is intimately linked with men's achievements, which subsequently marginalise women in the national imagining.

⁸² Abu is a nickname used to call fathers by the name of their first son.

Tislam Lish-sha'b (May You Be Protected for Your People)

This cult of fatherhood and leadership is further intensified by projecting Hafez al-Assad as embodying the fatherland's glorious past. What is evident in this song is the veneration of the sacred relationship between leader and people, which is marked by sacredness and hierarchy. The first excerpt worships the leader's presence:

May you be protected for your people, oh Hafez,
As you are the hope of millions.
You have raised our flags, oh Hafez,
And mustered our dignity, oh Hafez.
May you be protected for your people, oh Hafez.

These words signify the excessive love towards the leader as if his presence is indispensable to the nation's improvement. He is conceived as a father-like figure that his family depends on and cannot live without. He is further perceived as the only source of hope and dignity for the nation. It is unclear if the term "people" is here an exclusively masculinist construct or gender-inclusive. However, the following lines make it clear what type of relationship is identified between the leader and the people:

Syria is the country of free men.
Syria is the country of revolutionaries.
Your goals [oh, Hafez] are "Unity, Freedom"⁸³
And gathering the whole Arab nation.
As long as Hafez is our leader, be proud and please, oh Arab people.

As already emphasised, the nation is perceived as an extension of the family, yet the role of women is disregarded. A striking example of this gender bias is in defining Syria as the country of "free men" and "revolutionaries", which in turn casts women as outsiders. Clearly, women are overlooked in this patriotic song and, rather, the leader–people relationship is identified with the father–son relationship that is marked by

⁸³ Unity, freedom and socialism are the main goals of the Ba'ath Party, the leading party in Syria since 1970, which is usually led by the president, who was Hafez al-Assad at the time this song was written.

superiority and hierarchy. While this patriarchalisation of the nation legitimises dominance and coercion, it also affirms the liminality of women in national imagining.

Further demonstration of glorifying al-Assad in this song is that, by giving him the title of Arab leader, he is conceived not only as an inspiration to Syrian men but rather the source of hope and dignity for all Arab nations:

All people of the Arab nation are praying for you.
Oh Hafez, may God protect you.
You have promoted the local unity
And strengthened the national dignity.
As long as Hafez is our leader, be proud ...
May you be protected for your people, oh Hafez.

This primacy given to the excessive worship of al-Assad's achievements goes beyond Syria's borders to include the whole Arab nation. Such emphasis on constructing a god-like figure that is magnificent and autonomous reaffirms the hierarchical order within both the private and public spheres. More importantly, the universal glorification given to him is marked by mobilising religion as a means to legitimise his political authority and cultural dominance.

This coercive and subordinate relationship between father and sons and leader and men perpetuates a social system based on women's subordination to both the nation's leader and the family patriarch. In fact, if the relationship between Hafez al-Assad and men is marked by patriarchal hierarchy, it is much worse when applied to women in the private sphere. In this classification Hafez al-Assad is conceived as the leader and men as second, while women have an unrecognised position in national imagining.

Hamāka Allah ya 'Assadu (May God Protect You, Oh Assad)

This song signifies the combination of a different masculinist ethos that defines Syrian national identity. The trinity of fatherland, party and leader constitute the basic

principles that define the rituals of national imagining. The cult of excessive worship of the leader is now extended to the party and fatherland, yet this exaltation is defined by the greatness of their leader, Hafez al-Assad:

Here we are, at your service, oh homeland of the proud.
Here we are, at your service, oh the Ba'ath of our Arab Nation.
Thanks to you, life gets prosperous.
Here we are, at your service, oh the leader of our nation.

As explored earlier, the hierarchical classification is epitomised in the submissiveness of the masses. These lines make clear the blind obedience of the relationship. This submission is marked by the repetition of the phrase “at your service” to demonstrate the extent of compliance with al-Assad’s authority, which reinforces masculine supremacy. In fact, themes such as obedience and submission to the leader’s rule are prominent in Syrian public culture and are emblematised in these patriotic songs. This embodiment of the leader’s superiority is enhanced by showing his militaristic abilities. Hence, this obedience not only underscores political legitimacy, but even reinforces the subscription to the masculinist ethos.

This cultivation of the leader’s masculinist features is evidenced in the following lines:

As you are the lion [*assad*] of attitudes and firmness.
You have lightened and showed us the ways to our dignity,
And, by our dignity, you maintained our unity.
May God protect you, oh Assad.
Our souls and bodies are ready to be sacrificed for your sake.
Under your guidance, we become unified.
With your dignity, the country achieves glory.

The intimations of masculinist connotations can be found in the lion metaphor to demonstrate al-Assad’s physical strength and firmness of personality. Indeed, this identification with al-Assad is conceived as the source of dignity for both the nation and the people. However, this dignity is associated with al-Assad’s masculinist features and

further perpetuates power relations. This exaltation of his physical strength is further celebrated and supported by religious prayers. The song also emphasises the readiness of the people to die for him, and here we can see the shift from sacrificing the body for the nation to doing so for the leader. Such substitution puts the leader and the fatherland on the same level, which in turn further mystifies his status. Furthermore, this masculinisation of his cult symbolises the nation's glory as derived from al-Assad's dignity, which further obscures women's position in the national imagining.

