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The Ancient Walls of Damascus and the Siege of Mouaddamiyya : A Historical and
Spatial Analysis of Bounded Place and Cultural Identity

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Abstract

*Throughout the Syrian crisis, the presence of material and symbolic boundaries to
culture became a particularly salient element of the continuously unfolding political
turmoil. As one terrorist group, Daesh or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria seeks to
unite the vast area of the Middle East under the political, religious and cultural
administration of a "Greater State of Syria," or "al-Sham," this paper revisits the
historical spatial organization of Damascus and the construction of city boundaries and
walls as factors that contributed to the cultivation of spatially-grounded cleavages within
Syrian and Damascene identity. In the latter section of this paper, I reflect on the impact
of these cleavages on the Syrian crisis by focusing on the public response to the siege of
the Mouaddamiyya neighborhood.*

Keywords: Place & Identity, Walled City, Social Movements.

Biography

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Introduction

Throughout the period between 2012 and 2016, the Syrian neighborhood of *Mouaddamiyya* in the outskirts of Damascus remained under siege. While the residents in the neighborhood complained of catastrophic food and medicine shortages, the siege was ignored by Syrian public discourse and life in the urban center of Damascus continued largely undisturbed in spite of the struggles of countrymen and women only kilometers away. As such, the earliest events of the siege marked it as a critical juncture in the Syrian Revolution and its aftermath. It represented several key factors that would come to shape this revolution: the fracturing of earlier narratives, the centrality of spatial dynamics of inclusion and exclusion to current tensions, as well as the indifference of urban elites to the plight of besieged rural areas during a crisis that would become marred with numerous other sieges across the country.

While the fear of government retaliation may have motivated this silence in part, the lack public reaction to the siege cannot be attributed solely to the Syrian regime's suppression of dissent. Nor can the sectarian analytic lens that has dominated treatments of the Syrian crisis to date explain the limited public reaction to the siege. In fact, both the urban center of Damascus and its environs share a relatively similar demographic makeup. Instead, this analysis suggests alternative cleavages brought about by geographical factors such as the construction of city walls and boundaries may influence the tensions of the current conflict. I argue that the historic walls of Damascus have created binaries of "within" and "without" the city walls. These binaries continue to inform contemporary collective identity, limiting solidarity between groups of insiders and outsiders within the Damascene geography in ways that influence the reaction to the siege and ongoing conflict.

Mouaddamiyya

The town of *Mouaddamiyya*, a suburb lying west of the Syrian capital Damascus became a battle ground between opposition forces and the Syrian military following the suburb's participation in the protests that spread across Syria in March 2011. *Mouaddamiyya*'s proximity to Damascus made the regime's crackdown on the town critical to its strategy of containment of protests across the country ("Syria", 2016). As such, the state laid siege to the town in 2012, restricting residents' access to medical supplies, electricity, alimentary products, running water and heating fuel. Throughout the siege, the social media pages of the *Mouaddamiyya* local council regularly reported children dying of starvation and residents suffering from the shortage of medical supplies (*Mouaddamiyya* Local Council, January 14, 2016) beseeching urban Damascenes to react to a siege that had left *Mouaddamiyya*'s inhabitants "dying of hunger" (*Mouaddamiyya* Local Council, January 14, 2016). These attempts addressed the perceived inhumane silence of neighboring Damascenes throughout the siege.

The neighborhood also issued a warning to the Syrian regime as residents wrote, "watch out, we will starve but we will never kneel," on the walls of Mouaddamiyya. This expression became a widespread response to the regime's "starvation strategy" in the besieged areas such as Eastern Ghouta, al-Zabadani, Yarmouk refugee camp, and others (Mahdi 2015). As such, the walls of Mouaddamiyya emerged as deeply symbolic elements of the region's geography, they stood upright as the residential buildings around them were

turned to rubble, and they carried on their faces the messages of the perseverance of the residents as a reminder to their future selves, and as a warning to their oppressors.

Figure 1 "Watch out! We'll starve but we will never kneel." (Khabieh 2016) Taken with permission from the photographer.

