

# GENDERED REORGANIZATION IN LATE OTTOMAN BEIRUT: THE RECIPROCAL INFLUENCE OF THE DOMESTICITY DISCOURSE AND THE URBAN SPACE

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**Abstract** | This chapter explores the relationship between women’s private lives and the evolving urban space in the late Ottoman Empire. Although numerous studies have focused on either the public or the private/domestic sphere, there is scant research on the ways in which the discourse on domesticity and the expansion of the urban space impacted relationships between changes in the home and outside of it. Specifically, it examines how the gendered reorganization of the “modern” Arab home influenced the urban space and vice-versa. This reciprocal influence emerged in particular toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when new urban spaces in Beirut such as department stores but also private balconies became loci where the private and the public, the domestic and the urban intersected. These “in-between spaces” gradually became both “feminine” and “masculine” thus forging a larger place for women in the urban space.

## INTRODUCTION

As of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the major urban centers of Greater Syria (as was the case elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire) underwent significant changes. As a result, a growing domesticity discourse, which appeared in local journals, led to major upheavals within the homes of the Beirut middle class, but also outside of it with the rise of a more open urban space.<sup>1</sup>

Although numerous studies have focused on either the public or the private/domestic

sphere (see for example Jürgen Habermas<sup>2</sup> on the Euro-American bourgeoisie), there is scant research on the ways in which the domesticity discourse and the urban space influenced each other.<sup>3</sup> The investigation of these reciprocal relationships can shed light on the gendered reorganization of the “modern” Arab home and its influence on the urban space and the ways in which reconstructing gender inside the home reorganized gender relationships outside it. It also shows how women took advantage of the

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2 Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Black Well Publishers Ltd, 1989).

3 See for example, Toufouh Abou-Hodeib, *A Taste from Home: The Modern Middle Class in Ottoman Beirut* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017); Sharon Halevi and Fruma Zachs, “Arab Home in Turn-of-the-Century Beirut,” *Hagar-Studies in Culture, Polity and Identities* 10/2 (2013), pp. 139–156.

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\* Author’s note: I would like to thank Uri M. Kupfer-schmidt for reading an earlier version of this article and for his insightful comments.

1 The term “domesticity” here refers in particular to the role of women within the home and home decoration.



domesticity discourse to gain ground in the urban space.

Comparable to Sharon Marcus<sup>4</sup> analysis of apartment buildings in Paris and London in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, from the end of that century, as a result of technological progress such as city lighting, the tramway, and the growth of consumerism, new urban spaces in Beirut such as department stores and private balconies as well as public gardens and coffee houses, led the private and the public, the domestic and the urban to intersect. These fluid areas, what I term “in-between spaces” or “converged places,” were considered both “feminine” and “masculine.” This gradually forged a larger place for women in this social and cultural or intermediate space. Although the home remained the woman’s domain, some urban spaces became adapted to the mixed presence of middle-class women and men, thus enabling women, especially in the 1920s-1930s, to become more visible in the urban space and play a more active role in its evolution. As Yavuz Köse emphasized in his analysis of department stores in Istanbul: “[T]hey were not only innovative in their marketing, they become public spaces when men and women could stroll through the world of goods and consumption. One might argue that, with them, the clear distinction between private and public began to disintegrate.”<sup>5</sup>

The Victorian domestic ideal of the single-family home that had influenced the Beirut middle class was eventually negated by the reality of middle-class Beirut life where women were gradually integrated into the public/urban space and defined their own spaces.<sup>6</sup> As Toufoul Abou-Hodeib noted with regard to changes in tastes in Beirut, the public sphere was harnessed to changes in the home.<sup>7</sup>

## BEIRUT IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by Beirut’s changing interactions with its regional surroundings, the imperial center, and the world beyond the Ottoman Empire that altered social and economic notions of domesticity. During this period, Beirut became the economic and cultural center of Greater Syria. By 1915, the population of Beirut was roughly 175,000 (compared to 250,000 in Damascus and 200,000 in Aleppo). Christians of various denominations made up the majority of the population, followed by Muslims and Druze.<sup>8</sup> The city and its burgeoning foreign trade attracted growing numbers of merchants and entrepreneurs from outlying regions. This was also when a strong middle class emerged, who accumulated wealth and married among themselves. The exigencies of trade and contact with foreigners also necessitated the expansion of the traditional educational systems. In response, missionaries (in particular, American missionaries from various Protestant denominations) set up a network of schools (and later colleges) for boys and girls. Members of the bourgeoisie gradually (and cautiously) adopted Western ideas, styles, and tastes; the city’s architecture took on a European appearance, the wealthier classes (both Christian and Muslim) adopted a more modern lifestyle, moved to the suburbs, and avidly consumed newly imported fashions, goods, and cultural products.<sup>9</sup>

The exposure to Western ideas, culture, and technology inspired great admiration, but with it came a growing understanding of the need to preserve the Arab heritage. Part and parcel of this cultural encounter and its renegotiation was the growing public debate on the role the “modern” Arab woman should play in her family, society, and nation.<sup>10</sup> In this

4 For more details, see Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

5 Yavuz Köse, “Vertical Bazaars of Modernity: Western Department Stores and Their Staff in Istanbul (1881–1921), Ottoman Department Stores and Their Staff in Istanbul (1889–1921),” *Ottoman Republican Turkish Labor History* 54/17 (2009), p. 93.

6 For more details, see Marcus, *Apartment Stories*.

7 Abou-Hodeib, *A Taste from Home*, p. 29; see also, Toufoul Abou-Hodeib, “Taste and Class in Late Ottoman Beirut,” *IJMES* 43 (2011), pp. 475–492.

