Borderlanders

People from the in-between spaces

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This exhibition stems from a research project focusing on the many ways the residents of the border regions of Lebanon, or «borderlanders», live and perceive the international border of Lebanon. The men and women we met are privileged observers of this ordinary institution. Their daily experience of the border stands in stark contrast with our usual experience of borders encountered once in a while when we are travelling abroad. Their narratives might be able to enrich our understanding of what a border is thanks to the meaning and impact it has on their lives.

This fieldwork carried out on various locations in Lebanon aims to understand what it means to live in a borderland region for each of the observers. Through their personal life experiences, they all brought to light how «their» border – the one they know and experience on a daily basis – provide them with opportunities and/or create constraints. Each of them showed us how much a border is not a simple phenomenon like a «line of sovereignty» but rather an entity that has an impact on those living nearby. All of them, Lebanese or foreigners, underscored how they shape, use and transform this entity.

Our investigation shows that it is not sufficient to say that Lebanon has got two very different border dyads – one with Syria and the other one with Israel. The country has far more borders because of the many and various relationships that have existed along each segment of the international border, with
their own local history and dynamics. The Lebanese residents we met shed light on how people are living, the kind of resources they have and the dreams they share in the borderland regions. There is a large range of different perceptions and trajectories, effects and actions, gains and losses the border can create, depending on who you are and where you are located along the border.

Among the borderland relationships, there is a specific one stemming from the presence of refugees coming from the neighboring states. On the one hand, Syrians who fled the war and are expecting to go back home soon, on the other hand the Palestinians that are far from any possible return to Palestine. Through years or decades, both are slowly becoming different from who they were before exile. Beyond the status of refugees or displaced persons, some of them started to have a blurred or mixed identity, thus becoming vivid examples of what borders can do to people’s identity.

There are other foreigners living in the borderland regions, who are less ordinary and numerous. They came there voluntarily, for NGOs or international organizations, and are part of the human landscape of the borderlands. While a majority of them did not specifically choose the border regions as a place to stay, they discover the borderland impact when living among other local residents, understand its complexity and meaning. The portraits you are about to discover all define a certain type of relationship with the border, in certain circumstances with various perceptions of their experience. The border itself slowly appears as a dotted line which is fragmented, cut, sometimes isolated but also ideologized. The border is a location that reveals concerns, tensions and shows what is at stake. It is telling of identity and belonging, probably a reason why such a place speaks to all of us.
اعتيادية. أدوا هناك بعض إرادتهم. للمؤسسات غير الحكومية والمنظمات العالمية، هم جزء من المشهد البشري للأراضي الحدودية. لم يختر معظمهم المناطق الحدودية خصوصاً كمكان عيش لهم، لكنهم اكتشفوا تأثير المناطق الحدودية عبر مخالفات سكان آخرين وفهموا تعقيداتها ومعناها.

تصور اللوحات التي تتشكل على رؤيتها نوعاً محدداً من العلاقات مع الحدود، وفي ظروف معينة مع تصورات مختلفة لتجربتها. تظهر الحدود ببطء كخط منقطع، مجيزاً، مقطوع، مرئياً، مقطوعاً، أحياناً ولكن أيديولوجيا أيضاً. الحدود هي موقع يكشف اهتمامات وتوترات وتظهر ما على المحك، هي قصة هوية وانتماء، ورها هي السبب الذي يجعل هذا المكان يكلمنا جميعاً.
هذا المعرض هو وليد مشروع يركز على طرق المعيشة المتعددة لسكان المناطق الحدودية للبنان وكيف ينظرون للحدود الدولية للبنان. التقييما بالعديد من الرجال والنساء الذين يتعاطون بشدة هذا الوضع الاجتماعي. فجريتهم اليومية للحدود تقف في تناقض صارخ مع تجربتهم المعتادة للحدود التي نما في حياتهم، وعندما ينتقلون خارج البلاد، يشعرون أنهم قد تكون قادرًا على إثراء فهمنا لفقدان الحدود بشكل مباشر والتأثير الذي تحدث على حياتهم.