This excessive cult of omnipresent imagery is accompanied by rhetorical flattery of al-Assad's glorious achievements:

April⁸⁴ is the torch of our Ba'ath,
when darkness has been defeated.
Glory was in its highest point in March,⁸⁵
October⁸⁶ is the blazing fire of our achievements.
Thus badges of honour decorate our chests.
Al-Assad, the proud leader, his people guides
Through the way to dignity.
May God protect you, oh Assad.

These references signifying al-Assad's glorious achievements become synonymous with his leadership, and further dignify his authority and domination. This configuration of heroic deeds is conceived as a restoration of the nation's glorious past.

The analysis of these songs captures the projection of al-Assad as both a father and a leader, and the nation becomes associated with his glorious achievements, masculinised figure and autonomous leadership.

The admiration of al-Assad's personality has also been reinforced by promoting his physical fitness and strong character (see excerpt beginning "As you are the lion").

⁸⁴ In Syria, April marks two significant events. On 7 April 1970, the Ba'ath Party was founded, and the evacuation of French troops occupying Syria was completed on 17 April 1946.

⁸⁵ March marks the famous revolution against capitalism and feudalism (8 March 1963).

⁸⁶ 6 October 1973 saw the start of action by Syrian and Egyptian forces against Israeli forces. 6 October is still marked as a national holiday in Syria (Armed Forces Day).

The promotion of this model masculinises national community and identifies belonging with manliness and hierarchy. The concentration on sanctifying the character of al-Assad is also evidenced by encouraging the notion of dying for him. This discourse of a masculine formation of leadership cult is shaped by conceptualising al-Assad as a patriarch and a military leader. Moreover, the justification of blind obedience to the leader is related to the affiliation between the nation and al-Assad. Equally, the presentation of al-Assad's manly character in these songs as both a father and a leader normalises masculinism in both the private and the public spheres. Thus, the cult of his leadership is a combination of ethos such as manliness, chivalry and strength, which have been internalised by the masses.

6.4.5 The cult of love and subordination: Bashar al-Assad as a lover

This section aims to highlight the shift in the conceptualisation of leadership and its perpetuation of masculinism in the cult of Bashar al-Assad. While the image of Hafez al-Assad endorsed in nationalist songs affirms his roles as a father, leader and warrior, with Bashar al-Assad, the following song portrays him as an attractive lover. When he took power in 2000, he was the youngest president in the Arab world and could not be configured as a father figure but rather as a young, modern leader who would take his country to prosperity. Another reason is that nationalism was predominantly about garnering legitimacy by establishing the state during the rule of the father, whereas with the son it was and is about the consolidation of the state.

The constructed relationship between Bashar al-Assad and the nation is based on romanticism and affection, but in the patriarchal context there is still a hierarchical order that recognises men as controlling and superior, while women are submissive and subordinate. This configuration of Bashar al-Assad as a lover can be seen in the following nationalist song.

Minhibbāk (We Love You)

This song propagates a romanticised relationship between the leader and the masses. From the title, one can discern two interpretations: one that deals with relationships and the other with representation. It explores how the symbolic relationship between ruler and ruled is configured as a romantic one based on coercion and hierarchy. Moreover, in terms of representation, it demonstrates how the “people” as a group identity are constructed, and whether women are included.

Starting with the use of romantic symbolism between the leader and the people, the following lines reveal how this constructed romantic relationship has been a way of inducing people’s loyalty and obedience:

We are all your kin and your people
In prosperity and adversity, we would be by you
We support you, so go on. We love you. We love you.

Despite drawing a romanticised conception of the leader–people relationship that is synonymous with that of man–woman, the first line reaffirms the familial ties that link the leader to his people. Such reinforcement legitimises patriarchal authority and consolidates cultural hierarchy within both the private and public spheres. Such identification follows the early Syrian national narrative that identifies the man with the nation. However, it is not only a matter of endorsing the nation with the man, but of conceptualising his masculinity, achievement and glory as defining the nation. Moreover, this cult of love is internalised with masculinism and hegemony. This is evident in how this song perceives Bashar al-Assad as a national symbol of unification, hope, dignity and glory:

We love you, oh the very great man.
We love you, oh the symbol of our homeland.
We love you, oh the man with a very big heart.
Your heart is as big as our homeland.
We love you because you have emerged among us,

And we are similar to you.
We love you because you are our leader, unifier and Assad
Forever, forever, forever.

It is no wonder that the idea behind repeating the phrase “we love you” is to institutionalise ultimate obedience and submissiveness. On the representational level, Bashar al-Assad’s cult registers the paradox between the “you” and the “we”, that is, the leader and the people. This cult incarnates state formation with Bashar al-Assad, but this personification is based on the internalisation between the leader and the people. It emulates al-Assad’s authority and simultaneously works to represent the connection between the masculinised leader and the feminised masses.