However, the messages of the walls of *Mouaddamiyya* could neither protect the inhabitants from the violence inflicted upon them, nor inspire a wider audience of Damascenes, as it received limited public attention and media coverage inside the urban center.

Figure 2 The Destruction of Walls in besieged neighborhood of Douma (Khabieh, 2016). Taken with permission from the photographer.

In many ways, the siege of *Mouaddamiyya* is representative of the siege tactics imposed on many other rebel-held areas across the country. However, this case study is marked by both a proximity and visibility to the capital as well as an indifference of urban Damascenes, raising critical questions for how the construction and ordering of space may influence the belonging of the collective identities it and solidarity across spatial boundaries. Beginning with that understanding, the following section offers a historical analysis of the geographical development of the city of Damascus to uncover the roots of public silence on the siege inherent in the history of inclusion and exclusion in Damascene urban development. It seeks to provide an explication for chaos that resides within the relative peace predating the outbreak of the revolution.

The Politics of Space in Damascus

Inhabitants of Damascus pride themselves on the city's history of colonization[1]. Historical evidence as early as the 1st and 2nd century B.C. points to the importance of Damascus to a number of civilizations that emerged during the period (Pitard 1987: 10). The city has since experienced considerable periods of successive colonization. During the 11th century B.C., Damascus hosted the Aramaean civilization, then the Persians, Assyrians, and Greeks. In the 6th century B.C., the region was annexed by the Roman empire; Later, it was ruled by the Umayyad kalifate, followed by the Ayyubid. In the 16th century, it was colonized by

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[1] The term colonization in this context is used to denote the archeological term given to human habitation of natural land. See Pitard (1987), Burns (2007), Sauvaget.

the Ottomans, followed by the French in the 19th century. As such, the city's development withstood centuries of political colonization and reorganization.

The city's rich history however is in direct opposition with the obstacles to human inhabitation cited by archeologists (Pitard 1987: 2 and Sauvaget 1934: 427). Yet, natural elements surrounded the area and encouraged colonization in the absence of fortification due to their ability to demarcate space and create boundaries, which proved in the Damascene case to supersede the need for natural defenses. The Barada and Mnin rivers surrounded the city "like the halo around the moon," according to the poet and traveler Ibn Jubayr[2] (Burns, R. 2005: xvii). Moreover, the Qassyun Mountain, Qalamoon Mountain, and the surrounding mountain range naturally demarcated the area. All in all, a convergence of natural forms of demarcating the space of Damascus encouraged the continuous colonization of the geographic region despite its vulnerabilities and fostered the cultivation of a distinct identity tied to a demarcated place.

Building the Wall

These natural elements complemented human efforts to demarcate and define the city. First among these human interventions was the construction of a wall surrounding the city of Damascus, allowing the inhabitants to enter and exit the city at seven egress points: *bab sharqi, bab al-Faradees, bab touma, bab jabya, bab el-saghir, bab kisan,* and *bab alsalam.*

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[2] For a more detailed account of the travels of Ibn Jubayr in Damascus see Wright, W. (1907) *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr*. Leyden: B rill.
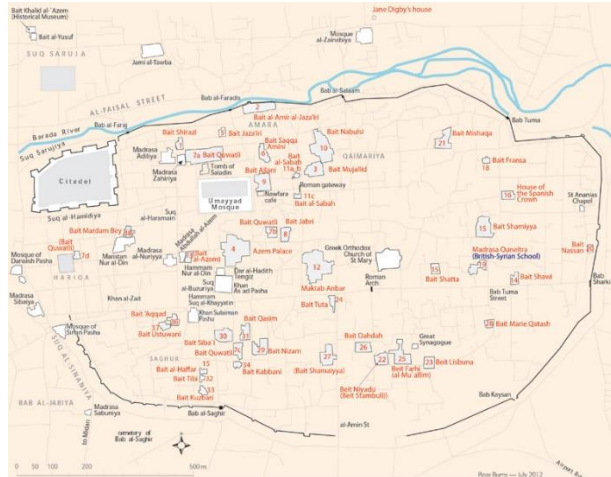
Figure 3: Map of Damascus from Damascus: Hidden Treasures of the Old City by Brigid Keenan, 2000, republished with permission from Dr. Ross Burns

Political powers of the earlier periods often employed city walls to distinguish the urban center from the surrounding rural environs (Creighton 2007: 346). Thus, the walls of Damascus distinguished what would be come to be known as city "Damascus" from the earlier conceptions of a "Greater Damascus" or *Bilad al-Sham,* which encompassed the area of the Levant including modern-day Jordan, Israel and Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria. In addition, the walls of Damascus asserted Roman political power by demonstrating Rome's capacity to "make and remake landscapes" (Smith 2003: 5). Finally, the fortifications of the wall protected the political and economic capital of Damascus and signaled security to urban inhabitants.