هذا العمل الميداني الذي أنتج في مناطق عدة في لبنان يهدف لدراسة ماذا تعني الحدود في المناطق الحدودية لكل من هؤلاء المراقبين. عبر تجربة حياتهم الشخصية، سلطا الضوء على كيف توفر «حدودهم» التي يعرفونها ويجربونها كل يوم، الفوضى وأو تخلف القيود. كل منهم أراد أن الحدود ليست مجرد ظاهرة عادية مثل «خط السيادة»، بل كان يؤثر على أولئك الذين يعيشون في المحيط. فكلهم، اللبنانيون وأجانب، يشكلون ويستعملون ويحولون هذا الكيان.

تحقيقنا يظهر أنه ليس كافياً تصنيف الحدود في مجموعتين، واحدة مع سوريا والأخرى مع فلسطين (اسرائيل). فلبنان يملك الكثير من الحدود بسبب العلاقات العديدة والمتنوعة التي بدأت في كل جزء من الحدود الدولية الذي يمتلك تاريخه الخاص وديانته، فالسكان اللبنانيون الذين التقينا بهم يسلطون الضوء على كيف يعيش الناس، نوع الموارد التي لديهم والأحلام التي تشاركا المناطق الحدودية. هناك مجموعة كبيرة من التصورات والممارسات المختلفة، الأثر والإجراءات، الإرباك والفساد التي يمكن أن تخلق الحدود، بناءً على هويتك و موقعك على طول الحدود.

بين العلاقات الحدودية، هناك علاقة محددة تبعي من وجود اللاجئين من الولايات المجاورة. من جهة، اللاجئون الذين هربوا أثناء الحرب واتباعوا العودة لمنازلهم قريبًا. ومن جهة أخرى، الفلسطينيون المستمرين رجوعهم إلى فلسطين، عبر السنوات والعقود، كالمجموعات تتغير تدريجيًا، على كيف كان عليه قبل نفيهم. فإذا نظرنا بعيداً عن وضع اللاجئين أو المشردين، بدأ الهويات البعض منهم تصبح مختلطة أو غير واضحة، وبالتالي يمكن أن تكون أمثلة حية على تأثير الحدود على هوية الناس.

هناك أجانب آخرون يسكنون المناطق الحدودية، أعدادهم أقل ووضعهم أقل
Al-Nahr Al-Kebir

The river Al-Nahr Al-Kebir that embodied the border between Lebanon and Syria on its northern flank can become wide and deep when it is flooding its banks in the early Spring. The smugglers would then need a boat to cross it or wait few days for the water to drop. This picture has been taken from a balcony of a private house in Al-Ab-boudiyeh highlighting the proximity of the border with Syria and a sort of continuum between the two countries. Since 2011, the Syrian regime built new watch towers and militarized the northern flank of the river to avoid infiltrations.

النهر الكبير

يمكن أن يصبح النهر الكبير الذي يجسد الحدود بين لبنان وسوريا على الجهة الشمالية للبنان، واسعًا وعميقًا عندما تغمر ضفافه في أوائل الربيع. ثم يحتاج المهربون إلى قارب لعبوره أو الانتظار بضعة أيام حتى يهبط مستوى المياه. هذه الصورة المأخوذة من شرفة منزل خاص في العبودية تبرز قرب الحدود مع سوريا حيث تشكل الأراضي السورية ما يشبه الامتداد للأراضي اللبنانية. منذ عام 2011، بنى النظام السوري أبراج مراقبة جديدة ووضع عساكر على الجانب الشمالي من النهر لتجنب التسلل.
Hamad Ribejih is in his fifties, he is a mason has been living in Al-Abboudiyeh (North Lebanon) near the river Al-Nahr Al-Kebir for more than 30 years. At first sight, the place is a little bit strange and reminds us of an abandoned village along a large road that stops when reaching the river. He explains: «After the end of the war, I came here to take profit of the new project of the «Arab Highway». I decided to build a house and have a garage nearby but everything stopped with the assassination of former Prime minister Rafic Hariri».

Therefore he retrained in the farm tractor business with his cousin who was living in Syria and various other trafficking across the border: «We used to smuggle a lot of things from Syria such as diesel petrol, tobacco, cleaning products, wheat, chickpeas, clothes, fabric, earthenware (for mural decoration). We also brought some stuff from Syria like porcelain and bananas. But since 2011, the border became a dangerous place»
He used to be called Abu Ahmad, he is 29 years old and he is a Syrian worker since a decade or more. Abou Ahmad used to work in Lebanon before the war in his country. We met him on the shores of the border river Al-Nahr Al-Kebir on his motorbike, registered in Syria. That day, he was discreetly helping another Syrian guy to cross the river under the eyes of local inhabitants who came here to fish.

