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PRESENTING THE “TRUE FACE OF SYRIA”
TO THE WORLD: URBAN DISORDER AND
CIVILIZATIONAL ANXIETIES AT THE FIRST
DAMASCUS INTERNATIONAL EXPOSITION

. . . the Damascus International Exposition will be an excellent opportunity to encounter the Western world, many of whose inhabitants are ignorant of the truth about this country, its social life, the achievements of its civilization, its rapid development in all vital spheres of cultural activity, and the beautiful form that Syria has begun to assume. Through the above, the entire world will know that the vile falsehoods and propaganda that our enemies (who choke on all the progress and flourishing achieved by Arab countries) continue to spread will recede and dwindle in the minds of all, to be replaced by a beautiful, splendid tableau of brilliant images that represents the truth of this country and that, over time, will continue to trigger the sweet memories for which all who see the true face of Syria will long.¹

International fairs—the “folk-festivals of capitalism”—have long been a favorite topic of historians studying quintessential phenomena of modernity such as the celebration of industrial productivity, the construction of national identities, and the valorization of bourgeois leisure and consumption in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Europe, the United States, and Latin America.² To date, however, such spectacles occurring in the modern Middle East remain largely unexamined.³ This article, an analysis of the discourse surrounding the first Damascus International Exposition in 1954, is conceived in part as a preliminary effort to redress this historiographic imbalance.

The postwar period (1945–63) witnessed dramatic political and economic transformations in Syria. For this and other reasons, it has been dubbed the “critical juncture” in that country’s modern history, the period during which Syria was the focus of multiple, interrelated struggles between local, regional, and global actors.⁴ Yet, paradoxically, it is woefully underrepresented in the historiography, and the few exceptions to this state of affairs, such as Patrick Seale’s *The Struggle for Syria* and Steven Heydemann’s *Authoritarianism in Syria*, are explicitly and, one could argue, exclusively political in nature.⁵

Furthermore, although cultural phenomena have received considerable attention in the scholarly literature of the late Ottoman, French Mandate, and Asad (1970–2000)

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eras,⁶ they simply do not feature in that of post World War II Syria. This article thus seeks to add a cultural history component to the historiography of the period and to begin the process of recovering what the aforementioned struggles and transformations meant for those who experienced them. Specifically, it attempts a “thick transcription” of an emergent elite’s anxieties about foreigners’ perceptions of their country, as expressed in this stratum’s homiletic, or moralizing, discourse about street begging and other forms of urban disorder that appeared in the official and popular press during the period spanning the “exposition month” of September 1954.⁷

Although all events such as international expositions excite similar dreams and anxieties, I argue that the specific historical context in which the young Syrian state mounted this spectacle imbued it with increased significance in the minds of its proponents. I contend that the inaugural staging of the Damascus International Exposition constitutes *the* screen upon which such collective longings were projected, the physical and cultural site at which various forms of agency were deployed and contested, and the venue at which a host of collective identities were enacted and the norms surrounding these identities challenged. In other words, the discourse surrounding this event constitutes a unique text, one that reveals “compelling pictures of the tensions, fears, and hopes that define a particular political epoch.”⁸

Another contention of this article is that, by the time of independence, meaningful agency in Syria had shifted from the “urban notables” who dominated local politics in the late Ottoman and early Mandate periods to a new social stratum, one comprising merchants, military officers, civilian bureaucrats, journalists, and other opinion makers who, despite differing political affiliations, shared an approach to governance, a vision of Syria’s economic and political future, and a conception of their country’s rightful place within regional and global structures of power. Thus the tensions, fears, and hopes on display during this “particular political epoch” were those of this uneasy coalition’s members, who shared a cultural outlook that was surprisingly homogeneous and displayed features that were distinctively “modern” and “bourgeois,” as those terms were locally appropriated and mediated. Featured in this grouping are the technocrats of the Directorate General of the Damascus International Exposition who actually planned and staged the event; bureaucrats in the middle and upper levels of several ministries tasked with providing a host of state resources and services in support of the exposition; and, most important, the editors and publishers of state- and privately owned periodicals modeled, in terms of structure, content, and appearance, on American newspapers and magazines. The last of these, acting in the role of “public moralists,” played a critical role in the production and shaping of public discourse about the exposition.⁹

Throughout this article I refer to members of this larger grouping with the shorthand term “the bourgeoisie.” In so doing, I posit no single, fixed location within Syria’s rapidly changing political economy nor do I suggest a shared “class consciousness” that determined collective opinion on all, or even most, issues. I merely assert that the members of this grouping were easily distinguishable from both the old notable names who still dominated Syria’s highest electoral offices and from the country’s poor and that the first Damascus International Exposition, from its conception to its execution, was, first and foremost, an expression of their collective vision of Syria’s past, present, and future.

"AN OPPORTUNITY FOR MATERIAL AND MORAL GAIN":
BOURGEOIS DREAMS OF SOVEREIGNTY, PLENTY,
AND STABILITY¹⁰

Touted as the first such event in the Arab world, the Damascus International Exposition was the product of an earlier alliance between merchants, protoindustrial capitalists, and the authoritarian state, a fact that was manifest in the fair's celebration of "progress" through autarkic (i.e., import substitution) economic development and the expansion of a nascent military-industrial complex.¹¹ Equal parts trade show, arms exhibition, and engine of tourism, the exposition was also the venue for the visual and discursive expression of several interrelated contests between Cold War antagonists, rival claimants for Arab "national" leadership in the struggle against Israel, and advocates of various regional and global alliances of developing states. Most important, the exposition was the stage upon which the recently independent, and still fragile, Syrian state conducted an exercise in "autoethnography," the attempt to define and represent itself to both its own citizenry and the outside world.¹² This effort was deployed with all of the rhetorical ambiguity characteristic of modernist discourse, the conflation and/or studied reconciliation of a host of ancient (Figure 1) and modern dichotomies, the pride and disquiet evoked by the contemporaneous presentation of "foreign" and "authentic" cultural products at a host of subsidiary events such as book fairs, archaeological excursions, and arts festivals, and the simultaneously euphoric and anxiety-ridden display of technology's transformative promise.¹³

The significance that the Syrian state afforded to the first Damascus International Exposition and the functional embrace between state power and national economic development generated by the bourgeoisie were explicit from the event's conception. Originally the brainchild of Colonel Adib al-Shishakli's economic advisors, the exposition was but one, albeit the most grandiose, of a host of measures designed to stimulate economic activity and raise the country's international profile that were proposed under the military dictator's regime (1949–53) and enacted under its civilian successors. The exposition had been conceived as Syria's opportunity to assume its "destined place in the sun" among other modern states.¹⁴ In this vein, the exposition's advocates frankly and unselfconsciously acknowledged the event's theatrical and propagandistic qualities.¹⁵

This "staging of the modern" took many forms. In the economic sphere, dreams of the plenty and abundance to be derived from international trade and industrial development were evident in the press's many advertisements for, proclamations from, interviews with, and stories about Syria's captains of industry and commerce, all of which were linked to the exposition, as both site and event.¹⁶ Most of the twenty-seven countries participating in the exposition attempted similar feats of economic or technological representation.¹⁷ Given the Cold War context in which the exposition was mounted,¹⁸ the most visible of such efforts were made by that conflict's chief protagonists, the United States and the Soviet Union. The Soviets were said to have invested an unprecedented quantity of resources and personnel in their national pavilion, which dwarfed all others in size and was lauded in the local press for its sleek ultramodern design, for its "splendor," and for the variety of cheaply priced durable goods displayed within it.¹⁹

Nevertheless, the contribution of the United States to the exposition garnered by far the most interest, attendance, and commentary. Mounting a remarkable last-minute



