CHAPTER 10

Remapping the Urban Landscape

State reform and economic change reorganized city life in a process that had begun long before, and accelerated under, French rule. Most significant politically were the sheer expansion of the space deemed public and the incription of new class boundaries into the urban landscape. Both of these changes in turn entailed the redrawing of gender boundaries.

Public space existed in cities long before the French mandate. Streets, baths, fountains, bakeries, coffeehouses, and markets were accessible generally to the population. Custom, however, regulated access to certain groups, in what was a broad spectrum between the universally public and the most private.[1] Gender marked the extremes of the spectrum. Perhaps the most unrestricted, or public, spaces were streets, which elite women avoided altogether and where other women customarily veiled. The most restricted, or private, spaces were the women's quarters in homes, where unrelated males were never permitted. Between these extremes, there were many gradations of public and private. People generally socialized within their own quarter, among people who were familiar to them. Multiple families might, for example, share a courtyard where space was used in common by a restricted few. Streets, baths, coffeehouses, and other services in a particular urban quarter were customarily used only by its residents or a habitual clientele. The leader of the quarter (mukhtar) or a strongman (qabaday) would regulate the quarter's customs and intervene against troublesome outsiders.[2] Common space was thus shared locally, and was generally not divided by class, as most quarters contained a mix of rich and poor. Likewise, religious divisions were irregular: while cities might have had predominantly Muslim, Jewish, or Christian quarters, most quarters were mixed. Christians and Jews tended to mix with Muslims in bathhouses (provoking periodic reprimands from ulama), and often worked alongside Muslims in shops.[3] Gender boundaries to communal space were

more strict, but did not entirely exclude women. While only men customarily gathered in coffeehouses, women turned bathhouses in community centers, where they lounged with neighbors and relatives.[4]

The wider horizons of the public, binding people unknown to one another, generally stretched no farther than the city limits. People identified themselves as Aleppine or Damascene, and only rarely as Ottoman. Aside from the relatively few soldiers, government officials, traveling merchants, and scholars, and those who managed pilgrimage to Mecca, contact or even knowledge of people outside of one's home city was limited to relatives who might reside in an ancestral village or another town. Most people, in fact, identified mainly with their own quarter, although there were some spaces where they mixed with the wider urban population. The sense of urban unity was perhaps most strongly felt in the central markets, where people of all quarters might sell and shop with the broadest array of strangers.[5] Likewise, the Friday mosque marked the heart of the city, and was its largest assembly space. Like smaller neighborhood mosques, it was used for a variety of communal activities. However, mosques were not unrestrictedly public, since only Muslim males customarily met in them. Christian and Jewish communal life focused separately on their local churches and synagogues. And while there were no formally public parks, certain spaces were customarily open for general leisure. In Damascus, men often lounged along the Barada River (women also did so, at times provoking moral outrage). In both Aleppo and Damascus, families would make picnics in the orchards that surrounded the city.[6]

In the late nineteenth century, the Ottoman state and European investors began to expand and reshape the urban public. Links among individual urban quarters were strengthened with the construction of tramways in Tripoli, Beirut, and Damascus. Aleppo expanded to the northwest of its walled city from the 1860s onward, where railroad stations anchored new commercial districts and bourgeois quarters. Clocktowers were built in the centers of Aleppo, Beirut, and other cities, marking a new concern with common timekeeping.[7] Social horizons also expanded beyond an individual city with increased ease of communication. A French-built carriage road connected Beirut and Damascus in 1863. In the 1880s, the Tripoli-Homs-Damascus and Baalbek-Beirut highways were built. And by the turn of the century, railroads and telegraph networks also linked the cities.

The Ottomans and Europeans also built new civic centers in major cities. In Damascus, Midhat Pasha, governor between 1878 and 1880, paved over the Barada River and built a new public garden and courthouse just west of the old city walls. These became the nucleus of the city's new civic center, Marja Square, built between 1895 and 1914. Marja became the node of the city's telegraph and

tramway lines and featured the Serail (government palace), a large police station, a hospital, a multi-storey office building, and several hotels. To the east of the square, new covered bazaars were built, notably the extensive Hamidiya market (Suq al-Hamidiya), which stretched to the Umayyad mosque. To the west rose the Hijaz railway station and the Victoria Hotel. Marja's theaters and cafes offered nightly entertainment, including music, circus acts, and dancers. In the late 1920s cafe singers became choice entertainment among elites in Syria and Lebanon.[8]

