



FORMALIZING INFORMALITY IN THE STATE: URBAN EXPANSION OF THE POOR IN DAMASCUS

John Jamil Kallas
New York University

QUESTIONS

What caused the number of informal housing settlements in and around Damascus to increase from 1970-2011 and beyond? What role did this increase play in the landscape of state-led development?

METHODS

Research on developments in the housing sectors of Syria and Damascus uses reports produced by the Syrian government, NGOs which focus on housing, and independent scholars. Research on developments in political economy is primarily based on the work of scholars who specifically study the topic with a focus on Syria in the past century.

CONCLUSION

The flexibility that informal housing settlements and the resulting informal economic networks provided represents the poor's attempt to survive brutal material conditions without support from the state. As the government relinquished investments into the wellbeing of the lower classes of Syrian society, these informal networks of survival allowed employers to maintain low wages and ensured the poor remained vulnerable enough for the rich to exploit.

POST-2011 IMPLICATIONS

As time passes, the reaffirmation of the pre-2011 political and economic order (now contextualized by a catastrophic war and brutal sanctions from Western world powers) will only exacerbate the problems faced by Syria's poor under the rule of a government who has insistently turned its back on the people in favor of the old networks which defined its authority—the very authority that so many people in the country challenged a decade ago.



"The Growth of Damascus, 1938-1994"
Depicting the expansion of Damascus from 1938 (gray) to 1960 (blue) to 1994 (yellow)

From: El-Dehain, K. "Spontaneous Settlements around the City of Damascus." University of Damascus, Damascus, 2001.