النهر الكبير

كانوا ينادونه أبو أحمد. عمره 29 سنة وهو عامل سوري منذ عقد أو أكثر، حيث بدأ العمل في لبنان قبل اندلاع الحرب في بلده. التقينا به على شواطئ النهر الحدودي، النهر الكبير، وكان على دراجته النارية، المسجلة في سوريا. في ذلك اليوم، كان يساعد رجلاً سورياً آخرًا بعبور النهر بشكل سري تحت أعين السكان الذين جاؤوا لاصطياد السمك.
Yahyah, 50 years old, is a professional soldier now retired. In 2013, his village Qochloq was targeted several days in a row by Syrian shootings. «All the inhabitants fled and took refuge in neighboring villages. But we quickly understood that the shootings were not intended to kill anyone but to spread the fear among the borderlanders, a deterrence strategy towards the infiltrations of opponents to Bachar».

Moataz (Abou oueiss), 52 years old, has a little shop at the entrance of the former border zone in Al-Abboudiyeh. «Our family was well connected with the Syrian authorities before the war (2011). In our shop, we used to give back their passport to their owner after the police control. Our business worked very well but unfortunately the war broke and most of our resources from the border crossing disappeared. Nowadays, only Alawite people are entitled to do business with the Syrian authorities».
Majed is a Sunni guy in his early forties and works as a manager of a gas station. He is from Al-Abboudiyeh where he initially worked as moneychanger at the border. «With my brother, we opened a mini-market located very close to the border. Life was easy: we had a daily 18’000 Syrian workers crossing the border there. We were crossing the border all the time to run some errands and buy some goods and sell them on the Lebanese side. We were making 300$ daily, that was absolutely amazing!»

Then, in 2005, the assassination of Rafic Hariri created a shock among the Sunnis in the Northern region. «I became a member of the Mustaqbal movement and took part in the electoral process of 2005. And suddenly I was blacklisted by the Syrian authorities and was not able to enter Syria. We continued the changing of money up to 2011 when we had to stop this business too». Nowadays, only the shop owned by his brother is still open.

Sad about what happened, Majed explains: «Now we cannot enter Syria. Only those who follow the Syrian regime can go there to do business…and come back». In the meantime, he acknowledges the importance of the securitization of the border in the re-creation of a new relationship: «I would not allow any terrorist to create a problem at the Syrian border. It is now really important to avoid any problem with the Syrian regime. We need to find new agreements in order to go back to business».
Fouad is a wedding musician in his fifties. He lives in this Syrian refugee camp near Al-Abboudiyeh with his wife. He warmly welcomed us in his tent to show us his musical ability but also to surprise us:

«In fact, I am Lebanese» while showing us his ID card. «I used to live in a Syrian town not far from here until 2011. I met my wife there and we used to live there. Because of the war, I had to sell the lands and houses I owned and move to Lebanon». He chose to live under a tent instead of buying a proper flat: «it was too expensive and moreover I had to choose between having a house and marrying off my children... It's expensive to marry off your children, you know!»

Al-Abboudiyeh

فؤاد عازف حفلات زفاف في الخمسينات من العمر. يعيش في مخيم للاجئين السوريين قريباً من العبودية في شمال لبنان مع زوجته. رحب بنا بحرارة في خيمته ليبرنا موهبتاه الموسيقية وليفاجتنا أيضاً:

«في الواقع، أنا لبناني» قالهنا بيننا أرنا هويته. «كنت عازف في قرية سورية غير بعيدة من هنا حتى 2011. إنتميت بزوجتي هناك وعشنا هناك. اضطررت إلى بيع أراضي وبيوتي وانتقلنا إلى لبنان». أختار أن يعيش في خيمة بدلاً من شراء شقة. «الشقق باهظة الثمن كما كان علي الاختيار بين امتلاك منزل وبين تزويج أولادي... فمساعدة الأولاد على الزواج أمر مكلف كما تعرف». 