However, these words not only define the superiority of Bashar al-Assad, but also masculinise national belonging and identity as they become synonymous with the leader’s personal image. This incorporation of the love between the leader and the people obscures the definition of membership. Such authority, symbolised by political leadership and familial patriarchy, casts women as submissive within the private and public spheres. Moreover, this creation of a romantic relationship between the nation and the leader perpetuates women’s subservience to a male-dominated nationalism, familial hierarchy and a masculinised belonging.

A related question is how this song defines the people; the “we”. Who *are* the people? In fact, this song defines not only the relationship between the leader and the people, but also who “the people” are:

We are the dear promise, the guardians of the nights.
Oh, the man with the uplifted forehead,
We are the sun that shines, the sword that glows
We are the determination that never gives up.

The repetition of “we” is suggestive of the different roles and identifications given to those who embody this term, and “we” is rather restricted to the role of guardianship

and fighting. In fact, how the “we” is constructed in this context is connoted with building an ideal image of the man. This is visible in reference to the army and sword. Such use leaves no room for doubt over the masculinisation of the “we”, which denotes physical strength.

Further configuration of the people as a group of men is echoed in the following lines:

We are the government focusing on education.
We are the symbol of love.
Oh, guardian of our people’s dignity, we love you. We love you.
We are the eye that never sleeps, always awake to guard Al-Sham
Whatever hardships we may face, we love you.

The symbolic displays of the “people” here generate gender boundaries based on configuring strong men as those who are worthy of national love, belonging and identity. The repetitive “we” in these lines masculinises peoplehood through identifying them with the sword, which underlines physical strength. Hence, the relationship between the leader and the masses is measured by subscription to masculinist values and ethos.

In line with the above, this song explores the politics of representation and relationship, which reveal the masculinisation of belonging, identity and membership. Thus, this song encapsulates the relationship between the masculinised leader and the feminised nation, which in turn symbolises hierarchy within both the private and the public spheres. It also highlights the configuration of “people” as a dichotomised construct between those who are ready to guard the nation and those who are not.

6.5 The backbone of Syrian national identity: The National Anthem

One important symbol that has received much attention from researchers examining belonging is the national anthem, which acts as a salient idiom of nationhood. Just as

national anthems tend to reinforce narratives about “who we are” in relation to other nations, they also sustain narratives of inclusion and exclusion based on selective symbolic myths and commemorations. Moreover, as an element invented by nationalism (Geisler, 2005: xxv), the national anthem not only defines the main characteristics of national identity, but also identifies the limits of each person’s individuality within the community. Geisler observes that the national anthem

suspend[s] each person’s identity within a larger, transcendent “individuality” – that of the nation. In doing so, national anthems, if only momentarily, allow us to overcome one of the horrors of modernity – individuation. (ibid.)

According to Geisler’s conception of the role of the national anthem, it is the absorption of your individuality in the group identity – like giving up your own personality for the collective whole. However, the related questions in this context are: Is the constructed collective identity within the national anthem at all gender-inclusive? What is the collective group identity that emerges from the national anthem? And, how does it socially construct collective memory and identity, and are women included in its narrative?

Such question pertaining to how women are positioned in national anthems have recently been asked in different contexts. Perhaps the most recent case is the vote in the Canadian parliament in June 2016 to alter the words of Canada’s national anthem to become gender-neutral (*The Guardian*, 2016). This debate highlights that such change reflects the progress made by Canada in terms of gender equality. Another case is the Austrian national anthem, “Land of Mountains”, the first verse of which was changed to recognise the country’s “great daughters” in addition to the pre-existing “great sons” (Pidd, 2011). Countries that have changed their national anthems for political reasons include: Iraq, after the fall of Saddam Hussein; Germany, following the Second World

War; and South Africa, after the end of apartheid. These examples highlight that national anthems are important for both delimiting national boundaries on the international level and, in the Canadian and Austrian cases, reflecting the status of women in the country.

I aim to analyse the Syrian national anthem, with lyrics by Khalil Mardam Bey and music by Mohammed Flayfel. It was adopted in 1938 following a national competition held by the government of Hashim al-Atassi to choose a national anthem for the republic two years after the Franco–Syrian Treaty of Independence. The fact that this song won the competition thanks to its popularity among the Syrian people reflects how its themes follow the national atmosphere reinforced by the Syrian founding fathers in the early 20th century.

For the purpose of this study, the lyrics of the national anthem will be analysed to see how gender is constructed and how it reflects the narrative of nationalism (Bohlman, 2004: 150). The national anthem employs the same early national gendered narrative of militarism, Arabism and history as the basis for the formulation of both national identity and belonging. Taking into consideration how these characteristics marginalise women and disregard women’s role in preserving history and culture (see Chapter Four), women’s status in the Syrian national anthem will be revealed by analysing its language and content.