8 Rashid Khalidi, “Ottomanism and Arabism in Syria before 1914: A Reassessment,” in Rashid Khalidi et al. (eds.), *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press 1991), p. 56; Leila Tarazi Fawaz, *Merchants and Migrants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 1, 31.

9 Fruma Zachs and Sharon Halevi, “From Difa’ al-Nisa’ to Mas’alat al-Nisa’ in Greater Syria: Readers and Writers debate Women and their Rights, 1858–1900,” *IJMES* 41 (2009), pp. 615–634; Fruma Zachs, *The Making of a Syrian Identity: Intellectuals and Merchants in Nineteenth-Century Beirut* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

10 Zachs and Halevi, “From Difa’ al-Nisa’.”

regard missionary women teachers acted as significant cultural mediators in introducing and transmitting a “Western” brand of femininity (and domesticity) to their Arab women students.

The Tanzimat (lit. re-ordering; 1839-1876) enactment of provincial reforms (1864), and efforts at centralization and modernization, encouraged concerted efforts to rationalize and modernize the urban space and plan its expansion in advance. During this period (but most notably from 1864 to 1918), countless administrative buildings such as municipal structures, police stations, and law courts, transportation hubs (tram and train stations), and grand private homes were built, new water and sewage systems were put in place, and gas and electric streetlights were installed. Old streets were enlarged, and new ones were paved in the newer urban and suburban areas; shopping, leisure, and entertainment areas were planned, including department stores and marketplaces, hotels, coffeehouses, theaters, and parks.<sup>11</sup> As a result of Beirut’s urban growth, middle-class families began moving into the city’s new neighborhoods, whose expensive villas dotted the hills of the new suburbs. New houses were constructed, and new types of architecture and a self-conscious design attitude replaced the traditional courtyards.

In recent years, historians investigating the architectural developments and changes to the major cities of Greater Syria, such as Beirut,<sup>12</sup> Aleppo,<sup>13</sup> and Damascus,<sup>14</sup> as well as the major

Ottoman centers, such as Izmir and Istanbul,<sup>15</sup> and those of Egypt,<sup>16</sup> have found increasing material evidence of these interior and exterior changes. As upper- and middle-class families began to move out of courtyard houses into apartment buildings and suburban villas in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they increasingly adopted and combined old and new architectural features, furniture, and decorative items. However, the social and gendered meanings of this reorganization of the interior domestic space, which went hand in hand with the architectural changes, have only been touched upon recently.<sup>17</sup>

### THE DOMESTICITY DISCOURSE: REORGANIZING THE MODERN ARAB HOME

The architectural redesign of the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Arab / Beirut home and the reorganization of its interior should be seen as the product of a complex interweaving of complementary and at times contradictory Ottoman, Arab, and “Western” discourses concerning modernity and the role of women and the family in the reconstitution of the nation. In the last three decades, scholars from a range of fields have devoted considerable attention to the subject of houses, homes, and domestic spaces; most agree that homes are primary sites in which national, class, and gender identities

11 Jens Hanssen, “‘Your Beirut Is on My Desk’: Ottomanizing Beirut under Sultan Abdülhamid II,” in Peter Rowe and Hashim Sarkis (eds.), *Projecting Beirut: Episodes in the Construction and Reconstruction of a Modern City* (Munich: Prestel, 1998), pp. 41–67; Bruce Masters, “The Political Economy of Aleppo in the Age of Ottoman Reform,” *JESHO* 53 (2010), pp. 290–316.

12 Ralph Bodenstein, “Housing the Foreign: A European’s Exotic Home in Late Nineteenth-Century Beirut,” in Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp, and Stefan Weber (eds.), *The Empire and the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2002), pp. 105–127.

13 Heghnar Zeitlian Watenpaugh, “The Harem as Biography: Domestic Architecture, Gender, and Nostalgia in Modern Syria,” in Marilyn Booth (ed.), *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 211–236.

14 Stefan Weber, “Images of Imagined Worlds: Self-Image and Worldview in Late Ottoman Wall Paintings of Damascus,” in Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp, and Stefan Weber (eds.), *The Empire and the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2002),

pp. 145–171; idem, “Reshaping Damascus: Social Change and Patterns of Architecture in Late Ottoman Times,” in Thomas Philipp and Christoph Schumann (eds.), *From the Syrian Land to the States of Syria and Lebanon* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2004), pp. 41–58; Leila Hudson, “Late Ottoman Damascus: Investments in Public Space and the Emergence of Popular Sovereignty,” *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 15 (2006), pp. 152–169.

15 Haris Exertoglou, “The Cultural Uses of Consumption: Negotiating Class, Gender, and Nation in the Ottoman Urban Centers during the Nineteenth Century,” *IJMES* 35 (2003), pp. 77–101; Sandy Isenstadt and Rizvi Kishwar, “Introduction: Modern Architecture and the Middle East: The Burden of Representation,” in eidem (eds.), *Modernism and the Middle East: Architecture and Politics in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), pp. 3–36.

16 Mary Ann Fay, “From Warrior-Grandees to Domesticated Bourgeoisie: The Transformation of the Elite Egyptian Household into a Western-Style Nuclear Family,” in Beshara Doumani (ed.), *Family History in the Middle East: Household, Property, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 77–98.

17 See for example, Abou-Hodeib, “Taste and Class.”

are produced, performed, and reaffirmed.<sup>18</sup> Feminist historians in particular have focused on the rise of a specific set of gendered bourgeois ideals of the home (and its inhabitants) as of the 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>19</sup> as well as on how these Euro-American gendered ideals were disseminated, altered, and contested around the globe over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as a result of both indirect and direct colonialism.<sup>20</sup>

These major changes in the design and spatial organization of houses can be seen as clear indicators of changes in the relationships between its members, as well as between household and non-household members and institutions such as the state. The historical literature indicates that the “home” is both a gendered space and a space critical of the gendered constitution of society; it is a space infused, shaped by, and reflective of the gender ideologies defining a period and place.<sup>21</sup> Given that the person entrusted (in modern Western cultures) with much of the work involved in transforming a physical “house” into a psychological “home” is the wife and mother, spatial reorganizations of

the home are indicative of a reorganization or a re-conceptualization of the roles of the wife and mother. However, less attention has been paid to the influence of these changes on the activity of women outside the house or how these changes influenced or reshaped gender relationship in public spheres.

