

At the Edge of the City (English)

Reinhabiting Public Space toward the Recovery of Beirut's Horsh Al-Sanawbar

<http://attheedgeofthecity.wordpress.com/>

Details

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Includes poster [by Danny Khoury] and DVD [by Lasse Lau]

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Abstract

Since the early 1990s, Beirut's Park, Horsh Al-Sanawbar, was sealed off from the lives of many Beirut residents and visitors, with numerous justifications for their exclusion. *At the Edge of the City* aspires to chart an alternative discourse from that which produces this exclusion. Through exploring issues of advocacy and politics, the book aims to provide a platform to contest the existing governance of Horsh Al-Sanawbar and to bring forward a well-informed public space policy agenda.

At the Edge of the City is a contemporary critique of urban governance and spatial production in Beirut. The undertaking is advocating in scope, multidisciplinary in approach, and journalistic in style. The book is an edited volume on public space in Beirut, focused on the case of Beirut's park Horsh Al-Sanawbar, hosting the original textual and visual works of over 25 scholars, professionals, journalists, activists, and artists. The book is supported by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung (Middle East Office) and published by the professional initiative DISCURSIVE FORMATIONS.

In Part 1: *An Intricate Urban Context*, the authors discuss the history of the park and evolving meanings of public space. From pine woods in the seventeenth century to a park in the twentieth century, Horsh Al-Sanawbar is established within Beirut memory and continues to be a part of its imagination due to its current closure. Collective memory and social imagination in Beirut are continuously located in a peculiar context of difference, division, conflict, coexistence, and creativity. Amidst the reproduction of fear and division – during and post the civil war – and amidst dire socioeconomic disparities, people continue to remember, practice, and appropriate the public space of the city. Spatial coexistence, in Beirut's loaded context, becomes synonymous with political and cultural coexistence.

In Part 2: *Heterotopias of Park & City*, the authors investigate the spatial connections between Beirut and its park through the lenses of Modernity, spatial justice, confessional divisions, exclusion, gender equality, and environmental ethics. The place, its rehabilitation, and the closure of Horsh Al-Sanawbar constitute experimental fields for the authorities and citizens of Beirut to try to manifest recovery from the civil war and reinhabit a "missed" Modernity. The park and the city seem at odds, and Foucault's notion of a heterotopia dominates all utopian imaginations of a place that is supposed to bring people together.

In Part 3: *Transient Citizenship*, Transient Public Space, the authors inscribe citizens' understandings of ownership of public space and their consequent practices and experiences of advocacy and activism to reclaim their domain. Enacting citizenship through public space is questioned as an imported, political, and cultural construct against practices of claiming and reclaiming collective ownership. Thus, when a group of citizens decide to mobilize to reclaim the spatial design, green space, or picnic space of the park, their citizenship is enacted. However, whether citizenship (and its enactment) or the public space (and its domain) is transient remains a central controversy in the context of the confused meanings of Beirut.

Contributors

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