On the linguistic level, sexism in national anthems has been debated in the Western context, although some would argue that the use of masculine terms such as “man” and “sons” are examples of the traditional use of the gender-inclusive masculine form (Nardelli & Sedghi, 2015). In the Syrian context, the use of masculine terms as gender-inclusive is problematic not only in terms of how women are represented, but also because of how they produce normalised conceptions of masculinity. This is

evidenced in the title of the Syrian anthem, as it is addressed particularly and exclusively to the “Guardians of the Fatherland” (*Hūmāt al-Dīyār*) – the army. Suffice to say that in Syria the army is the most salient institution in state-building, which in turn contributes to normalising a militaristic culture. The first verse reads:

Guardians of homeland, upon you be peace,
our ever-proud souls refuse to be seized.
The den of Arabism is our sacred home,
and the throne of our suns will never go down.⁸⁷

Starting by emphasising the cultural identity of the nation, Arabism is intimately linked with promoting the army as guardian of both the cultural and national boundaries. This promotion of the role of the army as preservers of culture indulges sacrificial heroism, which in turn marginalises women. The way the national anthem begins illustrates how the conception of “people” is defined and constructed. As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, the army is conceived as an educational institution and therefore part of the pedagogical process for the new generation. As such, the Syrian army is conceived as guardian both of the nation’s borders and citizens’ integrity. Moreover, these lines illustrate four defining pillars of national belonging and identity: readiness to die for the nation; the pride associated with courage and bravery; being an Arab; and everlasting national glory. While pride, glory and Arabism are associated with masculinism, this cultivation of the Syrian army in the national anthem demonstrates the identification of who represents the nation.

Mosse argues that most national anthems tell battle stories, because war and the birth of a nation are inseparable. As he states: “studying national anthems means examining how war was built into most nationalisms” (1993: 14). Mosse goes further,

⁸⁷ This English translation of the Syrian national anthem is by Muhamed Elhindi, and taken from Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humat_ad-Diyar Accessed 10 March 2015.

justifying the lyrics of national anthems as particularly concerned with death and sacrifice (1993: 15). Although this conception that the nation is a product of war might be true, such emphasis on the role of the army in the most obvious symbol of the nation seeks to perpetuate muscular nationality.

The promotion of a military ethos in the anthem is further echoed in the third verse, which deals with the masculinist achievements of men:

The flutter of our hopes and the beats of our hearts,
depicted on the flag that united our land.
Did we not derive the black from every man's eye,
and from ink of martyrs' blood wrote to the tall sky?

Since this verse is about Syrian people, their hopes, martyrs and flag, the related question is how these lines define them as a homogeneous category, and whether women are part of this constructed category. This verse not only appears to indulge men's heroic deeds in realising national unity but, more importantly, uses muscular expressions exemplified in the metaphor of "derive the black from every man's eye", which normalises violence. This further highlights how men's physical power is conceived as the mechanism for building a national identity, and for defining the nation.

In the same vein, the last verse significantly invokes the nation's historical heroes, such as Walid and Rashid. This configuration of the nation's glorious past creates a connection between the past and the present associated with heroism, glory and history, involving male figures. This begs the question of how women fit into this recreation of national membership:

Spirits defiant and past so glorious,
and the martyrs' souls are our guardians.
Walid is from us and so is Rashid,
so why won't we prosper and why wouldn't we build?

In fact, this employment of the past to maintain national glory is manifested in the pride of having Walīd and Rashīd as two great 'Ūmayyad leaders. As the Syrian founding fathers approached history selectively, the incorporation of these particular figures in the Syrian anthem is linked to masculinism. This invocation of a common past, the formation of a collective memory – by bringing examples of great male leaders to communicate myths – is a highly selective process of gender exclusion, identifying what counts as national history and thus who belongs to the nation.

Within the aforementioned narratives of Arabism, sacrifice and history, the army is conceived as the ultimate definer of both national culture and history. At the same time, the construction of group identity is affiliated with perpetuating a muscular ethos. Such masculinist identification of the people is linked to how history and sacrifice are reinvented within the national anthem. Hence, this manifestation of the people obscures women's status in the collective memory and further problematises their national belonging.

6.6 Conclusion

Read in the context of early national narratives, national symbols reveal the missing representation of women in the process of state consolidation. In these songs, the nation is perceived as a familial entity, reflecting the association between masculinist characteristics measured by conceptualising men as both political and patriarchal guardians; and the production of gender boundaries in both the public and private spheres. In this sense, songs have increasingly become a prominent form of discourse in the field of national identity that stimulate the communal experience of struggle, pain and suffering. By enforcing common conceptions of national experience, men are configured as guardians, protectors and heroes. The attempt to impose traits of patriotism and nationalist consciousness is characterised by a recuperative tendency to

celebrate a national identity defined by selective achievements, in particular military victories and physical strength.