The analysis below of the spatial implementation of the Arab discourse on modern domesticity is based primarily on a thematic reading of newspaper articles, advice columns, and advertisements published from 1880 to 1914 in three of the leading Arabic journals of the time, *al-Jinan* (Beirut, 1870-1886), *al-Muqtataf* (Beirut, 1876-1884; Cairo, 1885-1900), and *al-Janna* (Beirut, 1879-1884),<sup>22</sup> in women’s journals such as *al-Fatat* (Alexandria, 1892-1894) and *al-Hasna’* (Beirut, 1909-1912) and also in *Lisan al-Hal* (Beirut, 1878-1900). This periodical literature enriches the scanty narrative biographical material from the region of Greater Syria in the form of diaries, memoirs, letters, etc., which have served as the basis for similar studies in other countries. Ideals, ideas, and advice concerning how women should spatially implement the ideals of domesticity were embedded within a much larger debate on the appropriate role of the modern Arab woman which touched on her education, contributions to her family and society, and her role in the life of the nation at the turn of the century. This debate was found mainly in *tadbir al-manzil* (household management) columns, which detailed the domestic arts a woman needed to master and the newly emerging standards of housekeeping and mothering.

The writers of the *tadbir al-manzil* columns considered that a woman’s role was not only to exert a civilizing influence on her family through her formal knowledge and education but also to ensure the smooth running of her household through her practical knowledge. Her main role was to preserve the home and family order and exercise good rational care to ensure the peace and harmony of the household while the menfolk worked outside the home. It was through these activities that she derived her dignity and honor. The articles in the *tadbir al-manzil* columns, while providing women with a broader, at times quasi-scient-

18 Sophie Bowlby, Susan Gregory, and Linda McKie, “Doing Home: Patriarchy, Caring and Space,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 20 (1997), pp. 343–350; James S. Duncan and David Lambert, “Landscapes of Home,” in James S. Duncan, Nuala C. Johnson, and Richard H. Schein (eds.), *A Companion to Cultural Geography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), pp. 382–403; J. Macgregor Wise, “Home: Territory and Identity,” *Cultural Studies* 14 (2000), pp. 295–310.

19 Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1750–1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1987); Karen Harvey, “Men making Home: Masculinity and Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” *Gender & History* 21 (2009), pp. 520–540; Dolores Hayden, *Grand Domestic Revolutions: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1981); Christopher Lasch, *Haven in a Heartless World* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); Bonnie G. Smith, *Ladies of the Leisure Class: The Bourgeoisies of Northern France in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

20 Alison Blunt, “Imperial Geographies: British Domesticity in India, 1886–1925,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 24 (1999), pp. 421–440; Ellen Fleischmann, “Our Moslem Sisters’: Women of Greater Syria in the Eyes of American Protestant Missionary Women,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 9 (1998), pp. 307–323; Susan Zlotnick, “Domesticating Imperialism: Curry and Cookbooks in Victorian England,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 16/2–3 (1996), pp. 51–68.

21 Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006); Marcus, *Apartment Stories*; Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

22 *Al-Janna* was published from 1871 to 1884; I examined the last five years.

tific,<sup>23</sup> understanding of the importance of their work within the home and family, had a strong practical orientation. Intellectuals of the time noted that by preserving the tranquility and orderliness of her household, a woman could also ensure the wellbeing of the nation.<sup>24</sup> In 1910, for example, in an essay entitled “The Syrian Girl and Her New Future,” Fictoria [Victoria] Antaki argued that the role of the Arab woman in the Nahda required her to invest her energies in the home to ensure the well-being of her family and the regeneration of the nation. The woman who carries out her role satisfactorily will be rightfully entitled to “ascend to the throne of this little kingdom” (*arsh al-mamlaka al-saghira*).<sup>25</sup>

Articles and columns discussing the changing social organization of the modern Arab household, the physical appearance of the house, and the shifting styles of daily life occupy a middle ground between grand philosophical articles extolling the moral and political role of the well-ordered household, and the highly practical *tadbir al-manzil* pieces advising the housewife on the intricacies of stain removal. While only a handful of articles dealt with the spatial expressions of this tranquil and ordered household, these articles were extremely detailed; their authors walked the reader through the home and provided comprehensive explanations for the rationale behind the design and arrangement of each room in the house. The best example of this type of early article was written in 1885 by Rujina Shukri, who describes visiting “a friend’s house,” which although clean and tidy, does not live up to her standards of household décor. She then proceeds to tell her readers how to better organize and decorate their homes.<sup>26</sup>

23 For example, Maryam Nimr Makarius, “Ba’d khurafat al-ifranj [Various Western Superstitions],” *al-Muqtataf* 5 (1880), pp. 169–171 [in Arabic]; Yakut Sarruf, “Turaf Tarkib al-Insan [Anecdotes on the Human Body],” *al-Muqtataf* 5 (1880), pp. 110–115, 141–143, 165–169 [in Arabic].

24 Salim al-Bustani, “al-Zawj wal-zawja [The Husband and the Wife],” *al-Jinan* 6 (1877), pp. 382–384 [in Arabic]; Julia Tu’ma, “al-Sama’ al-ula [The First Sky (the Home)],” *al-Hasna’* 2/1 (1910), pp. 9–14 [in Arabic].

