Post-Ottoman Diasporas, Identity Formation, and American World's Fairs in the Interwar Period

Semih Gökatalay

This chapter explicates relations among and within US-based diasporas from the post-Ottoman countries through the world's fairs of the interwar period. While subgroups under the 'post-Ottoman' umbrella included vastly different ethnic and religious groups, their representation at the fairs was similar not only because of the proximity of their cultures but also because they shared the purpose of using these fairs as avenues of negotiation and identity formation. Consequently, this study accommodates interconnected stories of the post-Ottoman diasporas instead of the sum of individual cases because different diasporas replicated the patchwork quilt of post-Ottoman representation and came together to form a broader shared culture at world's fairs.

I employ the term "diaspora" based on the work of scholars of diaspora culture and politics. Diaspora includes not only those who were "born outside a host state" but also "subsequent generations that maintain strong ties to the country of origin."[1] An overwhelming majority of members of the (post-) Ottoman diasporas migrated to the United States before the partition of the Ottoman Empire, and the rest were born to immigrant parents. The number of newcomers remained very low in the interwar period because of legal barriers to migration from the region.[2] Accordingly, those who played a central role in exhibiting their culture at the fairs were predominantly foreign-born naturalized citizens and their second-generation descendants. Although these diasporas included all people with a migration background from the Ottoman Empire and its successor states, this study is interested in those of their members who identified with the culture of their ancestors and remained within

1 David Carment/Ariane Sadjed: "Introduction: Coming to Terms with Diaspora Cooperation", in: David Carment/Ariane Sadjed (eds.): *Diaspora as Cultures of Cooperation: Global and Local Perspectives* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 1–26.

2 For details for these barriers, see Robert L. Fleegler: *Ellis Island Nation: Immigration Policy and American Identity in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 17–34.

the social structures and institutions of their various ethnic communities, because these were in the forefront of representation of diasporas at the fairs.

I consult primary sources to offer a novel and nuanced interpretation of the nexus between post-Ottoman diasporas and the American world's fairs. Special collections in archives and libraries in host cities contain valuable information, not readily available elsewhere, about correspondence between fair managers and diaspora leaders, as well as communication between home countries and diaspora groups on the preparation of exhibits, special days, and pavilions. Official magazines and publications provide insights into the composition of national committees and reveal details of the expectations, speeches, and writings of diasporas. The third empirical backbone of the study is American periodicals, especially those in host cities. Since diaspora leaders attached special value to the impression they made on the public, press accounts demonstrate the extent to which diasporas were able to influence opinion in the United States. Local and national papers further published interviews with those who spearheaded the organization of national days and exhibits.[3] Newspapers and journals from home countries complemented their American counterparts, though their focus on official representations means they provide limited information about the role of diasporas. Finally, novels and memoirs by diaspora members who witnessed these fairs firsthand shed additional light on the topic.

Building on this extensive research, this chapter argues that the world's fairs became an international platform for post-Ottoman American elites to foster a sense of unity within the diaspora, interact with their home countries, fraternize with other diasporic communities, compel their compatriots to see their culture through immigrant eyes, negotiate their place and better integrate within American society, preserve their native culture, and honor their heritage. Negotiating a new identity for diasporas had three aspects: preserving their native culture in the United States; catching up with political currents in their home countries, especially emergent nationalism; and searching for a place within American society. These were catalysts for the stimulation of a novel identity that blended old and new cultures. This identity was the set of beliefs, public expressions, qualities, and traditions that characterized diaspora leaders. The contrary trends – the preservation of native cultures and Americanization – exhibited themselves in the panoply of communal activities, events, and gatherings held at the fairs, from folk and music festivals to restaurants and beauty pageants.

3 Although diaspora groups had published a number of periodicals in the United States prior to the 1930s, the Great Depression led to the bankruptcy of many of them (Gregory J. Shibley: "The Business Saga of New York's Syrian World, 1926–1935", in: *New York History* 96:2 (2015), 197–216, here 216). That is why I could consult diaspora papers only to a limited extent in this study.

This interdisciplinary survey draws from anthropology, history, and sociology, as well as diaspora, identity, and migration studies. It differs from most similar studies in both geographic and thematic focus by uniting two strands of historical inquiry: The background and development of diasporas from the Ottoman Empire and its successor states and the cultural appraisal of world's fairs. Traditional studies of diasporas have focused on specific ethnic groups and explored the economic, social, and cultural dimensions of their integration into the American society,[4] such as the preservation of native cultures and the well-being of diaspora communities.[5] A growing number of recent scholarly works provide rich evidence of the significance of the global political context, as well as transnational exchanges between diasporas and home countries.[6] The transnational identity of diasporas further helped revisionist studies challenge long-held scholarly interpretations of immigrants and diasporas that relied on state-centric formulations, moving beyond perspectives that were "constrained by the borders of the nation-state."[7] The present article echoes the growing recognition of the transnational approach and deals with several diaspora communities, instead of one ethnic group, through the prism of world's fairs.

By introducing these international commercial events into the narrative of diasporas, I hope to produce a common history of the diasporas of former Ottoman countries. I do not offer a comprehensive history of these diasporas. I rather present an interpretation of a seminal period of their history and seek to explain how diasporas viewed themselves by way of identifying with their heritage, how they came to

4 Phillip Hitti: *The Syrians in America* (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1924); Habib Ibrahim Katibah (ed.): *Arabic-Speaking Americans* (New York: Institute of Arab American Affairs, 1946); Elaine C. Hagopian/Ann Paden (eds.): *The Arab Americans: Studies in Assimilation* (Wilmette: Medina University Press International, 1969); Mary Sengstock: *Chaldean Americans: Changing Conceptions of Ethnic Identity* (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 1982).

5 Sameer Y. Abraham/Nabeel Abraham (eds.): *Arabs in the New World: Studies on Arab-American Communities* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983); Alixa Naff: *Becoming American: The Early Arab Immigrant Experience* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985); Elizabeth Boosahda: *Arab-American Faces and Voices: Origins of an Immigrant Community* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003); Akram Fouad Khater: "Becoming 'Syrian' in America: A Global Geography of Ethnicity and Nation", in: *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 14:2–3 (2005), 299–331.

6 Reem Bailony: "Transnationalism and the Syrian Migrant Public: The Case of the 1925 Syrian Revolt", in: *Mashriq & Mahjar: Journal of Middle East and North African Migration Studies* 1:1 (2013); Bryan A. Garrett: "Otherness and Belonging in 'Democratic Empires': The Syrian Diaspora And Transatlantic Discourses Of Identity, 1890s–1930s" (PhD dissertation, The University of Texas at Arlington, 2016); Stacy D. Fahrenthold: *Between the Ottomans and the Entente: The First World War in the Syrian and Lebanese Diaspora, 1908–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

7 Nina Glick Schiller: "A Global Perspective on Migration and Development", in: Nina Glick Schiller/Thomas Faist (eds.): *Migration, Development, and Transnationalization* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 22–62, here 27.

occupy the center stage of the representation of their native culture, and what types of cultural and social references these community members built their identity upon at the fairs.

This chapter further situates world's fairs within the context of broader cultural representations of the post-Ottoman countries and contributes to the scholarly understanding of these gatherings as sites of cultural analysis. A plethora of academic studies have contributed immeasurably to the understanding of cultural and diplomatic relations between the Ottoman Empire and the West through world's fairs.[8] Scholars have particularly been interested in Orientalism, with specific references to the commodification of the exotic "East", the sexualization and objectification of Middle Eastern women through dances and other show performances, and the depiction of the "Orient" as an uncivilized place, unchanged for centuries.[9] Historians have further explored the self-portrayal of Ottomans through Islamic architecture and symbols, as well as Ottoman attempts to better demonstrate their empire's potential role in the world community.[10] Despite the popularity of studies about the world's fairs and the Ottoman Empire, there is still a lack of attention to the role of diasporas in representing their native cultures both in the waning decades of the empire and the post-imperial era.

Likewise, although historians have provided in-depth accounts of world's fairs prior to the First World War, relatively little has been written about the representation of the post-Ottoman countries in universal expositions in the interwar period. Extant studies have mostly focused on individual countries and the representation of the region by the governments of home countries.[11] I intend to contribute to the existing literature by exploring the common experience of post-Ottoman diasporas and assembling the history of individual communities at the Chicago World's Fair of 1933–34 and the New York World's Fair of 1939–1940.

---

8 Eric M. Davis: "Representations of the Middle East at American Worlds' Fairs 1876–1904", in: Abbas Amanat/Magnus T. Bernhardsson (eds.): *The United States and the Middle East: Cultural Encounters* (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 2002), 324–81.

9 Charles A. Kennedy: "When Cairo Met Main Street: Little Egypt, Salome Dancers, and the World's Fairs of 1893 and 1904", in Michael Saffle (ed.): *Music and Culture in America, 1961–1918* (New York: Garland, 1998), 271–98; István Ormos: "The Cairo Street at the World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, 1893", in: Nabila Oulebsir/Mercedes Volait (eds.): *L'Orientalisme architectural entre imaginaires et savoirs* (Paris: Picard, 2009), 195–214.

10 Zeynep Çelik: *Displaying the Orient – Architecture of Islam at Nineteenth-Century World's Fairs* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992); Selim Deringil: *The Well-Protected Domains – Ideology and the Legitimation of Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1876–1909* (New York: I.B.Tauris, 1999).

11 James L. Gelvin: "Zionism and the Representation of 'Jewish Palestine' at the New York World's Fair, 1939–1940", in: *The International History Review* 22:1 (2000), 37–64; Asher Kaufman: "'Too Much French, but a Swell Exhibit': Representing Lebanon at the New York World's Fair 1939–1940", in: *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 35:1 (2008), 59–77.

There are specific reasons behind the choice of Chicago and New York. Both fairs can be considered a watershed in the history of the world's fairs. The United States hosted a number of world's fairs before the First World War. In the 1920s, however, European countries took the lead when it came to international commercial meetings.[12] Only with the Chicago and New York Fairs was the United States able to return to its "former prominence in the exhibition world."[13]

Diasporas played a key role in the representation of their home countries at these two fairs. Although official pavilions had historically played a more important role than non-official pavilions and commercial displays at international gatherings, the latter began to supersede the former starting with the Chicago and New York fairs.[14] In the absence of official participation for most post-Ottoman countries, diasporas came to prominence, especially at the Chicago Fair. Those who migrated from the Ottoman Empire and its successor states were only one out of the multiplicity of diasporas who sought to make the best impression of their respective culture. For example, German, Irish, and Italian diasporas made efforts to portray their heritage in Chicago.[15] The involvement of these diasporas at universal expositions and fairs dated back to the 19th century.[16] Compared to them, the efforts of post-Ottoman diaspora leaders to play a key role in fairs had remained relatively limited prior to the interwar years.

12 Robert W. Rydell: "World Fairs and Museums", in: Sharon Macdonald (ed.): *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 135–151, here 136.

13 Kenneth W. Luckhurst: *The Story of Exhibitions* (London: The Studio Publications, 1951), 161.

14 Burton Benedict: "The Anthropology of World's Fairs", in: Burton Benedict, Marjorie Dobkin et al. (eds.): *The Anthropology of World's Fairs: San Francisco's Panama-Pacific International Exposition, 1915* (Berkeley: Scolar Press, 1983), 1–65, here 26; Larry Zim/Mel Lerner/Herbert Rolfes: *The World of Tomorrow: The 1939 New York World's Fair* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 10–11.