Syrian national identity is composed of both cultural and political constructs. In terms of the cultural phase, the construction of masculinist interpretations of language, history and education (militarism) in the Syrian narrative has been reflected in the nationalist songs, by associating this cultural construction of identity with sacrificial heroism. In defining sacrifice, heroism and dignity as markers of men's national identity, the nation becomes bounded by a group of men. This, in turn, marginalises women's role in national memory. Thus, the cultural construction of national identity defines belonging by inciting an ethos of militarism in both the private and public spheres.

At the same time, for the political construction of national identity, three components (struggle, suffering and ideal man-warrior) emerged as definers of constructed binary opposition, symbolised by articulating the president as both a political leader and a father. The sovereignty of the state becomes reconciled with individualised masculine leadership and authority, which raises the question of women's status within national imagining. This glorification of the two Syrian presidents in nationalist songs masculinises national belonging, as the two mirror the hierarchical order in the family and the nation.

In the case of leadership cults, the conceptualisation of Hafez al-Assad is shaped by the conjunction of two roles: the father of heroic men and a historical knight who resembles national heroes from the past. This construction delineates the masculinisation of the private and public spheres as such roles symbolise hierarchy and domination. The construction of Bashar al-Assad as a lover subsequently reconfigures the nation as an imagined battlefield – a feminised territory guarded and defended by

both the leader of the nation and his men. At the same time, this feminised topography of the nation is further intensified by the love relationship between Bashar al-Assad and the nation. Such construction of a romanticised nexus between the leader and the nation justifies sexual domination and repression that evokes women as men's property.

By analysing these nationalist songs, one can say that they reconceptualise the past as a tale of sacrifice and create an emotional atmosphere filled with the spirit of comradeship and militarism. While reviving the nation's past involves a selective approach to its history, the configuration of heroic leaders from the past is connoted with the celebration of muscular strength that further underscores women's marginalisation. Such an approach conceptualises patriotism as a prerequisite for the realisation of manhood. Moreover, as these songs are devoted to the suffering and sacrifice of great men, the romanticisation of militarism, masculinity and bravery produces national membership suitable for men only. As these songs are heavy with references to glory, heroism and sacrifice as synonyms for courageous death, this symbolic construction of national belonging has therefore proved to be masculinist by dictating military values.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of this thesis, I recounted a presidential speech given in July 2015 that praised the role of the army in defending the fatherland and defining the politics of national belonging and identity. Two years later, speaking to an audience of diplomats in Damascus on 20 August 2017, Bashar al-Assad praised the role of the army and other militia groups for their role in protecting country's borders and creating a "homogeneous national community" (*mujtam 'a mutajanis*). He said:

We have lost our greatest men and our infrastructure that cost us a lot of money and sweat, that is right. Yet we have won a community that is much healthier and much more homogeneous ... this homogeneity is not a complement, but it is the basis of our national unity ... this homogeneity is the homogeneity of ideologies, cultures, ideas and visions ... when these characteristics become homogeneous ... it means that now we have only one colour; one national colour which means national unity. (al-Assad, 2017; author's translation).

This shows the extent of indoctrination propagated by the Syrian regime, emphasising that homogeneity is the only means to unify national consciousness and to create a solid national belonging. This notion of homogeneity not only blurs gender roles and specifications, but also reflects the conceptualisation of the "masses" as a cultural construct and not citizens. Given that the gender neutrality of this "homogeneous" national community is synonymous with masculinity (Chapter Three), the use of this term reflects the complicated status of women in national imagining since this homogeneity is measured by conformity to the ethos of hegemony and hierarchy. More importantly, it creates a horizontal national front, a construction of competing masculinities between the people (*sha'ab*) – masculinised group identity of the "homogeneous community" – and the leader. At the same time, the speech is a

continuation of the gender bias traced in the historical narrative of Syrian nationalism, but even after more than four decades and many years of war that has transformed women's lives in matters of their inclusion in politics, there is still no acknowledgement of their role when issues related to definitions of national belonging and identity are addressed.

The speech proves the relevance of this research topic as women who are central to nation formation are consciously ignored. Some would say that, given the geopolitical context in which Syria was created, there has always been a need to emphasise its being in a state of war and in constant defence of its creation. Although the invocation of manliness in Bashar al-Assad's speeches can be read in the context of the current war, this sort of narrative is not very distinct from the speeches of Hafez al-Assad (Wedeen, 1999: 54). The Syrian regime has always imposed a national narrative that Syria is in a state of emergency, in constant need of male protection and national defence, to legitimise the rule of the Ba'ath (see Hobsbawm, 1990: 10). Syria was brought into being by appropriating a national narrative to legitimise its authority and its circumscribed entity, and to subordinate women. The aim of this thesis has been to shed light on the role of national narratives in the process of maintaining and reinforcing masculinist national identity and belonging, a neglected field in the Syrian and Arab context.