However, walled cities insulate and segregate populations in ways that present geographically-based cleavages within collective identity. As Oliver Creighton noted, "While the image of the walled city might outwardly be one of enclosure, cohesion, and privilege, equally important but underestimated is the enduring role of walled heritage in excluding […] populations." (Creighton 2007: 344) Thus, the walls of Damascus played an enduring role in both enclosing and encouraging the development of a cohesive

"Damascene" identity, as well as excluding the environs from the urban identity-contributing to the cultivation of multiple opposing identities and signally future fissures in society. Beginning with the identity within the wall and proceeding to its counterpart beyond the wall, this section will identify how the construction of city boundaries impacted the development of Damascene identity over time.

Identity Within the Wall

Within the wall, the daily trajectories of Syrian inhabitants entered a dialectical relationship with the constructed space (de Certeau 1984: 97) that contributed to the meaning-making of the city of Damascus. In parallel, these daily trajectories defined the "Damascene" subject. They established the city's rhythms, sights, and sounds. More specifically, as neighborhoods established an identity constructed of the activities of its inhabitants, Damascenes began to assign archetypical identities to inhabitants of each neighborhood as well. *Al-Shaghoor* held the rough *ibn balad* personalities, and *qabadayat* who would populate Keith Watenpaugh's accounts of Syrian cities (2006: 263). *Al-Qanawat* would house families of notables alongside the water channels of the neighborhood. Similarly, Damascene quarters within the wall such as the Christian quarter *Bab Touma*, and the Jewish Quarter *Haret el-Yahud* each offered a different aesthetic feel and social network. Accordingly, these aesthetic and social divergences allowed neighborhoods to perform the social stratification of Damascene society. When in previous eras, *al-Sham* had referred to what is now understood as "Greater Syria," an area that once encompassed much of the Levant, the material boundaries of Damascus constrained the word to the area it encompasses. As a result, Damascenes gradually restricted the use of

"*al-Sham*" or Damascus to the identities and activities allowed within the city's material infrastructure. Eventually, the families living within the wall began to represent the notable families of *al-Sham*, a mechanism of social stratification that informed numerous realms of society including marriages, social networks (Salamandra 2010: 228), business interactions and political capital (Khoury 2003: ix). Inhabitants who studied in the madrasa became known as the *mutaʿullemoon* or educated, and the *tujjar* were merchants who sold goods in the markets. Together, these activities contributed to future mechanisms of stratification and exclusion vis-à-vis inhabitants outside the wall.

As the term "*al-Sham*" became constrained to the city center, the spatial organization of the city contributed to the emergence of a distinct rhythm of Damascene life that would come to define Damascene identity. This rhythm began at the heart of the city and radiated to the extremities in a concentric pattern. In this schema, life began in the neighborhoods. Neighborhoods such as *haret al-Amin* represented the urban housing and also the primary access point one possesses to the city's map, the point where one enters through birth. At five years of age, boys went to schools in the center of the city. These *kuttab* or *madares* [community schools] were concentrated around the great mosque of Damascus, what is now known as the Ummayad Mosque. Here, the *Madares* reified the power of the ʿ*ayan* or urban notables of Damascus. They transferred social capital through education, and bestowed upon ʿ*ayan* the title of *mutaʿallim* (Chamberlain and Morgan 2002: 7), or "educated" as a mark of social distinction that persists in contemporary discourse. As education and consciousness are cultivated in the schools at the heart of the Damascene geography, life emanated over time from the center to the periphery. As

students reached maturity, they took apprenticeships in the market stores surrounding the core of the city.