15 Charles Fanning: "Dueling Cultures: Ireland and Irish America at the Chicago World's Fairs of 1933 and 1934", in: *New Hibernia Review* 15:3 (2011), 94–110; Andrew C. Herman: "Fascists at the Fair: Political Resistance at the 1933–1934 Chicago World's Fair", in: *Journal of Historical Sociology* 33:2 (2020), 198–215.

16 Regina Donlon: *German and Irish Immigrants in the Midwestern United States, 1850–1900* (Cham: Springer International, 2018), 187–188, 197.

Table 1 Post-Ottoman Diasporas in Illinois and Chicago (1930)[17]

	Native of Foreign or Mixed Parentage, by Country of Birth of Parents		Foreign-Born by Country of Birth		Total Diaspora Population	
Country of Birth	**Illinois**	**Chicago**	**Illinois**	**Chicago**	**Illinois**	**Chicago**
Yugoslavia	33,998	15,090	28,173	16,183	62,171	31,273
Greece	15,858	11,569	20,003	14,815	35,861	26,384
Romania	11,704	9375	13,172	11,033	24,876	20,408
Palestine and Syria	1814	846	1551	904	3365	1750
Turkey	1183	916	2147	1647	3330	2563

Table 2 Post-Ottoman Diasporas in New York State and City (1930)[18]

	Native of Foreign or Mixed Parentage, by Country of Birth of Parents		Foreign-Born by Country of Birth		Total Diaspora Population	
Country of Birth	**New York State**	**New York City**	**New York State**	**New York City**	**New York State**	**New York City**
Romania	51,048	46,729	51,014	46,750	102,062	93,479
Greece	21,188	16,651	33,337	27,182	54,525	43,833
Turkey	11,129	9563	17,523	15,115	28,652	24,678
Palestine and Syria	12,951	7197	13,024	8696	25,975	15,893
Yugoslavia	8259	4184	10,917	6450	19,176	10,634

17 *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Volume 3, Part 1* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932), 639–640, 643–644. These numbers include only counties, cities, and villages of 10,000 or more residents. The fifth and sixth columns were prepared by the author.

18 *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Volume 4* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1933), 299, 301, 303. These numbers include only counties, cities, and villages of 10,000 or more residents. The fifth and sixth columns were prepared by the author.

Even though these diasporas were dispersed throughout the country, the host cities and neighboring regions had heavy concentrations (Tables 1 and 2).[19] Participation reflected demographic trends. For example, although the lower density of Romanian Americans in Illinois limited their representation at the Chicago Fair, they came to occupy a more prominent place at the New York Fair.[20]

Finally, unlike the European world's fairs, which were managed by a partnership of private and public enterprises, American fairs were run by private entrepreneurs. Organizers aimed to make these fairs a financial success by enticing millions of visitors and inviting a variety of foreign countries and ethnic groups helped to enhance the appeal of the fairs. Fair promoters therefore encouraged the broader representation of post-Ottoman countries and their diasporas. Members of the fairs' organizing committees approached diaspora leaders and arranged for the representation of their cultures, especially when the governments of their home countries decided not to attend officially.

Although the historical contexts of these two fairs were different, their function from the perspective of diasporas was virtually identical: Both helped them to display their native culture and negotiate their place in American society. Accordingly, the following sections are presented thematically, not chronologically. The second section explores the historical background of migration from the Ottoman Empire and its successor states to the United States. In this section, there is an emphasis on the role of international exhibitions in the emergence and growth of diasporas, because the world's fairs accelerated immigration to the United States from the Balkans and the Middle East.[21] The third section unpacks special challenges that US-based diasporas encountered before and during the fairs, since both events took place against a backdrop of deepening gloom over the international economy and global politics. Section four treats the fairs as a communication channel that enabled diasporas to cultivate closer relations with both their old and new countries. The last section looks at the many-sided involvement of diasporas in exhibiting their native cultures at the fairs.

19 Kathleen Benson/Philip M. Kayal (eds.): *A Community of Many Worlds: Arab Americans in New York City* (New York: Museum of the City of New York and Syracuse University Press, 2002).

20 "Rumanian Day", *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 May 1939, 11.

21 Louise Seymour Houghton: "Syrians in the United States I: Sources and Settlement", in: *The Survey* 26 (1911), 480–495, here 483; Rıfat N. Bali: *Anadolu'dan Yeni Dünya'ya Amerika'ya İlk Göç Eden Türklerin Yaşam Öyküleri* [From Anatolia to the New World: The Life Stories of the First Turks who Migrated to America] (Istanbul: İletişim, 2004), 57–81.

The Historical Background of Ottoman and post-Ottoman Migration to the United States

The representation of post-Ottoman diasporas at the fairs was closely tied to the historical context in which the growth of diasporas in the United States took place. Although the number of Ottoman immigrants was low in the mid-19th century, immigration accelerated in the closing decade.[22] Economic distress, ethnic violence, and political turmoil in the Balkans and the Middle East combined to drive a growing number of people to the New World in the 1890s.[23] Despite the attempts of local officials to restrict emigration,[24] a significant number of people from the Ottoman Empire and its successor states left their homes to make a living in the United States. New communities from the region bloomed across the country in the decades that followed.[25] Some of the immigrants, especially Muslims, returned to their home countries, while others chose to stay.[26] While diaspora organizations helped non-Muslim Ottomans preserve their identities, the lower numbers of Muslims led to the gradual weakening of their identity,[27] a major factor that adversely affected the presence of Muslims at the fairs. Table 3 demonstrates the country of origins for post-Ottoman diasporas in the interwar era. Greeks, Romanians, and Yugoslavs were more heavily represented than Muslim Arabs and Turks at the fairs because the former groups made up a much larger share of the U.S. population.

---

22 Alixa Naff: "Lebanese Immigration into the United States: 1880 to the Present", in: Albert Hourani/Nadim Shehadi (eds.): *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration* (London: Centre for Lebanese Studies and I. B. Tauris, 1992), 141–165, here 144; Akram Fouad Khater: *Inventing Home – Emigration, Gender, and the Middle Class in Lebanon 1870–1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 48.

23 Rıfat N. Bali: "From Anatolia to the New World: The First Anatolian Immigrants to America", in: Deniz Balgamış/Kemal H. Karpat (eds.): *Turkish Migration to the United States: from Ottoman Times to the Present* (Madison: Center for Turkish Studies at the University of Wisconsin, 2008), 57–74, here 58.

24 David Gutman: *The Politics of Armenian Migration to North America, 1885–1915: Sojourners, Smugglers and Dubious Citizens* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 4.

25 Mehmet Uğur Ekinci: "Reflections of the First Muslim Immigration to America in Ottoman Documents", in: Deniz Balgamış/Kemal H. Karpat (eds.): *Turkish Migration to the United States: From Ottoman Times to the Present* (Madison: Center for Turkish Studies at the University of Wisconsin, 2008), 45–56, here 51.

26 Kohei Hashimoto: "Lebanese Population Movement 1920–1939: Towards a Study", in: Albert Hourani/Nadim Shehadi (eds.): *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration* (London: Centre for Lebanese Studies and I. B. Tauris, 1992), 65–107, here 66.

27 Nedim İpek/K. Tuncer Çaglayan: "The Emigration from the Ottoman Empire to America", in: Deniz Balgamış/Kemal H. Karpat (eds.): *Turkish Migration to the United States: From Ottoman Times to the Present* (Madison: Center for Turkish Studies at the University of Wisconsin, 2008), 29–43, here 43.

Table 3 Country of Birth of Foreign-Born Americans from the post-Ottoman Countries (1920, 1930)[28]

Country of Origin	**1920**	**1930**
Yugoslavia	169,439	211,416
Greece	175,976	174,526
Romania	102,823	146,393
Syria	51,901	57,227
Turkey	16,303	48,911
Bulgaria	10,477	9399
Albania	5608	8814
Palestine	3203	6137

When a particular diaspora was small, the official participation of their home countries made possible the representation of their native cultures at fairs. Politically independent countries, such as Albania, Bulgaria, and Turkey, took part in at least one fair, giving a chance for their diasporas to represent their culture.[29] The diasporas of politically dependent countries, however, could not enjoy the same privilege. For example, the Syrian government intended to erect a national building at the New York Fair.[30] Yet, because of tension between Syrian nationalists and the French, the Syrian parliament refused to vote for funds, which led to the cancellation of the Syrian plans.[31] This is not to say that these diasporas could not represent their culture and celebrate their heritage in the United States. Instead, they continued to do so through festivals in different parts of the country,[32] if not at the world's fairs. Nevertheless, their small numbers in the United States and the reluctance of home countries to attend precluded them from negotiating their identities at the world's

28 *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 Volume 2* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1933), 232. These numbers do not reveal ethnicity. There were many Armenians and Greeks who originated from modern Turkey. At the time of the New York Fair, for example, the number of Turks in New York amounted to 5000 (M. Hulusi Aydınoğlu: "Amerika Mektupları 3" [Letters from America 3], *Muğla'da Halk*, 26 August 1939, 2) although the number of people whose roots were in Turkey was much higher.

29 "fi Majlis al-Nuwab" [in the Parliament], *al-Ahram*, 2 November 1937, 7.

30 "Min Dimashq" [From Damascus], *al-Difa*, 21 October 1938, 5.

31 Reports on Foreign Government Participation, 25 January 1939, 17–20, The New York Public Library: New York World's Fair 1939 and 1940 Incorporated Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division (NYPL).

32 "2,000 Lebanese Folk", *Daily Boston Globe*, 22 July 1934, sec. A, 26.

fairs. For example, Palestinian Arabs maintained a small but well-established presence in host cities. While Jewish diasporas from Eastern and Central Europe helped Palestinian Jews to represent 'Jewish' Palestine at both fairs, Arabs from Palestine could not find any way to participate on these occasions. Arab newspapers in Palestine complained that only the 'Jewish' part of their country was represented.[33]

International developments began to play a predominant role in the formation of new identities for both Muslims and non-Muslims who had come from the Balkans and the Middle East in the interwar years. American officials and public figures had labeled a variety of ethnic and religious groups from the Ottoman Empire using the overarching category 'Ottomans' and 'Turks' before the First World War. This was also very much the way various immigrants from the Ottoman Empire portrayed themselves. For example, many Anatolian Greeks in the United States continued to cast themselves as Ottomans despite the attempts of Greek nationalists to instill a sense of ethnic identity.[34] Relations between immigrants and their home countries showed signs of deterioration with the outbreak of the First World War.[35] Immigrants still maintained their contact with the region during the war,[36] but after the Ottoman Empire dissolved into independent nations and mandates, their public perception and self-portrayal experienced important changes during the 1920s.[37] The dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and the emergence of new states deeply transformed the self-identification of diasporas.

Domestically, the 1924 Immigration Act sharply decreased the number of immigrants from post-Ottoman countries who could settle in the United States. For example, it restricted the number of people who could migrate from both Lebanon and Syria per year to 123.[38] The Act further led the United States to deport a small

33 "tamsil Filastin" [Palestinian Representation], *Filastin*, 7 March 1933, 6; "fi Mar'id Shikaghu al-'Alami" [at the Chicago World's Fair], *al-Jami'a al-'Arabiyya*, 21 June 1933, 1.