FIGURE 1. The official poster for the first Damascus International Exposition, “An Economic Demonstration by Syria and the Arab Countries,” depicting the 16th-century Takiyya Sulaymaniyya and the flags of the twenty-seven participating countries. *Al-Raqib*, 4 September 1954. [A color version of this figure can be viewed online at journals.cambridge.org/mes]

effort, Public Affairs Officer Harris Peel, the senior United States Information Service officer stationed in Damascus, achieved a propaganda coup by arranging twice-daily screenings of the film *This is Cinerama* throughout the period of the exposition.²⁰ By the 1950s, the display of “spectacular new audio-visual means” had long been a traditional feature of international expositions,²¹ yet this first exhibition of *Cinerama*’s

unique "panoramic" widescreen technology outside the United States was the focus of extraordinary hyperbole. Advertised as a product of the "most profound flights of the scientific imagination," "the human mind's most recent invention for the entertainment of his fellow man," and the "flying carpet of the twentieth century," *Cinerama* was, by all accounts, the star attraction of the first Damascus International Exposition. Press stories trumpeted the arrival of *Cinerama's* massive, elaborate screening equipment on one of the U.S. air force's gargantuan C-124 Globemaster transport planes; provided detailed, illustrated descriptions of that equipment's operation²²; depicted a host of dignitaries undergoing "the *Cinerama* experience"; lamented the degree to which demand for tickets outstripped their supply; presented "expert" assessments of the phenomenon's significance for the future of cinema²³; and recounted numerous tales of the chaos and confusion that seemed to ensue at each screening.²⁴

This avalanche of publicity overwhelmed Syria's comparatively modest attempts to publicize its display of military technology as an assertion of "true independence." Nevertheless, because the effort was central to the exposition's agenda of representation, the Ministry of National Defense erected its own pavilion displaying products of modern military technology, which were depicted as manifestations of "the renaissance of the Syrian army."²⁵ Although not formally associated with the exposition, an additional aspect of Syria's self-constructed identity as a modern state possessing robust and durable institutions was featured in the discourse surrounding the event. The country's parliamentary elections (the first occurring under civilian authority since 1947) were held during the exposition month and were ceaselessly trumpeted as evidence of Syria's reacquisition of popular sovereignty and its capacity to achieve stability through the peaceful resolution of political conflict.²⁶

In all of this, the Damascus International Exposition was, first and foremost, an expression of the recently manifested (and therefore still insecure) cultural and political hegemony of a new elite, the commercial, industrial, managerial, and technological bourgeoisie, a group epitomized by the exposition's director general, the forty-nine-year-old Khalid Buzo. Hailing from a cadet branch of the eminent Ottoman-era clan of Kurdish military commanders, Buzo was a chemist by training and a teacher and academic administrator by profession.²⁷ Dr. Buzo's lengthy experience as an administrator at the Syrian University and a bureaucrat in the Ministry of Education, coupled with his reputation as a technocrat without fixed political allegiance, made him the ideal choice for the position, one who could work closely and amicably with the politically independent caretaker government of Sa'ïd al-Ghazzi.²⁸ The dreams and anxieties that Buzo, his senior deputies, and their allies and supporters in the press projected on to the exposition were symptoms of the incompleteness of Syria's embourgeoisement, "the process by which all classes come to identify with the interests and aspirations of the middle class."²⁹ Members of Syria's emergent bourgeoisie, like their counterparts in the West before them, necessarily envisioned "their" exposition as "a means of enhancing their hegemonic position in society."³⁰ The "uninterrupted monologue of self-praise" produced by these would-be hegemonies merely served to underline the tenuous nature of their position.³¹

The most concrete manifestations of bourgeois perceptions and proclivities were found in the exposition fairgrounds themselves. Located on the Beirut Road at the southwest corner of the city's modern center, the fairgrounds were designed as a site of bourgeois leisure, the locale in which the local equivalent of Walter Benjamin's fabled

flâneur could while away the hours in a host of respectable pursuits. Specific sites for such leisure included the Orient Restaurant, the bar and restaurant of the International Exposition, and the amusement park/midway known as “Entertainment City.” Publicity for each of these attractions featured assertions of their technological novelty and cultural hybridity.³² Predictably, however, the boldest assertions were made on behalf of the less refined attractions found in Entertainment City, which was billed as that “thrilling world-famous phenomenon” offering the “newest amusements” from various European countries and a variety of other spectacles reputed to “have amazed the entire world.”³³

FILTH, DISORDER, AND THE GAZE OF FOREIGNERS

Because mass attendance was fundamental to the enterprise’s success, Syria’s new government enacted various legislative and administrative measures to stimulate international tourism during the exposition. These included the cancellation of visa fees, the reduction of fares for internal and external travel, the establishment of a new communications network at the fairgrounds, the expansion of banking and translation services, increased availability of temporary housing, the relaxation of rules governing entertainment venues, and the imposition of price controls on lodging, dining, and museum attendance.³⁴ Such efforts yielded results, as the number of tourists entering Syria and the volume of its foreign trade increased dramatically during the exposition period.³⁵

The initial success, however, bore an inevitable consequence: the exposition’s organizers and supporters would now measure the realization of their aforementioned dreams through the lens of foreign perceptions. This experience was, of course, anything but new. It was, I argue, a single manifestation of a much larger phenomenon of the modern period: the anxious preoccupation of Arab authors, journalists, and other intellectuals with Western perceptions of their cultural products and practices. I refer here to the “civilizational anxiety” that Joseph Massad has designated the defining characteristic of that body of modern Arabic cultural production circumscribed by the term *al-nahḍa*.³⁶ The resulting expressions of such anxiety vis-à-vis the exposition were palpable, as is clear in the quote appearing at the beginning of this article. These ranged from the mundane to the existential, encompassing fears that the exposition would not open on time, the incidence of street crime would skyrocket, the influx of automobiles would exacerbate existing traffic congestion, the government would fail to maintain order and otherwise ensure the physical safety of attendees, external political forces would intrude upon the festivities, and the very image of Syria that the exposition’s “autoethnographers” had labored so assiduously to compose and deploy would be undermined by the “peculiar irregularities” and “blemishes and faults” of Damascene social reality.³⁷

Until the archives of the postindependence Syrian state are opened to researchers, the country’s press is the only available body of sources from which we can recover the aforementioned autoethnography and its accompanying expressions of civilizational anxiety. It is fortunate that the press of this period is uniquely suited to such an endeavor. Temporarily freed from official censorship for the first time in its history, the Syrian press flourished during the “democratic years” of 1954 to 1958.³⁸ This development coincided with another of equal significance, the coming to maturity of a generation

of journalists who had apprenticed under the dean of Syria's late-Mandate and early-independence-period press, *al-Ayyam* publisher Nasuh Babil.³⁹ As a result, Syrian press outlets proliferated, as did their varieties of form, content, and style. Most notable among these outlets were a number of American-style periodicals that were lengthier than most contemporary publications, dedicating much of the additional space to advertising, editorials, and illustrated features covering sports, entertainment, crime, and gossip. The discourse found in the most prominent of these "American-style" publications, the magazines *al-Raqib* and *al-Jami'a* and the newspapers *al-Mukhtar* and *al-Nas*, thus feature prominently in what follows.⁴⁰

In relying so heavily on such sources, I am mindful that they do not provide a Rankean account of unmediated historical reality. Rather, they present "a story about what happened" and thus "should be read for information about how contemporaries construed events."⁴¹ This caveat precisely defines the proper task of the cultural historian studying phenomena such as the first Damascus International Exposition and the apprehension of meaning for those who planned, staged, celebrated, and narrated or sought to secure, exploit, or disrupt the event.