The emergence, character and nature of the intersection between masculinism and nationalism in the Syrian context have been addressed by two overall research questions: What is Syrian nationalism and how is it ideologically borrowed from the two European schools of thought: Germanic and French? To what extent does investigating national narratives contribute to the perpetuation of masculinism in both

the state and society? On the basis of these questions, the following hypotheses were offered:

- National narratives express deeper aspects and meanings of national identity and belonging.
- National narratives produce a hegemonic conceptualisation of the nation and perpetuate gender bias in the state and society.
- The conceptualisation of the nation as an extension of the family naturalises women's subordination in the Constitution and legislation.
- The civic construction of nationalism has idealised militarism and conceptualised establishment of the state as synonymous with the passage to manhood.

The application of the hypotheses, and the relationship between the emergence of nationalism and women's subordination, have been considered by, first, defining what is Syrian nationalism by providing a thematically novel perspective to the origin of the ideological conceptions that had characterised early national thought in Syria, which still dominate both the political and cultural contexts. Second, the construction of masculinism has been investigated by deconstructing the language and national concepts of the ideologies of the three Syrian thinkers, al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi.

As I began this research, I intended to show the significance of analysing these ideologies in unearthing the subordinate status of women in both state and society by deconstructing three national narratives – philosophical, political and cultural – to highlight the role of nationalism in propagating masculinism as a prerequisite for realising national membership.

This thesis was guided by four objectives. First, I sought to provide a broader perspective of the origin of nationalism in Syria by tracing its ideological borrowings from the German and French schools of thought. This was crucial for identifying the evolution of Syrian national thought in its two phases, cultural and political. Second, the thesis investigated how masculinism has been constituted in the narratives of al-Husri, Aflaq and al-Arsuzi in both the cultural and political phases. Third, it examined how women have been constructed in these two phases by investigating whether they were perceived as part of the cultural formation of the nation or the civic establishment of the state. Finally, it investigated how the masculinist characteristics of Syrian nationalism have dominated the cultural narrative through nationalist songs not only as symbols of the consolidation of the state but also in regenerating gender hierarchy, hegemony and patriarchy, to create a hegemonic national identity and normalise masculinity and patriarchy.

In the attempt to analyse women's inclusion in or exclusion from the two phases of Syrian nationalism, two dominant models have been idealised in the Syrian national narrative. First, the patriarchal Ba'athi in the cultural phase that dominates the private sphere by preserving the cultural identity of the nation in terms of transmitting the language, representing history and defending the nation. Second, the citizen Ba'athi in the political phase that subjugates other men in this spectrum and creates a hierarchical order based on categorising men as passive versus active. This categorisation is further intensified and measured by the readiness of these active men not only to die for the nation but also to normalise struggle, masculinise citizenship and socialise martial strength. Third, these two Ba'athist models have been reinforced and idealised in the political narrative that further complicated women's relationship to citizenship and normalised their secondary rights in both the Constitution and legislation. Women's

subordination in the political narrative has been through associating the right to citizenship with the readiness to die for the nation. This emphasis on sacrificial heroism has relegated women's status as only men are conceived as defending the nation and preserving its honour by controlling women's sexuality and choices. Thus, the construction of masculinism and the idealisation of men's superiority as preservers of '*ird* (honour) and '*ard* (land/nation) in the political narrative is synonymous with the feminisation of the woman's body as a marker of the nation's boundaries.

This thesis highlighted the important role narrative plays in the perpetuation of gender bias in both state and society by showing how the early emergence of nationalism in Syria contributed to the maintenance of gender bias in the Constitution and Syrian culture. Notions of defence, heroism and struggle were central, dominant discourses of Syrian muscular nationalism in its cultural and political phases, directly linked to the perpetuation of a hegemonic, hierarchical and patriarchal model of national membership, and inculcating and maintaining a very specific nationalist version of heroic military Ba'athist man. While this study has not approached militarism in Syria as a distinctive institution that legitimises and consolidates the rule of the Ba'ath regime, it is conceived as an arena that intensifies gender boundaries and hegemonises national belonging and identity. Militarism, as a narrative propagated by the state, further exemplifies and honours a particular set of masculinities that act as signifiers of a national community composed only of strong men.

The relationship between the emergence of nationalism and masculinism in Syria is reciprocal and bidirectional in defining the contours of national belonging and identity. When scholars approached nationalism in the past, they focused on femininity and sidelined masculinity and its other modes of construction, such as hierarchy, hegemony and militarism. The significance of investigating the origin of nationalism in

Syria and how its emergence is co-constituted with masculinism, patriarchy, hegemony, hierarchy and militarism has been neglected. The co-emergence of these modes of construction is significant in the reinforcement of a national belonging and identity measured by idealising the ethos of manliness and manhood. This creation of identity politics bounded by realising the ideal image of the Ba'athi as both a warrior and a citizen excludes women from national imagining.

The political upheavals of the past few years have given Syria a fresh relevance not only to political scientists but also to scholars from an array of disciplines. However, despite this special status of Syria in political studies (see sections 1.2 and 2.2), construction of masculinism and how it is maintained and reinforced in Syrian national narratives is still one of the most ignored topics in both Syria and the Arab region. I have sought to examine any study from all the new literature that attributes gender bias in Syria to the exclusivist nature of nationalism.