34 Yannis G.S. Papadopoulos: "Ottoman, Anatolian, Greek, yet above All American: Evolving Identifications and Cultural Appropriations", in: *Immigrants & Minorities* (2022), 1–48, here 31.

35 Michael W. Suleiman: "The Arab Community in the United States: A Comparison of Lebanese and Non-Lebanese", in: Albert Hourani/Nadim Shehadi (eds.): *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration* (London: Centre for Lebanese Studies and I. B. Tauris, 1992), 189–207, here 192.

36 Birol Akgün: "The Turkish Diaspora in the United States and its Role in Promoting Turkish-American Relation", in: *The Turkish Yearbook of International Relations* 31 (2000), 99–117, here 105; Simon Jackson: "Diaspora Politics and Developmental Empire: The Syro-Lebanese at the League of Nations", in: *Arab Studies Journal* 21:1 (2013), 166–190.

37 Suad Joseph: "Arab American Women: Intersectional Genealogies and Trajectories", in: Michael W. Suleiman/Suad Joseph/Louise Cainkar (eds.): *Arab American Women: Representation and Refusal* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2021), 1–17, here 2.

38 Samir Khalaf: "The Background and Causes of Lebanese/Syrian Immigration to the United States before World War I", in: Eric J. Hooglund (ed.): *Crossing the Waters: Arabic-Speaking*

number of former Ottoman subjects.[39] The United States and local governments expected diasporas to passively accept the identities assigned to them by the states.[40]

While devoting considerable effort to fitting into their new country, many immigrants began to jostle for position and influence, opened their own businesses, formed business associations, and experienced upward social mobility.[41] A novel diasporic culture flourished accordingly.[42] As Elo and Minto-Coy put it, a "diaspora is not some static post-migration social network, instead, it involves a multitude of actor types, agencies, and contexts."[43] The relative power and agency of diasporas, however, varied broadly along class lines. Generally, diaspora leaders played a more crucial role in shaping the representation of their communities and creating and sustaining their sense of collective identity at fairs than did the lower classes. The primacy of elites for diaspora politics was intimately linked to their perception in American society. Social disparities and class biases manifested in immigration laws as well. Wealthy immigrants were treated more respectfully by American officials than people from humble backgrounds.[44] Elites adjusted better and were able to profit from integration.[45] Elites also exercised more agency in portraying their

---

Immigrants to the United States before 1940 (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 17–35, here 19.

39 Chris Gratien/Emily K. Pope-Obeda: "Ottoman Migrants, US Deportation Law, and Statelessness during the Interwar Era", in: *Mashriq & Mahjar* 5:2 (2018).

40 Chris Gratien/Emily K. Pope-Obeda: "The Second Exchange: Ottoman Greeks and the American Deportation State during the 1930s", in: *Journal of Migration History* 6:1 (2020), 104–128; Stacy D. Fahrenthold: "'Claimed by Turkey as Subjects': Ottoman Migrants, Foreign Passports, and Syrian Nationality in the Americas, 1915–1925", in: Lâle Can et al. (eds.): *The "Subjects" of Ottoman International Law* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2020), 216–237.

41 Joseph S. Roucek: "The Yugoslav Immigrants in America", in: *American Journal of Sociology* 40:5 (1935), 602–611, here 603; Khalaf, "Background and Causes of Lebanese/Syrian Immigration", 24; Ann Flesor Beck: *Sweet Greeks: First-Generation Immigrant Confectioners in the Heartland* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021).

42 Işıl Acehan: "Conflict and Cooperation: Diverse Ottoman Ethnic Groups in Peabody, Massachusetts", in: Deniz Balgamış/Kemal H. Karpat (eds.): *Turkish Migration to the United States: from Ottoman Times to the Present* (Madison: Center for Turkish Studies at the University of Wisconsin, 2008), 75–86, here 86.

43 Maria Elo/Indianna Minto-Coy: "The Concept of Diaspora from the Perspective of International Business and Economy: An Introduction to the Book", in: Maria Elo/Indianna Minto-Coy (eds.): *Diaspora Networks in International Business: Perspectives for Understanding and Managing Diaspora Business and Resources* (Cham: Springer, 2019), 1–14, here 6.

44 Anna Pegler-Gordon: *Closing the Golden Door: Asian Migration and the Hidden History of Exclusion at Ellis Island* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 48.

45 Shanthi Robertson and Rosie Roberts: "Migrants 'in-between': Rethinking Privilege and Social Mobility in Middle-class Migration", in: Shanthi Robertson/Rosie Roberts (eds.): *Rethinking Privilege and Social Mobility in Middle-class Migration: Migrants In-between* (London: Routledge, 2022), 1–26, here 17.

native cultures.[46] Moreover, most studies on diasporas have focused on "self-made" immigrants "who moved up the socio-economic ladder to achieve success, the 'American dream'" instead of socially excluded people.[47] The self-portrayal of diasporas at the fairs was emblematic of elite-dominated history.

The world's fairs not only reflected class differences but contributed to social stratification, since they offered an unrivaled opportunity to meet other members of their own diasporas and to acquire customers. By strengthening the diasporas' common identity and seizing the economic opportunities of the fairs, diaspora elites consolidated their power in their communities. The consumption of goods from home countries represents a key point of contact between diasporas and their countries of origin.[48] As Volery has noted, diaspora members constituted the customer base for ethnic businesses.[49] Transnational entrepreneurs benefited from the transfer of these commodities most because the construction of national pavilions and stands and the exhibition of imported items at fairs served vested interests and powerful elites.[50] From a practical perspective, the consolidation of diasporas through fairs raised the demand for the goods and products that these businessmen sold.

Marketing these items can also be considered part of the consumer culture that was developing in the United States during this period. Though it had a history reaching back to the late 19th century, consumerism reached full force in the prosperous economy of the 1920s. With the expansion of advertising, the capitalist classes encouraged adults and children alike to raise their consumption.[51] This movement was centered on gendered expectations and social norms. For example,

---

46 Khachig Tölölyan: "Elites and Institutions in the Armenian Transnation", in: *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 9:1 (2000), 107–136, here 110.

47 Thomas W. Gallant: "Tales from the Dark Side: Transnational Migration, the Underworld and the 'Other' Greeks of the Diaspora", in: Dimitris Tziovas (ed.): *Greek Diaspora and Migration since 1700* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 17–29, here 27.

48 Manuel Orozco/Julia Yansura: "A Taste of Home: The Nostalgia Trade and Migrant Economic Transnationalism", in: Maria Elo/Indianna Minto-Coy (eds.): *Diaspora Networks in International Business: Perspectives for Understanding and Managing Diaspora Business and Resources* (Cham: Springer, 2019), 79–102, here 79.

49 Thierry Volery: "Ethnic Entrepreneurship: A Theoretical Framework", in: Léo-Paul Dana (ed.): *Handbook of Research on Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship: A Co-evolutionary View on Resource Management* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2008), 30–41, here 31.

50 "Transnational Entrepreneurs (TEs) are immigrants who are engaged in border crossing business activities involving their country of origin and destination" (Ricard Zapata-Barrero/Shahamak Rezaei: "Diaspora Governance and Transnational Entrepreneurship: The Rise of an Emerging Social Global Pattern in Migration Studies", in: *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 46:10 (2020), 1959–1973, here 1959).

51 Lisa Jacobson: *Children and Consumer Culture in American Society: A Historical Handbook and Guide* (Westport: Greenwood, 2008), 4.

men's magazines constructed a novel version of manhood via masculine images and promoted "Mr. Consumer" as a powerful role model for men to emulate.[52] At the same time, advertising campaigns targeted women through the idealized image of feminine beauty.[53] As discussed below, this particular vision of gender segregation had implications for the male-dominated representation of post-Ottoman diasporas and the use of girls to promote exhibits and items at pavilions and stands.

The consumerist spirit of the 1920s was intertwined with the sense of national identity in myriad ways. By equating consumption with citizenship, the power of patriotism became a strong motivating force that encouraged Americans to consume.[54] Although these slogans rallied around inclusive, all-class citizenship, consumerism did not thoroughly translate into rising opportunities for the working classes, who developed their own culture of consumption.[55] This was especially the case for ethnic communities, whose integration into consumer culture was far from complete.[56] The nexus between material culture and citizenship thus varied across different diasporas. Immigrants from Western Europe sat at the apex of a hierarchical system and played an integral role in reconfiguring consumption patterns, commercial design, and marketing methods.[57] Other groups, such as African Americans, were not left out entirely, with racialized campaigns marketing specific products for them.[58] Within the confinement of systematic racism, they created their own culture of consumerism.[59] Nonetheless, the patriotic sentiments that were geared to rebuilding and consolidating citizenship through consumerism

52 Tom Pendergast: *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture, 1900–1950* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 111.

53 Liette Gidlow: *The Big Vote: Gender, Consumer Culture, and the Politics of Exclusion, 1890s–1920s* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 163–174.

54 Charles McGovern: *Sold American: Consumption and Citizenship, 1890–1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 63.

55 Jean-Christophe Agnew: "Coming up for Air: Consumer Culture in Historical Perspective", in: John Brewer/Roy Porter (eds.): *Consumption and the World of Goods* (London: Routledge, 1994), 19–39, here 27.

56 James R. Barrett: "Americanization from the Bottom up: Immigration and the Remaking of the Working Class in the United States, 1880–1930", in: *The Journal of American History* 79:3 (1992), 996–1020, here 1020.

57 Jan Logemann: "European Imports? European Immigrants and the Transformation of American Consumer Culture from the 1920s to the 1960s", in: *German Historical Institute Bulletin* 52 (2013), 113–133, here 115.

58 James C. Davis: *Commerce in Color: Race, Consumer Culture, and American Literature, 1893–1933* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 210–211.

59 Paul R. Mullins: "Race and the Genteel Consumer: Class and African-American Consumption, 1850–1930", in: *Historical Archaeology* 33:1 (1999), 22–38, here 35; Erin D. Chapman: *Prove it on me: New Negroes, Sex, and Popular Culture in the 1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 81.

had their own limitations, a key point that affected the integration of post-Ottoman diasporas into American society through consumerism in general and world's fairs in particular.

The vital link between consumerism and citizenship changed considerably during the Great Depression, which exercised a profound influence on the representation of diasporas at the two fairs under consideration. The immediate effect of the economic crisis on consumerism was negative.[60] Low-income neighborhoods were mired in poverty, and their residents, with less money to spend, formulated new patterns of consumer behavior.[61] After President Franklin D. Roosevelt aimed to reflate the economy through the New Deal in 1933, hard-pressed sectors began to enjoy a revival, and domestic demand rose. A new understanding of consumerism came to life, accordingly.[62] It had far-reaching effects on architecture and industrial design,[63] as well as the conceptualization of more inclusive citizenship.[64] Both the Chicago and New York World's Fairs reflected the momentum of New Deal consumerism by promoting a utopian vision of technology and encouraging optimism.[65] Businessmen and other community leaders from post-Ottoman diasporas sought to seize the resulting opportunities by encouraging the consumption of their products by other members of their groups and marketing their commodities to other visitors within the schema of standardized American consumer culture. This profit-making motivation made them the driving force behind the representation of post-Ottoman countries and their diasporas at both fairs.