In Beirut, private initiatives and foreign capital contributed heavily to changing the urban landscape, particularly in the 1890s economic boom. By the turn of the century, the city's bustling commercial district revolved around Burj Square (also called Place des Canons or Martyrs' Square), first built as a public park in 1884. Like Damascus's Marja, it hosted modern hotels, theaters, and cafes, as well as major tramline stops. In 1900, the new Orosdi-Beck department store and a railway station opened on the city's northern shore, near the port. A government center was established west of Burj Square, where the Hamidiya fountain was dedicated near the Grand Serail, the Ottoman government headquarters and future seat of the French High Commission. Bordering a working class district, the new square (later named for nationalist leader Riyad al-Sulh) became a gathering ground during Muslim holidays and a major commercial district. World War I hastened the pace of change, as Jemal Pasha demolished whole neighborhoods in Beirut to make way for wide avenues.[9] In all three major cities, the new civic centers coexisted with the "madina," the old city's central markets, artisanal districts and mosques. But they also gradually transformed the relationship of the quarters to one another, as the tramlines and avenues that radiated from them broke down neighborhood barriers and attracted large numbers of people to gather in one central location.

While French urban planning followed Ottoman precedents, it produced distinctively colonial social effects. The French amplified Ottoman efforts to expand the new civic centers and build new extramural quarters. In Damascus this led to a polarization of the "modern" and "traditional" city. The French settled and Europeanized the Salihiya quarter northwest of Marja, where their barracks, Officers' Club, and lycées were located. Urban elites were attracted to the district's modern amenities, where together with the French they developed a lifestyle distant from that in the old quarters they left behind. The relationship of domestic and public space changed, for example. Elite families left behind their households built around an internal courtyard for villas and apartments built on wide avenues. There, they took pleasure in gardens built outside the home or strolled in newly created public parks and

along sunny boulevards. Some elite men took to taking walks and picknicking in public with their wives, although others frowned upon the practice.[10] A 1930 cartoon satirized the new potential for male-female interaction in places like Marja Square, showing two flapper-style women being pursued by gentlemen in fezzes (fig. 12).[11] In contrast, French architects sought to preserve and contain the "traditional" city within the old walls, a policy pursued in other colonial cities. They carefully restored old monuments like the eighteenth-century 'Azm Palace and routed automobile traffic away from the old quarters.[12] Reciprocally, popular leaders in the old quarters asserted a new conception of "traditional" life there to be protected from French influence. It was in these quarters, for example, that Islamic populists built their schools. Customary processions on religious holidays, especially the Prophet's birthday, took on a new political meaning as defiant assertions of a lifeworld resistant to colonial interference.[13]

As France's headquarters, Beirut followed a slightly different pattern. The old city was entirely obliterated by French urban development, so social polarization progressed not between competing centers, but between the French-dominated center and outlying districts. New was the increased presence of foreigners, particularly French. The number of foreigners in Beirut had remained under five percent of the population until World War I, then rose to 15 percent in the mandate period.[14] The French concentrated both west of the center city, along the shoreline between the Grand Serail and the Avenue des Français, and to its south, where the French hospital and St. Joseph University were. Avenues radiating from this center were named for French generals. The Lebanese population of the city was split between the francophile, Christian, bourgeois quarters of Ashrafiya, Sayfi, and Ghabah in the east, integrated into the republican regime, and the popular districts to the west and south, like Musaytba, where a diverse mix of rural migrants settled, and where new sectarian movements catered to residents' feeling of marginalization in the city. The city's first bidonvilles sprouted around its neglected edges.[15] Ras Beirut, a wealthy enclave around the American University of Beirut at the western end of town, developed its own brand of nationalist, dissident, but elite culture.

Beirut's elites adopted European customs more rapidly than their Damascene cousins did. In relatively prosperous middle-class homes in Damascus, families still slept on bedrolls on the floor and used common utensils at meals eaten by the light of gas lamps; many purchased their first electric lamps, chairs, and sets of dinner plates only in the 1930s.[16] In contrast, by the early 1920s Beirut's bourgeois villas were already equipped with Czech and Belgian bathroom fixtures, German aluminum cooking utensils, and French silver-

ware. Toothbrushes were introduced shortly before the war, and by 1927 an estimated 60 percent of the Beirut population used them. While knives and forks appeared as early as the 1870s, European-style beds and dining tables were generally used by Beirut's upper and middle classes by 1932. New to the postwar period were the luxuries that electricity could provide: electric doorbells, fans, and refrigerators appeared in elite homes in the 1930s.[17] The imported furnishings and gadgetry were not entirely practical, from a social viewpoint. While they offered status and convenience, they also strained budgets. In the mid-1930s, a Beiruti complained to an American visitor that the conventions of a European lifestyle made it too expensive to play the customary role of hospitable host:

> With the use of furniture, beds and individual rooms, instead of sleeping on mattresses on the floor, and with the need for dining at tables with knives and forks and china, and the service of meals in courses, instead of sitting on the floor in Arab fashion all gathered around one central tray, it has become very difficult to welcome whole-heartedly and entertain indefinitely any number of guests as we used to do.[18]

