



Yousur Al Mudaffar

Sea and Society

Photo-Essay

### The Lost Spaces along the Seaside

Ever since I came to Lebanon, 10 years ago, I spent every summer going to the beach until I turned to a human-coal. I went to private beaches near my house, near Khaldeh, and it was always some form of competition of which beach resort is the most luxurious. Each year, the entrance fee was increased, and to some families it wasn't as easy to go to the beach as it was before. What I usually noticed on my way to the beach was those little places in between beach resorts that barely show. They look like a tiny hut next to a mansion, completely invisible. To be honest I never really gave them much thought as I was always rushing to get myself sunburnt. What made me focus more on what they are was being in this class and going on the fieldtrip to discover the lost spaces in Ain Mrayssieh. The picture I chose depicts exactly what I was discussing previously. The little fishing-boats port is rendered invisible next to all the luxurious hotels and restaurants that has taken over the sea. This made me realized to what extent the place of the sea has shifted from being a dirty, smelly space that only fishermen and poor people were situated around to a place that only posh people can afford to live.

During our field trip to Ain-Mrayssieh, the fisherman Ibrahim was telling us about how they're trying to build a little sea food restaurant next to their port to sell their fish, and how it was such a disaster for big businessmen that such a local place was situated next to all the other expensive places. They're trying to shut it down because its mere existence between Dreams hotel and Dardashat café was wrong. The whole space around the sea is reconstructed to give an image of Beirut that says "This place is not for everyone". Even in Marie Muracciole's lecture on Allan Sakula, she mentioned this shift of the place of the sea from deserted to completely upper-class and expensive. The problem is that what used to exist along the coastline is either taken down or being so invisible in the middle of this reconstructed space of the seaside. As I went to check the seaside and the beaches along Khaldieh beach again, I tried to focus on those invisible places I mentioned before; one of them had little stairs from the street level down to the seaside and I found a little house that looks so much like the old houses we found in Ain Mraysseih. The fishermen restaurant is one of those places, it is not visible anymore and this is how the image of Ain-Mraysseih is continuing to look more and more posh because everything is becoming bigger and bigger and those lost spaces are getting smaller and smaller.

The truth is that I lived here in Lebanon for ten years now and I never knew about this port in the picture up until the fieldtrip. It is right there next to the sea. Its under the street I pass on every day, and I never knew there was something like that existing in a place like this. The problem is even the old houses between Ain-Mrayssieh and Bliss street, are not seen as something that is normal and a part of the area. When people look at it they see History and

something to reminisce over and nothing more, and they're not seen as normal houses with normal people living in them, they're not seen as something that fits. It's a kind of coercion that is more mental than physical. The form of coercion makes them feel out of place, and this is why I think they're lost spaces along the seaside. It's as if those houses are being told "If you don't want to leave, we'll make sure you're invisible next to all of us".