Trade events also shaped the public perception of diasporas. A historical appraisal of American fairs prior to the 1930s has illustrated the stereotyped portrayal of the Ottoman Empire and post-Ottoman countries, which was colored by West-

60 Douglas J. Goodman: *Consumer Culture: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2004), 157–158; Johannes Malkmes: *American Consumer Culture and its Society: From F. Scott Fitzgerald's 1920s Modernism to Bret Easton Ellis' 1980s Blank Fiction* (Hamburg: Diplomica, 2011), 31–33.

61 Ronald Paul Hill/Elizabeth C. Hirschman/John F. Bauman: "Consumer Survival during the Great Depression: Reports from the Field", in: *Journal of Macromarketing* 17:1 (1997), 107–127, here 108.

62 Rita Barnard: *The Great Depression and the Culture of Abundance: Kenneth Fearing, Nathanael West, and Mass Culture in the 1930s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 24.

63 Jeffrey L. Meikle: *Twentieth-Century Limited: Industrial Design in America 1925–1939* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 69; Gabrielle Esperdy: *Modernizing Main Street: Architecture and Consumer Culture in the New Deal* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 144.

64 Stefano Luconi: "Italian Americans, the New Deal State, and the Making of Citizen Consumers", in: Simone Cinotto (ed.): *Making Italian America: Consumer Culture and the Production of Ethnic Identities* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 137–147.

65 Meikle, *Twentieth-Century Limited*, 189–210.

ern values and the cultural attitudes of European imperialism.[66] As in the late Ottoman Empire, certain businessmen who had originated from the Middle East continued to impose their own Orientalist interpretations on the displays for commercial purposes. Their understanding of Orientalism differed from prevailing ideas about "Oriental countries" in the public imagination because it sought to dismiss negative perceptions.

They nevertheless made efforts to commercialize exoticism. The most notable example was the Oriental Exposition in New York that took place between 12 December 1927, and 7 January 1928. Ralph M. Saliba, who was a native of Ottoman Syria and a real estate speculator in Birmingham, Alabama, organized the exposition. He spent $80,000 to publicize his project, contacting officials in the 'Oriental' countries to facilitate the transfer of local products.[67] The exposition featured exhibits from almost all countries in the Middle East, such as filigree and jewelry from Egypt and brass and woodwork from Damascus.[68] Its stated objective was to accomplish "goodwill and understanding" between the East and the West because Saliba thought that people in the West were "ignorant" of the East. The exposition provided the reproduction of "life, manners, customs, and art products". Crowds of visitors flocked to the exposition, and merchants from the participant countries sold their products, albeit on a limited scale.[69] Although it was not a success from a financial point of view, with Saliba losing $100,000,[70] the visitors considered it "a social and moral success".[71] Oriental music, cuisine, and dancing girls entertained visitors.[72] The Orientalist depiction of the Middle East at exhibitions and fairs did not cease in this period. Though the intention of people like Saliba was to provide a better grasp of the 'Orient', they still reproduced stereotypes through the commodification of Oriental cultures, which contributed to the image of post-Ottoman diasporas as outsiders.

Alongside business concerns, this persistence also stemmed from the ways diasporas perceived their old countries, which complicated their intended refutation of Orientalist stereotypes prevalent in the United States. As with other immigrants perceived as 'Oriental', such as those from East and South Asia, post-Ottoman diasporas were viewed through the lenses of Orientalism by the society at large.[73] The understanding that diasporas had of their ancestral countries involved similar stereo-

66 Julia Phillips Cohen: "Oriental by Design: Ottoman Jews, Imperial Style, and the Performance of Heritage", in: *American Historical Review* 119:2 (2014) 364–398.

67 "East and West", *South China Morning Post*, 10 March 1928, 16.

68 "Oriental Exposition", *The Billboard*, 7 January 1928, 70.

69 "Uniting East And West", *The China Press*, 16 March 1928, 12.

70 "Outdoors", *Variety*, 11 January 1928, 57.

71 "Syrian", *The China Weekly Review*, 10 March 1928, 49.

72 "Oriental Exposition in America", *The Palestine Bulletin*, 14 March 1928, 2.

73 Charlotte Karem Albrecht: "An Archive of Difference: Syrian Women, the Peddling Economy, and US Social Welfare, 1880–1935", in: Michael W. Suleiman/Suad Joseph/Louise Cainkar

typing, with the addition of an emotional component. When they visited their countries of origin, diasporas articulated "a poetics of nostalgia".[74] This nostalgic perception of home countries was a result of "a collective memory and myth about the homeland" that occupied diaspora imagination. Diaspora groups have a tendency to idealize their "real or imagined ancestral home".[75] Despite this romanticized remembrance, diasporas, especially second-generation migrants, were aware of the social and cultural differences between their new homes and their countries of origin, not only because of their own experiences but also because of popular perceptions of their countries of origin in destination countries.[76]

Fairs offered diaspora leaders an opportunity to refute Orientalist stereotypes. Although the perception of these diasporas as strangers loomed large in the American imagination, in part because of the world's fairs of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, diasporas engaged in the world's fairs between the wars all the more actively and focused all of their energy on burnishing their image. Since the views of the rest of American society and of foreign spectators were built on a priori beliefs and prejudices, diaspora leaders sought to claim space at world's fairs that drew millions of visitors and succeeded in using these events to present a more positive image. Certainly, fairs were one part of the wider battle to alter the perception of the post-Ottoman countries and their people as backward, timeless, and unchanged.[77] In this regard, fairs were not hermetically sealed off from other avenues of representation, which included literature and the mass media and entertainment sectors.[78] As the next sections discuss, governments and diaspora groups agreed in the need to represent the Balkans and the Middle East in a modern and non-Orientalist fashion.

(eds.): *Arab American Women: Representation and Refusal* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2021), 134–165, here 162.

74 Martha Klironomos: "The Topos of Home in New Greek-American Writing", in: Dimitris Tziovas (ed.): *Greek Diaspora and Migration since 1700* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 239–255, here 252.

75 Robin Cohen: *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2008), 17.

76 Armand Gutierrez: "Being Filipino without the Philippines: Second-Generation Filipino American Ethnic Identification", in: Robyn Magalit Rodriguez (ed.): *Filipino American Transnational Activism: Diasporic Politics Among the Second Generation* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 26–53, here 27–28.

77 On the struggles of diasporas to integrate into the American society, see Sarah M. A. Gualtieri: *Between Arab and White: Race and Ethnicity in the Early Syrian-American Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 52–80.

78 Jack G. Shaheen: *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 2001), 8–39.

Challenges

As they dealt with ethnic and racial stereotyping and sought to represent their cultures appropriately, post-Ottoman Americans had to overcome several challenges that economic, cultural, and political differences had brought about. As Devi Mays has compellingly demonstrated, "originating in the same empire or sharing the same religious ascription did not mean that all those of Ottoman or even Ottoman Jewish provenance saw themselves as belonging to the same diaspora, despite Ottoman attempts to create a shared identification."[79] The most potent challenge was the diversity of languages. Just as a shared language might foster a sense of affinity within an ethnic group, linguistic barriers contributed to the lack of unity within the diaspora in other cases. Even the Jews of the same part of the empire did not speak the same language.[80] Chaldeans had closer relations with Arabic-speaking Christians than Syriac- and Persian-speaking Assyrians, although they shared "liturgical and ecclesial language and territorial history" with the latter.[81]

These diasporas were further fragmented along religious lines. Even if they spoke the same language, as in the case of Yugoslav Americans, religion could still cause tension.[82] Like religion, the importance of familial ties for diasporas contributed to this diversity.[83] Their heterogeneity extended beyond ethnic and religious identity, as exemplified by ideology.[84] In addition to American politics, they engaged with the politics of their home countries.

Fairs not only reflected such divisions but also inflamed struggles in certain instances. Socialist workers organized a protest during the Bulgarian national anthem on Bulgarian Day in 1933. They displayed a large red flag with the caption "Long Live Soviet Bulgaria" and threw thousands of leaflets from surrounding buildings that illustrated the disdain the workers had for fascism. Two workers were arrested but later released. This incident showed how class interests could easily supersede ethnic group interests. But while politics polarized Bulgarian Americans between their collective ethnic identity and ideology, it strengthened inter-diaspora relations, since

79 Devi Mays: *Forging Ties, Forging Passports: Migration and the Modern Sephardi Diaspora* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020), 14.

80 Marcia Hadad Ikonomopoulos: "The Romaniote Jewish Community of New York", in: *Journal of Modern Hellenism* 23/24 (2006), 141–168, here 147.

81 Yasmeen Hanoosh: *The Chaldeans: Politics and Identity in Iraq and the American Diaspora* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2019), 114.

82 Ivan Mladineo: *The American Jugoslavs* (Detroit: s.n., 1934), 63.

83 Michael W. Suleiman: "Early Arab-Americans: The Search for Identity", in: Eric J. Hooglund (ed.): *Crossing the Waters: Arabic-Speaking Immigrants to the United States Before 1940* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1987), 37–53, here 41; Boosahda, *Arab-American Faces and Voices*, 18.

84 Mladineo, *The American Jugoslavs*, 64–65.

Greek workers acted out of solidarity with anti-fascist demonstrations by their Bulgarian comrades.[85] This series of intense conflicts demonstrated the attempts of the working classes, particularly politically conscious segments, to challenge the dominance of elite groups in determining the representation of diaspora cultures in the public eye.

Armenian Americans were another politically divided group. While one group defended the freedom of Armenia from the Soviet Union, others tried to nurture good relations with the Soviet cadre. In July 1933, Archbishop Leon Tourian, the Primate of the Armenian Apostolic Church in the Western World, was scheduled to deliver a speech for the Armenian Day at the Chicago Fair. Dashnaks, members of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation, held protests since he was not an adversary of the Soviets. They replaced the flag of Soviet Armenia with that of Republican Armenia. To protest their actions, the Archbishop refused to give his address.[86] Tensions turned into a "riot", and thousands in attendance overturned their chairs and fought against their ethnic fellows.[87] All these events increased the schism in the Armenian Church.[88] The Dashnak-led campaign against Tourian reached full force, and a group of Dashnaks killed him in December. His assassination was an outstanding example of how political differences thwarted efforts to create stronger bonds among diaspora members through fairs.

His murder further proves the importance of class differences in terms of the adaptation of immigrants to their new society. While many wealthy diaspora members associated themselves with centrism as a strategy of ideological adaptation and faced less prejudice in political circles in the United States, many of the poverty-stricken masses gravitated toward left-wing ideologies and were exposed to "state repression and exclusionary immigration statutes."[89] The rift between different groups within a given diaspora community, such as Armenians and Bulgarians, points to tensions between diaspora leaders and sections of the lower classes.

Circumstances beyond the control of diasporas severely affected their representation as well. For example, the last-minute decision of the management of the New York fair to open national restaurants decreased the quality of service, particularly in the early days of the fair in 1939. Moreover, when the fair's plumbers went on strike, the Albanian pavilion could not get gas for a time on its opening day, which limited the variety of options for spectators to eat. According to a correspondent of the *New*

85 "Red Flag", *The Daily Worker*, 5 August 1933, 6.

86 "Legal Brief", *News-Week*, 21 July 1934, 34.

87 "Rioting", *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 July 1933, 5.

88 "Five of Armenian Secret Society", *Indianapolis Star*, 27 December 1933, 11.