Two unsettling topics that featured prominently in these press sources before, during, and after the exposition were the related issues of public safety and security. In fact, the press consistently reported on Interior Minister Isma'il Quli's frequent emergency meetings with senior police and security officials, as well as his initiatives to form a plethora of new police detachments.⁴² One such unit was tasked exclusively with "pursuing and combating" the throngs of street children who swam in the Barada River bordering the fairgrounds and otherwise congregated in "places that tourists frequent." Another unit consisted of both "stationary and roving" squads tasked with round-the-clock enforcement of statutes forbidding the carrying of weapons on the city's streets, while another was formed to "intensify the battle against drugs" in that same locale. Yet another special detachment of forty policemen was assigned exclusively to "maintaining order in and around the exposition." In addition, some ten days after the exposition's opening, the Interior Ministry was asked to authorize the creation of a special unit of tourism police that would serve as the enforcement arm of the Ministry of National Economy's newly established Bureau of Travel and Tourism. Finally, the multifarious dangers to public decency manifested in Entertainment City's carnivalesque attractions prompted one tribune to call for a special undercover detachment of morality police to be permanently deployed within that putative den of iniquity. In fact, so great was the perceived shortage of security personnel that the Directorate General of Police and Public Security grudgingly "yielded the authority to guard embassies and foreign legations in Damascus to the army for the duration of the exposition."⁴³

Beyond the fairgrounds and their environs, the traffic police were placed under additional pressure due to the perceived shortcomings of the capital's urban transportation system. Among the complaints appearing in the press prior to and during the period of the exposition were the rudeness and incompetence of employees on the city's buses and trams, the overcrowding of these vehicles, and the chaotic and dangerous scrambles that inevitably ensued when passengers embarked and disembarked.⁴⁴ This last phenomenon was the source of considerable distress. One commentator argued that the spectacle of "men, women, and children" "resembling donkeys" as they pulled on "each other's

collars” and charged the doors of buses and trams might harm Syria’s “reputation as an advanced nation in the sight of men” and called upon the traffic police to “compel” passengers to wait in orderly lines in the places “specifically designated for this purpose.”⁴⁵ In addition, as the exposition’s opening day drew near, traffic regulations were enforced with increasing stringency, the traffic police’s manpower was expanded yet again, the number and frequency of patrols of all types in the streets surrounding and leading to the fairgrounds were increased, and public appeals were made to ban carts, bicycles, and street performers on major thoroughfares in order to reduce the frequency of accidents and prevent the “disfigurement of these streets’ appearance in front of visitors.”⁴⁶

Another manifestation of disorder that inspired frequent public expressions of anxiety was the perceived inadequacy of Damascus’s public health and sanitation systems. These included concerns about the city’s insufficient supply of fresh, clean drinking water during the period of the exposition, complaints to the exposition’s management about the presence of “filth and insects” in displays on the fairgrounds, concerns about the prevalence of excrement and garbage heaped in areas likely to be visited by “guests,” and demands for the immediate creation of a continuously staffed medical clinic to remain open throughout the period of the exposition.⁴⁷ One of these apprehensive observers complained that the city’s markets were abuzz with “swarms of flies” that alighted alternately upon the “trash heaps that accumulated at street corners” and the produce, meats, and other food products on display. Although this critic noted the potential public-health consequences of this phenomenon and called upon the government to initiate an eradication campaign using the pesticide DDT, he reserved his special ire for the negative impression that this “disgusting spectacle” was certain to make on foreigners.⁴⁸ The same columnist also denounced the free movement of donkeys, mules, and camels throughout the city, a practice that, he argued, obstructed traffic and filled the streets with “filth and repulsive odors,” thereby diverting the foreigners’ gaze from its appropriate object, the Syrian capital’s “most beautiful ornaments.”⁴⁹

In fact, the proper ordering of Damascus’s physical environment through the banishment of all forms of “filth” was absolutely fundamental to the overarching goal of the Damascus International Exposition, the ethnographic construction and presentation of Syria’s “true” identity to the outside world. Some theorists have argued that the exclusion of dirt is essential to the construction and maintenance of all identities, particularly those of the “modern” and “national” varieties.⁵⁰ The exposition’s planners and advocates appear to have internalized such perceptions, for they clearly saw elements of those “subordinated populations” located outside their conception of the Syrian nation as repositories of filth and contagion and therefore enemies of the new “ideal, bourgeois order” represented on the exposition’s stage.⁵¹

These efforts to deny and exclude the difference embodied in such “others” ultimately failed, for the nexus of social and cultural forces within which the exhibition was embedded contested that dream and acted to undermine it.⁵² Such processes revealed that the dreamworld constructed by the exhibition’s proponents was inherently unstable, as was the collective identity upon which it was based. As we will see, discursively and physically excluded persons, practices, and events repeatedly transgressed the physical and conceptual boundaries of this constructed dreamworld.

THE SWARMING OF "HUMAN FLIES": BEGGARY AND
CONTAGION AT THE TEMPLE OF INDUSTRY

Of all possible manifestations of public disorder, none was deemed more functionally or symbolically threatening by the exposition's supporters than street begging. The press of the period abounds with discourse about begging, taxonomies of its practitioners, the manifold problems caused by this phenomenon, its historical and sociological sources, and its possible remedies. The omnipresence of the visible poor in the form of street beggars gave the lie to the developmental assertions intrinsic to the exposition's official narrative. These unfortunates, the capital city's "undeserving poor," animated the fantasies of social reformers and became the focus of extraordinary rhetorical animus. In the process, they were also subjected to the most concrete, institutional forms of disciplinary power available to the fledgling modern state of Syria.⁵³ In short, for the bourgeois planners, staggers, and promoters of the first Damascus International Exposition, the street beggar was the quintessential site of civilizational anxiety.⁵⁴

It had not always been thus. All of the available documentary evidence suggests that begging has been a legible social phenomenon in Damascus and in the broader Middle East throughout recorded history. Prior to the modern period, however, the discourse about begging in Arabo-Islamic societies was quite ambiguous in nature, and the region's premodern states left no record of sustained efforts to eradicate the practice.⁵⁵

The ambiguity of this premodern discourse is embodied in two major currents that appear to have coexisted over several centuries and to have drawn on similar textual sources for validation. The first of these currents held that begging was a distasteful but unavoidable facet of human existence and should be tolerated and mitigated through the provision of charity when possible. This discursive strand often acknowledged a distinction between the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor—in other words, "genuine" and "importunate" beggars—but generally erred on the side of generosity when making such distinctions. As for modes of social praxis, we can safely concur with Amy Singer's observation that "beggars were for the most part tolerated in Islamic societies before the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for a combination of reasons: the merits associated with charitable giving in general; the legitimacy of begging by Sufis; and because they did not often constitute a serious threat to the established social order."⁵⁶ The second literary current held that most, if not all, beggars were in fact "importunate" and "undeserving" and associated them with fraud, trickery, theft, and a host of other criminal activities common at the margins of respectable society, the medieval "underworld" known in the Arab East as the *Banu Sasan*.⁵⁷

At some point in the modern period, this second current began to prevail. This process was roughly concurrent with the expansion of state power and emergence of the social sciences, which together offered a palette of possible remedies to what was now seen as a "social problem" rather than a lamentable but eternal feature of human societies.⁵⁸ The obvious historiographical question is as follows: precisely when and under what circumstances did such attitudes form? It is clear that a definitive answer to this question is far beyond the scope of this article. We can, however, offer a few general observations with minimal fear of contradiction. Abundant anecdotal evidence of the relative tolerance Singer describes can be found as late as the 18th century in Syria, as is documented

in Abraham Marcus' study of Aleppo. The work of Abdul-Karim Rafeq has produced similar evidence concerning Damascus.⁵⁹

The 19th century, however, witnessed a transformation in such attitudes. In the eastern Mediterranean, this change is most precisely and comprehensively documented in Mine Ener's work on the "management" of poverty in Egypt in the 19th and 20th centuries, which charts the evolution of both elite attitudes to street begging and the state's desire and capacity to address the issue, placing these processes within the broader context of Egypt's "encounters with modernity." Ener found that the Egyptian experience constituted nothing less than the articulation of a "new political economy of poor relief." This new system entailed the discarding of old attitudes and practices that frowned upon begging but refrained from stigmatizing its practitioners and the eventual adoption of new ones characterized by the energetic and resolute "policing of idleness."⁶⁰

Of most significance, Ener found that this transformation was accompanied by an attitudinal realignment, as the middle and upper strata of Egypt's cities, who had perhaps always considered beggars "unsightly," now began to "abjectify" them through a homiletic discourse of hygiene, disease, shame, and noblesse oblige, a discourse that eventually demanded their permanent removal from public view.⁶¹ Of equal significance is Ener's observation that these changes occurred in a very specific historical context: the increased presence of foreigners and their expanding authority in Egyptian political and cultural life. Thus, we have yet another manifestation of civilizational anxiety, in this case prompted by the concomitant exposure to these foreigners' negative perceptions of Egypt, its populace, its institutions, and its state of public health and hygiene.⁶²

