Regimes of fear in Lebanon: perspectives from the borderlands

Daniel Meier

Most states today tend to refer to their national borders when they mention the need to protect themselves against various types of threats. In Europe, the narrative focuses mainly on migration issues, with the exception of Russia's aggression in Ukraine. By contrast, the Middle East faces several additional security issues, including wars, where borders play a pivotal role (Del Sarto, 2018). In the meantime, state narratives referring to a foreign threat often homogenize their national identity, thereby erasing different perceptions of the Other among the country's citizens. For instance, very few studies have dealt with borderland communities' perception of conflicts, threats, and national issues (Martinez, 1994). As a result, borders and national identities resonate and feed off each other (Donnan & Wilson, 1999). From this point of view, Lebanon offers a rich, contrasting, and complex environment for an investigation of this issue through the lens of key actors' fears. What are the current dominant threats and fears identified by the Lebanese state or the dominant Shi'ite militant group Hezbollah? How can one explain some of the differences in how these threats and fears are perceived between the heartland and the borderlands? How do these perceptions impact the borderlanders' identity construction? To address the research questions, I will explore three regimes of fear that are dominant narratives provided by the state institutions and Hezbollah. I will examine how they resonate among the borderland communities and how they reveal alternative forms of identity construction in each of the borderland regions.

Several notions, including identity, borders, and fear, need to be theoretically framed to utilize the concept of a regime of fear as a means to investigate the impacts of those fears on borderlanders' identity. The latter is a key aspect of that research not per se or as a substance but more as a process, as Brubaker & Cooper (2000) have pointed out. The 'identification' process (Bucher & Jasper, 2017) explains that actors' identity emerges through social arrangements in time and space. Therefore, it is important to highlight acts of identification through practices and narratives related to the othering process in different locations of the borderlands. In Lebanon, identity has been extensively investigated through the lens of sectarianism as a prominent explanation of wars and local tensions among the main sectarian groups (e.g., Blanford, 2011; Ziadeh, 2006), while others have explored the political logic of sectarianism in studying various topics from the welfare state to the mediascape (Cammett, 2014; Salloukh et al., 2015). Historical and sociological perspectives on Lebanese

Daniel Meier, Grenoble Alpes University Sciences Po, daniel.meier@iepg.fr

identity (Beydoun, 1984; Salibi, 1989) have also helped get rid of analyses in essentialist terms, opening the door to much deeper research on national identity (Meier, 2016; Picard, 2016) and highlighting the border's importance as a nexus, along with actors' practices, in borderland regions.

This research also aims to articulate the relationship between identity and borderland regions to show how cultural transformations occur more readily in such liminal zones of states (Campbell, 2015). As a social construction and a social process, the border becomes "bordering" (Yuval-Davis, Wemyss & Cassidy, 2019). It implies, alongside the dedicated literature, emphasizing the temporary and mobile nature of contemporary borders (Popescu, 2012; Amilhat-Szary, 2015) while being historical and linked to politics (Albert, Jacobson & Lapid, 2001; O'Dowd, 2010). As a consequence, the scope of actors that could be considered expands to include local communities along the border regions, as well as any other local actors that contribute to defining and redefining the meaning of the border in everyday life. In the Middle East, borders need to be contextualized. First, they are analyzed as the outcome of Western powers' influence and the incompleteness of State building (Del Sarto, 2018). They are also related to geopolitics and ideologies linking power, space, and identity (Meier, 2018). This raises the need to articulate the bordering processes with other political and identity processes as well, like ordering and othering (Van Houtum & Van Naerssen, 2002). In the case of Lebanon, borders and borderlands are largely understudied, local bordering communities are under-documented, and borderlands have generally been poorly explored by social science researchers, with very few exceptions (Khalifeh, 2006; Mouawad, 2018b, Trombetta, 2016). Only South Lebanon has escaped this fate, with some works dedicated to the historical and sociological aspects of the border and borderland communities, including the UNIFIL mission (Beydoun, 1992; Hof, 1984; Jaber, 1999; Kassem 2017; Kaufman 2014, Meier, 2016). However, the treatment of the two dyads is shaped in completely opposite terms. On the one hand, since the peace accord signed in Taif in 1989, there has been a lack of interest in border issues along the dyad with Syria (northern and eastern flanks of Lebanon for a total of 375 km). This disinterest has occurred as Syria has extensively integrated these border areas into its economy and trafficking activities, particularly in North Lebanon (Hutson & Long, 2011; Mouawad, 2018a). Since Syria withdrew its troops in 2005, several border disputes have emerged; after 2011 and the outbreak of the war in Syria, the LAF slowly re-appeared on these fringes of the national territory. On the other hand, numerous works have focused on the dyad with Israel, emphasizing military confrontation during the heyday of the *fedayeen* (Brynen, 1990), the civil war (Beydoun, 1992; Kassir, 1994) and especially since the emergence of Hezbollah (Norton, 2007; Seguin, 1989). These studies also explore issues related to the local United Nations mission, UNIFIL (Göksel, 2007; Kassem 2017). Western political stances regarding "terrorism" have also shaped the borderland in the South as a dangerous place, notably due to the local hegemony of Hezbollah, despite UNRSC 1701 and the subsequent redeployment of the LAF along the 79-kilometer international border with Israel.