While the focus has been on the growing violent crisis in Syria – ranging from sectarianism and terrorism to human trafficking and the influx of refugees – and the international community's response to it, nationalism in the context of the current crisis has been disregarded, at least as a research topic. The work presented in this thesis is therefore an invitation for further research. Sections 1.2, 2.2 and 3.2 provide some way forward in studying the relationship between women and politics in Syria, but further research in the area of nationalism will likely take some years to mature, especially alongside a turbulent political situation. I hope that the way I have proposed to make sense of the relationship between nationalism and masculinism will inspire other researchers to offer their contributions. There are two particular areas in need of research: the relevance of militarism in subjugating women's status and how this is related to the way national belonging and identity are formed in Syria; and how the

language used in national and constitutional narratives evolves in post-conflict Syria. This includes how Syrian national identity will be constructed at the official level by any future government, which should adopt a plural and gender-inclusive approach.

Another area where research is urgently needed relates to how national symbolism subordinates women in Syria. In Chapter Six, I presented clear evidence that Syrian nationalist songs reflect the masculinist narrative. Research is clearly needed to shed light on other forms of political symbolism propagated by the Ba'ath state not only to legitimise its rule but also to reinforce the secondary status of women. There is a need to highlight the importance of analysing how political symbols are produced and mobilised to generate and shape identities. This is also particularly important during the period of the Syrian Uprising to address the ways in which Syrian identity is evolving and emerging from the hegemony of Ba'athist institutions.

As explored in section 1.6, this thesis does not seek to analyse the rise of an Islamist narrative before and during the Syrian Uprising for reasons related to limitation of time and scope. However, future research can be undertaken on investigating whether Islamist groups such as *Kuftaru* and *Qubisiat* have empowered women and how their tactics in preserving religious identity in the political struggle against the regime have empowered women socially and culturally, but still undermined them politically.⁸⁸

There is also a continuing need to make such research available in Arabic. As noted in Chapter Five, the studies conducted on the political status of women in the Constitution and Syrian laws is of interest to some scholars but not matched by the availability of scholarly work that demonstrates this interest in the Arabic language. Scholarly works in Arabic on how language is used in both the Constitution and Syrian

⁸⁸ For further reading on the rise of these two Islamist groups in Syria, see Imady, 2016.

laws are also scant. This has created an intellectual gap. However, in general, research on the refugee crisis is growing constantly, evidenced by the rise in the number of conferences, journals and books dedicated to this topic in Europe. Such interest leaves other topics, such as women's status in Syria, underdeveloped.

7.1 Reflections

Finally, it is important to point to non-academic interest in the question of investigating the idea of national identity and politics in Syria. During the final stages of writing my conclusion, I was invited to take part in a roundtable discussion organised by the Rethink Rebuild Society (*Orient News*, 2017).⁸⁹ This event asked: Are we still Syrians? And what makes us Syrians? It was a great opportunity for my research and proved timely and relevant. Moreover, it was a response to a growing need to define what drives our identity and what makes us Syrians in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising. I was keen to take part for two reasons. First, I wanted to know if my academic pursuit in understanding Syrian nationalism and how it has imposed particular definitions of belonging and identity was an arcane intellectual investigation; but I discovered that the research findings are relevant and shared in reality. Second, I was very interested to find out whether these topics are of interest to women and whether men identify and measure their identities and belonging by masculinist prowess.

In the event, the participants expressed great interest in discovering what drives our national identity and who is worthy of being Syrian. The discussion revolved around two types of belonging, romantic and civic. The participants (both male and female) defined their belonging to Syria as involuntary, natural and familial. They demonstrated that they are resolutely attached to the idea of a motherland by shared culture, language

⁸⁹ Rethink Rebuild Society is a British-based non-profit organisation that works to improve the lives of Syrians in the UK and help them become positively established in British society.

and history. There were arguments that the pride of being Syrian stems from the heroic deeds of our fathers and grandfathers. The male participants, in particular, referred to Syria as a mother to which they are emotionally attached. Despite this, they discussed how Syria should develop in terms of building its civic institutions and the need for basic principles of citizenship, democracy and the rule of law. These revelations reflected how this thesis has defined Syrian nationalism as composed of two overlapping yet complementary phases, cultural/primordial and civic/modernist.

More importantly, the discussion also centred on the nature and origin of our sense of national identity. The participants were quite aware that nationalism is a constructed entity that has been used by the Ba'ath regime to incite hegemony, authority and stability. However, they did not see it as also gender exclusive; even the women emphasised the role of women in instilling the sense of Syrian nationhood in the future generation through preserving traditions, culture and language.