العبودية

North
الشمال
In Wadi Khaled, on the top North-east side of the borderland, the Lebanese territory is designed like a bulb. And a Syrian road crossed this Lebanese borderland from East to West. In the picture, the eastern border check point which goes in the direction of Homs is also showing a Lebanese check point. The latter appeared for the first time in 2013 alongside the return of the Lebanese Army to the state’s borders, a process known as “rebordering”, a term which underscores a tighter control and ongoing securitization process.
Wadi Khaled

While walking near a field close to the border, we meet Mukhtar, Hussam, Luay and Abdessalam hanging out together. They are Syrian refugees from Tell Khalakh except for Mukhtar who comes from a small village near Homs where his entire family was massacred.

They all arrived in Wadi Khaled in 2013 by foot. «At that time, explains Abdessalam, the older amongst them, as Syrian citizens, we were entitled to enter Lebanon without any problem, you just needed to show your ID card». Registered at the UNHCR, all of them are receiving some financial support while they try to work as day laborers in the agricultural field or in construction. «Some of our former commercial partners are now helping us since we arrived here». Life turns tough for all of them but none of them wants to return to Syria with the present conditions. Mukhtar translates this feeling of the border as a space not to cross: «On the other side of the border, there is a permanent danger, and death is waiting for us».
Wadi Khaled

Wadi Khaled borderland region encompass 23 villages over approximately 40 sq/km. During the 20th century, most of its inhabitants were not even recognized as Lebanese while they were not Syrian either. They finally got the citizenship thanks to the naturalization decree of 1994. The region knew a certain economic prosperity in the pre-2011 war era thanks to its in-betweenness towards Lebanon and Syria. Since 2011, it relies more on the Syrian refugees as they are channeling international aid.
Ahmad Hussein Ezzeddine, is an energetic man in his fifties. He is a shepherd from father to son in Wadi Khaled. «I was born here and I inherited this piece of land where we are currently standing. It goes up to the houses over there, near the border. Aside the flock, I also grow wheat, potatoes, corn and greens. Nothing is sent abroad, all the products stay here».

For him, the border has a clear commercial function: «before the war, we used to see Syrians coming here with goods that we were buying. But since then, it is over. Before, I used to go to Syria to find spare parts for my tractor; now it is not possible anymore and I found it annoying». 
Al-Qaa

«Welcome to the Syria of al-Assad» announced the Syrian border post of Al-Qaa. It was the last border crossing to reopen at the end of 2017 after five years of closure. And for the first time, the Lebanese Army moved its check point control from the outskirts of the village of al-Qaa up to the limits of the Lebanese territory, 15 km north of the village, just before the Syrian border post.
Al-Qaa

On the eastern flanks of the former no man’s land between the village of al-Qaa and the Syrian border post, 30’000 Syrian refugees sought refuge in the al-Qaa border-lands, most of them working in the fields of this fertile land.
Naji Nasrallah, 61 years old, is from Al-Qaa where he lives. He wwrently is a Christian businessman in agricultural products in Ras Baalbeck. Like his father, he is a farmer in this area, a region where he values the territorial depth on the Eastern flank. «We only once had a problem with Syrian soldiers because they were occupying our lands, it was in 1980. Before 2011, the border did not exist, Syrian policemen where on both sides of the border. Now, the Lebanese army took control of every inches of the national territory!»

In 2017, the Lebanese army came back to these borderlands for the first time, once they managed to push the Jihadists out of Juroud Arsal. «For the first time, our soldiers re-opened the border road, cleared the fields from any bombs and took control of the border. Without border, no country».
Melhem al-Hujjeiri, 61 years old, is a Sunni businessman in the industry of concrete in Arsal. «I am a supporter of the Nasserist politician Mustapha Saad, and every week I go to the meeting of the party in Saida. After 2006, I decided to hang the portrait of Hassan Nasrallah in my lounge for what he did for Lebanon.» Commenting on Arsal’s behavior after the Syrian uprising, he says, «there was a lot of enthusiasm in the village yes, …it was a mistake».

Talking about his relationship to the border, he explains: «before 2011, the border was meaningless, our village and its surrounding were unified with the Syrian borderland region. Since then, things took a different direction and there are no more economic resources stemming from the border trade. We now want the border to be clearly delineated and controlled».