The question of fear in politics sheds more light on any border issue, highlighting the shaping of the perception of the border as a risk or a potential or serious danger. Following a sociological analysis of fear, the "horizontal" dimension of fear is a social and political construction attributing danger to a source located outside the national territory or society (Robin, 2004). In such an approach, borders are key locations to identify objects of fear, an ideal locus to elaborate a narrative on fear in politics, a national institution that offers a political opportunity to unify the nation against the "others." There are several ways of approaching fear in politics, although this topic has not been at the heart of the literature on feelings in politics (Fauré & Négrier, 2017). Two approaches stand out: The first emphasizes the phenomenology of perception (Correa-Cabrera & Garrett, 2014), which favors the subjective dimension of fear, while the second, which is more constructivist and involves a vision of Marxist obedience (Robin, 2004), leads to an interest in the infrastructure of fear – that is, the production of a deliberate policy of using fear in politics. Mobilizing feelings and particularly fear in politics is a rather old process used to gain control over a population (Braud, 1996; Koschut, 2020) and is all too often seen as a tool used by authoritarian regimes to discredit, intimidate, physically harass, and persecute opponents (Gel'man, 2020). IR literature provides a fruitful perspective dealing with ontological security, not limited to the individual sphere. In her attempt to expand the scope of ontological security to states, Mitzen (2006) showed how this perspective collides with the realist perspective, as "ontological security-seeking suggests that states may not want to escape dilemmatic conflict" (Mitzen, 2006: 341). This demonstrates how and why institutions may be attached to a politics of fear in order to continue to provide security. It is a point Robin (2006) mentioned when he studied how the US state tended to be in control or monopolize the channels of communication to designate the source of fear and, therefore, the means to combat it in the aftermath of 9/11. More recently, Zarakol (2016) offered a refreshing perspective to think about ontological security outside the context of the state as the universal institution for the provision of ontological security. She underscored the role of religion throughout history and suggested considering a different context and time. The lens of sovereignty is a key resource here to do so: "sovereignty (...) cannot be thought of as separate from such an institutional monopolization of the provision of ontological security" (Zarakol, 2016: 49). For our purposes, this perspective helps to consider the limited capacity of the weak Lebanese state as an ontological security provider and, therefore, the need to consider Hezbollah as another security provider, less as a rival institution and more within a security assemblage (Hazbun, 2016). Thus, fear appears as a byproduct of the definition of a threat, calling for security measures to shield the population against that threat and the subsequent fear of insecurity. The sources of insecurity/fear are mostly found outside the community (Robin, 2006), although there may also be some traitors inside the community. In this way, the "otherness" is a key argument to explain the danger and justify the fear, particularly in the sphere of media (Greer & Jewkes, 2005), although fear in politics is a key theme for populist powers (Wodak, 2020).

I will rely on the term "regime" to identify and distinguish between several types

of "others" in the production of fear in politics in contemporary Lebanon, following the Foucauldian example of the "regime of truth." In it, Michel Foucault explained the need to conceive the truth as historicized and deeply linked to power (Foucault, 1975). Following the intuition of Leclerc (2001), a regime of truth can be understood as primarily "a regime of authority/control" capable of defining the truth/reality and making it acceptable thanks to its authority. In the field of IR, the state and its institutions obviously provide these narratives. Among them, the provision of ontological security, as seen above, is a key resource to shield a population against any threat. A regime of fear, like a regime of authority, can be defined as social, symbolic, institutional, and ritual processes through which fear is shaped. In this sense, the capacity to elaborate such a regime requires a position of authority toward a society or segments of it. In the post-Taif era and particularly after Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon (2005), the state institutions and Hezbollah became the most prominent providers of such regimes, but they were not the only ones.

On a methodological note, this research relies on extensive fieldwork conducted along the three borderland regions in 12 different locations at various times throughout the 2010s. Most of the interviews (around 80) conducted among local inhabitants were carried out thanks to local contacts, thus helping to shape the necessary confidence such a topic requires with interlocutors. Still, the repeat visits I made in some places, mainly in South of Lebanon, allowed me to develop stronger relationships with local actors, inhabitants, civil servants, LAF officers, various militants from the main political movements or simple entrepreneurs, farmers, or landowners. The fieldwork in borderland regions also faced major security checks from military intelligence, sometimes with the clear intention not to allow foreigners reaching some places (e.g., Chebaa, Jabal al-Sheikh) under the pretext of security purposes, thus limiting the insight into what borderlanders are experiencing, feeling, and naming as a local threat or fear they can have.

In the following section, I will first explore the three regimes of fear the Lebanese state or Hezbollah have shaped with regard to the state borders. In the second section, I will delve into the living conditions and perceptions of inhabitants of the border regions to assess how such regimes of fear have resonated among the local population along the two border dyads with Syria and Israel. Lastly, the conclusion will sum up the research by assessing the main research questions linking identity, borderlands, and fear.

