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Introduction

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Introduction

This work originates in a will to understand what seemed to be a complicated conflict zone, Lebanon and in particular its southern part, where the many topics regarding regional and local contradictions of an enduring war zone during the civil war (1975–90) and after have converged. This work is also built on a deep interest in Middle Eastern politics and the central position of the Palestinian issue, which affects Lebanon specifically and the region more generally. In brief, it draws upon key questions of collective identity, relationships between groups and the fluctuation of those categories and their boundaries in time and space. The emphasis on the spatial feature of the issue, namely the South Lebanese borderland, underscores the decision to raise theoretical questions linking the notion of identity with those of space and power.

The main goal here is to discuss the cross-effect of different types of actors – from the Lebanese state to foreign powers as well as nonstate armed groups – on a borderland's territoriality and society as well as the border's impact on those actors' identity and strategy. I see this double-binding process as the shaping of the borderland. The inquiry that mixes history with political sociology focuses on the political, geographical, social or cultural means that have shaped South Lebanon over the years. The book looks at three central issues. As territory remains an important factor of identity (Kaplan, 1999), the first is the fluctuation of the border line, which affects the borderland's identity defining it as a disputed entity that has been permeated by social struggles and ravaged by wars and occupation. The second issue concerns the border effect that the region may have on the four main actors that have shaped the borderland: the Lebanese state, the Palestinian refugees and their armed resistance, Hizbullah and the United Nations local mission, UNIFIL. Each of them has had to adapt to a local and regional environment while acting on the ground. This point links to the third issue, which is everyday bordering (Jones & Johnson, 2014). This last issue facilitates a better understanding of how local/national agents, as well as refugees or foreign agents, are bordering South Lebanon by means of diplomacy, security, culture and crossing/circumventing the border.

The exploration of these bordering processes and their actors was carried out through in-depth research based on several fieldworks trips since 2009 but also on previous and parallel research investigating the issues affecting Palestinian refugees. The book is organised into two sections. The first shows a progression through time, while the second probes the borderland's many layers of contemporary meaning. The seven chapters that comprise these two sections explore the ways in which different actors b/order South Lebanon's borderland, as well as their interrelationships and the border effect on them.

In the first section, three chapters analyse several armed struggles that have marked the borderland's identity. In line with Bourdieu's theory, any struggle over a physical entity is also a struggle over its classification. This point highlights the double dimension (material and representational) that any relationship with a territory entails. In other words, each armed struggle is also a struggle over the interpretation of the symbolic definition of the coveted space. After a long period of marginalisation following Lebanon's independence, 'the South' (*al-Janoub*) became a vantage ground for the Palestinian resistance. The civil war broke out in 1975 and eased Israeli penetration for security purposes, transforming the southern strip of South Lebanon into a buffer zone. Two invasions (in 1978 and again in 1982) helped to consolidate Israel's influence over the South but simultaneously saw the emergence of two different types of Lebanese resistance movements: the Lebanese National Resistance Front,

which was a mixture of several leftist groups and remaining Palestinian resistance fighters, and the Shi'i Islamist movement of Hizbullah. The latter tied its political identity to South Lebanon's borderland through its armed struggle under the banner of Islamic resistance before developing a national dimension. After its breakdown as a local actor in 1976, the disappearance of the Lebanese state was counterbalanced by the arrival of the blue helmets of UNIFIL in the aftermath of the 1978 Israeli invasion, following the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 425.

In the second section, focused on borderland narratives, the book's remaining four chapters delve into the main narratives of the border: those of Hizbullah, of the Palestinian refugees, of the international institutions with direct implications for the UN, and of course of the Lebanese state itself. Once again, the meanings of the border are made up of collective experience, cross-border relationships and partnership or authority over this land that have all formed different 'mental maps' (Migdal, 2004). Hizbullah's refers to its cultural redefinition of the landscape through, among other things, tourist sites as an extension of its Islamic sphere (*hala islamiyya*). The one of the Palestinians is linked to a narrative of exile and reconnection across the border, most of the time by circumventing the Lebanon – Israel border. The experience of the UN in this borderland also provides a peacekeeping narrative that draws a political line on the ground and brings enemy states together to administer this line. Finally, the Lebanese state claims national sovereignty over its land, airspace and maritime exclusive economic zone in the face of Israeli violations and claims.

The conclusion takes a broader view by questioning South Lebanon's meaning for a region that currently finds itself in turmoil. The direct meaning is tied to South Lebanon's place in the geopolitical context of the current crises in the Middle East as one axis of confrontation among many others. South Lebanon's indirect meaning is what the theoretical framework shows, namely that the triple process of bordering, ordering and othering tends to illuminate the arbitrary and man-made origins of borders. It also underlines the importance of the state – society relationship as well as the changing face of borders/boundaries understood as the cross-result of individual impacts on limits and the power of borders/boundaries over social actors. While borders can be mobile, history teaches us that they tend to persist over time. In an era of the breakdown of Libya and the spreading of the Islamic State across the Iraq–Syria border, it might be less the change of borders than the shift in political regimes that is at stake in the aftermath of the Arab uprisings.

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