Ultimately, at the inevitable final stage of life the Damascene subject reaches the peripheries of the urban geography. However, only in death does the Damascene body finally take residence beyond the wall. In a final farewell, the body is remembered in prayer at the religious places at the core of the city, then it is delivered to its final resting place in the cemeteries along the outside of the wall. Each gate along the periphery of the wall possessed a cemetery, with a cemetery at *Bab Sharqi* (the eastern gate) and *Bab Al-Jabye*, *Bab Kissan*, *Bab Sagheer*, and *Bab Touma.* Only in rare cases is the interment of an inhabitant made within the walls of city. In 1193, Saladin Al-Ayyubi was an exceptional case; he was buried north of the Umayyad mosque (Herzfeld 1946: 47), where later his son Malik al-ʿaziz Uthman would construct a *madrasa* dedicated to his memory (Burns 2005: 175). The exceptional position of Saladdin's burial site in fact reaffirms his privileged status in Syrian history. The choice to bury his body at the heart of the city, in front of the Umayyad mosque, ensures that even in death, Saladin's memory is registered as an integral part of the daily life of the city, while protecting him from the erasure that may result from a burial beyond the wall. In the contemporary period, the 33 cemeteries surrounding Damascus became prohibitively expensive, restricting burial in the environs of the city to a "handful of families who own graves" in the city's cemeteries ("33 Cemeteries", 2013).

Consequently, urban residents of Damascus consolidated social and political power within the confines of the geography of exclusion provided by the city walls. In turn, the construction of the Damascene identity within the wall continued to be diametrically opposed to, and superior to, the environs in the hierarchical social, political, and economic

structure of the region. What impact did this spatial-structuring have on the perception of dwellers outside the wall and what impact did it have on Damascene identity?

What lies beyond the wall?

For "Damascenes" living inside the city walls, the space beyond the wall can be conceptualized with the expression common for non-spaces or "other" spaces,

"*el-fayet maf'ood wel tale' mawlood.*" The expression translates to, "those who go in are vanished, and those who come out are reborn." It is also telling that the expression is commonly used in contemporary Syrian dialect to describe state prisons, where people are "disappeared".

The city walls distinguished the urban landscape from the countryside (Creighton 2005: 43) whose residents became the *Fallaheen*, peasants or *'Arab*[3]*,* Bedouins. The former group was looked down on for their seemingly primitive way of life, and the other engendered mistrust for their nomadic lifestyle that inspired fear to the local inhabitant. The appellation *Fallah* later became a derogatory term intended for lower social classes. Similarly, the Bedouin experienced longstanding discrimination in Damascene social and political life, and the term *Badawi*, equivalent to the Anglicized "Bedouin", became synonymous with backwardness. Both categories point to the salience of spatial configurations on the social fabric and future dynamics of othering.

Inevitably, the city walls experienced centuries of decay and degradation from the Roman period to the contemporary context. Moreover, the wall of Damascus ceased to provide the primary geographical boundary as the city expanded in the Umayyad, Abbasid,

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[3] 'Arab is a term used to describe Bedouins and nomads (Rafeq 1966: 76).

and Ottoman eras during which the city walls evolved from material realities to abstract conceptualizations that inform cultural identity along their historical boundaries. Throughout this period, the construction of a boundary between Damascus and its environs allowed the parallel development of two distinct cultures, engaged in different activities and lifestyles, and culminating in the construction of two separate collective identities.

In these opposed insider and outsider identities, the othering of the outside allowed "Damascenes" to continue to tolerate exploitative relationships with the outré region, and violence towards its inhabitants. In the case of *Mouaddamiyya*, this exploitative relationship can be seen in the role the region played in supplying urban residents with agricultural products.

