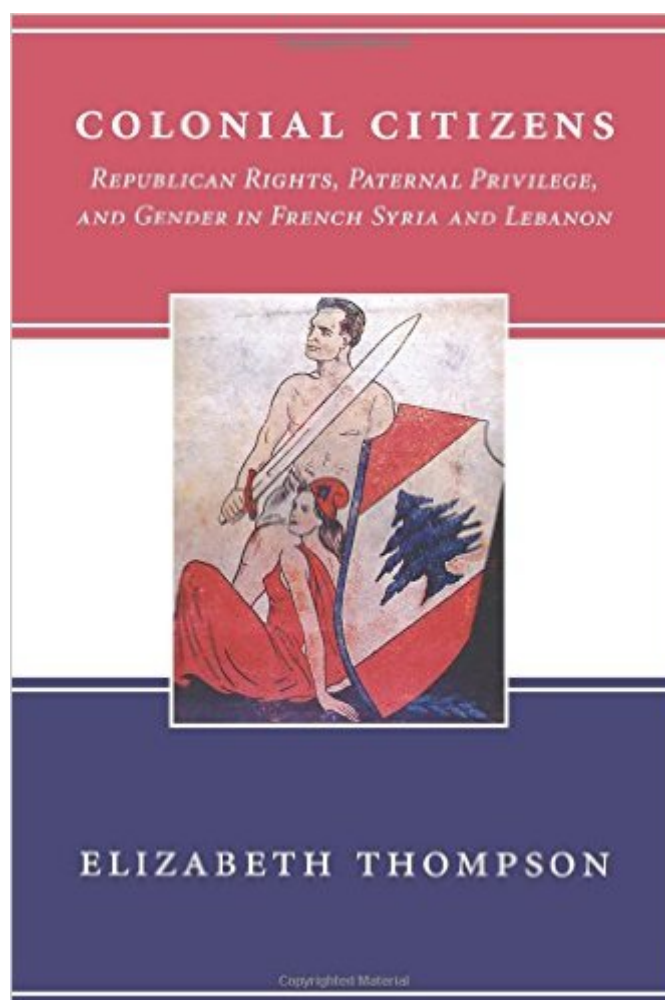


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# Colonial Citizens



## Synopsis

French rule in Syria and Lebanon coincided with the rise of colonial resistance around the world and with profound social trauma after World War I. In this tightly argued study, Elizabeth Thompson shows how Syrians and Lebanese mobilized, like other colonized peoples, to claim the terms of citizenship enjoyed in the European metropole. The negotiations between the French and citizens of the Mandate set the terms of politics for decades after Syria and Lebanon achieved independence in 1946. *Colonial Citizens* highlights gender as a central battlefield upon which the relative rights and obligations of states and citizens were established. The participants in this struggle included not only elite nationalists and French rulers, but also new mass movements of women, workers, youth, and Islamic populists. The author examines the "gendered battles" fought over France's paternalistic policies in health, education, labor, and the press. Two important and enduring political structures issued from these conflicts: First, a colonial welfare state emerged by World War II that recognized social rights of citizens to health, education, and labor protection. Second, tacit gender pacts were forged first by the French and then reaffirmed by the nationalist rulers of the independent states. These gender pacts represented a compromise among male political rivals, who agreed to exclude and marginalize female citizens in public life. This study provides a major contribution to the social construction of gender in nationalist and postcolonial discourse. Returning workers, low-ranking religious figures, and most of all, women to the narrative history of the region—figures usually omitted—*Colonial Citizens* enhances our understanding of the interwar period in the Middle East, providing needed context for a better understanding of statebuilding, nationalism, Islam, and gender since World War II.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Thompson's work was a good read, and her writing style was interesting and engaging. Her research is admirable as well as her clarity. However, too often she failed to make connections intended to be formed between her ideology and research. There are a few key, general criticisms I have. The book has poor understanding of the term "subaltern", misidentifying it with social groups which are not. Ironically, she neglects to discuss one social group under the mandate totally, the Shi'a, thus, reconfirming their subaltern status. Moreover, though she claims to have done so, she fails to say anything meaningful or significant about Islam whatsoever. Also, events and individuals are not often historicized enough in that background events are neglected and omitted which are key to understanding the time period.

Of the dozens and dozens of books that I've begrudgingly bought throughout undergrad, this is one of the most memorable and insightful, and one that I will definitely not be selling back for cash. A great buy!

The sociological/psychological undercurrents of history have long fascinated me. Problematic and intangible, it is often difficult to grasp the more fragile, subtle details of past events. Often, the same difficulty occurs with current events. Therefore, reconstructing and understanding historical events is even more difficult. In *Colonial Citizens*, Elizabeth Thompson makes an attempt at this challenging task. She frames the events of French Mandate era Syria and Lebanon in familial terms, labeling the sequence overall, a "crisis of paternity." Undoubtedly, if we were to ask any of the men in that time period the reason for their actions, they would likely give a very pragmatic, political reply. However, as Freud has illustrated, humans are often themselves unaware of their motivations. Subsequently, Thompson's argument, in many places seems on purely visceral indications to be solid. There are places in the text, however, that the familial relational terms seem strained. There are portions of the text where it seems that the events were not framed by the citizens themselves in gendered terms, but Thompson continued that language because this is the frame she chose. Gender relations is the viewpoint from which she approaches the issues, and it is possible that this perspective isn't appropriate for all the matters discussed in the text.

Colonial Citizens won the 2000 Joan Kelly Memorial Prize for best book in women's history from the American Historical Association.

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