25 Fictoria Antaki, “Fatah Suriya wa-mustaqbaluha al-jadid [The Syrian Girl and her New Future],” *al-Hasna’* 2/6 (1910), pp. 228–229 [in Arabic].

26 Shukri, a graduate of the American School for Girls, also presented the main argument of this article several years earlier in a lecture to the *Bakurat Suriya*.

Shukri emphasizes that it is the woman’s responsibility to turn her home into a tranquil and welcoming place and cautions them that if the woman fails in this task, the home may become a place of desolation. While Shukri acknowledges the limited financial resources at the disposal of many middle-class families, she claims that the ideal house she is about to describe is the appropriate abode for “ordinary people of the middle class.”<sup>27</sup>

Shukri’s characterization of a Beirut middle-class home as one with “many rooms” (*ghuraf*) and her first recommendation that the woman of the house should assign different rooms for different activities (each with its appropriate furniture), suggests that she was referring to a new type of house.<sup>28</sup> The “central-hall house,” as it came to be known, became popular in Beirut during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was designed for the use of one nuclear family. These houses were sub-villas that started to be built in the 1830s and 1840s as a middle-class status symbol. The central hall itself was often called *dar*, which basically means home, and was the most important room of the house.<sup>29</sup> The central hall house penetrated all layers of society that had a certain level of wealth and a certain status.<sup>30</sup> With their red-tiled roofs and triple-arch windows and balcony, these houses, which opened up onto a front garden and the street, were con-

27 Rujina Shukri, “Farsh al-buyut wa-tartibuha [Home Furnishing and its Organization],” *al-Muqtataf* (1885), p. 743 [in Arabic]. Her article is on pp. 743–745.

28 Shukri, “Farsh al-buyut,” p. 743. Jirjis Himam, writing several years after Shukri, also suggested that an educated and distinguished bourgeois family should have several rooms at its disposal, including a nursery, a guest bedroom, and a kitchen. Jirjis Himam, “Ikhtiyar al-manzil [Choosing a House],” *Lisan al-Hal*, 1271 (1891), p. 3 [in Arabic].

29 Friedrich Ragette, *Architecture in Lebanon: The Lebanese House during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1974), p. 113.

30 Anne Mollenhauer, “Reading Late Ottoman Architecture: Exterior Expression and Interior Organization of Central-Hall Houses between Beirut and Lattakia,” in Michael F. Davie (ed.), *La maison beyrouthine aux trois arcs: Une architecture bourgeoise du Levant* (Beirut: Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts; Tours: Centre de Recherches et d’Études sur l’Urbanisation du Monde Arabe, 2003), p. 116; Jean Said Makdissi, *Teta, Mother and Me: An Arab Woman’s Memoir* (London: Saqi, 2005), pp. 159–164; May Davie, “La millat grecque-orthodoxe de Beyrouth, 1800–1940” (PhD diss., Université de Paris, 1993).

structed in Beirut and the towns and villages surrounding it.<sup>31</sup>

These houses constituted a radical departure from the inward-oriented, interlocked houses of the inner city. In contrast to earlier residential styles, especially the traditional courtyard houses (the *dar* and the *hara*), where rooms were built around a central court, in the new “central-hall house” (see Figure 1) rooms were organized along a rectangular central hall.<sup>32</sup> The introduction of several rooms, organized around the longitudinal central hall also encouraged a separation between the various family members and between the private family quarters and the central reception area. Shukri devoted considerable attention to the public portion of this central hall (the vestibule) and to the first public room it opened onto, the main reception room or sitting room (*ghurfat al-majlis*, see Figure 2).

Although relatively small, the vestibule should in her opinion have several multi-colored rugs; paintings and prints should be displayed on the walls. For the comfort of guests waiting to be received, there should be several chairs and a large stand where they could deposit their walking-sticks, parasols, and hats.<sup>33</sup>

Next came the main receiving room, or sitting room, which the historian Karen Haltunnen has argued lay between “the urban street where strangers freely mingled and the back regions of the house where only family members were permitted to enter uninvited.”<sup>34</sup> As the main receiving room was both the first room guests would encounter and one that “reflects the skills of the woman of the house,” it had to be attended to with great care and furnished with the best furniture and decorative items. Shukri once again provides precise in-

structions for the décor and appearance of this room, as well as a detailed list of the items to be displayed, which include flower arrangements, candelabras, chandeliers, handsomely bound books, carpets, and light, airy curtains.<sup>35</sup> Archeological and architectural case studies of “central-hall house” interiors that served as vestibules and reception rooms have found evidence of the widespread usage of light green, pink, and blue wall paint, stucco ornaments, cornices, *trompe-d’œil* paintings, decorated ceilings, mosaic tile or marble floors, and glass windows.<sup>36</sup>

Shukri and other columnists also turned their attention to semi-private areas such as the dining room and the library, and private family rooms such as the bedroom and the nursery. Like the reception room, the dining room became a place where women could both demonstrate and enhance their family’s wealth and cultural capital by displaying the china, silverware, and table decorations correctly. Arguing that “the table is the mirror of the level achieved by the mistress of the house (*rabbat al-bayt*),” Arab women were instructed on how to furnish their dining rooms, how to present food dishes, and columns devoted considerable attention to how to set a formal dining table,<sup>37</sup> explained the fine points of dining etiquette, provided detailed instructions on how to create and decorate an epergne, and compared the older *service à la française* with the virtues of the newer *service à la russe* (*al ma’ida al-Muskubiyya*).<sup>38</sup>

35 Shukri, “Farsh al-buyut,” p. 744.

36 See for further details, Maurice Cerasi, “Some Considerations on the Mediterranean Archetypes Active in the Constitution of the Three-Arched Lebanese House Type: Fashion and Groove of Memory,” in Michael F. Davie (ed.), *La maison beyrouthine aux trois arcs: Une architecture bourgeoise du Levant* (Beirut: Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts; Tours: Centre de Recherches et d’Études sur l’Urbanisation du Monde Arabe, 2003), pp. 319–342; Günzel Renda, “Westernisms in Ottoman Art: Wall Paintings in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Houses,” in Stanley Ireland and William Bechhoefer (eds.), *The Ottoman House: Papers from the Amasya Symposium, 24–27 September, 1996* (London and Coventry: British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara and the University of Warwick, 1998), pp. 103–109.

