

The 'Woman Question' in the Aftermath of the Great Syrian Revolt:

A Transnational Dialogue from the Arab-Argentine Immigrant Press

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Beyond the geographical borders of the Middle East, discourses and debates about Middle Eastern women played an important role in the Arabic immigrant press in the *Mahjar* (diaspora). This article explores the particular case of *al-Istiklaal* in the final moments and aftermath of the Great Syrian Revolt, “the largest, longest, and most destructive of the Arab Middle Eastern revolts” (Provence, 2005, p. 12). From its first issue in June 1926 until late 1929, this Arab-Argentine newspaper systematically attacked the French Mandate and advocated for an independent Syria and Lebanon, which should be part of a larger pan-Arab political entity. Although *al-Istiklaal* was a political publication produced by men and intended for a male audience,² it nonetheless introduced women as an iconographic and discursive element. *Al-Istiklaal* incorporated in its issues visual images of female activists and prominent Middle Eastern and European women along with editorial articles on debates about the veil and education that, to some extent, reproduced those taking place in Syria and Lebanon. What were the reasons that led a pan-Arab political publication in Buenos Aires to include women? What was the relationship with the politics expressed in the publication? How did *al-Istiklaal* reproduce or transform general debates on women and gender in the late 1920s in the Middle East?

Although still in its early stages, the literature on Syrian and Lebanese immigrants in Argentina is a growing field with groundbreaking works from scholars such as Ignacio Klich, Michael Humphrey, Gladys Jozami, Christina Civantos, and Margot Scheffold, among others. Their studies explore the intersections between identity, ethnicity, and nationality in the context of a heterogeneous immigrant community that dates back from the last decade of the nineteenth century. As is the case with Middle Eastern studies literature, however, women have been a neglected subject in most of these works (Fleischmann, 1999, p. 93). This article builds on previous work in the field and sheds light on how general debates in Syria and Lebanon on the 'Woman Question'³ in the 1920s were adopted and, in some cases, adapted to accommodate the special characteristics of *al-Istiklaal* as a pan-Arab newspaper published in Argentina. The 'Woman Question', thus, becomes an analytical tool to explore the tensions that originated in the intersection between national identity and transnational nationalism as represented in *al-Istiklaal*.

The Great Revolt: the Courage of Exceptional Women in Exceptional Times

Al-Istiklaal came into being in June 1926 as a political and