ملحـم الحجـري رجـل أعـال سـني يعمـل في صناعـة الباطـون في عرسـال في الواحـدة والسـتن من عمـره. «أنا أدعم السياسي الناصري مصطفـى سعد، وأذهـب إلى اجتـاع الحزب كل أسـبوع في صيـدا. بعد 2006، قررت تعليـق صورة حسن نصر الله في غرفة المعيشة لما قدمه للبنان.»

كما قال معلقاً على التصرفات في عرسال بعد الأزمة في سوريا: «كان هناك الكثير من الحواس في القرية وهذا شيء خاطئ».

وفي حديثه عن علاقته بالحدود، قال شارحاً: «قبل 2011، لم يكن للحدود معنى حيث كانت قريناً ومحيطها متحدة مع منطقة الحدود السورية. منذ ذلك الحين، أخذت الأمور منحى آخر: توقفت خصوصاً الاضرار الاقتصادية الناتجة عن التجارة الحدودية. الآن، نريد من الحدود أن تكون مرسومة بوضوح وتحت السيطرة».
Mohammed Khaled Seeba, 56 years old, is a businessman in the construction field. He is a Syrian from Yabroud, a border town on the Syrian side of Anti-Liban mountains. «I left Yabroud in March 2014, the weather was cold. I left by car and I entered Lebanon illegally when the Lebanese Army arrested me and threw me in jail in Baalbeck. The general security freed me after paying 600$. Then I came here to Arsal.»

Mohammed saw the need for humanitarian help so he set up the association Voices of the Refugees in Ersal. He later created a Facebook group Emergency for Ersal in order to coordinate ONGs aid with the municipality and the 131 Syrian gathering surrounding Arsal.

«For me the border is a hajez (roadblock) between us and our neighbors. But in order to cross it and go back home to Syria, we demand international security to protect us.»
Arsal

Arsal counts approximately 120,000 Syrian refugees who are living in one of the 131 gatherings spreading all around the town of 40,000 citizens. But this village is also known for being isolated from the Lebanese state and has a long history of relationship with Syrian neighboring villages.
Majdel Anjar

Mohammed and Moataz, two friends in their thirties, came from Homs to Majdel Anjar in 2013. They entered Lebanon between Qussayr and Arsal with the help of smugglers. Mohammed lives with his family on this piece of land that he is renting for 60$ a month from a Lebanese owner. He receives an aid from UNHCR of 180$ each month for his entire family of seven and therefore has to work in order to have enough to live.

As a resident of Bab Amr, the rebel suburb of Homs, Mohammed explains: «I don’t want the Lebanese nationality, I just want to be able to go back to Syria. Unfortunately, they continue to arrest people on the basis of false allegations. Until now, there is no guarantees for us.»
Anjar

Krikor Sakayan, mostly known under his artistic name Koko Garabet, is fifty years old. He is an Armenian painter coming from Anjar. «My relationship with Anjar is ambiguous. On the one hand it is a place I love and where I am working and painting. On the other hand, it is a very tiny space that I dreamt of leaving, that I eventually left and came back to in 2011».

In the Lebanese mindset, Anjar is a synonymous of HQ of the Syrian Intelligence Services until 2005. «For us, as residents, there were no border with Syria during many years. Syrian officers were living among us, in some of the abandoned houses. Then the war broke in Syria and one day during the summer of 2016, I found myself at the head of a squad armed with light weapons, trying to protect our village against a possible invasion of Daech! Now, luckily, there is the Lebanese army watching over the border. In any case, we are now well prepared for any emergency that might occur. Now I would know where to go and what to do.»
Anjar

Berj Tumberian is a young Armenian from Anjar, his hometown village. The landscape of the borderland with Syria is his fieldwork. Even before this job, the border was part of his life: «I previously worked in Damascus as a plumber and I used to commute every day from Anjar». Thanks to a local policy of re-forestation, Berj was offered a more stable position as forest warden. «That was great before the war in Syria: we were doing long walks in the mountain. But now, there are limitations for us to walk just here above, up to the military outpost».

«One morning few months after the outbreak of the war (2011), I saw four Syrian young men walking down the hill above the village. They were Syrian refugees who started to panic when I called the police. Soon enough they were caught and probably brought back to Syria...I later had regrets to have acted like this, understanding that they were trying to escape that horrible war».