A Fellah Rules Damascus: The Case of the ʿAzems

Another aspect of the tensions between insiders and outsiders can be seen in the rule of the prominent ʿAzem family that *Mouaddamiyya'*s name echoes. The ʿAdhem (pronounced ʿAzem in Damascene) family rose to power in 1725 and continued to govern Damascus under the Ottomans until 1783 (Rafeq 1966: 3). The ʿAzems are not simply notable family of influence, or *ashraf*, from inside the wall. In fact, the controversy surrounding the identity of the ʿAzem family exemplifies the tensions between inside and outside, rural and urban inhabitants of Damascus. The family is said to originate from *Maarrat al-Nuʿman*, a northern rural area surrounding Hama. Sayyid Raslan Al-Qari, a Damascene historian contemptuously referred to Ismail Pasha Al-ʿAdhem as a *Fellah* from *Mu'arra* in his accounts. Raghib Pasha, a Grand Vezir of the 18th century referred to Ismail Pasha Al-ʿAdhem as a *fellah ibn fellah*, or a peasant son of a peasant, further berating his lineage

(Rafeq 1966: 87). As such, the rural origins of the family justified resistance to the family's newfound political power.

Yet, the ʿAzem governorship also exemplified violence and exploitation of rural areas. The ʿAzem family's governorship was particularly harsh on the *Fellahin* and Bedouins outside the city's walls because it restricted their primary source of income as suppliers of livestock to the urban center. Ismail Pasha established a livestock and produce monopoly, restricted the supply of meat to two slaughter-houses, and the distribution network to ten butcher shops. Finally, he proclaimed himself the sole supplier of livestock, providing sheep from regions he owned in Homs and Hama rather than rural Damascus (Rafeq 1966: 95). The decision not only jeopardized the livelihood of the *Fellahin* and Bedouin tribes around Damascus, but also it justified regular punitive measures against them for selling contraband sheep, or even allowing herdsmen to visit their land (Rafeq 1966: 102). Thus the example of ʿAzem governership reveals that the expansion of urban center, or migration into it does not release outsiders of their "otherness," nor does it mitigate the history of violence towards the "other" within the city's landscape.

In parallel to the violence from within, the exclusion of the outré regions from the protection of the city's walls exposed them to the violence of invaders as well. Accordingly, the rural outré regions were strategically employed as a region to be exploited, and a buffer zone that absorbs military invasions and natural disasters. For instance, a Crusade campaign on Egypt and Syria in 1217, flooded the suburb of *Darayya*, and placed the residents of the suburbs of ʿ*Aqraba* and *Harasta* in danger, leading to the rise in prices of produce and chaos in Damascus (al-Zaybaq 1997: 31). Similar accounts of attacks demonstrate that despite the vital contribution of the outré regions to Damascus, areas

beyond the wall were excluded from the protection offered by the wall, and instrumentalized as natural protection reinforcing the fortifications of the urban center, resulting in mutual distrust on both sides of the manmade construction. In response to the violence inflicted on them by the urban geography, the outré regions of Damascus revolted against the urban center regularly. During one significant revolt in August of 1860, the growing resentments beyond the city walls drove gangs of Bedouin, Druze, and Kurds to attack Damascus, a precursor to the spatial-reorganization of Damascus in the *Tanzimat*, or "organization decrees" that continued in the late 19th century.

The Tension between Inside and Outside the Wall in the Syrian Crisis

The tension between the inhabitants within the wall and without is an important prism through which the public response to the siege of *Mouaddamiyya* may be seen. Moreover, at the center of the tension lay the role that media played in bringing these tensions to the fore. When one group of directors, actors and screenwriters wrote "*Bayan al-Halib*" or the "Milk Declaration," pleading with the government for the safe passage of people, medical supplies, and specifically infants' milk to the people under siege, the response from industry colleagues was to declare that the signatories are traitors (Joubin 2013: 49). In addition, a list of twenty-two production companies announced that they would not work with any signatory of *Bayan al-Halib*, justifying the decision as appropriate response to "traitors who are participating in a global conspiracy against their homeland" (Joubin 2013: 49-52). Syria's vibrant television serial production industry (Salamandra 2011) thus was at the center of the contestation of the siege, as well as the responses to such statements.