The unfolding of this process remains more obscure in the Syrian case, but the outcome is nearly identical. By the penultimate decade of the Ottoman Empire's existence, the emerging bourgeoisie of Damascus—that "tense new middle class" making its appearance in the context of the urbanization and physical restructuring of the capital city, 19th-century Ottoman government-reform programs, and global economic changes—would unreservedly use the language of shame and contempt when discussing the urban poor.⁶³

Such attitudes had achieved something approaching hegemonic status by the time Syria acquired independence in 1946, a reality that was reflected in the official discourse and policies of Adib al-Shishakli's authoritarian regime. Al-Shishakli's security forces repeatedly decried street begging as a shameful social problem, adjudging it the practice that "mars the beauty" of the capital city and "harms the reputation of the country."⁶⁴ In fact, al-Shishakli's immigration policy expressly denied entry to beggars, equating them with "madmen, prostitutes, extraditable criminals" and others "likely to disturb public security and peace."⁶⁵

Given that such historically constructed attitudes were extant by the 1950s, it is not surprising that the elevated levels of distress induced by the staging of the first Damascus International Exposition were accompanied by a change in the public discourse on street begging, which underwent a significant expansion in scope and intensification in tone during the period. This new discourse displayed a number of characteristic features.

Like the previously cited elite discourse of late 19th-century Cairo, the Damascene discourse on street begging was homiletic in nature. It thus operated to "other" or "abjectify" the city's beggars, to demarcate a physical and moral space between them and "the people," whose norms were thereby defined and enacted by the bourgeois

politicians, technocrats, and journalists who enjoyed predominant positions within this discursive field.⁶⁶

This "abjectification" was accomplished by a variety of means. All entailed the employment of what Judith Butler has called an "exclusionary matrix," a discursive system in which mutually exclusive yet interdependent identities are linguistically constituted.⁶⁷ In this case, the Syrian (modern, bourgeois) subject was substantiated through the construction of its antithesis, the street denizen, that deviant "something" whose putative characteristics and menacing presence demarcated the boundaries of respectable identity.⁶⁸ In this way, the disturbing ambivalences produced by the dislocations of modernity are banished to and confined within a place outside the realm of respectable existence.⁶⁹

It is not surprising that this need to abjectify was more prominently and frequently expressed in relation to the exposition, for the event constituted a "symbolically pure" physical and conceptual space whose very existence necessitated the expulsion of all such threatening manifestations of deviance.⁷⁰ Thus, the beggar and his ilk, the "Sons of the Street," were depicted as willfully abandoning "productive" labor and severing all other "communal ties" so that they could more systematically violate "universally accepted norms" of behavior and reap financial benefit without the tiresome expense of capital or honest effort.⁷¹

Yet the most significant elements of this exclusionary matrix are a number of literary figurations that emerged in early modern European discourse about begging and appear to have become nearly universal in the 20th century. The most common of these were the tropes of the "wealthy beggar" and the "outsider," which were often employed together to render the beggar simultaneously "undeserving" and "foreign," in other words, unworthy of local sympathy. These declarations were usually romantic in style and content, contrasting an idealized preindustrial and preurbanized past, during which the archetypal street beggar was a known member of the local community who was brought low by circumstances beyond his control, with a debased present, in which the beggar is now alien and sinister, one who pursues his freely chosen and highly profitable "profession" by deceptive and socially disruptive means.

Such assertions rely almost exclusively on anecdotal evidence for support. A classic example is the sensationally titled "A Beggar's Fortune—60 Thousand Lira!" Neatly conjoining the wealthy beggar and outsider tropes, this piece trumpets the arrest of one Mustafa Darwish Kan'an on Fu'ad al-Awwal Street, a major traffic artery to the northeast of the fairgrounds. Upon searching and interrogating the unlucky Mr. Kan'an, the police determine that he is from the village of Jdaideh, where he owns property whose "estimated value is nearly 60,000 lira."⁷²

As the exposition's opening approached, another more normative trope appeared. Perhaps the most defamatory, and thus the most effective, it featured the "language of pest control,"⁷³ sounding an alarm over the city's "infestation" with beggars and other "street people," thereby further dehumanizing them through the metaphorical association with vermin. In these editorials beggars were repeatedly associated with flies, the ultimate metaphor for filth and contagion. For example, in the previous editorial denouncing the "real" flies plaguing the city's open-air markets, "Ibn al-Balad" also denounces "the human flies, that army of beggars who pounce upon you one after the other wherever you go and wherever you turn, at the street corners, the bus stops, and the market entrances."

Explicitly linking these “two issues” (the “real” and “human” flies) to the exposition and contemporary political realities, he declares that they are comparable in their capacity to defame his “young nation,” which is “at war with a brutal and cunning enemy” and thus in desperate need of positive publicity. He then calls upon the government to emulate those of all “advanced countries,” which, he naively asserts, have accomplished the “complete eradication of this social problem despite the continuing presence of the factors causing its emergence and its spread.”⁷⁴

In another editorial, the presence of these human flies is linked to other manifestations of the Damascus municipal government’s perceived inadequacies, the anarchic state of its public-transport system, and the apparent incompetence and indifference of its public security personnel. Recounting a recent shopping excursion with a friend, the columnist registers the now familiar complaints of prolonged delays, abusive personnel, veritable passenger melees erupting during the boarding process, and, of course, the presence of beggars at all major bus stops. Upon reaching his destination of the Suq al-Hamidiyya, he is confronted with their “offensive” sight, “among them women, children, the elderly and the disabled” “pouncing on the pedestrians like flies.” Proclaiming his anger with the police for “staring stupidly” while these beggars cling to his clothing with “oppressive persistence,” our reformer demands a “practical and permanent solution to the problem of begging.” After observing that the Syrian Directorate of Social Affairs is the logical government body to implement such a remedy, he closes by sarcastically remarking that such an effort could succeed only if the directorate’s officials were “chosen for their qualifications rather than their connections.”⁷⁵

ENFORCING THE “MOST SEVERE PROVISIONS”: THE ROLE OF THE STATE

As the quotes from the preceding editorial illustrate, the discourse under study features a final defining characteristic. It functions as an expression of and an impetus for one of the Syrian state’s key policy objectives during the exposition’s tenure: the physical removal of Damascus’s street beggars from public view. This discourse is framed by the uncritical approbation of two closely related dyads, each comprising mutually exclusive categories. The first such pairing is that of “industry” and “sloth,” according to which the beggar “occupies a determined place in a social, politico-economic, and symbolic topology” as the figure who always consumes but never produces scarce and valuable resources and whose very being is thus deemed “surplus to economic requirements.”⁷⁶

The concepts “hygiene” and “filth” constitute the second dyad, which posits the necessity of eliminating all phenomena that are not “treatable” by “natural” social processes, thereby constituting “the ‘garbage’ of a functionalist administration.”⁷⁷ As Mary Douglas has observed, in every culture, elites establish “provisions for dealing with ambiguous or anomalous events.”⁷⁸ According to this logic, if the beggars were removed from sight, their presence could not refute the official narrative of industry, pride, sovereignty, and modernity embodied in the exposition’s autoethnographic project. Thus it was perhaps inevitable that the “production of deviance” resulting from the exercise in discursive exclusion documented previously would be followed by one more physical in nature,⁷⁹ for the rhetorical exercise of cultural hegemony necessarily entails

an accompanying spatial expression, that is, the attempt to institute the physical exclusion of the anomalous.