Perhaps because of the increasing cost of home entertainment, homes became more private, and the expanding bourgeoisie began to socialize more in clubs, restaurants, and hotels. In Beirut, the Avenue des Français became crowded with hotels, cafes, cinemas and restaurants. The number of hotels in Beirut nearly doubled from 1923 to 1929, and continued to increase in the 1930s. Beirut's restaurants also increased in number during the same period, from 21 to 32.[19] In Damascus, a similar but slower trend ensued: In the 1930s, the new Orient Palace Hotel supplanted the Victoria Hotel as the new bourgeoisie's preferred spot to socialize, and Marja's cafe culture migrated northwest toward Salihiya, where it attracted an exclusively rich clientele. The annual balls for the Red Cross and Drop of Milk Society were now held in hotels, glittering affairs noted in the press for their excess of electric lights. In 1928, an article on the winter social season noted that Damascus had become "unrecognizable," in that the previous year receptions had been held at socialites' homes and had been "more or less tiring for women," who had to prepare them. This year, however, the receptions had moved to hotels, clubs and cafes and so were "more gay and chic, and less fatiguing for everyone."[20] While mostly a male milieu, nightlife drew increasing numbers of women, at first foreign and Christian. By the mid-1930s, even some Muslim women attended mixed-sex charity balls.

The difference in the gendering of elite sociability in Christian-dominated Beirut and Muslim Damascus may be captured by a look at women's shopping. Bourgeois women in both cities, as we have seen, began spending more of their leisure time outside the home, gathering at one another's homes to plan charity work and the like. By the 1930s in Beirut, women had stopped asking their husbands' permission every time they left the home. Whereas men had always done the household shopping, women increasing undertook that task.[21] The new consumption lifestyle of the rich also drove them to the stores. Beirut's downtown shopping districts were identified with "modern" fashion. By 1914, Christian Beirutis had generally adopted Parisian styles of dress. A decade later, both Syrian and Lebanese women wore French high heels.[22] And while most Muslim women in Beirut continued to wear veils until the early 1940s, they would pull them off downtown, only to don them again when they returned to their home neighborhoods.[23] No such shopping district existed in Damascus. For bourgeois Damascene women, Beirut became the focus of longing, a local Paris where they might shop freely for the latest fashions.[24] At home, however, their husbands still did most of the shopping, as it was considered indecent for notable women to walk in the street.

However, a prominent sociologist of the day, Kazem Daghestani, blamed Damascene women's supposed idleness at home for their "morbidity" and tendency toward "lesbian love." He applauded women's charity work as a healthy means of ousting women from their pathological nests.[25] Clearly attitudes toward space were changing. Women's quarters of the home, the most private of spaces marking the family's honor, were now viewed by at least some bourgeois elites as potential dens of idleness and sin. One must be careful, however, to distinguish the Europeanized bourgeoisie from other elites who remained in old quarters and adhered to customary lifestyles, shunning the new trends. Lutfi al-Haffar, a leader of the Syrian National Bloc, for example, never learned French and maintained the family traditions of his native quarter of Shaghur, despite his move to the francophone Salihiya quarter of Damascus. While he permitted his daughter to study at French schools, he kept her under tight supervision at home, much to her dismay. The Haffars, like the middling and lower classes, pursued a very active social life focused on visits, weddings, and holiday celebrations at home with relatives and neighbors. Women often held monthly receptions for other women in their homes.[26]

While the mandate period saw the full emergence of distinctly bourgeois spaces and lifestyles, it also introduced a new mass culture. What was restricted to the elite in the late Ottoman period now spread to middle and lower classes, as a new phase of capitalist penetration swept in a multitude of

imported consumer goods and practices. By the mid-1920s little girls in the mountains of Lebanon wore imported French dresses and by the early 1940s a set of household inventories showed that average families in Syria frequently owned numerous imported or Western-style products: electric irons, imported dress shirts, toothbrushes, aspirin, electric lamps, telephones, packaged cookies, canned meat, tuna and sardines, chairs made of iron and wood, and even some gramophone records.[27]

Technology underpinned the growth of mass culture, creating wider spaces where individuals might associate. Before the Great War, only the most wealthy could travel to Cairo, Istanbul, and Europe in search of broader cultural horizons. A quarter-century later, railroads, automobiles, and airplanes brought information from the neighboring cities and the farthest reaches of the globe into every quarter of the city. A Lebanese schoolteacher, for example, recalled how her middle-class family took a tour of Hama, Homs, and Damascus by train in 1927.[28] Train travel was soon superseded, as airports were built in the major cities and as motor transport boomed. There were virtually no civilian automobiles in the Levant in 1918 (and only a very few before the war); by 1939 there were 11,511 registered cars, trucks, buses, and motorcycles.[29] Most cars were taxis for hire within or between cities; a trip between Damascus and Beirut in 1932 took only three hours. Many roads were still bad enough, though, that a trip from Beirut to Aleppo took 12 hours.[30]