In 2013, Berj faced another irruption of a border crosser: «one day, an old school friend knocked at my door. This guy was from Deraa and explained to me that he fled the Syrian Army when he faced death during the fight with people from Jabhat al-Nusra. He was carrying a Bible with him so I had the idea to help him move to Beirut disguised as a Priest.» He eventually moved to Canada where he recently got a residence permit and works as a beekeeper. «We stayed in touch by Skype and he finally convinced me to try to start honey craft».

بيج توميريان شاب أرمني من قرية عنجر، تشكل المناطق الحدودية مع سوريا مجال عمله. حتى قبل عمله الحالي، كان الحدود جزءاً من حياته: «كان أعمل في دمشق سابقاً كمساعد و كنت أسافر يومياً إلى عنجر». بفضل السياسة المحلية لإعادة التحريج، حصل بيج على وظيفة أكثر استقراراً كحارس للغابات. «كان كل شيء رائعًا قبل الحرب في سوريا حيث كنا نسير لمسافات طويلة في الجبل. لكن الآن، لا يمكننا بالمشي بعد حاجز الجيش في الأعلى هناك».

 ذات صباح، بعد أشهر من اندلاع الحرب في سوريا عام 2011، رأيت أربع شبان سوريين ينزلون من التلة فوق القرية. كانوا لا يجاويتاً سوريين وملكهم الذعر عندما اتصلت بالشرطة. سرعان ما أقفل القبض عليهم ومن المحتمل أنهم رجعوا إلى سوريا...أنبي ضميري لاحقاً لتصري في هذا الشكل عندما فهمت أنهم كانوا يحاولون الهرب من الحرب.

عام 2013 أواجه بيج مشكلة مع عابر حدودي آخر: «أنا يوم، طوق بطيع صديق قديم كان معه في المدرسة. كان هذا الرجل من درعا وشك لي بأنه هرب من الجيش السوري عندما واجه الميلوت خلال صراع مع جهة النصرة. كان يحمل إنجيلًا معه لذا خذت في فكرة مساعدة بالذهاب إلى بريوت متنكرًا بزي كاهن». انتقلت في النهاية إلى كندا حيث حصل على إقامة واستعنال بترتبة النحل. «بقينا على تواصل عبر سكايب وأقنعتني بتأهيل حرفية استخراج العسل».
Al-Khiam

Abu Yasser, 72 years old, is a Shi’ite native from Al-Khiam. He fled the village after the Israeli invasion of 1977 and came back after the withdrawal of the troops in 2000. «The village has been emptied of its population after a massacre in 1977 by the militiamen of Saad Haddad». Paradoxically, the erasure of the border following the 1982 invasion allowed the people to come back «because the Israelis wanted to normalize the situation. Initially, only the Christians of the village were granted the return but the Mukhtar (a Christian) defended the idea of the multi-sectarian identity of the village. He told the Israelis that none would come back unless all would be entitled to come back». Israel finally allowed all the residents to come back and rebuild their houses.

The 2000 withdrawal was a great relief for Abu Yasser. «During the occupation, I always had to pay a permit to the men of Lahad (of the ‘South Lebanon Army’) when I was going to work in Nabatieh. Of course, the families of all the collaborators were entitled to cross the border and enter in Israel to work there, no permit was required in that case». Since then, Abu Yasser sees the border as «something that separates me and my enemy. Beyond the border, there is an enemy».
Claudia is a family mother in her forties, she lives in the Christian village of Qla’yat. She lived there since she was born, in the early 1970’s. She remembers the Israeli occupation in the southern region and says: «our tragedy for the people here is that we were not considered humans either for Israel or for Lebanon. That’s the dominant feeling we experienced here between 1982 and 2000. After the withdrawal, we were capable of moving freely, the Lahad border and then the check-point to enter Saida at Kfar Tebnine were removed! We became Lebanese again.»

When talking about the Israeli wall that embodied the border and which is observable from the window of the dining room, she comments: «Israel built it for its own security. In my point of view, it is a good thing: it renders the conflict less dangerous and volatile because before that, it was possible to walk along the fence and shout at the Israeli soldiers or throw rubbish at them».

In a sigh, she concludes: «The South is a war zone but we don’t like war»
Qla’yat-Marjayoun

Roberta Zuin is in her thirties and works in the field of Development. She lived several years in the area of Qla’yat-Marjayoun (South Lebanon). Among the residents she recalls her encounter with Syrian refugees: «They were coming by foot from Shebaa, they had nothing but were so happy to reach a place where they have basic rights».