In this effort, the oft-quoted "Ibn al-Balad" played a prominent role. Some seven weeks before the exposition's inauguration, he began to hector the government, employing now familiar metaphors of hygiene and filth to demand the physical removal of the city's street beggars. Again, this call is linked specifically to the exposition's future success or failure, as Ibn al-Balad asserts that the "cleansing" of Damascus is imperative if the event is to achieve its objective of becoming "a triumph for Syria, the Arab world, and the entire Orient." The most telling passage in this editorial, however, comes near its conclusion, when its author deems the aforementioned operation necessary "in order to secure the homeland for the leisure of its citizens," thereby rhetorically excluding the "Sons of the Street" from that privileged category, those enjoying the rights of membership in the national community.⁸⁰

Others echo such calls, albeit in a tone somewhat tempered by compassion for the urban poor and faith in the social sciences. "Abu Asima" agrees that the exposition's occurrence will "attract the eyes of the world" and thus calls upon the government to "chase away all the beggars" and remove them from public places. He also decries beggars' and other street denizens' "occupation" of the city's major thoroughfares, its public squares, and its trams and buses, as well as their incessant "disturbance" of the general public. Yet he proffers his protest at this "assault on the decorum of the street" as analysis of an underlying "social phenomenon" caused by desperate poverty and argues that the beggar and his cohort (street barbers, shoeshine boys, cigarette butt collectors, etc.) are merely attempting to fulfill the most elemental and "natural" of all human desires, self-preservation. Abu Asima concludes by beseeching the government to reopen its shelters for the homeless.⁸¹

On the exposition's opening day, another commentator, who modestly styled himself "an eminent social reformer," opened his editorial by registering familiar grievances about the capital's unruly vehicular and pedestrian traffic, overcrowded markets, and general uncleanness. His subsequent complaint, however, is a most unusual expression of civilizational anxiety, a lament that Syria could not boast of an active chapter of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, as such a development was impossible in a country that still routinely practiced cruelty to human beings, particularly children, peasants, and the poor. As anecdotal evidence of this national deficiency, the self-described social reformer relates a disturbing tale. Just three days previous, he had witnessed a five-year-old girl, alone and burdened by a heavy bundle, repeatedly try to cross a major thoroughfare. Each time she failed due to drivers' systematic disdain for traffic regulations and a callous refusal to enforce them on the part of the policeman on duty. Ultimately, the reformer was shamed by the fact that the only person who deigned to stop his car and help the little waif cross the street safely was a foreigner.

These two tendencies, compassion for the city's most unfortunate and humiliation at Syria's apparent unwillingness to alleviate their suffering, run through the editorial. After acknowledging the necessity of removing the "great multitude" of beggars from Damascus's streets, this commentator offers a solution that is reminiscent of the sense of civic responsibility espoused by Cairo's elites decades earlier. Arguing that it is unnecessary to rely upon and "blame the government for everything," he invokes the "sacred duty" of all Syrians "in whose hearts God has instilled compassion and the

inclination to kindness” to do all that is necessary “to eliminate this practice that afflicts the reputation of Damascus.” After summarizing the tale of one such allegedly successful effort in an unnamed Indian city, he issues a final appeal to Syrians’ latent noblesse oblige, asking, “Cannot we Arabs do what the Indians did? Or are we Muslims and Christians lacking in kindness and charity?”⁸²

Such entreaties for private beneficence were exceptional, however, and the repeated demands for government action prior to the exposition bore fruit on the eve of its opening. On 29 August, the Directorate General of Police and Public Security announced two initiatives. The first such measure proposed the formation of a ministerial committee to study the “problem of begging and beggars” in all of Syria’s cities, recommend the proper “measures to eliminate this problem,” and thereby make possible the presentation of Damascus “in the appropriate manner.” The directorate’s second measure dispelled all possible suspense about the outcome of the first, for it ordered the Directorate of Criminal Police to reassign a sufficient number of personnel to create a unit tasked exclusively with “expelling beggars and preventing them from being seen by visitors to Damascus.”⁸³

Just three days later the ministerial committee, chaired by Acting Director of Police and Public Security Shakir Antaki, announced its adoption of a resolution to “prosecute all of the beggars.” Upon their arrest for suspicion of begging, it declared, all “young adults and adolescents” would be dispatched to criminal courts for sentencing, all minors would be sent to reformatories, and the elderly and otherwise disabled would be put in homes for the “aged and infirm.” In addition, all persons of any age or condition who were apprehended while begging and could not prove Damascus residency would be “banished from the city.” Furthermore, the directorate announced that the police detachment hastily assembled for this purpose had begun fulfilling its mission the night before the resolution authorizing its activities was published.⁸⁴ As if this were not enough, on the following day the now energized Directorate of Police and Public Security issued a public appeal to the Ministry of Justice, asking its officials to intervene individually with criminal court judges “in order to have them enforce the most severe provisions of the law and keep beggars and vagrants in custody throughout the period of the Damascus International Exposition.”⁸⁵

Thus, Damascus’s street beggars and vagrants were deemed so threatening to the “moral geography” of the exposition fairgrounds, and by extension, that of the entire city, they were to be held in preventative custody for the entire month of the exposition.⁸⁶ These state initiatives represent the culmination of a process. Those participating instrumentally and/or rhetorically in the state/bourgeoisie project that was the Damascus International Exposition had asserted and successfully enacted their “right to the city” while denying that right to various manifestations of the visible, “undeserving” poor.⁸⁷ As previously noted, such actions were virtually inevitable, because the physical and conceptual dreamworlds constructed by the exposition’s exponents invited, by their very existence, multiple forms of transgression. The built environment of the exposition, that is, its fairgrounds, associated tourist venues, and the transportation infrastructure linking them together, was designed to act as a magnet for tourists and other practitioners of bourgeois leisure. However, these sites simultaneously constituted ideal hunting grounds for beggars, thieves, hawkers of disreputable wares, and other “Sons of the Street.” Thus their “swarming” presence can be read as a counterassertion of the aforementioned “right

to the city."⁸⁸ This counterassertion is also manifested in a discursive fragment one of their number left behind.

TRACES OF SUBVERSION

As various theorists have observed, the concept of "abjectification" is not only essential to the construction of hegemonic identities but is also "productive of various forms of transgressive identity that subvert the assumed naturalness of social norms."⁸⁹ In other words, hegemonies are contested. It is logical to assume that the deployment of bourgeois hegemony embodied in the first Damascus International Exposition was no exception to this rule. Yet, such assertions are often difficult to document, for those resisting hegemonic discourse do not enjoy comparable access to the conventional means of expressing their dissent and thus leave fewer traces behind. Sometimes, however, the would-be hegemon, in their desire to cement their vilification of the abject, record and preserve the latter's pronouncements. A remarkable example of this phenomenon appeared in the Damascene press two weeks after the exposition's opening, when the various police measures described previously had begun to produce, at least temporarily, their intended effect.

The piece in question, provocatively entitled "Roundup of the Madmen," begins by noting the "campaign to sweep the beggars from the streets" and its obvious purpose, to "prevent them from disgracing Damascus during the International Exposition." It then expresses outrage that "one of these scum" has the temerity to issue a verbal rejoinder to the campaign. In a very clever subversion of the normative position, an unnamed beggar links the issues of street begging, the parliamentary elections, and anxieties about the presence of foreigners during the staging of the exposition and thus deftly turns the prevailing discourse on its head. According to the correspondent, this representative of Damascus's "scum" asked, "Why don't the police mount a campaign to round up those madmen who nominate themselves for elections? This would prevent the ridiculous statements they make from marring the dignity of the exposition in front of foreign visitors."⁹⁰ Thanks to this anonymous representative of Damascus's "Sons of the Street," we are reminded once again that, even from "its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master."⁹¹

CONCLUSION

The Damascus International Exposition's inaugural staging in September 1954 was the Syrian Republic's first spectacular "act of representation,"⁹² a grand material and symbolic effort to substantiate the young state's sovereignty, demonstrate its capacity for regional leadership, and assert its right to play a role in international politics and commerce. This prompts an obvious question: was the first Damascus International Exposition a triumph for the Syrian bourgeoisie? In other words, did its organizers achieve their apparent collective goals, demonstrating that Syria was entitled to its aforementioned "place in the sun"⁹³ and institutionalizing their vision for the country's future political and economic arrangements? Or was this event, like most other international

expositions, merely another “ephemeral” moment of “self-congratulation and self-deceit”⁹⁴

There is, in fact, ample empirical and anecdotal evidence of the first exposition’s nominal success in the short term. The former is found in the previously cited data documenting dramatic increases in tourism and trade and the latter in the decision, which followed immediately upon the exposition’s closure, to make it an annually recurring event.⁹⁵ As all who are familiar with the country’s subsequent historical experience know, however, Syria did not achieve its dream of regional supremacy nor did the vision of the country’s future expounded by the exposition’s organizers and supporters prevail.

