“Social Mapping a 21st Century Amman”
Betty S. Anderson
Boston University

Local and regional investment and infrastructure projects initiated by the Amman Municipality in the 21st century have transfigured old and new neighborhoods in the city to be locales of consumption, entertainment and socializing. Even though Jordanian citizens have little input into the neoliberal choices being made across the city, they are taking charge of how they use the new venues being established, enrolling in new private educational institutions, taking on new jobs in the private sector, taking advantage of new housing and transportation opportunities, and finding new means for advertising their choices on social media. Rainbow Street and parts of downtown read as tourist destinations; the Abdali project as a reimagined Beirut Solidere. Abdoun Circle, Jabal Husayn, and neighborhoods in East Amman layer new consumer options onto streets still recognizable to long-term residents. Social media sites have enabled owners and customers to present their own images of these newly built and reconfigured spaces, images that embrace the country’s neoliberal direction but which also highlight the differences in class, society and gender that these changes have wrought. Amman, like any city, was never just one urban area, but a patchwork of residential neighborhoods and public- and private-sector employment zones. I propose to discuss how the changes to the city have enabled the creation of new socio-economic and geographical bridges across neighborhoods while also exacerbating long-term divisions.

Betty Anderson is the author of Nationalist Voices in Jordan: The Street and the State (University of Texas Press, 2005), The American University of Beirut: Arab Nationalism and Liberal Education (University of Texas Press, 2011), and A History of the Modern Middle East: Rulers, Rebels and Rogues (Stanford University Press, Spring 2016), as well as a co-author with Carol Berkin of the History Handbook (Houghton-Mifflin 2003 and Cengage 2011). Dr. Anderson has published articles in Civil Wars, Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Critique, and Jordanies, as well as chapters for a number of edited volumes. She has written about the themes covered by Islamic and history textbooks used in Jordan, the politicizing role of education in twentieth-century Middle East history, and the evolution of the American liberal education system at the American University of Beirut (AUB). Her latest project examines the economic, educational, political and social changes that have come to Beirut, Amman, and Ramallah over the last 25 years. Dr. Anderson has received Fulbright and American Center for Oriental Research (ACOR) grants to conduct research in Jordan and Lebanon. At Boston University, she is director of the Institute for the Study of Muslim Societies and Civilizations.