Competing narratives surrounding the *Mouaddamiyya* siege also emerged, in particular one labelling the residents "terrorists," justifying their othering yet again (Zakarya, November 26, 2013). Meanwhile, opposition members claimed that the regime has placed illegal conditions on the passage of food, demanding that the village concede to the government and expel rebel fighters (Zakarya, November 29, 2013). In the meantime, the space continued to act as a heterotopia, in which the competing narratives that defined the Syrian nation battled for dominance. In a country where the regime has held an uncontested monopoly over defining the grand narrative of the Syrian nation and acting as the primary story-teller of the greatest Syrian drama (Joubin 2013: 25), *Mouaddamiyya* has acted as an "other" space where the regime may battle rebel forces over the narratives, identities and political formations that would define Syria's future. Meanwhile, Damascenes living inside of the city center acted as spectators, viewing the shelling of *Mouaddamiyya* from their windows and balconies (Zakarya, December 25, 2013).

Even deeper lies the tension that persisted over time between the urban and the rural, as the politics of inclusion and exclusion rears its head in the Syrian Revolution. Superficially, the Syrian Revolution is inevitably (because of the demographic makeup of the nation) a Sunni-majoritarian revolution contesting the legitimacy of the minority rule of the '*Alawi* Assad family. Underneath the sectarian dynamic however lies a Damascene urban core that harbored a persistent animosity towards the rule of rural peasants. After the former peasant from *Qordaha* came to power in the military coup of 1970 (Ajami 2012: 28), Hafez al-Assad ruled with an iron fist over a core of Damascene notables antagonistic to his rule. In his interviews with former political detainees, Ajami reveals that an act as simple as a chat recounting the Assad family's origins would land a person in jail for

decades, demonstrating the centrality of the rural/urban divide to opposition to the state, as well as its role in state oppression of the populace (Ajami 2012: 3). Thus, as Martin Kramer wrote, the *'Alawis* had "beaten their ploughshares into swords, first becoming military officers, then using the instruments of war to seize the state." (Kramer 1987).

Meanwhile, while the rural origins of Hafez al-Assad became taboo, the leader proceeded with what Ajami called the "ruralization" of Damascus, pasting the face of his mother Naissa in peasant clothing on billboards in the urban center (Ajami 2012: 41). Linguistically, as Batatu pointed out, the dialect of the rural coastal region from which the Assads hailed intruded into Damascus and alarmed its inhabitants (Batatu 1999: 160).

Throughout this period, the centrality of geography also informed much of the social fabric of Damascene society. The ruralization of Damascus exacerbated Damascene efforts to preserve the legacy of urban notables. A search for "Damascene notable families" yields 250,000 results on Google spanning old and new media platforms including books, archives, social media pages (Notable Family Names, Faceboo) and blogs (Old Damascus, 2014). Consequently, despite the consistent sectarian analyses of the Syrian Revolution, the revolution has brought to the forefront the geographies of distinction that organize Damascene life in the capital. It also reveals the longstanding material and cultural impact of the built environment on social life.

The apathy with which the siege of individuals outside the walls is regarded, and the willingness to label critics of the siege as "traitors" reveals the longstanding impact that the material organization of space achieved by the wall has on people's understanding of community and belonging. The spatial boundaries of the wall differed in the centuries following its construction, however the symbolic violence done unto outsiders persisted

throughout time. Long after the material construction of the wall had decayed, Damascene notables continued to search for friends, business partners and prospective brides and grooms that could trace their lineage to the "notable Damascene" families from within the wall. Long after families had moved out of Old Damascus and into the modern residential areas of Kafarsuseh, Mezze and others, they continued to identify themselves as descendants of residents of their old neighborhoods within the wall.

Thusly, the cleavages resulting from the material ordering of space and the construction of city boundaries endure far longer than the material constructions upon which they were based. They enable acts of violence towards "outsiders" for generations to come. Moreover, as "Damascenes" are conceptually and materially constructed within the wall, the development of the identity of Damascus" occurred against the background of the social, material and environmental "ground" of the rural environs.

Space, Place, Identity in the Era of Walls

The historical geography of modernity points to political formations, notably the state, as a primary force in the organization of space and the definition of territorial boundaries (Arendt 1970: 81-2, Howell 1992: 312). This is due to the centrality of the demarcation of space to the exercise of political power because political authority requires a geographically bounded space over which it can reign (Herb 1999:10). In the Syrian case, the practice of organizing space is performed through the building of citadels, fortifications, mosques, and madrasas (Herzfeld 1946: 37). Yet as shown in this article, once space becomes bounded, finite and defined, society becomes the crucial component of the meaning-making tied to place. As such, once places defined, they enter a dialectical relationship with the social formations that inhabit it. In sum, place is intimately tied to identity, as the two concepts mutually construct one another.