As both the disciplinary initiatives that the state mounted during the exposition and the discourse surrounding the event demonstrate, realizing even the event’s more immediate goals was threatened by factors complicating the most essential component of this endeavor: the projection of an “image of unity” to the exposition’s domestic and foreign audiences.⁹⁶ In this regard, the event’s proponents clearly did not have the “ugly, dirty” countenances of Damascus’s street urchins, its homeless population, its marginalized ethnic minorities, or its other nonconformists and malcontents in mind when they repeatedly invoked the image of Syria’s “true face.”⁹⁷ Yet, the apparent omnipresence of the capital city’s “Sons of the Street” served as a constant and painful reminder of the “messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” urban reality outside the gates of the fairgrounds. This repeated violation of the exposition organizers’ urban imaginary all but demanded the rhetorical and instrumental responses discussed previously.

It has been a central contention of this article that the marginalized populations of Damascus, those archetypal figures whose physical appearance and habitual practices constituted the antitheses of bourgeois hygiene and industry, played a more fundamental role in this “urban drama.”⁹⁸ The proponents of the first Damascus International Exposition required the symbolic presence of these “internal others” in order to construct and enact their own collective identities, for, to paraphrase Lacan, it is only through such “use of the Other” that one comes to recognize the self.⁹⁹ In addition, as I have attempted to demonstrate, by closely reading the discourse produced by this effort, we can best come to know the bourgeois “selves” who, however fleetingly, achieved cultural hegemony in post World War II Syria. Thereby we begin the process of investigating the cultural forces informing the storied “struggle for Syria” in the 1950s, a first step toward achieving a more nuanced picture of independent Syria’s history.

NOTES

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¹“Ma’rid Dimashq Mir’a li-Nahdat Suriya wa-l-Bilad al-‘Arabiyya al-Haditha,” *al-Nas*, 1 September 1954, 3. The phrase also appears in “Wizarat al-Difa‘ al-Watani Tashtarik fi Ma’rid Dimashq al-Dawli,” *al-Jundi*, 2 September 1954, 7; “Wa-Akhiran . . . Yaftatih Ma’rid Dimashq al-Dawli, wa-Tantahi Mawjat al-Sha’i‘at!” *al-Jami‘a*, 29 August 1954, 3–4; and “The Damascus International Fair: 2nd September to 1st October, 1954,” in the special English-language magazine *Syria*, published in 1953 by the Ministry of Information and National Guidance, 41.

²Susan Buck Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1989), 86.

³Notable exceptions include Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); idem, “The World as Exhibition,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31 (1989): 221; Eric Davis, “Representations of the Middle East at American World Fairs 1876–1904,” in *The United States and the Middle East: Cultural Encounters*, ed. Abbas Amanat and Magnus Bernhardsson (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 2002), 342–81; and Zeynep Çelik, *Displaying the Orient: Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World’s Fairs* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1992), 139–51.

⁴Steven Heydemann, *Authoritarianism in Syria: Institutions and Social Conflict, 1946–1970* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), 8.

⁵This category also includes Gordon Torrey’s *Syrian Politics and the Military, 1945–1958* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1964); Derek Hopwood’s *Syria, 1945–1986: Politics and Society* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988); and several studies that focus exclusively on the Ba‘th Party, as well as a handful of theses and dissertations.

⁶For the first two eras, see James Grehan, *Everyday Life and Consumer Culture in Eighteenth-Century Damascus* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2007); James L. Gelvin, *Divided Loyalties: Nationalism and Mass Politics in Syria at the Close of Empire* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1998); Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000); and Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006). For the Asad era, see Lisa Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric and Symbols in Contemporary Syria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Miriam Cooke, *Dissident Syria: Making Oppositional Arts Official* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007); and Christa Salamandra, *A New Old Damascus: Authenticity and Distinction in Urban Syria* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁷Eric J. Arnould, “Daring Consumer-Oriented Ethnography,” in *Representing Consumers: Voices, Views and Visions*, ed. Barbara Stern (New York: Routledge, 1998), 111–13.

⁸Wedeen, *Ambiguities of Domination*, 13.

⁹Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 5.

¹⁰Special publication *Syria*, 1953.

¹¹See, for example, the back cover of *al-Jami‘a*, 31 January 1954. Such assertions of the exposition’s novelty were dubious at best. For details about previous expositions mounted in the region, see Zeynep Çelik, *Empire, Architecture, and the City: French–Ottoman Encounters, 1830–1914* (Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 2008); and Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*.

¹²Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, *Mexico at the World’s Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1996), 7.

¹³See, for example, “Suriya Bilad al-Athar,” *Sawt Suriya*, 14 August 1954, 42; “The Damascus International Fair,” 41.

¹⁴See, for example, “Qadaya al-Balda,” *al-Mukhtar*, 23 September 1954, 5; *al-Mukhtar*, 2 September 1954, 1; “Ma‘rid Dimashq”; “The Damascus International Fair,” 41; and Ibn al-Balad, “Qadaya al-Balda,” *al-Mukhtar*, 17 August 1954, 3.

¹⁵“Al-Ishtirak fi al-Ma‘arid Naw‘ Jadid min al-Di‘aya,” *al-Jami‘a*, 29 August 1954, 20.

¹⁶See, for example, “al-Sina‘at al-Suriyya al-Haditha” and “al-Sina‘a al-Suriyya fi al-Tarikh,” *al-Mukhtar*, 2 September 1954, 21, 32; and “Bayan min al-Sharika al-Tijariyya al-Sina‘iyya al-Muttahida (al-Khumasiyya) ila al-Sha‘b al-Suri al-Karim,” *al-Dunya*, 27 August 1954, 10, 31.

¹⁷These were Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, China (People’s Republic), Czechoslovakia, Egypt, France, (West) Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Iraq, Iran, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, The Netherlands, Pakistan, Poland, Saudi Arabia, the Soviet Union, Spain, the United States, Yemen, and Yugoslavia. “Ma‘rid Dimashq al-Dawli Safha Mushriqa fi Tarikh Suriya al-Haditha,” *al-Raqib*, 4 September 1954, 18–19; “Ta‘ala ma‘i ila Ma‘rid Dimashq al-Dawli,” *al-Dunya*, 27 August 1954, 13.

¹⁸This context colored much of the official discourse surrounding the exposition. See, for example, “Ahali Hay al-Qasa‘ Yastankirun wa-Yutalibun Sahib al-Safir al-Amiriki min Dimashq,” *al-Nas*, 25 August 1954, 2.

¹⁹See, for example, “al-Ishtirak fī al-Ma‘rid,” 20; “Luqat fī Ma‘rid Dimashq,” *al-Nas*, 5 September 1954, 1.

²⁰For details of Peel’s role, see *Time*, 13 September 1954; *Life*, 27 September 1954; *Life*, 8 April 1957; and *American Heritage.com* 21, no. 2 (2005), http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/it/2005/2/2005_2_10.shtml (accessed 1 August 2008).

²¹John Knight, “Discovering the World in Seville: The 1992 Universal Exposition,” *Anthropology Today* 8, no. 5 (1992): 23.

²²“Ta’ira Taqta‘a Musafa Tawila hatta Tabluḡ al-‘Asima al-Suriyya li-Taḡaddum ‘al-Sinirama’ fī Ma‘rid Dimashq al-Dawli Qariban,” *al-Nas*, 18 August 1954, 3; “al-Falak al-‘Ardi . . . Hadhihi Hiyya al-Sinirama,” *al-Nas*, 25 August 1954, 3; “al-Sinirama . . . Akhir U‘juba . . . fī Dimashq,” *al-Mukhtar*, 2 September 1954, 35; “al-Sinirama fī Dimashq,” *al-Raqib*, 4 September 1954, 25.

²³Among those so depicted were the Egyptian actors Muhammad Fawzi and Farid Shawqi and a number of prominent Syrian political figures. *Al-Nas*, 6 September 1954, 4; *al-Mukhtar*, 23 September 1954, 6; *al-Nas*, 10 September 1954, 4. For ticket scarcity, see Nash‘at al-Tiḡhilbi, “Bitaḡat Majaniyya Tuba‘a fī al-Suq al-Sawda’,” *al-Jami‘a*, 9 October 1954, 13; for the expert assessments, see Salah Dehni, “al-Fan al-Sabi‘,” *al-Jundi*, 23 September 1954, 33.