While this was an open discussion on one of the most widely discussed topics of the 21st century, the male participants expressed their sadness at leaving Syria and not being able to defend and preserve its borders. Some concluded that they were not worthy of being Syrians due to losing the honour of carrying arms and defending the nation, while others expressed their desire to go back to die on its soil. The extensive use of two terms – “dignity” (*karāmah*) and “virility” (*rūjūlah*) – in association with identifying what constitutes national identity constructs a national belonging based on a masculinist ethos. These revelations reflect the core finding of my research, which is that the constructed narrative of nationalism has so far perpetuated sacrificial heroism and militarism as synonymous with the creation of the nation; the rite of manhood and the passage to nationhood is identical and reciprocal.

The participation and observation of such an event impelled me to reflect on my personal position towards this research. Indeed, it was necessary to address the role of my identity in framing my research questions and analyses. As this notion of reflexivity is gaining increasing interest in social sciences, especially among researchers who study topics such as identity and belonging, raising questions about reflexivity is intimately linked with the “meaning and limits of ‘objectivity’ in scientific inquiry” (Suleiman, 2006: 52). Suleiman demonstrates the importance of reflexivity for scholars, particularly those “writing about identity [as they] may in some sense be driven by personal concerns, even anxieties, about their own personal identity. Writing about identity, a scholar may in fact use the occasion, knowingly or unknowingly, to grapple with issues of personal identity” (2006: 51).

Addressing the quest for objectivity in social science, Letherby, Scott and Williams note that those working in social studies need to “challenge some of the simplistic understandings of and values attached to so-called ‘objective scientific’ approaches” (2013: 1). In this context, Haraway (1988) provides an excellent discussion on the meaning of objective approach in the field of women’s studies. Haraway highlights the problematic definition of objectivity as it is defined as “an external, disembodied point of view” that claims to provide an omnipresent perspective (1988: 584). Such a definition highlights the privilege given to “Unmarked Bodies”, a person considered part of the majority of a given society, so they are “neutral” (1988: 582). However, “Marked Bodies” are considered less neutral as they are part of marginalised groups (ibid.), such as women or ethnic, social and religious minorities. Following Haraway’s conception that knowledge is situated, and admitting that the knowledge produced in this research is opposed to the point of view of the unmarked (the omnipresent positioning), and reflects and is affected by my own specific positioning

(1988: 586), I cannot deny the influence of my own personal identity in this research, as a woman and a Syrian and, more importantly, as someone who has lived under this despotic and militaristic regime. This experience of living in such situations led me to this research topic.

In a period when it had become impossible for any Syrian not to develop strong political positions and alignments, I demonstrated at the beginning of this research that I had asked myself: What does Syria mean to me, an insider-outsider? While my position and experience as an insider allowed me to highlight the need to investigate the origins of gender bias in national narratives, as an outsider, being constructed in this narrative, has required me to research the topic in the most objective and impersonal way possible.

As these personal and political enquiries persist, there will be questions related to what the future holds for the Syrian people, and how women will be portrayed in any newly employed nationalist ideology, though currently they are not included in the peace negotiations. Nonetheless, at present the process of nation-building while fighting despotic regimes and terrorist groups continues, with interethnic and sectarian relations fundamentally altered by the changes in power relations. Indeed, in such circumstances, development of nationalism in Syria will be confronted by the failure to create any stable government in the future. However, in the event of the fall of the Ba'athist regime, the writing and rewriting of history will be intimately linked to currents and fashions in national politics. An externally imposed state or political system that does not support and encourage a gender-inclusive policy would slavishly follow the same exclusivist pattern of Syrian nationalism.

Given the geopolitical context of the Syrian case, this thesis has answered an important question as to what constitutes Syrian nationalism and how it is used to

perpetuate masculinism. In fact, the Syrian people face many scenarios that carry a particular set of nationalistic sentiments. While hoping that the current Syrian regime will cease to have power over mobilising a national narrative of any sort in the near future, we are still faced with fierce speculation and personal questions as to what is the nation and how we define our national love and belonging. Closely related to this enquiry is how much this nationalism will still have an implicit impact on defining our identity and belonging. How much have Syrians internalised the Ba'athist ethos and ideals? Will the Syrian war impose new definitions of national ideologies based on different geographical entities? The attempt to answer these questions will appeal to a wider audience beyond the important core of scholars and students in the social sciences, particularly those with an interest in nationalism, who will be its key constituency.

Syrian national belonging and identity has become a persistent topic. The unique opportunity to study the origin of national ideology and relate it to women's subordination shaped the central contribution of this thesis. The example of Syria thus presents an extraordinary opportunity to explore the ways in which nationalism generates and imbues masculinist ethos and values. Although this thesis is not, strictly speaking, comparative, its findings and insights should have relevance for other countries in the region. As a scholar investigating why nationalism has been masculinist, and how interrogating its origin is significant for understanding its exclusivist nature, my research efforts beyond this thesis will be concentrated on chronicling women's role in the Syrian Uprising and how, in a context free of imposed nationalism from the Ba'ath regime, women continue to be disregarded. Understanding why women are still not being included in remaking the nation will likely continue to attract research interest for many years to come.

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