Thus, the practice of creating the city both spatially and conceptually defines the boundaries of the identities that occupy the places of the urban landscape. Kaplan names these "spatial identities," indicating that once place becomes bounded and meaningful, the material aspects of place begin to play a role in identity construction (Kaplan 1994: 31) that construct spatial identities in nested layers (Herb 1999:10), beginning at the local level where identities are grounded in the immediate experience of neighborhoods and the domestic environment, to the national level where identities are rooted in the geographic boundaries of the nation-state, and finally coalescing at the regional level where transnational agreements and cultural, geographic and historical proximity inspire identities. Moreover, the attachments cultivated to places of belonging weaken as our experience of them expands from intimate and adjacent to distant and removed (Tuan 1977:

168-170), indicating how the different nesting layers of spatial identity intersect. As the case study of Damascus demonstrated, the material construction of the local realm may influence the relationship between nested identities, fortifying some and undermining others.

In particular, the organization of space through the construction of walls influences the relationship between the attachment to the neighborhood, city, and its environs. As a result, fortifications do not exist as "discrete features in abstraction from their historic urban contexts" (Creighton 2005: 43), instead they contribute over time to the development of distinct identities within and without their bounds. In the case of Damascus, the fortifications contributed to the cultivation of distinct identities between urban and rural Damascus, they reified social power of the ʿayan vis-à-vis the Fallaheen and Bedouin, and they offered symbolic boundaries that persist despite their material depletion in the contemporary context.

As Peter Marcuse argues, borders and walls carry several meanings; there are walls of shelter and walls of aggression, walls of fortification and enclosure (1995: 243). However, this analysis reveals the duality of meanings inherent within each category. Here, walls of fortification are at once walls of enclosure and exclusion, carrying divergent meaning between inside and outside, material and symbolic, and critical signals that inform the construction of collective identity. Moreover, walls that signify protection to Damascenes have contributed to the exclusion of outsiders from the Damascene collective identity. In doing so, these walls have justified aggression towards the outside. Over a decade before *Mouadamiyya* came under siege, Christa Salamandra's ethnography of Damascus pointed to the city's adherence to norms of "geographic distinction" (2000: 182)

that provided socio-economic, cultural and other forms of stratification. Shortly before the siege, journalist Stephen Starr marveled at the indifference of wealthy urban Damascenes to the plight of rural peasants during the revolution (2012: 148-9). Together with the public silence to the siege, this suggests that any critical analysis of social movements and the role of media institutions within them must originate in a historical perspective that reveals preexisting social constructions that influence the development of social change.

Moreover, not only does this case study reveal the importance of spatial organization on movements and the role of media, but also this projects contends that many social movements addressed by scholars are *emplaced* (Gieryn 2000: 190) in contexts that bear significant consequences for identity and that continuously complicate the various vectors of identity beyond essentialist views of religion and sect, and urban and rural categories. It certainly does not aim to attribute to spatial organization the sole explanatory factor to understanding existing theories of conflict. However, this argument presents the geo-social stratification of Damascenes, and many other communities along the boundaries of the city to demonstrate the role of the lived environment in the interaction of social movements, media, and society.

Finally, enclosing a city using walls and checkpoints persists after the material depletion of these boundaries and enables violence towards the environs. The lack of urban responses to the siege of *Mouaddamiyya*, and other besieged towns reflects the impact that the walls of Damascus have had on the development of Damascene culture and identity. Moreover, the consequences of this argument extend far beyond the limited case of Damascus. Just as this study of the fortifications of Damascus allows us to better understand the role the built environment in the historical social organization of Syrian cities along

geographic boundaries, it presents scholars with a new a historically grounded lens to address the burgeoning discussions supporting the construction of new walls, the fortification of new boundaries to separate cultures and peoples across the world, from Hungary, to Israel, to the United States.

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