37 Farida Hubayqa, “Adab al-ma’ida [Dining Etiquette],” *al-Muqtataf* 9 (1884), pp. 370–372 [in Arabic]; Niqula Nimr, “al-Tat’im bi-l-madda al-judariyya [Feeding during Chick-enpox],” *al-Muqtataf* (1883), pp. 164–166 [in Arabic].

38 Anonymous, “Zinat al-ma’ida [Decorating the Dining Table],” *al-Muqtataf* 9 (1884), pp. 554–556 [in Arabic]; Hubayqa, “Adab al-ma’ida.” In the older *service à la française*,

31 Ann Mollenhauer, “Continuity and Change in the Architectural Development of Zokak El-Blat,” in Hans Gebhardt et al. (eds.), *History, Space and Social Conflict in Beirut* (Würzburg: Ergon, 2005), pp. 109–142.

32 Akram Fouad Khater, “Building Class: Emigration, the Central Hall House, and the Construction of a Rural Middle Class in Lebanon, 1890–1914,” in Michael F. Davie (ed.), *La maison beyrouthine aux trois arcs: Une architecture bourgeoise du Levant* Beirut (Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts; Tours: Centre de Recherches et d’Études sur l’Urbanisation du Monde Arabe 2003), pp. 371–393.

33 Shukri, “Farsh al-buyut,” p. 743.

34 Karen Haltunnen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830–1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), p. 59.



**Figure 1:** A View of Central Hall Houses in Beirut with Tiled Roofs, Triple-arch Windows and Balconies.  
Source: Matson (G. Eric and Edith) Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress Online Catalog, Call Number LC-M32- 450 [P&P], 1900-1920. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/matpc.01183> (accessed 14 September 2020).

As books were noticeably present in all the rooms discussed (except for the dining room), it is clear that reading had become an important social activity cultivated by the Beirut middle classes, and one much preferred over idle card or backgammon games. It is thus unsurprising that home libraries were increasingly part of the recommendations for and descriptions of modern Arab homes.<sup>39</sup> However, contrary to the other rooms, few if any details were given as how this room should be furnished. It is possible that in Beirut, as in Europe and North America, the library was thought of as a masculine space,<sup>40</sup> where a man retires after dinner to work or “read a newspaper or a novel.”<sup>41</sup> While his wife may have been welcome to join him occasionally and keep him company while he worked, it was not hers to make an imprint.

Last came the bedrooms (*ghurfat al-nawm*); these were supposed to cater to both to the inhabitants’ physical (such as sleep) and emotional needs (to withdraw from the world and let one’s guard down). Thus, they needed to provide a bed for each person, a washstand, and a mirror, as well as a chest of drawers and a clothes closet. But no less importantly, the bedroom had to be restful and pleasing to the eye; thus, a few pictures should be hung on the walls, and a “nice rug” placed on the floor in front of a comfortable armchair and a side table with books on it.<sup>42</sup>

Four areas in the house were not described in detail: the kitchen, the bathroom, the laundry room, and the servants’ quarters. The lack of attention to these areas may be explained by the fact that the activities that took place in

most of these rooms were carried out by servants belonging to the lower social classes; given the known “invisibility of housework” and especially the “invisibility” of servants performing such work, this omission should come as no surprise.<sup>43</sup> However, ignoring these areas could also be the result of the ongoing separation of the living and service spaces. In traditional houses many service activities (such as cooking and washing) took place outside the house; in the case of central-hall houses, they were carried out both outside and on a different (housekeeping or mezzanine) floor.<sup>44</sup> Although this housekeeping floor is not mentioned in the press, it is found in houses that are still standing today and in photographs.<sup>45</sup>

In general, all these columns and articles on *tadbir al-manzil* reflect the ongoing project of redesigning the interior boundaries of the modern Arab home and investing them with new social and gendered meanings. The columns dealt with the emergence of public areas of the home, which were often occupied by both female and male guests. They defined the reception room and the dining room as spaces that a modern and educated but respectable woman could safely occupy and in which she could demonstrate her family’s status. At the same time, they also called for shielding the home, and in particular the private rooms, from the outside world by fences, hedges, front gardens, shutters, windows, and curtains, which created a visual and acoustic barrier between the outdoor noise, dirt, and disorderliness, and indoor quiet, cleanliness, and order. Taken together, both these features may be reflective of the transition from a home organized around a male-female principle to one organized around a public-private one. In addition, in line with trends in Europe and North America, Arab

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all the dishes were placed on the table and the guests served themselves; in the newer *service à la russe*, food was placed on the sideboard, and the servants served the guests course-by-course.

39 Elizabeth M. Holt, “Narrative and the Reading Public in Beirut,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 40 (2009), pp. 37–70.

40 S. J. Kleinberg, “Gendered Space: Housing, Privacy and Domesticity in the Nineteenth-Century United States,” in Janet Floyd (ed.), *Domestic Space: Reading the Nineteenth-Century Interior* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 142–161.