Electricity not only made charity balls glamorous, but expanded the horizons of the urban public with extended tramlines, radio and telephones. Electricity was introduced to Damascus and Beirut before World War I. In 1920, Beirut had only 800 subscribers for electricity, but by the early 1930s, electrical lines were installed in many Lebanese villages. Aleppo's first municipal electric plant opened in 1924 and the Hama-Homs plant in 1928.[31] With the reception of Cairo radio stations from 1934 and the opening of Radio-Levant in 1938 another new public realm emerged. More than 11,000 radios were sold between 1933 and 1938, many of them played continuously in public places like cafes and barber shops. Taxis and buses often paused in villages still without electricity to allow locals to hear broadcasts on their radios.[32] Arabic and European classical music, Qur'an readings, and news programs dominated radio programming. Telephones, long restricted to military networks, spread gradually during the 1930s to wealthy homes, individual offices, and public places. By 1935, there were phone booths at most busy intersections of large cities.[33] In 1939, more than 13 million local calls were made from 7,660 telephones in the region. An additional 1.1 million calls were made between Syrian and Lebanese cities.[34]

Also important in fostering mass culture, and mass politics, was the proliferation of popular meeting places. In 1925, the sanitary police designated in Damascus alone 214 locations as public spaces, including baths, hotels, restaurants, and theaters. Of the total of 544 public spaces in all of Syria, 231 were cafes, a time-honored meeting spot. There were also 45 theaters in the country, concentrated in the cities of Aleppo and Damascus.[35] People also met in train stations, libraries, and most of all in the growing numbers of schools. It had been out of encounters in elite schools that the bourgeois nationalist and women's movements had formed by World War I; in the 1930s, the proliferation of schools would foster much larger middle-class youth movements.

The mandatory state constructed a new regulatory apparatus to control these new forms of sociability, which had been largely unforeseen in the Ottoman laws. Automobile licenses and road regulations were issued in the early 1930s.[36] The French not only obliged all male citizens to carry identity cards, but also strengthened Ottoman laws regulating public meetings and requiring all associations to register with the state.[37] Public buildings were regularly inspected for health, safety, and political violations. Extensive regulations were imposed on all music halls and night clubs. Extreme policing measures were taken after times of rebellion. In 1928, for example, it was impossible for a civilian to obtain a street map of Damascus without making a written request to the municipality.[38]

In sum, the expansion of public space fostered new and broader forms of socialization, and new forms of conflict. New city centers and their adjacent quarters for elite leisure created new class boundaries, and upset old gender boundaries. The new centers stood as glittering, opposing poles to old city centers focused on the declining artisanal districts and Friday mosques, where religious norms governed sociability, not the pursuit of "modern" fashion and leisure. The graduated spectrum of restricted to unrestricted urban space, where social life concentrated within quarters populated by familiar faces, was now punctuated with novel and confusing new usages of space by people who were strangers to one another. Finally, the state's growing claims to regulate public morality over widening swaths of urban terrain increasingly pre-empted local authority over communal space in individual city quarters. What had been a presumption of power by the Ottomans became more controversial when the French assumed control of the state.

Just as gender had once marked what was most public and most private in urban space, it would become the bounding principle in conflicts over control and use of the new spaces in the cityscape. As women increasingly moved through the city, in pursuit of work, education, leisure or their rights, along

with them moved the old markers of public and private boundaries. With each footstep women seemed to shake the social and political order. Symptomatic of this disturbance, at a mundane level, was a running debate on where women should walk on sidewalks. The Beirut journal *al-Haris* answered in 1928 that they should walk at the side of their male escorts, away from the street.[39] While gender integration in public was perhaps most remarkable among elites, it also progressed among lower levels of the populace. The postwar influx of rural refugees disrupted norms of sex segregation in popular quarters of cities, as rural women were accustomed to working and to going about unveiled. A photograph taken in Damascus just after the Ottoman evacuation, for example, shows numerous poor and unveiled women milling about the streets alongside men (fig. 13). In the coming years, the decline of family-based artisanal businesses sent more women across town to wage-earning jobs, often as housemaids, traveling by foot along streets or by tram or bus, where they mixed with strange men. Likewise, while schools were segregated by sex, girls had to travel to them in unsegregated streets and tramcars.

As the subsequent chapters of Part Four will show, women found themselves at the intersection of multiple urban battlefronts, between nationalists and colonizers, between religious and secular interests, and between rich and poor classes. In a curious twist the most radically modernized city, Beirut, which had lost its old center and had long been dominated by Christians, saw the least conflict. Tension flared most violently in cities with the greatest Muslim majority, Damascus, Tripoli, Homs, and Hama, which remained in the 1930s far more segregated according to gender. It was there that "modern" and "traditional" had been constructed in the most polarized, zero-sum terms.