In Damascus there are a number of different places where women are active, when they jointly occupy part of their normal day, where they communicate intensively with one another, and where they find the place and time for social togethering. Temporary exclusive women's domains exist within the women's public domain and form one element of women's cultural reality.

The construction of a female public space and male public space serves as a basic moral framework and conditions the necessity of women's domains. The strict spatial separation of female and male spheres and spaces characterizes the segregated and segmentary social order of the Middle East; academic work, both female and male, associate the living domain of Muslims today directly with the public and isolation. This description has proved to be Eurocentrist and obliterates the view of the differences in social and cultural reality.

The construction of social reality, as undertaken by women in Damascus, indicates two publics: a female one and a male one. Instead of the public sphere women's domains arise as an integral part of society. This definition differs from Western culture, and it also deviates from the common definition of the public domain as being accessible to everybody on an unrestricted basis.

The so-called public domains in Damascus cannot be chosen freely or exchanged by both genders. They co-exist. I am therefore turning away from the previous concept that built the so-called women's domain on the public space – men's domain, since it puts the men's domain at the forefront and highlights women's domains only under the aspect of exclusiveness. Clear instructions on roles and tasks exist for both public domains. Male claims to power and space, which are explored in the repressive mechanisms against women from the male public domain, allow the emergence of a likewise isolated female public domain.

In the women's world, the opportunity exists for women to free themselves for a limited time from imposed social obligations, and to rid themselves from patriarchal mechanisms. A common positive feeling of self-confidence can be developed here. Women connect according to their own ideas and express their needs without any hindrances. Differences can be made between domestic informal women's domains, formal out-of-house women's domains and formal out-of-house charitable organization forms.

Domestic domains

Domestic informal women's domains exist temporarily in the apartments and houses of those involved. The groups which are close to the family are formed out of the necessity at certain times to do something only for oneself. According to their life cycle, women at certain times to do something only for themselves strength and to improve their own economic situation. The mobile interior is used to create accruals to secure the social security. The community spirit and motivation to carry out charitable work.

Concluding remarks

The use of participation in informal and formal women's domains creates set points in the daily, weekly and yearly scheduling of the women. In dynamic social situations, the interaction of women's domains the women are welfare workers, therapists, advisors and aid workers to each other. Added values are created and to improve women's domains on their looks because they are attended to for their beauty and capacities as housewives. As well as beauty care, they use the visit to the hairdresser as a social event and look for contact with female staff and customers. The women's open-air swimming pools are a relatively new phenomenon within the city of Damascus. The first opened at the beginning of the 1970s. The current ten existing women's swimming pools are social places for women of all social/economic backgrounds, religions and ages. The level of admission fees, the type of swimming and mathematics are the decisive factors as regards the customers in the pools. Nadiyia, fitness clubs for women, of which 26 exist today, have formed part of the infrastructure in many parts of the city since the 1990s. Going to aerobics classes is very popular amongst women between the ages of 18 and 40, and amongst all social classes. The main motivation of the participants attending aerobics classes is mainly weight reduction. They want to lose as much weight as possible in a short period of time, while overcoming their dislike for sports. Contact with other people is also important.

Charity organizations

The colorful expansion of formal women's domains in the centre of Damascus at the end of the 1990s allows one to focus on four aspects regarding the women's motives: obtaining better health and greater attractiveness, social care, keeping tradition in the sense of ‘back to the roots’, and adapting American/European norms in their use of leisure time. Observing and maintaining emotional satisfaction of all concerned is the main objective of coming together. In this way, informal and formal women's domains contribute to gender separation and help to stabilize the existing social order. As the patriarchal supremacy is not being questioned, and the women's increased overall satisfaction has a positive effect on men; most household leaders approve of the expansion of different women's domains. For this reason as well, the number of institutionalized women's domains is currently on the rise. The description of the living situation of women in Damascus society which is portrayed as an un-Free and repressed from a European point of view, often neglects the positive qualities of women's domains. A lived out women's community offers security and certainty to its members. If the lack of orientation or the loneliness of the individual is being denounced in Western European society, the female public space of the Damascene women offers assistance and support in coping with everyday life.