41 Fayiqah Ghabril, “al-Sa’ada al-baytiyya [Home’s Bliss],” *al-Hasna* 2/2 (1910), p. 109 [in Arabic].

42 Shukri, “Farsh al-buyut,” p. 745. Other writers recommended separate rooms for younger and older children and urged mothers to see that the nursery was clean, sunny, and airy, and maintained at a steady temperature. Himam, “Ikhtiyar al-manzil,” p. 3.

43 Jessica Gerard, “Invisible Servants: The Country House and the Local Community,” *Historical Research* 57 (136) (1984), pp. 178–188.

44 Ragette, *Architecture in Lebanon*, pp. 114–115. Ragette claims that Lebanese (and especially Beirut) cuisine differed significantly from the elaborate Arab cuisines of cities such as Aleppo and Cairo. It relied mainly on fresh fruit and vegetables and baked and grilled foods, for which a small oven and a simple charcoal grill would suffice.

45 Fouad C. Debbas, *Beirut Our Memory*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Naufal Group, 1986). For additional photographs, see Fouad C. Debbas Collection: <http://www.thefouaddebbascollection.com> (last accessed February 17, 2020).





**Figure 2:** An Example of the Interior of a Beiruti Central Hall House. The picture shows the main reception room or sitting room (*ghurfat al-majlis*).  
Source: Matson (G. Eric and Edith) Photograph Collection, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress Online Catalog, Call Number LC-M32- 451 [P&P], 1900-1920. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/matpc.01184/> (accessed 14 September 2020).

middle-class housewives in Beirut were encouraged to create an atmosphere at home that would enable their menfolk (in particular husbands) to recuperate from the hustle and bustle of “a heartless world.”<sup>46</sup>

Shukri’s detailed descriptions of the layout of the various rooms, their functions, and the items placed in them can also be seen in photographs/ pictures from this period. This suggests that spatial reorganization had a strong consumer and class aspect, which was evidenced in the growing advertising in Beirut journals for household goods. This consumer side of the spatial reorganization of middle-class homes in Beirut hints that bourgeois men, and especially women, were using these newly acquired items and services to achieve and broadcast their class status to the world. Historian Deborah Cohen argued that for middle class Victorians, items (e.g., furniture, paintings, carpets, and curios) conferred status to such a degree that “things preceded identity; what you owned told others (and yourself) who you were.”<sup>47</sup> More broadly, this reorganization of the home influenced women’s behavior outside the house and impacted gender relationships in the urban space.

### IN-BETWEEN SPACES

The discourse on domesticity in the media gradually and indirectly influenced the evolution of urban space in Beirut and vice versa, since the acquired taste and wealth of the Beirut middle class quickly manifested itself in the urban space. Middle-class domesticity was in no way hegemonic or homogeneous. As the house became a status symbol for the bourgeoisie, each house reflected the taste of a specific family. Houses in Beirut started to be painted in different colors and to exhibit different tastes, even though they all adhered to the same general lines of the central hall house structure. For example, although most of Zokak al-Blat’s late Ottoman houses have a central hall and a red-tiled roof and the balconies and façades are more open to the urban space, a number of variations demonstrate the influence individual owners could have on the building’s ap-

pearance, thus injecting variety into the urban space.<sup>48</sup>

There is a growing interest among historians of street culture on the porous nature of the relationship between “inside” and “outside,” rather than the hard boundaries between interiors and the street. The discourse on domesticity in Beirut was one of the parameters that contributed to blurring the lines between the private and public spheres and influenced the formation of “in-between spaces,” between the private and the public, both inside and outside the house. These changes, however, sometimes clashed with the original aims of domesticity and reshaped gendered relationships.

A good example of an “in-between space” in newly built middle-class houses in Beirut is the balcony, where women could see and be seen in the public arena while still in their private homes. The balcony was the place that connected the family, and especially women (but also men), to the public sphere/view or the public streets. The increasing importance of the balcony for women can be seen in the Beirut Arabic novels of the time and was used extensively as a key setting in the plots. The liminal position of balconies both exposed women to the public gaze and made them into potential subjects of gossip, while enabling them to see and hear what was going on below. Balconies, for women, were far more than visual places on which and from which to be observed; they were also places from which and to which to speak and to be heard.<sup>49</sup>

The domesticity discourse also helped create “in-between spaces” or “converging spaces” outside the house in the urban space, since women’s growing consumerism went beyond the confines of the home. Although in the discourse of domesticity women were expected to devote their time and efforts to the interior of the home, they found themselves increasingly leaving the home to fulfil this domestic mission. Department stores are a good example of places where women forged links between the commercial public and the bourgeois private family. The prosperous import and export activities in Beirut prompted new needs and

46 Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, pp. 112–113.

47 Cohen, *Household Gods*, p. 86.

48 Mollenhauer, “Continuity and Change,” p. 118.

49 For more details, see Alexander Cowan, “Seeing is Believing: Urban Gossip and the Balcony in Early Modern Venice,” *Gender & History* 23/3 (2011), pp. 721–738.

tastes in home decoration, which department stores as well as local stores sought to satisfy. These stores spread rapidly through Beirut as of the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> and were highly visible in public life and in urban space.