89 Kenyon Zimmer: *Immigrants against the State: Yiddish and Italian Anarchism in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 156.

York Herald Tribune, having "meager menus", the Albanian restaurant could not respond to the demand and was "unable to serve anything more exotic than broiled lamb chops."[90]

Political developments paralleled managerial issues and curtailed the historical agency of diasporas. The Italian invasion of Albania delayed shipments of Albanian exhibits to New York and postponed the formal opening in 1939.[91] At the same time, the Italian pavilion featured a new section of exhibits about Albania where the following words of Benito Mussolini were read: "A new era for the Albanian people who have entered as equals into the imperial community."[92] Italy even claimed to represent Albania within its pavilion. Likewise, because of the diplomatic crisis between the Soviet Union and Romania as well as the latter's territorial losses, Romania was full of discontent, which significantly downsized the scale of its presence at the fair. Although the Romanian pavilion remained open, the restaurant was shut down.[93] These examples demonstrated that the decisions of the fairs' managers and the actions of foreign powers undermined all the efforts of diasporas to exercise their agency at the fairs.

The Fairs as a Channel of Dialogue between Diasporas and their New and Old Countries

Despite all these challenges, the fairs nonetheless functioned as a fulcrum for diasporas to communicate with their countries of origin, the rest of the post-Ottoman diasporas, and other segments of American society.[94] The degree of communication between diasporas and home countries largely depended on whether or not the governments of these countries officially participated in the fairs. The organizers of the Chicago Fair sent delegations to different parts of the world, including countries in the Balkans and the Middle East.[95] The Great Depression curbed international trade and plunged the region into an economic crisis. As it was intensely challenging for governments to take part in the fair, the organizers turned to diasporas. Although diasporas were "enthusiastic" about erecting national pavilions, sponsoring a pavilion

90 "Fair Cafes", *New York Herald Tribune*, 2 May 1939, 2.

91 "Outdoor Style", *Women's Wear Daily*, 11 May 1939, 32.

92 "Italy Re-enters Fair", *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 May 1940, 20.

93 "Fair Attendance", *New York Herald Tribune*, 15 August 1940, 36.

94 They were not alone in this. New York Russians listened to Soviet music for the first time thanks to Soviet participation in the New York Fair (Natalie K. Zelensky: *Performing Tsarist Russia in New York: Music, Émigrés, and the American Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2019), 111–112).

95 London Office – Cole, Henry, 4 August 1931; 28 April 1932, 1, University of Illinois at Chicago Library, Special Collections & University Archives (SCUA).

was not easy without government support.[96] Nonetheless, diaspora groups, especially businessmen, attempted to open pavilions.[97] Romanian Americans even suggested the formation of a company to raise money for a Romanian pavilion.[98] The Greeks of Chicago and surrounding cities financed a pavilion for their representation.[99] Although the Greek government sent a number of art pieces to be displayed in Chicago, the pavilion had to rely on the generosity of Greek Americans. The Greek colony in Chicago worked for weeks for its inauguration.[100] Other US-based diaspora groups could not afford pavilions but arranged a series of days and programs of events within the format of the fair.[101]

Official participation was far more common in 1939, when most Balkan and Middle Eastern groups were officially represented. Indeed, Lebanon participated in an international fair as a politically independent entity for the first time.[102] Armenians did not have a national pavilion, but Soviet Armenia was represented as part of the Soviet Pavilion. They, nonetheless, organized national days and festivals. Palestine was another country that was not officially represented, but the Jewish Agency for Palestine, other Zionist organizations, and Jewish communities in the United States secured one spot for the Jewish Palestinian Pavilion, which excluded the Arab communities of the country.[103] The variation of representation of post-Ottoman societies and discourses from home countries demonstrated the importance of transnational factors in determining the power of diasporas over their self-portrayal.

With or without a formal presence, community leaders, together with diaspora clubs and societies,[104] tried to expand diaspora support for fair-related projects at both fairs. They focused on making diaspora groups more aware of the cultural and social benefits of the fairs for the communities. On behalf of their diasporas, they met fair officials and local political authorities. As discussed below, they wielded serious power over the representation of their cultures even where there was also official participation.

---

96 Foreign Participation, 21 February 1931, 1–2, SCUA.

97 Foreign Exhibits – Correspondence, 12 May 1933, 1, SCUA.

98 Foreign Participation, 21 February 1931, 50–56, SCUA.

99 Exhibits – International Participation, 23 March 1934, 1, SCUA.

100 Earl Mullin: "100,100", *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 24 June 1934, 6; Sterling North: *Seven against the Years* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), 219.

101 "Century of Progress", *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 29 July 1933, 7.

102 Asher Kaufman: *Reviving Phoenicia: The Search for Identity in Lebanon* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2004), 153–154.

103 "Senior Hadassah", *The American Jewish World*, 2 June 1939, 12. For further details, see Gelvin, "Zionism and the Representation of 'Jewish Palestine'", 37–64.

104 On the connecting role of diaspora institutions, see David Leblang/Jenny Glazier: "Diaspora Engagement Strategies: Theory and Case Study Evidence", in: Liam Kennedy (ed.): *Routledge International Handbook of Diaspora Diplomacy* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 34–47, here 37.

The fairs increased contacts between diaspora groups and their countries of origin in a variety of ways.[105] Despite cultural assimilation, "homeland" still stands as "an important site for identity formation and subjectivity" for immigrants and resonates with their descendants.[106] Undoubtedly, their relations with ancestral homes varied in intensity and structure. While certain diasporas established close ties with their home countries, others did not have frequent contacts.[107] The world's fairs we are considering increased contacts between home countries and diasporas in both cases. One way was through the dissemination of information about native cultures and contemporary politics via national pavilions. These enabled both diasporas and other visitors to follow the news abroad.[108] The pavilions served "as a barometer" of international events, including the assassination of Romanian Prime Minister Armand Călinescu.[109] The demand for such news increased as the Second World War intensified.[110]

Ambassadors to the United States and diaspora leaders also acted as intermediaries. The ambassadors made frequent trips to the fairgrounds and host cities to supervise preparations and gave dedication speeches on the opening of national pavilions.[111] Diasporas honored the leaders of their home countries with special programs.[112] Civic and military dignitaries from the Balkans and the Middle East came to the United States for fairs and met diaspora leaders, who gave a rapturous welcome to their visiting countrymen.[113] From the perspectives of these dignitaries, building a bridge between themselves and diasporas could generate income for the home countries via tourism. As "informal economic diplomats", diaspora leaders

105 Bali, *Anadolu'dan Yeni Dünya'ya*, 342.

106 Robyn Magalit Rodriguez: "Introduction", in: Robyn Magalit Rodriguez (ed.): *Filipino American Transnational Activism: Diasporic Politics Among the Second Generation* (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 1–25, here 2.

107 Elie Chrysostome/Jean-Marie Nkongolo-Bakenda: "Diaspora and International Business in the Homeland: From Impact of Remittances to Determinants of Entrepreneurship and Research Agenda", in: Maria Elo and Indianna Minto-Coy (eds.): *Diaspora Networks in International Business: Perspectives for Understanding and Managing Diaspora Business and Resources* (Cham: Springer, 2019), 17–40, here 25.

108 "Fair Injects Carnival Spirit", *New York Herald Tribune*, 23 September 1939, 11.

109 Sidney Shalett: "362,522", *New York Times*, 25 September 1939, 1.

110 "Fair Sets Mark for Attendance", *New York Herald Tribune*, 28 June 1940, 17; Robert S. Bird: "Fair's Crowd", *New York Times*, 28 June 1940, 23.

111 "Features for the Week", *New York Herald Tribune*, 10 September 1933, sec. D, 5; Earl Mullin: "Fair Attendance", *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 14 October 1934, 17.

112 "al-tariq alladhi" [The Way that], *al-Ahram*, 21 August 1933, 3; Earl Mullin: "Fair Record", *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 3 September 1933, 2.

113 "fi Wizarat al-Kharijiyah" [in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs], *al-Ahram*, 2 June 1933, 7; "Prime Minister", *The Washington Post*, 15 August 1933, 7; "Amerika'da Türk Günü" [Turkish Day in America], *Türk Sözü*, 25 July 1939, 3.

have the capacity to facilitate the transfer of goods and knowledge between their host and origin countries.[114] Accordingly, the guests called for the diasporas to visit their old countries.

The post-Ottoman governments wanted to build a modern and friendly image of their countries in the United States with the help of diasporas.[115] Recent scholarship has reinforced the role of diasporas in disseminating messages about their home countries in their countries of destination because "public diplomacy is not solely the purview of the state."[116] One can see the individual and collective efforts of diasporas to promote positive views about their countries of origin in the United States via media outlets and publications since the early days of the interwar period.[117] The transfer of money and investment by diasporas benefited home countries.[118] Of course, the purposes of diasporas and the governments of home countries may not align perfectly. The main concern of diasporas is the well-being of their families and relatives, not the interests of their nations.[119] Even when diasporas do not collaborate with state authorities, they can easily "help the homeland advance its goals in the host nation."[120] This was nowhere more evident than at the fairs, since the diasporas were always concerned to portray their cultures in a positive light, which state officials in home countries welcomed.

The coming of non-diplomatic visitors from the Balkans and the Middle East to fairs was another channel of dialogue. Some of them arrived in the United States

114 Michaella Vanore: "Diasporas as Actors of Economic Diplomacy", in: Liam Kennedy (ed.): *Routledge International Handbook of Diaspora Diplomacy* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 156–168, here 157.

115 Elpida Vogli: "The Making of Greece abroad: Continuity and Change in the Modern Diaspora Politics of a 'Historical' Irredentist Homeland", in: *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 17:1 (2011), 14–33, here 22–23.

116 Vanessa Bravo/Maria De Moya: "Introduction: Diasporas from Latin America and Their Role in Public Diplomacy", in: Vanessa Bravo/Maria De Moya (eds.): *Latin American Diasporas in Public Diplomacy* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 1–24, here 3.

117 Ḥannā Ṣalāḥ: *Filasṭīn wa tajdīd ḥayātihā: kitāb jāmi' li-mabāḥith tārīkhīyah wa 'umrānīyah wa ijtimā'īyah wa siyāsīyah 'an Filasṭīn* [Palestine and its Rejuvenation: A Comprehensive Book for Historical, Civil, Social, and Political Discussions on Palestine] (New York: al-Maṭba'ah al-Tijārīyah al-Sūrīyah al-Amrīkīyah, 1919), 165.

118 Pablo S. Bose: "Diaspora, Development, and the Reshaping of Homelands in an Evolving World", in: Ajaya K. Sahoo (ed.): *Routledge Handbook of Asian Diaspora and Development* (London: Routledge, 2021), 95–106, here 98.

119 Joaquin Jay Gonzalez/Ador Revelar Torneo: "Diaspora Diplomacy: Weapon of Mass Dispersion", in: Ajaya K. Sahoo (ed.): *Routledge Handbook of Asian Diaspora and Development* (London: Routledge, 2021), 253–267, here 259.