²⁴See, for example, Nash‘at al-Tiḡhilbi, “Wara‘a Sitar al-Sinirama al-Aluminyumi,” *al-Jami‘a*, 9 October 1954, 12–13.

²⁵“Wizarat al-Difa‘ fī al-Ma‘rid,” *al-Jami‘a*, 29 August 1954, 9.

²⁶The security and validity of these elections remained in doubt until their successful completion. See, for example, “al-Ghumud Yusaitir ‘ala al-Mawqif al-Intikhabi fī Suriya,” *al-Nuqqad*, 11 July 1954, 1; “Nida’ Wazir al-Dakhiliyya ila al-Nakhibin,” *al-Nas*, 25 September 1954, 2.

²⁷The family had produced numerous prominent political figures in the 20th century, most notable among them Khalid’s distant cousin Ali Buzo, who served as Syria’s interior minister several times prior and subsequent to the first Damascus International Exposition.

²⁸For additional biographical information, see George Faris, ed., *Man Huwa fī Suriya 1949* (Damascus: Matba‘at al-‘Ulum wa-l-Adab Hashimi Ikhwan, 1951), 115–16; and idem, *Man Hum fī al-‘Alam al-‘Arabi. al-Juz’ al-Awwal: Suriya* (Damascus: Maktab al-Dirasat al-Suriyya wa-l-‘Arabiyya, 1957), 98–99.

²⁹Julia Prewitt Brown, *The Bourgeois Interior* (Charlottesville, Va.: University of Virginia Press, 2008), xi. Most prominent among Buzo’s deputies were Inspector General Salim al-Zirikli, Assistant Director General Akram al-Kilani, Public Relations Director Sharif al-Urfali, Lottery Director Khalid al-Nabulsi, Director of Exhibitors’ Affairs Hisham al-Khatib, Financial Officer Mustafa al-Banna, and Technical Director al-Amir Hasan al-Jaza’iri. With the exception of al-Jaza’iri, who retained his family’s Ottoman-era princely titles, all were products of lesser branches of old notable families who owed their positions primarily to professional qualifications. “Ma‘rid Dimashq,” 3.

³⁰Davis, “Representations,” 378.

³¹Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1995), 19.

³²See, for example, *al-Nas*, 23 August 1954, 4.

³³*Al-Dunya*, 27 August 1954, 10.

³⁴“Tashila li-l-‘Aridin wa-l-Za‘irin al-Ajanib,” *al-Nas*, 18 August 1954, 4. See also “Ma‘rid Dimashq,” 3; and “Bayan,” *al-Jundi*, 16 June 1954, 38, in which Exposition Director General Khalid Buzo calls upon owners of private residences to rent them to “guests” during the exposition.

³⁵The number of tourists who visited Syria during “the exposition month” of September was 171,582, more than four times the next highest total of 39,832 in June. Receipts from foreign trade permits rose from 500,000 Syrian lira in 1953 to 750,000 in 1954. The Syrian Republic, *al-Majmu‘a al-Ihsa’iyya li-‘Am 1955* (Damascus: Government Press, 1955), 303, 197. This influx of outsiders ultimately compelled the government to make schools available as “suitable sleeping quarters for visitors.” “I‘lan,” *al-Mukhtar*, 22 July 1954, 2.

³⁶Joseph A. Massad, *Desiring Arabs* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 50, 76–94. Massad’s focus is, of course, on the *nahḍa* literature’s tendency to disavow or explain away the sexual predilections and practices depicted in classical Arabic literature. Yet, I maintain, the observation applies here as well, with “the beggar” standing in for the omnipresent “sodomite” in the texts Massad analyzes.

³⁷See, for example, “Ma‘rid Dimashq al-Dawli Yaftatih fī Hina,” *al-Nas*, 8 August 1954, 2; “Balaghan Tudhi‘uhuma Mudiriyyat Ma‘rid Dimashq al-Dawli,” *al-Nas*, 16 August 1954, 2; and “Balagh ila al-‘Aridin al-Suriyin,” *al-Jundi*, 26 August 1954, 6. The evasion of customs fees, the violation of price controls, and

street crime were recurring problems. See, for example, “Mudiriyyat al-Jamarik Tunzir Ru’asa’ al-Ajniha bi-l-Ma’rid,” *al-Nas*, 10 September 1954, 2; “Mamnu’ al-Bay’ bi-l-Ma’rid,” *al-Nas*, 15 September 1954, 2; “Min Sijill al-Shurta,” *al-Nas*, 22 August 1954, 2; “Min Sijill al-Shurta,” *al-Nas*, 7 September 1954, 4; and “Min Sijill al-Shurta,” *al-Nas*, 10 September 1954, 2. For injuries and deaths at the fairgrounds, see “Hadith Mu’sif Yaqac’ Zuhr Ams fi Ma’rid Dimashq al-Dawli,” *al-Nas*, 26 August 1954, 2; “Min Sijill al-Shurta,” *al-Nas*, 3 September 1954, 2; “Min Sijill al-Shurta,” *al-Nas*, 5 October 1954, 1; “Min Sijill al-Shurta,” *al-Nas*, 24 August 1954, 4; and “Min Sijill al-Shurta,” *al-Nas*, 29 August 1954, 2. For evidence of Cold War tensions, see “Luqtat fi Ma’rid Dimashq,” *al-Nas*, 5 September 1954, 1; “Himayat al-Janah al-Amriki,” *al-Nas*, 7 September 1954, 2; and Ibn al-Balad, “Qadaya al-Balda,” *al-Mukhtar*, 29 July 1954, 2.

³⁸This state of affairs persisted until the promulgation of the United Arab Republic’s Press Law #195 in December 1958. For details, see Hashim ‘Uthman, *al-Sihafa al-Suriyya: Madiha wa-Hadiruha* (Damascus: Matabi’ Wizarat al-Thaqafa, 1997), 241, 295, 310, 324–28; Juzif Iliyas, *Tatawwur al-Sihafa al-Suriyya fi Mi’at ‘Am* (Beirut: Dar al-Nidal li-l-Tiba’ a wa-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzi’, 1982–83), 2:89–94, 139–48; and Tom Johnston McFadden, *Daily Journalism in the Arab States* (Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University Press, 1953), 44–56. Attempts to reinstate earlier controls were unsuccessful.

³⁹See Nasuh Babil, *Sihafa wa-Siyasa: Suriya fi al-Qarn al-‘Ashrin* (London: Riad El-Rayyes, 1987).

⁴⁰Shakir al-Khurajji’s weekly newspaper *al-Mukhtar* and Husni al-Barazi and Nazir Fansa’s daily newspaper *al-Nas* were founded after the restoration of civilian government in March 1954. Nash’at al-Tighilbi and Fu’ad Ya’qub’s weekly magazine *al-Jami’a* as well as ‘Uthman Shuhur’s comparable *al-Raqib* slightly predates the overthrow of al-Shishakli. Al-Barazi was a politically eccentric and ambitious member of an old notable land-owning family from Hama, while the rest were professional journalists of more “middling” origins.

⁴¹Robert Darnton, “The Library in the New Age,” *The New York Review of Books* 15:10 (12 June 2008), 73.

⁴²See, for example, *al-Nas*, 13 September 1954, 2; and “Halat al-Amn Hadi’a,” *al-Nas*, 19 September 1954, 2.

⁴³“Balagh Jadid min Mudir al-Shurta wa-l-Amn,” *al-Nas*, 22 September 1954, 2; “Dururat Itfa’ Nur al-Sayyarat,” *al-Nas*, 3 September 1954, 2; “Mukafahat al-Tahrib li-alla Tastaghilil Fursat al-Ma’rid” *al-Nas*, 1 September 1954, 2; “Uhdharu Madinat al-Milhi,” *al-Raqib*, 4 September 1954, 28.