The architectural drama of these new stores was inescapable, both as an urban presence, with the building itself serving as an advertisement, and through their often-startling new interiors. They were built of iron and steel and plate glass and used new engineering methods and construction techniques featuring open yet imposing facades alongside airy and expensive interiors.<sup>50</sup> In fact, the department stores were constructed as monuments in the modern urban space. Lisa Tiersten, in her work on turn of the century Paris, notes that “the perception of the department store as an extension of the city street was accentuated by the lure of its opulent window displays and its policy of free-entry<sup>51</sup> [...] the very scale of the place, the sense of open space seemed to make the store a city in itself.”<sup>52</sup> Socially and culturally, as well as architecturally, these stores left their mark in the urban web of the Middle East. In the history of consumption and the modernization of shopping, they form a link between the “traditional bazaar” and the postmodern mega mall.<sup>53</sup>

Although Beirut newspapers advertised domestic goods,<sup>54</sup> from the second half of the

19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, department store marketing expanded rapidly. Advertisements for goods and fashions that would appeal to the middle class appeared on the pages of the Beirut newspapers.<sup>55</sup> The opening of local merchandise depots (such as al-Kaff al-Ahmar and Makhzan Suriya) and the launching of European department store outlets at the turn of the century responded amply to these needs.<sup>56</sup> Beginning in the 1880s, branches of major French department stores such as Au Bon Marché were set up in Beirut. This store was famous for its marketing innovations, which included a reading room for husbands while their wives were shopping.<sup>57</sup> It is known that women gradually worked and bought in these stores.

Other stores such as the Grand Dépôt and the Grand Magasin du Printemps acquired wholesale branches into the region. They specialized in low prices and a vast array of goods that was imitated in local knick-knack stores such as al-Kaff al-Ahmar (also known as Au Gant Rouge, the French translation of its name), Au Petit Bon Marche, and Makhzan al-Bada'i' al-Inkliziyya (Depot for English Goods).<sup>58</sup>

One of the best-known department stores in Beirut was Orosdi Back. It was the first large-scale department store in Beirut and opened in 1888. It was located on Bank Street in downtown Beirut, the road that leads up to Riyad al Sulh Square. This chain of stores came about as a result of a partnership between Adolf Orosdi, a Hungarian army officer, and his sons, who had opened a clothing store in Galata in 1855, and the Back family, who were Austro-Hungarian Jews, as was Orosdi. The store was known as the “Harrods of the East.” It was an impressive three-story building with large

50 For more details on these changes, see Geoffrey Crossick and Serge Jaumain, “The World of the Department Store: Distribution, Culture and Social Change,” in eadem (eds.), *Cathedrals of Consumption: The European Department Store 1850-1939* (London: Ashgate, 1998), p. 21; Lisa Tiersten, “Marianne in the Department Store: Gender and the Politics of Consumption in the Turn of the Century Paris,” in *ibid.*, p. 119.

51 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 120.

53 Köse, “Vertical Bazaars,” p. 112.

54 Most advertisements were for goods that appealed to women, such as ready-made clothes, furniture, household goods and appliances (particularly sewing machines), children’s and women’s clothes, silverware, mirrors, clocks, watches, safes, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, detergents, soap, and chocolates, as well as services, such as housekeepers, French and English teachers, and piano instructors. Fruma Zachs, “The Beginning of Press Advertising in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Beirut: Consumption, Consumers and Meanings,” in Gisela Procházka-Eisl and Martin Strohmeier (eds.), *The Economy as an Issue in the Middle Eastern Press: Papers of the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting “History of the Press in the Middle East”* (Neue Beihefte zur Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes, vol. 2) (Vienna: Lit, 2008), pp. 187–202.

55 Uri M. Kupferschmidt, “The Social History of the Sewing Machine in the Middle East,” *Die Welt des Islams* 44/2 (2004), pp. 195–213. The same process also took place in Egypt. See Mona Russell, “Modernity, National Identity, and Consumerism: Visions of the Egyptian Home, 1805–1922,” in Relli Shechter (ed.), *Transition in Domestic Consumption and Family Life in the Modern Middle East: Houses in Motion* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), pp. 37–63.

56 Kupferschmidt, “The Social History of the Sewing Machine;” Mary Louise Roberts, “Gender, Consumption and Commodity Culture,” *American Historical Review* 103 (1998), pp. 817–844.

57 Khater, “Building Class,” p. 389.

58 Abou-Hodeib, *A Taste from Home*, pp. 148–150. See also Michael B. Miller, *Au Bon Marché: Bourgeois Culture and the Department Store* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981).

display windows on the street. It opened in 1901 for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Sultan Abdülhamid II's accession. It had elevators and an internal telephone system but burned down in 1937. Jens Hanssen notes that the store was highly profitable, with a net profit of 117,699 francs in 1914.<sup>59</sup>

These department stores were designed to appeal to middle-class women and men who wanted to modernize their homes and families and hence indirectly their nation. Mona Russell suggests that women became "the general administrator and purchasing agent for their home whether wealthy or middle class."<sup>60</sup> Beirut women needed to leave their homes to purchase goods for the house. This became easier when modern means of transportation, including the tramway, were built during this period in Beirut. Very soon primarily men but also women went to shop in these department stores, thus signaling a change not simply in the structure of commercial life, but in the very nature of gendered relationships in the urban space. Reynolds notes that:

[...] department-store shopping challenged the non-metropolitan gendering of urban space and consumption that marked the broader society, bestowing on its customers a certain independence from older social codes and practices. The mixing of men and women in department stores complemented the modernity associated with the new kinds of goods the stores sold and increased their marketability.<sup>61</sup>

It is known that in Istanbul, for example, from 1914, the women who were employed in department stores were mainly Greeks, Jews, and Armenians. After World War I, Muslim women also started working in these stores. Women

59 Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 252; Uri Kupferschmit, *European Department Stores and Middle Eastern Consumers: The Orosdi-Back Saga* (Istanbul: Ottoman Bank Archives and Research Center, 2007), p. 27; Debbas, *Beirut Our Memory*, p. 27.

60 Mona Russell, *Creating the New Egyptian Women: Consumerism, Education, and National Identity, 1863-1922* (New-York: Palgrave, 2004), p. 84.