120 Maria De Moya/Vanessa Bravo: "Conclusion: Lessons Learned and Future Research", in: Vanessa Bravo/Maria de Moya (eds.): *Latin American Diasporas in Public Diplomacy* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 311–324, here 315.

through societies and tourist companies,[121] others came individually. One potential barrier for an average visitor was the high cost of the voyage. For example, a tour from Tel Aviv to the New York World's Fair in 1939 cost $245 ($4899 in 2021), $180 ($3599 in 2021), and $135 ($2699 in 2021) for the first, second, and third-class tickets, respectively.[122] The second challenge for foreigners was the length of time for which a tourist visa was valid. If the visa expired, they had to send their application for an extension to the immigration commissioner at the port of arrival. With a valid passport, an extension was not difficult to obtain.[123] But, for those who arrived in cities other than Chicago and New York, the process was expensive and time-consuming. Although the exact number of individual visitors was unknown, the applications for the Immigrants' Protective League pertaining to the world's fairs indicated the existence of individuals from the post-Ottoman countries who wanted to prolong their sojourns. For example, the League received around 300 applications from 1932 to 1933, which included two Greeks, two Yugoslavs, and two Romanians.[124] Such individuals generally stayed with their relatives, who were naturalized citizens.[125] The relatively low number of people who came from home countries further increased the importance of diaspora leaders representing their native cultures at the fairs.

The fairs also strengthened ties between diasporas and the United States. The presence of the post-Ottoman nations not only meant that fairs had more people of Balkan and Middle Eastern heritage but also that other groups grew better acquainted with them. Both the Chicago and New York fairs ran under the motto of the integration of immigrant communities into American society. The organizers wanted to display the "cultural contributions of immigrant races to American civilization."[126] The one at New York underlined this theme even more by focusing on "amity among races and nationalities."[127] Political authorities expected the immigrants not only to "honor their old countries" but also "to blazon their record of achievement in the new." President Franklin D. Roosevelt acknowledged in his speech in Chicago that the U.S. population hailed from many different cultural and

121 "Visit to World's Fair", *The Palestine Post*, 4 June 1939, 6.

122 *The Palestine Post*, 18 May 1939, 5.

123 Immigration and Refugee Services of America Division of the Foreign Language Press – Press Releases, 8 April 1939, Immigration History Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota (IHRCA): IHRC1013, Box 21, Folder 3, Index No. 4748.

124 Mrs. Kenneth F. Rich, World's Fair Report, November 1933, 5–6, SCUA: MSIPL 67, Box 11, Folder 146, Series 1.

125 Ibid., 12. There must have been many more individuals who attended the fair on tourist visas but did not consult the League.

126 Immigration and Refugee Services of America Division of the Foreign Language Press – Press Releases, 29 April 1940, 1, IHRCA: IHRC1013, Box 21, Folder 5, Index No. 4866.

127 "Amity", *The Sentinel*, 4 May 1939, 40.

ethnic backgrounds across the world.[128] The Mayor of New York City, Fiorello La Guardia, was another top-level politician who attended most opening days and gave speeches to honor immigrant communities.[129] Likewise, radio broadcasts focused on "the contributions of various immigrant groups to the building of America."[130]

This prevailing rhetoric of inclusion was the direct outcome of the American social and political landscapes in the 1930s. The anti-immigration movement had gained momentum in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and eventually culminated in the enactment of restrictive policies in the 1920s. While this hostile atmosphere sustained the demographic preponderance of white ethnic groups, who formed a numerical majority in the country, those from other backgrounds were clearly discriminated against.[131] The latter were often blamed for stealing Americans' jobs, spreading diseases, and involvement in organized crime.[132] One major reason for this was the perceived difference between the "East" and the "West", with the former being assumed incompatible with "Western civilization".[133] Nonetheless, the low level of immigration of the following decade brought "a quasi-mystical belief in the US as a melting pot" for immigrants.[134]

The actions and speeches of high-ranking politicians, such as Roosevelt and La Guardia, at the fairs were emblematic of this belief. Presenting an image of the United States as a place of plurality, for example at fairs, had also practical outcomes, such as winning the endorsement of diasporas in future elections. Moreover, as Cull has argued, the governments of host countries try to give peaceful political messages to other countries via the latter's diasporas.[135] Considering the peaceful themes of the fairs and the intention of American politicians to use these spectacles as a tool of public diplomacy, it is safe to argue that post-Ottoman diasporas served the United States government in generating a favorable opinion of their country abroad.

---

128 "Emigrants Honor 'The Old Country'", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 20 June 1933, 5.

129 *Messager d'Athènes*, 9 June 1939, 1. He spoke in Croatian in the Yugoslav Pavilion ("France and British Empire", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 25 May 1939, 6).

130 American Jewish Committee Archives (AJC Archives), Report of Radio Activities for Month of April, 1939, 28 April 1939, 3.

131 Margaret Sands Orchowski: *The Law that Changed the Face of America: The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2015), 33.

132 Adam Goodman: *The Deportation Machine: America's Long History of Expelling Immigrants* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2020), 41.

133 Lon Kurashige: *Two Faces of Exclusion: The Untold History of Anti-Asian Racism in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), xi.

134 "Shannon Latkin Anderson: *Immigration, Assimilation, and the Cultural Construction of American National Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 2.

135 Nicholas J. Cull: "Diasporas and Public Diplomacy: From History to Policy", in: Liam Kennedy (ed.): *Routledge International Handbook of Diaspora Diplomacy* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 7–18, here 10.

In response to these inclusive messages, post-Ottoman Americans promoted the idea that they were an integral part of the United States, even if many of them did not hold U.S. citizenship at birth. They made efforts to construct and define their historical experiences and draw a 'patriotic' image of themselves as communities who served the United States in various ways. The pivotal role of war veterans on Yugoslav Day in 1933 reflected this striving for acceptance.[136] In 1934, Captain Louis Cukela and J.A. Mandusic, two Yugoslav-Americans who had been awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, were honored before their fellow Yugoslav-Americans.[137] The contribution of these communities to their new country and their enrichment of the American culture were commonly repeated themes of the national pavilions and days.[138] A special section of the Yugoslav pavilion in New York displayed the part immigrant Yugoslavs had played in the United States.[139] Greek Americans likewise propagated their contributions "to uphold the traditions of democracy" in the country.[140]

Religious activities were another instance in which certain immigrants were included in the broader category of "American". A number of immigrants from the Balkans and the Middle East lost their connections with the churches of their native lands and attended American denominations.[141] Others established their own churches in towns with sizeable diasporas, and religion became an important factor in binding diasporas.[142] Diaspora leaders, particularly businessmen, sponsored the erection of new churches in the New World.[143] The relations between new churches and religious authorities in the home countries "established fresh relationships and new levels of connectivity between" diaspora groups in the United States and their old countries.[144] The fairs showed the paramount role that diasporas assigned to religion in preserving their identities. In New York, "the prayer for peace", which was a multinational event, attracted hundreds of religious representatives from Catholic,

136 Earl Mullin: "Fair Dedicates", *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 2 July 1933, 5.

137 Events – National Days, 1934, 29 July 1934, SCUA.

138 "Marks Hellenic Day", *New York Times*, 9 September 1940, 34.

139 "Outdoor Style", *Women's Wear Daily*, 11 May 1939, 32.

140 "Hellenic Day", *New York Herald Tribune*, 9 September 1940, 13.

141 Naff, "Lebanese Immigration into the United States", 151.

142 Philip M. Kayal/Joseph M. Kayal: *The Syrian-Lebanese in America: A Study in Religion and Assimilation* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975).

143 Vassilis Kardasis/Gelina Harlaftis: "Anazitóntas tis Chóres tis Epangelías: O apódimos Ellinismós apo ta mésa tou 19ου aióna os ton V' Pankósmio Pólemo" [Seeking the Land of Promise: Greek Diaspora from the mid-19th century to World War II], in: Iōannēs K. Chasiōtēs/Olga Katsiardē-Hering/Eurydikē A. Ampatzē (eds.): *Oi Éllines sti Diasporá 15os–21os ai* [The Greeks in Diaspora 15th–21st Century] (Athens: Voulē tōn Hellēnōn, 2006), 53–74, here 65.

144 Malcolm Campbell: *Ireland's Farthest Shores: Mobility, Migration, and Settlement in the Pacific World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2022), 140.

Protestant, and Jewish backgrounds.[145] Although followers of Orthodox Christianity and Islam were excluded, diasporas nevertheless used religion to prove their Americanness at other times.[146] Bishop Kallistos and Archbishop Athenagoras of the Greek Orthodox Church were among the religious leaders who led ceremonies and gave messages in line with the patriotic themes of the fairs.[147]

A variety of exhibits highlighted post-Ottoman diaspora experiences, and diasporas used their prominent members to prove that they had successfully become part of the 'American dream'. Diaspora leaders promoted famous historical figures as symbols of their identity and pride. For example, Yugoslav exhibits highlighted the contributions of Yugoslav-American scientists, including Michael Pupin and Nikola Tesla, to the United States and Western civilization.[148] Celebrities of Balkan and Middle Eastern descent were invited to attend fairs as representatives of their communities. In return, some powerful voices in entertainment lent their support to the diaspora's representation in the hope of publicizing the pavilions and special events.[149] During the observance of Armenian Day in 1933, Armenian opera stars participated in concerts.[150] Their Bulgarian counterparts performed songs for Bulgarian Day. Georges Enescu, a Romania-born composer, led the New York Philharmonic on Romanian Day at the New York World's Fair in 1939.[151] Academics and other well educated people gave speeches on folklore, history, and language, introducing their heritage to the American public.[152] With such success stories and special events and by honoring distinguished members of their communities, diasporas tried to advance a view of post-Ottoman diasporas as hardworking and 'civilized' citizens to supplant previous stereotypes.

The role of these diasporas is connected to the larger story of racialization in American society. As Gowricharn has written: "Integration cannot be defined without reference to the prevailing ideology of the host society."[153] The assumed superiority of Anglo-Saxon (or Nordic) people dominated the cultural and social debates

145 "Jews, Christians Pray for Peace", *The American Jewish World*, 13 September 1940, 14.

146 "The Fair Today", *New York Times*, 23 July 1939, 28.

147 "Thousands", *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 10 October 1933, 11; "The Fair Today", *New York Times*, 7 October 1939, 12.

148 "Outdoor Style", *Women's Wear Daily*, 11 May 1939, 32.

149 Lucius Beede: "This New York", *New York Herald Tribune*, 19 August 1939, 12; "The Fair", *New York Herald Tribune*, 26 August 1939, 26.

150 Mullin, "Fair Dedicates", 5.

151 "Music", *The Victoria Daily Times*, 15 July 1939, 23.