⁴⁴See, for example, *al-Mukhtar*, 8 July 1954, 3; “Shakwat al-Nas,” *al-Mukhtar*, 29 July 1954, 2; “Ta’min al-Muwassalat Laylan,” *al-Nas*, 24 September 1954, 2; “Qadaya al-Balda,” *al-Mukhtar*, 23 September 1954, 5; and “Shakwa al-Nas,” *al-Mukhtar*, 29 July 1954, 2.

⁴⁵Ibn al-Balad, “Qadaya al-Balda,” *al-Mukhtar*, 17 August 1954, 3.

⁴⁶*Al-Nas*, 24 August 1954, 4; “Ziyadat ‘Adad al-Shurta,” *al-Nas*, 3 September 1954, 2; “Alfan Siyara Lubnaniyya Dakhilat Suriya bi-Sa’atayn,” *al-Nas*, 23 September 1954, 2; “al-Mubashira bi-Mukafahat al-Tasawwul wa-l-Mutasawwilin bi-Dimashq,” *al-Nas*, 2 September 1954, 2.

⁴⁷See Ibn al-Balad, “Qadaya al-Balda,” *al-Mukhtar*, 29 July 1954, 2; Muslih Ijtima’i Kabir, “‘Atash fi Madinat Dimashq!,” *al-Mukhtar*, 11 October 1954, 6; “Raqibu Sina’at al-Kazuz,” *al-Nas*, 9 September 1954, 2; Ibn al-Balad, “Qadaya al-Balda,” *al-Mukhtar*, 17 August 1954, 3; and “al-Sihha fi al-Ma’rid,” *al-Nas*, 29 August 1954, 2.

⁴⁸Ibn al-Balad, “Qadaya al-Balda,” *al-Mukhtar*, 29 July 1954, 2.

⁴⁹Ibn al-Balad, “Qadaya al-Balda,” *al-Mukhtar*, 17 August 1954, 3.

⁵⁰See, for example, Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 2, 161; and William A. Cohen, “Introduction: Locating Filth,” in *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life*, ed. William A. Cohen and Ryan Johnson (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), xxviii.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, xxiii; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Delhi, India: Permanent Black, 2002), 77.

⁵²James Martin, “Identity,” in *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts*, ed. David Atkinson, Peter Jackson, David Sibley, and Neil Washbourne (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 99–100; Iris Marion Young, “The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference,” *Social Theory and Practice* 12 (1986): 1.

⁵³Tim Cresswell, “Moral Geographies,” in *Cultural Geography: A Critical Dictionary of Key Concepts* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 131.

⁵⁴Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 76.

⁵⁵Clifford Edmund Bosworth, *The Mediaeval Islamic Underworld: The Banu Sasan in Arabic Society and Literature, Part One* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1976), 12–13.

⁵⁶Amy Singer, *Charity in Islamic Societies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 170.

⁵⁷For further details from the relevant literature on beggars, see Salah al-Din al-Munajjid, *al-Zurafa' wa-l-Shahhadhun fi Baghdad wa-Baris* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Jadid, 1969); Ahmad al-Hussain, *Adab al-Kudyah fi al-'Asr al-'Abbasi: Dirasat fi Adab al-Shahhadhin wa-l-Mutasawwilin* (Damascus: Dar al-Hasad li-l-Nashr wa-l-Tawzi', 1995); and Sayyid Sadiq 'Abd al-Fattah, *Mawsu'at Ghara'ib al-Shahhata wa-'Aja'ib al-Shahhatin* (Cairo: Maktabat Dar al-'Arabi li-l-Kitab, 2001).

⁵⁸One is tempted to attribute this change, at least in part, to Ottoman reformers' creation of "publicness," the structuring of an "environment for control, surveillance and homogenization of social bodies." Leila Hudson, "Late Ottoman Damascus: Investments in Public Space and the Emergence of Popular Sovereignty," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 15 (2006): 154.

⁵⁹Abraham Marcus, *The Middle East on the Eve of Modernity: Aleppo in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 214–15; Abdul-Karim Rafeq, "The Poor in Ottoman Damascus: A Socioeconomic and Political Study," in *Pauvreté et richesse dans le monde musulman méditerranéen*, ed. Jean-Paul Pascual (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 2003), 217–26.

⁶⁰Mine Ener, *Managing Egypt's Poor and the Politics of Benevolence, 1800–1952* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), xii–xiv, 47, 57, 58, 36.

⁶¹Idem, "Prohibitions on Begging and Loitering in Nineteenth-Century Egypt," *Die Welt des Islams*, 39 (1999): 339; idem, *Managing Egypt's Poor*, 63, 65, 74, 123.

⁶²*Ibid.*, xiii, 28, 76, 319–39, 321, 73, 99, 107. Such attitudes were present in the cities of Bilad al-Sham by the late 19th century, as is evidenced in Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut*, 115–37.

⁶³Leila Hudson, *Transforming Damascus: Space and Modernity in an Islamic City* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), 84.

⁶⁴"Al-Tasawwul Mihna wa-Fann wa-Khida'," *Majallat al-Shurta wa-l-Amn al-'Amm*, January 1953, 47.

⁶⁵Patrick Seale, *The Struggle for Syria: A Study of Post-War Arab Politics, 1945–1958* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1965, 1986), 121.

⁶⁶Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).

⁶⁷Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 3.

⁶⁸Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2.

⁶⁹Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 69.

⁷⁰David Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion: Society and Difference in the West* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 78.

⁷¹Abu Asima, "'Ala al-Hukuma an Tahma Ibn al-Shari'," *al-Jami'a*, 29 August 1954, 20–21.

⁷²*Al-Nas*, 23 September 1954, 2.

⁷³Sibley, *Geographies of Exclusion*, ix, 106.

⁷⁴Ibn al-Balad, "Qadaya al-Balda," *al-Mukhtar*, 29 July 1954, 2.

⁷⁵"Qadaya al-Balda," *al-Mukhtar*, 8 July 1954, 3.

⁷⁶Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 134–35. The final quote is from Georges Bataille, *The Bataille Reader*, ed. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (New York: Wiley–Blackwell, 1997), 25.

⁷⁷Michel de Certeau, "Practices of Space," in *On Signs*, ed. M. Blonsky (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 127.

⁷⁸Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 5.

⁷⁹Nanette J. Davis and Bo Anderson, *Social Control: The Production of Deviance in the Modern State* (New York: Irvington, 1983).

⁸⁰"Qadaya al-Balda," *al-Mukhtar*, 8 July 1954, 3.

⁸¹Abu Asima, "'Ala al-Hukuma," 20–21.

⁸²Muslih Ijtima'i Kabir, "Shawari' Dimashq," *al-Mukhtar*, 2 September 1954, 31.

⁸³"Mukafahat al-Tasawwul," *al-Nas*, 29 August 1954, 2.

⁸⁴"Al-Mubashira bi-Mukafahat al-Tasawwul," 2.

⁸⁵"Mudiriyyat al-Shurta Tatlub al-'Adliya al-Tashaddud bi-Muhakamat al-Tasawwulin wa-l-Mutasharridin," *al-Nas*, 3 September 1954, 2.

⁸⁶Cresswell, "Moral Geographies," 128.

⁸⁷Henri Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, trans. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), 147–59. See also David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *New Left Review* 53 (2008): 23–40.

⁸⁸Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, 147–59.

⁸⁹Martin, "Identity," 100.

⁹⁰"Jam' al-Majanin," *al-Nas*, 16 September 1954, 4.

⁹¹Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2.

⁹²Timothy Mitchell, ed., "The Stage of Modernity," *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 19.

⁹³Ibn al-Balad, "Qadaya al-Balda," *al-Mukhtar*, 17 August 1954, 3.

⁹⁴Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*, 7.

⁹⁵"Ma'rid Da'im," *al-Nas*, 29 September 1954, 2.

⁹⁶Burton Benedict, "International Exhibitions and National Identity," *Anthropology Today* 7, no. 3 (1991): 5.

⁹⁷Ibn al-Balad, "Qadaya al-Balda," *al-Mukhtar*, 17 August 1954, 3.

⁹⁸David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 223.

⁹⁹Jacques Lacan, *The Language of the Self: The Function of Language in Psychoanalysis*, trans. Anthony Wilden (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), 12.