PART IV

GENDERING THE PUBLIC: SPATIAL BOUNDARIES OF THE COLONIAL CIVIC ORDER

In 1929, a year after Nazira Zayn al-Din published her explosive book on unveiling, the Damascene newspaper *Les Echos* printed a front-page cartoon depicting a man with a fez on his head and a veil over his face, walking down an arch-covered street. He fumbled along blindly with a cane and a leashed dog, while ahead stood a woman with short hair and a flapper-style dress, waiting impatiently for him to catch up (fig. 11). The caption read: "The World Turned Upside Down—To Each His Turn."[1] In 1930, the front page of another Damascene paper featured the article "Let Men Unveil Before Women: Is There in Lebanon a Fully Masculine People Who Defends Honor?" It diagnosed a disease among Lebanese Muslim men that had originated in their humiliation and suffering during World War I, and now debilitated their patriotism, evidenced by their silent surrender to the "rape" of French occupation. The phrase "let men unveil before women" was attributed to one of Lebanon's few nationalists, who called upon men to demand their honor before permitting women's liberation. The article opined, "Isn't it ludicrous that Miss Zayn al-Din writes a book calling for respect of women's freedom, while no male writer dares to address a word of reproof to the sons of the coast [Lebanese men] for their silence and surrender?"[2]

The issues of the veil and women's personal status discussed in Part Three were debated not just in the dry terms of law, but in a climate of men's fear of demasculinization. Men's anxiety, as expressed in the press, intertwined the politics of personal gender relations with the politics of the larger civic order.

Both cartoon and article portrayed shifting relations between men and women as a zero-sum contest that was conducted not just in the home, but also in public. Women's unveiling, or emergence from seclusion, necessitated the occultation of men; there could be no equilibrium. The cartoon ambiguously suggested either that men were the veiled ones, fumbling blindly toward modernity, or that women's liberation had handicapped men in a world turned upside down. The article argued that Lebanese men had been triply unmanned, first by the war, then by the French, and now by their own women. The reversal in gender power relations threatened, in the writer's view, to neutralize (or neuter) men as a political force.

Anxiety was expressed not only in the pages of the press, but in the streets of the city as well. While women were denied suffrage, they voted with their feet: Thousands since World War I had begun to leave their homes each day to take up wage-paying jobs, attend school, go shopping, watch a movie, or join nationalist demonstrations. To contemporaries, it was as though floodgates had burst open. Women seemed to be everywhere in the city, invading territory many men claimed as their own.[3] The ensuing conflict, which turned quite violent in the 1930s, offers another window on the paternalistic structure of the colonial civic order, and on the efforts of subalterns to transform it. The incidence of men and women spraying one another with acid in 1928 (chapter seven) was merely the leading edge to a new pattern of physical assaults upon women who walked in the street, rode tramcars, went to the cinema, or attended charity balls at hotels. No longer limited to isolated attacks, violence against women became routinized in campaigns by Islamic populists and in the emergence of proto-fascist youth groups who paraded through streets in military gear. Efforts to remasculinize the streets coincided with the reassertion of male control in the press, which printed scathing satires and tales of terror about women who crossed the gendered spatial boundaries of the city.

Part Four explores the reasons for the rise of violent gender conflict in the 1930s in the context of rapid structural change in the urban public. *Public* is

used here to embrace both a physical and virtual dimension. Public space refers to those areas in the physical environment that are shared by anonymous individuals, whether they be owned by the state and designated as such, as in public gardens, or owned privately but explicitly open to anyone who chooses to enter, as in a grocery store or a theater. It is a space where city residents physically encountered fellow members of their urban community. In a secondary and related sense, the public indicates a metaphysical kind of shared and anonymous space, as in public morality and in the urban, national, ethnic, or gender communities imagined in the press.[4] In either case, the public is not necessarily defined in opposition to a private sphere. We have seen, for example, that women's childrearing practices had become very much a public concern, not only in the rhetoric of the women's movement, but also as the target of state-funded philanthropies. However, it is noteworthy that certain historical actors did attempt to construct a notion of the public that was defined in opposition to domestic space, as opponents of the women's movement did. Finally, the public, as used here, is distinct from Jürgen Habermas's public sphere, in that it denotes a wider realm of collective activity in the economic, social, and political spheres than he intends by his bourgeois reading public. Habermas's distinction between a "private" civil society and the "public" state also fits poorly with conditions in Syria and Lebanon, where, as we have seen, the line between state and society was quite blurred.[5]

Hence, the definition of the public used here parallels that of the civic order, emphasizing the interaction of state and social realms. The public, like the law, shaped the colonial civic order; it helped to set the boundaries of the norms and institutions that governed relations between citizens and the state. In turn, the public was also bounded by those relations, through state regulations, paternalistic privileges, and the multifarious practices of everyday life.

In the mandate era, the boundaries and norms of the urban public were profoundly destabilized by two structural changes. First, the public underwent a massive expansion with the growth of transport and communications,

public services like schooling and health care, new entertainment venues like cinemas and parks, and the publishing of newspapers and magazines. Second, the public became a primary political arena in the 1930s, when parliaments were shut down by the French for half of the decade. Mass demonstrations, market closures, and street battles became the modus operandi of politics, as nationalist elites mobilized their followers in protest, and as subaltern movements, normally excluded from the halls of parliament, seized the streets to voice their dissent. They and the French engaged in turf battles for control over urban space and the virtual public space of the press as a means of claiming power within the civic order.

The surge of violence against women in the 1930s appears to have originated, then, not solely in the crisis of paternity born of World War I and French occupation, but also in the remapping of the urban public and in the diversion of politics to the streets. With their rapid and remarkable influx into this volatile postwar public, women became a flashpoint for the various conflicts. They triggered multiple latent tensions on the faultlines of a destabilized and politicized urban landscape. Desperate to establish order in the chaos of street politics, male rivals could find common ground in their shared masculine anxiety. As a consequence, the battle for control of the public by the state, nationalists, religious patriarchs, and subalterns would ultimately be resolved through paternalistic gender alliances. These alliances effectively truncated women's civil rights to free speech and association, thereby handicapping the women's movement. The following chapters will examine how men reasserted control over women: first, in nationalists' and protofascists' politicization of the streets; second, in religious groups' battle with the state for regulatory control of the cinema; and third, in the changing representations of gender in the press.