In the South, there were sometimes exchanges of fire and Israeli shelling. «The first time, I was not afraid. But far more annoying were the drones patrolling day and night over our heads. Local inhabitants were acting as if the drones were not even roaming on their heads on a daily basis.»

If this borderland region did not change her life per se, she agrees to say such environment leads her to change her habits. «You know that you are under surveillance, so you don’t take any picture of the landscape anymore. You end up being cautious of all the little details». 
Reem, a Christian of 48 years old, is from Ebel Saghir where she currently lives. She explains that her multisectarian village is marked by a Communist influence and a strong anti-Israeli position. «Contrary to others in the South, we have been able to continue working despite the Israeli occupation while avoiding any collaboration. Our village has been shielded by the Norwegian UN battalion and I think the Israelis had no right to enter.» This international presence allowed her to have a small shop of local crafts while her brother took the advantage of Norwegian connections to go live there.

The occupation created de facto boundaries which rendered any move quite difficult; despite such constraints, she refused to leave the area: «I am rather steadfast: instead of moving to Canada where I had an opportunity in 1999, my husband and I decided to stay. Fortunately, one year later, in May 2000, we have experienced a magical moment when Israelis pulled back. Since then, I can tell you that the border does not mean anything anymore to me as it is not affecting my life anymore.»

In 2002, her husband decided to start building a house which should be finished soon. Is it a risky gamble? «Definitely not, on the contrary it is a challenge: living by the border means constantly rebuilding our house»
We met Abu Rajab, 83 years old, in his garden in Ebel Saghir. «I have always been a farmer and I struggle for my land because it means a lot to me». During the Israeli occupation, he left the village to avoid any sort of collaboration: «most of the southerners did collaborate but one needs to say the State was absent, therefore, to survive…».

He accuses the State for abandoning them: «no one was helping us. The Syrian refugees are far more well served now by comparison to us at that time». What now? «No one is really taking care of us, we are living in the margins of the State. Politicians only remember us during elections…»

التقينا أبو رجب، وهو في الثالثة والثمانين من عمره، في حديقتته في إبل صغير. «أنا مزارع وهذه الأرض تعني لي الكثير لذلك أحارب دائمًا من أجلها». خلال الاحتلال الإسرائيلي، ترك قريته ليتفادى التعاون مع الإسرائيليين. «تعاون الكثير من الجنوبيين مع الإسرائيليين وذلك لغياب حماية الدولة اللبنانية. لذلك، من أجل البقاء…» ومكمِّل أبو رجب جملته.

اللهتم بلده بهجره ويقول: «لم يساعدنا أحد. يخدمون الآن اللاجئين السوريين أكثر مما خدمونا في السابق. لا أحد يهتم بنا. نحن نعيش على هوامش البلد. يتذكّركنا السياسيون فقط وقت الانتخابات». 
Maroun is from Qla’yat where he was born and raised. He works in the field of humanitarian aid with an international company. «I spent my childhood under the occupation, the South was scattered. Personally, I felt mostly affected by the northern border, each time we intended to go to Beirut, it was complicated as we needed a permit. Beirut was like going to another country. And as a matter of fact, people from here don’t fit in Beirut».

«I really discovered the Southern region after the Israeli withdrawal in 2000. You know, people here need to have a state, an army and a central authority. They need to be recognized by the other villages. And in this country, we should not have any militias anymore».

For Maroun, the relationships between sects in the South is linked to a socioeconomic situation faced by the Christians: «living in this borderland environment means not being able to do plans for the future and also a lack of job opportunities. If Muslims are happy, for Christians, the war with Israel is not their war. So, they tend to leave the area and very few continue to stay in the South». 
The Blue Line

Between Lebanon and Israel stands the fence of the Blue Line, delineated by the United Nations and marked on the ground in the aftermath of the July War in 2006 with blue barrels. While most of the 94 km long has been marked, Lebanon stated 13 reservations (plus the contentious issue of Shebaa Farms) during the process of delineation in May-June 2000 after the unilateral withdrawal. In 2012, Israel started to build a wall along the blue line in Kfar Kila and continued the walling of the border in 2018.
Michael Iseli works for the UNIFIL for 15 years now. He is one of the main designers of the Blue Line and has also been monitoring its marking on the ground since 2006. «I initially came here as a military observer. It was in 2005 and at that time, the line was not visible, it was basically just a line on a map. Therefore, I made the proposal to the Force commander Pellegrini to mark the line. And this is how we placed the very first blue barrels in the area of the Shebaa Farms. It was a provocative act and of course it has been disputed!».