152 Mullin, "Fair Attendance", 17.

153 Ruben Gowricharn: "Introduction: The Politics of Integration in Indian Diaspora Societies", in: Ruben Gowricharn (ed.): *Political Integration in Indian Diaspora Societies* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 1–14, here 1.

in this period. Immigrants and their descendants from other backgrounds were depicted as enemies who threatened the survival of "American" values.[154] "Whiteness", combined with "class prejudice", marked the distinction between Americans of European ancestry and other populations. "Civilization and white racial identity" were integral to the national sovereignty of the United States from the perspective of political elites, which heavily influenced migration policies and attitudes toward immigrants.[155] If one imagines a racial spectrum between those of "Anglo privilege" and "populations with African heritage",[156] post-Ottoman diasporas were placed between these groups. "Whiteness" as a socially constructed category was not limited to racial appearance. Instead, a variety of "geographical, cultural, linguistic, and religious factors" defined its borders. The construction of a concept of whiteness for post-Ottoman diasporas was not straightforward. It was a set of overlapping and contested perspectives and perceptions rather than a linear scale.[157]

The attempts of post-Ottoman Americans to be included in the society at large via fairs thus reflected their desire to be considered "white". As Karen Brodkin persuasively observed, there is "a conceptual distinction between ethnoracial assignment and ethnoracial identity." While the former is constructed by political elites through the manipulation of public opinion, the latter is the self-identification of ethnic groups. The construction of ethnoracial identity takes place within the confinement of ethnoracial assignment.[158] Arab Christians exemplified this tension between ethnoracial assignment and identity. Early immigrants with Arab Christian backgrounds "sought to claim a space within white American culture

154 Anderson, *Immigration*, 78.

155 Patrick Manning/Tiffany Trimmer: *Migration in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 166.

156 Bruce B. Lawrence: *New Faiths, Old Fears: Muslims and Other Asian Immigrants in American Religious Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 10.

157 Andrew Shryock/Nabeel Abraham: "On Margins and Mainstreams", in: Nabeel Abraham and Andrew Shryock (eds.): *Arab Detroit: From Margin to Mainstream* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001), 15–35, here 16–17; Jen'nan Ghazal Read: *Culture, Class, and Work Among Arab-American Women* (New York: LFB, 2004), 1; Sawsan Abdulrahim: "'Whiteness' and the Arab Immigrant Experience", in: Nadine Naber/Amaney Jamal (eds.): *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 131–146; Earlene Craver: "On the Boundary of White: The Cartozian Naturalization Case and the Armenians, 1923–1925", in: *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28:2 (2009), 30–56; John Tehranian: *Whitewashed: America's Invisible Middle Eastern Minority* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

158 Karen Brodkin: *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 3.

through strategies of assimilation and strategic deployment of exoticism."[159] While Christianity made them closer to whiteness, they faced different levels of constraint on the grounds of their Arab and Middle Eastern origins.[160]

Figure 1 Group of Yugoslavian Visitors at the Chicago Fair.

As the activities of diasporas at fairs suggest, community leaders did not readily accept their exclusion as non-white people. Traditional accounts of diasporas and their assimilation to countries of destination ruled out the role of ethnic communities in shaping their identity. Recent scholarship has pointed out the active agency diasporas have in the negotiation of a new identity.[161] Women played a role in this

159 Lisa Suhair Majaj: "Arab-Americans and the Meanings of Race", in: Amritjit Singh/Peter Schmidt (eds.): *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 320–337, here 323.

160 Majaj, "Arab-Americans and the Meanings of Race", 332; Randa A. Kayyali: "Race, Religion and Identity: Arab Christians in the United States", in: *Culture and Religion* 19:1 (2018), 1–19, here 1.

161 Richard Alba/Victor Nee: *Remaking the American Mainstream: Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2003), 5.

process alongside men. The number of female immigrants from the Balkans and the Middle East remained low before the First World War, especially for Muslim groups, which diminished their involvement in the public sphere.[162] The gradual weakening of old identities as a result of immersion in American culture brought greater public visibility to women in the 1930s.[163] Fairs became a meeting place for women and men alike where they attempted to cross the racial line, even if they could not achieve whiteness (Figure 1).

Exhibiting Native Cultures

As they worked to prove their American identity, diasporas also tried to introduce as much as they could of their native culture into exhibits and events. They curated a variety of exhibits and organized events to help spectators gain a better understanding of their culture. Table 4 details major exhibits by national pavilions at the New York World's Fair. In addition to products and artworks, the pavilions offered books with pictures and informative articles about the nature and beauties of the home countries for adults and children.[164]

Music was one of the chief means used to represent native cultures and had a central place in the construction of the diasporas' "self-image".[165] Diasporas placed great importance on native musical instruments, which was exemplified by the widespread use of instruments, such as the shepherd's flute in performances at the fairs. The stress on so-called national instruments – though many instruments' sound and structure were in fact very similar – reflected the increasing nationalist

162 Michael W. Suleiman: "A Brief History of Arab American Women, 1890s to World War II", in Michael W. Suleiman/Suad Joseph/Louise Cainkar (eds.): *Arab American Women: Representation and Refusal* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2021), 21–52, here 22.

163 Suleiman: "A Brief History of Arab American Women", 47; Amy E. Rowe: "'Keeping Us Lebanese': The Role of Unmarried Daughters of Ottoman-Era Lebanese Immigrants in New England", in: Michael W. Suleiman/Suad Joseph/ and Louise Cainkar (eds.): *Arab American Women: Representation and Refusal* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2021), 84–113, here 87.

164 Mary Gould Davis, June 1934, 2, SCUA.

165 Stathis Gauntlett: "The Diaspora Sings Back: Rebetika Down Under", in: Dimitris Tziovas (ed.): *Greek Diaspora and Migration since 1700* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 271–284, here 272. On the crucial role of music as a marker of identity for these diaspora groups, see Anne K. Rasmussen: "Made in America: Historical and Contemporary Recordings of Middle Eastern Music in the United States", in: *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 31:2 (1997), 158–62; Silvia Angelique Alajaji: *Music and the Armenian Diaspora: Searching for Home in Exile* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Beau Bothwell: "'For Thee America! For Thee Syria?': Alexander Maloof, Orientalist Music, and the Politics of the Syrian Mahjar", in: *Journal of the Society for American Music* 14:4 (2020), 383–418.

spirit in the world in the 1930s.[166] Just as political elites tried to construct their national identities in the Balkans and the Middle East, diasporas in the United States claimed to possess distinctive cultural traditions.[167] Nation-building in home countries politicized diasporas abroad.[168]

Table 4 Notable Exhibits at the New York World's Fair (1939–1940)[169]

Country	Exhibits
Albania	Embroideries, furs, hides, wool, minerals, semi-precious stones, dairy products, rugs, perfumes, silverware, and refined oils
Greece	Glass, fruit, furniture, honey, marble, pottery, rugs, and silks
Lebanon	Native jewelry and silverware
Romania	Textiles, ceramics, handicraft works, rugs, furniture, painting, sculpture, and cultural exhibits
Turkey	Copper and brass bowls, fabrics, fruit, jugs, hand-worked metals, leather work, native perfumes, tobacco, and woven rugs.
Yugoslavia	Peasant art, natural resources and their exploitation, industry, and architecture

Next to music, dance formed another avenue of representation.[170] Post-Ottoman diasporas, without exception, performed traditional dances at the fairs. In certain cases, they offered open classes to teach spectators the basic principles of each dance.[171] Although dance brought together men and women, children and adults, alike, girls in national costume formed the heart of dance performances. The girls not only represented their respective cultures but also occasionally helped exhibitors promote their products, as shown by the use of dancing girls by the Iraqi pavilion.[172]

166 On diasporic nationalism, see Gualtieri, *Between Arab and White*, 113–134.

167 Their definition of nationalism evolved over time in line with political developments in home countries. For example, see Laurel Wigle/Sameer Abraham: "Arab Nationalism in America: The Dearborn Arab Community", in: David W. Hartman (ed.): *Immigrants and Migrants: The Detroit Ethnic Experience* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974), 279–302.

168 Steven B. Miles: *Chinese Diasporas: A Social History of Global Migration* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 137.

169 "The Exhibits", *New York Times*, 30 April 1939, 17–18.

170 The representative role of dance was not limited to post-Ottoman diasporas. For example, see George Dorris: "The Polish Ballet at the New York World's Fair, June 1939", in: *Dance Chronicle* 27:2 (2004), 217–234.

171 "Program for Today", *New York Times*, 13 September 1940, 25.

172 "The Fair Today", *New York Times*, 19 September 1939, 34.

As with music, the various dances were very similar: The Lebanese *dabke*, Bulgarian *horo*, Turkish *horon*, Greek *horos*, Armenian *kochari*, and Yugoslav *kolo* could all be seen.[173] The importance of dance performances mainly stemmed from their 'collective' characteristics. They brought together thousands of members of diasporas as both performers and spectators. For instance, representatives of Greek societies performed folk dances before an audience of 2000 people on Hellenic Day in 1939.[174] The unifying role of dance was particularly important for ethnic groups whose culture was not represented by a government. In such cases, community leaders took the lead and organized a dance festival at the fair, which reminded the celebrants of their community's heritage. For example, the Armenian Glee Club presented Armenian folk songs in 1939, and Margaret Valian, an Armenian-American dancer, performed a solo dance.[175] The gathering of huge crowds at the dance festivals was also used to hold weddings.[176] These collective activities and events provided diaspora leaders with arenas to promote a cohesive image of their communities, at least rhetorically.

Dance and musical societies of diasporas also took part in community events such as folk festivals. This means of celebrating and preserving ethnic identities in the United States dated back to the 19th century,[177] and participation increased during the interwar period. For example, the Folk Festival Council of New York organized folk festivals in 1934, attracting thousands of men and women of Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Jewish, and Yugoslav descent. The world's fairs provided a large and popular stage for post-Ottoman diasporas to show off their folk culture, and there was great interest in the folk festivals held at the Chicago fair.[178] A similar festival in New York in 1939 featured 29 ethnic groups, including Bulgarian, Greek, Jewish, Romanian, Serbian, and Slovenian performers.[179]

The preparations for these collective performances increased collaboration within diaspora communities. To develop coordination and have a good connection with the other dancers, the performers needed to practice for weeks. Visitors were impressed: According to *The New York Times*, Egyptians, Greeks, and Turks "caught the eye as they passed in a variety of nation[al] costumes" during a parade at the

173 *Chicago: A Century of Progress, 1833–1933* (Chicago: Marquette, 1933), 93.

174 "Exposition", *New York Times*, 21 July 1939, 10.

175 "Singing to Follow Orchestral Music", *Detroit Free Press*, 9 August 1939, 3.

176 "Century of Progress", *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 1 July 1933, 7.

177 Kathleen Neils Conzen: "Ethnicity as Festive Culture: Nineteenth Century German America on Parade", in: Werner Sollors (ed.): *The Invention of Ethnicity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 44–76; Donlon, *German and Irish Immigrants*, 124.

178 Immigration and Refugee Services of America Division of the Foreign Language Press – Press Releases, 9 May 1934, 1, IHRCA: IHRC1013, Box 21, Folder 4, Index No. 3701.

179 M.L.: "Dance", *The Christian Science Monitor*, 11 May 1939, 10.

New York Fair in 1939.[180] The cumulative effects of these activities demonstrated the success of diaspora leaders in claiming public attention.

Table 5 The Seating Capacity of National Restaurants (1939)[181]

Country	Capacity	Country	Capacity	Country	Capacity
Switzerland	618	Sweden	372	Japan	100
Belgium	617	Albania	300	Turkey	100
France	600	Brazil	300	Hungary	70
Poland	520	Portugal	200	Argentina	60
Romania	500	Norway	170	Finland	60
Great Britain	428	Denmark	125	Chile	30
Italy	400				

Like music and dance, special restaurants became a pivotal part of the diaspora representation that gave all visitors a chance to taste the enormous variety of "genuine" dishes of the Balkans and the Middle East.[182] Some of the nations had restaurants with varying seating capacities in the international area (Table 5). Others, such as Yugoslavia, opened restaurants as part of the official pavilions.[183] Iraq opened a "typical Arabian Restaurant".[184] Cafe Tel Aviv, as the fair's only kosher restaurant, offered "Palestinian specials" to visitors.[185] Moreover, there were scores of American restaurants and refreshment stands in and around the fairgrounds, some of which were owned by the naturalized citizens of post-Ottoman countries.