61 Nancy Y. Reynolds, *A City Consumed: Urban Commerce, the Cairo Fire, and the Politics of Decolonization in Egypt* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), p. 52.

were important to Muslim customers, as were the special rooms offering privacy, since they allowed the stores to offer culturally and religiously sensitive services.<sup>62</sup>

There is scant research on department stores in the Middle East. Questions such as how many women went to these stores towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> still needs to be explored. However, historical research on consumer behavior indicates that women began shopping much more in department stores in the 1920s and 1930s than in the early 1900s.<sup>63</sup> This trend can also be seen in articles in Beirut newspapers and in many novels in which intellectuals cautioned middle-class women time and again not to concentrate on their outward appearance and to stop buying and wearing European goods and fashions.<sup>64</sup> Studies also show that women's shopping varied in terms of class in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Lower- and middle-class women had longer or more regular experiences of public work and movement in market spaces than upper-class women, who more commonly bought goods in their homes from traveling peddlers or sent their servants or male relatives to the market. Nevertheless, many upper- and middle-class Muslim and Coptic women who had been secluded in previous decades began to shop in big stores.<sup>65</sup>

The change in gendered relationships was perceived as a threat that could blur the boundaries between the private and public spaces where unrelated men and women could mix.<sup>66</sup> For example, husbands<sup>67</sup> feared that payment for goods would make women more indepen-

62 Köse, "Vertical Bazaars," pp. 101-103, 113.

63 Reynolds, *A City Consumed*, pp. 79-80.

64 It is important to note that, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these advertisements were not aimed directly at women. The change began towards the turn of the century when advertisements began to be written for female consumers, especially for fashion. See also Abou-Hodeib, *A Taste from Home*, pp. 116-17.

65 Reynolds, *A City Consumed*, p. 73.

66 For more details on this subject, see Nancy Y. Reynolds, "Salesclerks, Sexual Danger, and National Identity in Egypt, 1920s-1950s," *Journal of Women's History* 23/3 (2011), pp. 63-88.

67 Uri Kupferschmit, "Who needed Department Stores in Egypt? From Orosdi-Back to Omar Effendi," *Middle Eastern Studies* 43/2 (2007), p. 182; Kupferschmit, "The Social History of the Sewing Machine," pp. 197-198.

dent. This public consumerism also challenged the bourgeois order and the goal of the domesticity discourse since it drew women into a “dangerous” network of unregulated desires, where self-interest and pleasure could easily overcome the dictates of social and familial duties and challenge bourgeois male authority at home and in public.

## CONCLUSION

Examining the reciprocal influence of the discourse of domesticity in Beirut and the development of urban space can help shed light on the ways gender relationships were reshaped. The process of rearranging the home, as seen in the domesticity discourse and the modern project of changing the urban space, eventually carved out a larger place for women in the public sphere. The home ceased being the sole *mamlaka* (domain) of women but increasingly

and in parallel more places were designed for both genders in the urban sphere. Since women’s changing position in society was articulated through the home, this process eventually led them to be more visible in the public sphere and enabled them to take an active part in changing it.

Most research on gender relations and urban spatial structures casts women as the innocent, passive victims of an environment created by property developers, the state, and patriarchy in an effort to establish a distinct territory for the “traditional” nuclear family. Clearly, however, women, as can be seen in the Beirut case, were also agents in the spatial structure of the city or at least took an active part in this process, even as a by-product of the patriarchal/domesticity discourse.<sup>68</sup> Additional comparative research with more empirical cases should be conducted to further explore the reciprocal influence of the domesticity discourse and the changing urban space.

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68 For more details, see Kim V.L. England, “Gender Relations and the Spatial Structure of the City,” *Geoforum* 22/2 (1991), p. 143.

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### **A BOTTOM-UP VIEW OF URBAN MIDDLE CLASS LIFESTYLES IN JOURNALS AND NEWSPAPERS FROM 19TH CENTURY OTTOMAN SYRIA**

This chapter on Ottoman Syria and Beirut in particular during the Nahda period (the awakening of Arabic culture) draws extensively on a rich collection of Arabic newspapers and periodicals published mainly from 1858 to 1914. Numerous newspapers and periodicals were founded and flourished during the Nahda period, and from 1858 onward (when the first journal in Arabic was launched) until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century most publishers were male intellectuals. However, they were aimed at both female and male audiences. Most of the writers themselves were men. Only toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did female figures found and publish journals (in Egypt and Syria). These publications dealt for the most part with subjects that appealed to women, although both men and women published articles in them.

These Arabic journals and periodicals can be found today in a number of libraries and archives, on paper, microfiche or microfilm or even online. The libraries of the University of Haifa and the Hebrew University house many of these periodicals and journals.

Although these lively publications are crucial to understanding political developments in Middle Eastern history, they are also essential for a grasp of the social, cultural, urban and gender history of the local middle classes. They shed light on bottom-up processes in history and provide insights into daily/private life narratives and events,

at times at the municipal level, that are rarely noted in governmental documents or other sources. Some of these newspapers printed illustrations that reveal much about the social and cultural messages the writers aimed to convey to their readers, and can provide precious information on processes such as modernization and consumerism. These can also be seen in newspaper advertisements for shops, merchandise depots and department stores.

Socio-cultural topics more clearly dominated the journals and periodicals founded by women and for women. This can be seen in particular in their advice or opinion columns where women's voices and thoughts can be heard over the political hegemonic voice. They approached topics such as the gendered reorganization of the "modern" Arab home (both within the home as well as in its facade; i.e., in the public space) and childrearing including trends in fashion, feeding, hygiene and play time.

Delving into Ottoman Syrian history is important to an understanding of urban history and its multifaceted relationship to gender discourses. Advice columns, for example, demonstrate how the recommendations of their authors, especially with regard to issues of domesticity, reflected both new cultural and social trends but at the same time how the writers themselves promoted trends in women's lives and their intersection with the rapidly changing world of the cities and towns they lived in.