At the initiative of the Lebanese Army, a system of measures of GPS coordinates on the ground was set between the two armies under the UNIFIL supervision. «For me, the blue barrels embodied the border, the tripartite meeting managed by UNIFIL as well and of course the people, the situation and the relationships on the ground».

«This border is now a huge part of my life». 

Sal-l-naqoura

يعمل مايكل إيزيلى لليونيفيل 15 سنة الآن. هو واحد من المصمم الرئيسين للخط الأزرق منذ 2006 كراقب تنفيذ على الأرض. أثبت هنا بداية كمراقب عسكري، كان هذا في عام 2005 حيث لم يكن الخط مظهراً بل كان مجرد خط على الخريطة. لذلك قدمت طلباً لقائد الفئة بيليجرني، تحديد الخط. وهكذا بدأتنا بوضع الراميل الثلاثة الأولى في منطقة مزارع شبعا. كان هذا عملاً استفزازياً وبالطبع تم الاعتراف عليه».

مبادرة من الجيش اللبناني، تم تركيب نظام إجراءات على الأرض مرتبط جهاز تحديد الموقع بين الجيشين تحت مراقبة اليونيفيل. «بالنسبة لي. جسدت الراميل الزرقاء الحدود والاجتماع الثلاثي الذي نظمته اليونيفيل والناس والوضع والعلاقات على الأرض». 

باتت تشكل الحدود جزءاً كبيراً من حياتي الآن.»
Shatila Camp

Ahmad Debs, 56 years old, is a Palestinian refugee. He was born in Lebanon in the Shatila camp (Beirut) and just received the Swedish nationality. After several years in exile, he is finally entitled to come back to Lebanon to meet his relatives.

«For us, 2011 was like a second Nakba... the war claimed the lives of several members of our family who were living in the Yarmouk camp. Others succeeded to join us in Shatila».

Facing the situation, with his wife and children he decided to join family members who were already settled in the North of Europe. «Now, with this Swedish passport, I can cross borders...and even go to Israel if I wish to. But this passport didn’t make me forget about Palestine!»
Burj Hammoud, January 2019.

Mahmud, 21 years old, is returning alone to Syria after four years in exile in Lebanon. Like thousands of other Syrian refugees, he chose to go back to Syria after receiving a clearance from the Syrian authorities. According to the General Security, more than 170’000 refugees decided to go back despite the hot debate between Lebanon and the international community on the conditions of return.
Daniel Meier, Political Scientist, is an Associate Professor at sciences Po Grenoble and teaches regularly in Beirut, Venice and Turin. Member of the Association of Borderland Studies, his researches are focusing on Identity and Space issues, with a special dedication for borders/boundaries questions in the Middle East. His last monograph titled «Shaping Lebanon’s Borderlands: Armed Resistance and International Intervention in South Lebanon» (IB Tauris, 2016).

Hussein Baydoun is a photojournalist for 13 years now and has worked for several local news websites and international agencies. He participated in exhibitions with ICRC, UNDP and Visa Pour l’Image as well as other projects. He is currently working as photojournalist at Al Araby Al Jadeed newspaper and website.

حسين بيضون يعمل كمصور صحفي منذ 13 سنة. عمل بالعديد من المواقع الإخبارية المحلية والدولية. شارك معارض مع هيئة الصليب الأحمر الدولي وبرنامج الأمم المتحدة الإنمائي والمشاريع الأخرى. يعمل الآن كمصور صحفي في جريدة موقع «العربي الجديد».
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شكر ون宠هم صرهم على الحدود في مقابلتهم لننا سمحوا إلى الذين الأشخاص كل المؤلفون يشكر بعلبكي نور بول هينرش ومن مؤسسة بلي زوين وبتول روبرتا جاكليان وفاتيفرار زكرياء وأحمده خوري حبيب أبي لرلى.

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