In addition to their importance for representation, restaurants yielded a profit for their owners. They brought cooks to New York. Romanian chefs from Casa Capșa, a historical restaurant in Bucharest, came to New York for the Romanian restaurant.[186] The personal chef of the late Kemal Atatürk supervised the Turkish restau-

180 "Crowds", *New York Times*, 1 May 1939, 1–2.

181 Documents Relating to Construction Progress, 1937–1939, 162, NYPL.

182 Reports on Foreign Government Participation, 24 February 1939, 3, NYPL. For relations between culture and food at these two fairs, see: Elizabeth Badger: *The World's Fare: Food and Culture at American World Fairs from 1893–1939* (Master's Thesis, Western Washington University, 2012), 54–78.

183 Documents relating to the Czechoslovakia Pavilion, 10 May 1939, NYPL.

184 Facts about the New York World's Fair 1940, 6, NYPL.

185 David Hillel Gelernter: *1939, The Lost World of the Fair* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), 299.

186 Local unions and workers felt threatened by foreign employees and opposed the arrival of such skilled people to do specialized jobs ("Foreign Nations", *New York Times*, 8 June 1939, 1).

rant. The managers of the pavilions and restaurants brought wine and caviar by ship or airplane. Musicians and dancers often enlivened restaurant atmospheres to attract more visitors.[187] Waitresses in national costumes served the specialties. While offering foods of central importance to the diet of the Balkans and the Middle East, the restaurants also served American and French dishes.[188] Primary accounts indicate that these restaurants proved very popular with both those of post-Ottoman descent and other spectators.[189]

By competing to attract diners, ethnic and national restaurants drew together the different diaspora groups, undermining the nationalist claims of community and political leaders. While visiting national restaurants, journalist Richard W. Dunlap heard people speaking Arabic, Greek, Romanian, Serbian, and Turkish.[190] Another account stated that Greeks, Turks, and Yugoslavs dominated the Albanian restaurant on its opening day.[191] In effect, the restaurants cemented the bonds of friendship even between people whose common history was full of conflicts. For example, many Armenians enjoyed dishes and drinks in the Turkish restaurant, although the Turkish delegation had feared an attack on the Turkish pavilion by Armenian Americans in 1939.[192]

The desire of diasporas to demonstrate their pride in their respective identity found its perfect form of expression in the arrangement of special days and events. These were funded through the sale of tickets to diaspora members. In 1933, 28 different nationalities organized special days.[193] There were special days for Armenian, Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian, Palestinian, and Yugoslav Americans.[194] In 1934, Albanian, Greek, Palestinian, and Yugoslav Americans continued to arrange national days. The number of days and events by post-Ottoman diasporas significantly increased in 1939, which saw the celebrations of Iraqi, Albanian, Jewish Palestinian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Armenian-American, Hellenic, Lebanese, Yugoslav, and Turkish days.[195] These days were visited by thousands of people from around the United States who wished to express attachment to their own identity.

---

187 "Fair will Prove Promised Land for Gourmets", *New York Herald Tribune*, 27 April 1939, 5.

188 "The Exhibits", *New York Times*, 30 April 1939, 17–18.

189 August Loeb: "Menus", *New York Times*, 28 May 1939, sec. XX, 3.

190 Richard W. Dunlap: "Prospective Travelers", *New York Herald Tribune*, 30 July 1939, sec. D, 12.

191 "Fair Cafes", *New York Herald Tribune*, 2 May 1939, 2.

192 Neşet Halil: "Günün Meseleleri" [Issues of the Day], *Tan*, 9 June 1939, 3; N. H. Atay: "Amerika'da Türkiye'ye Hasret Türkiye'liler" [Those from Turkey in America Longing for Turkey], *Ulus*, 31 July 1939, 5; Vedat Nedim Tör: *Yıllar Böyle Geçti: Anılar* [The Years Passed like this: Memories] (Istanbul: Milliyet Yayınları, 1976), 45. Tör was the general commissioner of the Turkish pavilion at the fair in 1939.

193 "Keeping in Step with a Century of Progress", *The Billboard*, 21 January 1933, 31, 36.

194 *Chicago: A Century of Progress*, 153–158.

195 Promotion Stories, 22 May 1934, 3–4, SCUA.

There were stark contrasts among social classes in terms of the opportunity to make this kind of pilgrimage. The cost of visiting the fair from other parts of the country was far beyond what a working-class person could afford. For example, to visit the New York World's Fair from Chicago, the cost for a single person was $38.90 (about $777 in 2021 terms) and $74.95 (about $1499 in 2021) for a five- and eight-day tour, respectively.[196] Generally speaking, it was the wealthy members of diasporas and community leaders from other states that attended national days and events, and thus dominated the representation of diasporas. [197]

Together with the residents of the host cities, these visitors filled the fairgrounds and waved the flags of the United States and their home countries.[198] Special programs included military spectacles; songs, music, and dance; a parade in native costumes; athletic contests; fireworks; motorboat races and many other attractions. The most interesting activity was arguably the beauty contest by the Yugoslavs in 1933 (Figure 2). Yugoslav Americans all around the United States cast their votes to select "Miss Yugoslavia to reign as queen over the official Yugoslav day." Radmila J. Govedarica, a 19-year-old who lived in Chicago, was the winner.[199]

Such beauty contests can be evaluated within the broader context of diaspora identity construction.[200] On the one hand, the beauty of the winners was seen as representing their countries and cultures of origin. On the other hand, since the beauty contest was conducted among Yugoslav *Americans* on American soil, which made the winners not only Yugoslav but American beauties as well, the contest established a distance between the diasporas and their roots. Such competitions were a clear sign of the formation of a novel identity that was the admixture of new and old cultures.[201]

196 *The Sentinel*, 8 June 1939, 15; *The American Jewish World*, 28 June 1940, 2. The GDP per capita in the United States was $710.82 in 1939 and $775.69 in 1940. In other words, someone with average income had to give approximately her one-tenth of their annual earnings for an eight-day tour.

197 "Greek Day", *World's Fair News*, 3 September 1933, 1.

198 "Nevyork Sergisi" [New York Fair], *Anadolu*, 25 July 1939, 9.

199 "Century of Progress", *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 June 1933, 7.

200 Lon Kurashige: "The Problem of Biculturalism: Japanese American Identity and Festival before World War II", in: *The Journal of American History* 86:4 (2000), 1632–1654, here 1644.

201 For details about this concept, see Vanita Reddy: *Fashioning Diaspora: Beauty, Femininity, and South Asian American Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2016), 4.

Figure 2 Yugoslav winners of a beauty contest at the Chicago World's Fair (1933).

Since this hybrid identity was symbolized by the youth, it was younger generations that became the main target audience of special days and events at the fairs. Although post-Ottoman Americans were mostly immigrants, there were many among them who were born in the United States to immigrant parents (Tables 1 and 2). Though "the Americanized children" of foreign-born families took a close interest in the native cultures of their families, their knowledge of the Balkans and the Middle East was naturally limited.[202] In many regards, the fairs introduced young members of the diasporas to their ancestral countries. Parents brought their children to the fairgrounds with the hope of preserving their traditions by reconnecting the youth to their cultural heritage. Young people formed the backbone of parades and other collective activities.[203] In the words of Israel Goldstein, who delivered a speech at the Jewish Palestine Pavilion at the New York World's Fair, youth was "a crucial test of

202 Naff, "Lebanese Immigration into the United States", 160.

203 Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivi (Turkish Republican Archives) (BCA), 30.1.0.0.5.22.7, 11 April 1939, 2.

national self-hood."[204] A wide range of activities and spectacles enabled the transmission of the culture of their parent's home countries to younger generations.

If the celebration of native cultures was one pillar of representation, the mixture of old and new cultures was another. Diasporas amalgamated their own culture with modern and Western elements at the fairs,[205] further proving their dual ambition to be included in American society while preserving their native cultures. On Greek Day in 1934, there was classical ballet and Greek music by Giorgos Grachis, a renowned luthier and the president of the Association of Greek Musicians of the United States, and his orchestra.[206] In 1939, a concert at the formal opening of the Romanian Pavilion, which was sponsored by the Romanian government, included a variety of Romanian music.[207] That same year, Turkish Day witnessed a violin recital and native Turkish folk dances.[208] During Armenian Day at both fairs, performers sang a variety of opera and folk songs.[209] In addition to the modernized version of folk music, performers played and sang a variety of American songs.[210] Just as the performance of native music was related to the representative of their identity, the inclusion of Western music in the concert repertoires reflected their aim of being included in the American society.[211]

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the role of the world's fairs at Chicago and New York in the identity formation of post-Ottoman diasporas in the United States in the 1930s. Each group had a lineage that originated in the same region, but they did not form cohesive communities, because they were divided by factors such as age, class, profession, ethnicity, ideology, language, and religion. This diversity had implications when it came to their representations at fairs. Even so, fairs became a unique means for immigrants and their descendants to come together and have a common set of experiences. Diaspora leaders used the fairs to call for unity between scattered communities. Especially those with higher income levels and more formal education and those who had pursued distinguished careers in arts, academia, and business came

204 Israel Goldstein: *Toward a Solution* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1940), 223.
205 Olin Downes: "Music of Rumania", *New York Times*, 6 May 1939, 23.
206 Mullin, "100,100", 6.
207 "Complete Program", *New York Herald Tribune*, 5 May 1939, 10.
208 "Fair's Tribute Paid to Turkey on Peace Ideals", *New York Herald Tribune*, 23 July 1939, 22.
209 Mullin, "Fair Record", 2; "Program for Today", *New York Times*, 15 September 1940, 47.
210 Mullin, "2,000 Shriners Stage Colorful Parade at Fair", 5.
211 The use of music "as part of a strategic intraethnic self-promotion" at these fairs was not unique to post-Ottoman diasporas (Derek Vaillant: *Sounds of Reform: Progressivism and Music in Chicago, 1873–1935* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 53–54).

to the fore. Challenges posed by the governments, colonialism, fair managers, and ideological conflicts notwithstanding, one can see the role of fairs in encouraging unity among diasporas.

The diasporas had two distinct yet interconnected aims: The desire for integration into American society was coupled with a wish to retain their native cultures. Since many did not see their native and American identities as being mutually exclusive, they created exhibits and staged massed choirs, folk festivals, and parades for large audiences to amplify the representation of their dual identities and dispel stereotypes about their native cultures. The restaurants and pavilions were a means for foreign nationals and immigrant communities to sample the best of their national cuisines and music. Enthusiasm for such undertakings was reflected in the attendance of thousands of diaspora members, as well as other spectators. These two world's fairs further provided a window onto broader integration of post-Ottoman diasporas into American society. The collective efforts of men and women helped them integrate into American society more effectively than other groups that were considered non-white in this period.[212] A wide array of activities and their popularity indicated that the efforts of diasporas to negotiate their social status and fit within the common understanding of American identity at the fairs were not in vain.

212 Louise Cainkar: "The Social Construction of Difference and the Arab American Experience", in: *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25:2/3 (2006), 243–278, here 243.