Ethnography of Rainbow Street in Amman, Jordan

Jessica Page

Washington University in St Louis

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This project examines how residents of the capital city of Amman are reacting to government sponsored urban development projects that aim to highlight the heritage and history of the country and city. Government and foreign agencies are forging a distinctive identity for Amman, a city positioned between long-established cities like Cairo and Damascus and newer oil-rich capitals such as Dubai and Doha. This identity is one that emphasizes modernization and heritage. I use Rainbow Street as a site to explore how Ammanis conceive of and interact with this newly renovated public space. The Greater Amman Municipality (GAM) sponsored the renovation of Rainbow Street, formerly known as Abu Bakr Siddiq Street, beginning in 2005. It is a public space utilized by expatriates (NGO workers, students, and teachers), Western and Arab tourists, and Ammanis from various sectors of society. Rainbow Street and GAM are results of a concerted effort of the government and international agencies to attract investment and tourism to Amman. How are these efforts connected to larger notions of state and nationhood? What does Rainbow Street symbolize to the shop owners, employees, customers, drivers, and pedestrians who occupy its space? How do the meanings associated with Rainbow Street influence the public interactions of its occupants? I use textual analysis, street observations, participant observation, and informal, semi-structured, and structured interviews to analyze how inhabitants of Amman are responding to changes in the urban environment. I argue that Ammanis are playing an active role alongside government and foreign agencies in creating a unique city identity. The study provides a micro, rather than macro, analysis of urban development in this Jordanian setting.