1. The production of regimes of fear

Three of these regimes can be identified in Lebanon's post-Taif era. First and foremost is the fear of a threat that Israel poses to Lebanon. In the 1990s, this fear turned into a rather concrete element of the lives of the southerners, especially in 1993 and 1996 during the two major military operations launched by the Israeli army to curb the armed resistance led by Hezbollah, which targeted Israeli and ALS troops in the occupied zone (Hollis & Shehadi, 1996). After the unilateral Israeli withdrawal in May

2000, tensions were lowered at the border with regard to a new rule of the game (So-belman, 2004), but the regional US agenda linked to the "war on terror" led Israel to launch a massive attack on Lebanon under the pretext of responding to a Hezbollah operation that had killed Israeli troops on the border. The 33-day war that ensued, along with its massive casualties and losses, raised a high fear among the population of such an Israeli attack, despite all of Hassan Nasrallah's "divine victory" speeches at the end of the conflict (Picard & Mermier, 2007).

The fear of Israel is a common and public experience based on a repetition of acts of war, warplane harassment, spying, and intimidation speeches from high-ranking Israeli officials[1]. It is no surprise that the Lebanese state's official narrative underscores the "brutality of the Zionist entity," a speech act repeated by ministers, MPs, the head of state, and ambassadors. For its part, Hezbollah has largely contributed to shaping and increasing the sophistication of this narrative through various attributes of the enemy following its actions: describing Israel as a "coward," "vile", "allied with the US," and "willing to destroy Hezbollah" (Saad-Ghorayeb, 2002). The fear of Israeli revenge, along with Hezbollah's militaristic statements, contributed to the feeding of this fear despite a very low level of violence at the border between 2006 and 2023. The growing fear of an Israeli attack has resonated strongly since the beginning of the war on Gaza in the aftermath of the 7 October Hamas operation. The "unity of the fronts" claimed by Hezbollah, as well as its operations targeting Israeli outposts and troops along the southern border of Lebanon, led to Israeli shelling targeting not only Hezbollah operatives but also journalists, thus raising fears among the population and the government of Lebanon sliding into war[2]. While the Shi'ite movement is not displaying concerns, it is contributing to it through military demonstrations, provocations along the border, and warning statements to Israel not to cross certain lines[3]. In return, this generates statements and threats from the IDF's chief of staff promising destruction in Lebanon at the scale of Gaza if Hezbollah acts beyond an implicit limit of behavior. This narrative, while not being produced by the State, is shared by broad segments of Lebanese society, including State officials like Prime Minister Miqati, who advocated for leaving Lebanon outside the war. This absence of state power and somewhat passive behavior also contributes to the spread of fear among the Lebanese. Another way for officials to instill fear about Israel is by underlining the very high capacity for Israeli intelligence to spy throughout Lebanon using various techniques[4] and devices, thereby justifying the counter-measures deployed by Hezbollah in the South of Lebanon. Some political actors, like the Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea, have traditionally blamed Hezbollah's behavior and warfare. Rather strong during the period of high contestation of the

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[1] At regular intervals, the head of the Israeli army explains they are ready to 'bring Lebanon back to the Stone Age' (ICG, 2022).

[2] *Le Devoir*, 18 October 2023.

[3] These limits set by Hezbollah have been formulated in various speeches since 7 October 2023. They appear to link a larger military investment of Hezbollah to a danger for the survival of Hamas, in case of an attack on Iran or Lebanon.

[4] *L'Orient le Jour,* 7 November 2013.

weaponry of the Shi'ite movement (Dot Pouillard, 2017), this critique faded with the economic crisis before returning after the recent Hamas–Israel confrontation in Gaza that spread to the South of Lebanon. According to Geagea, alongside several political opponents to Hezbollah, it is the latter and not Israel that should be seen as the actor responsible for such an outcome[5].

Another regime of fear is embodied in the figure of another enemy, the Salafi-jihadist militants that penetrate Lebanon through the eastern border in the context of the war in Syria. The regime of fear is a process that exists thanks to a production of a narrative. This narrative originates in the terms used by the Syrian regime itself, which seeks to delegitimize the popular opponents by categorizing them as "takfiris" (excommunicators) (Burgat & Paoli, 2012). This term was imported into Lebanon by the Shi'ite party of Hezbollah to justify its involvement with the Assad regime in 2013 (publicly) and to describe those who launched several car bombings targeting the Shi'ite suburbs or regions. Later on, the ministries of Interior and Defense also became providers of a narrative on these actors labeled as "terrorists" – objectified by their link to al-Qaeda – with a strong investment of state intelligence in the dismantling of such networks[6]. In the Beqaa Valley, on the eastern border, where there are large gatherings of Syrian refugees, in the Sunni city of Arsal, the army faced a large operation of abduction (more than 40 of its soldiers) conducted by Islamic State's militants who suddenly took control of the region and part of the city in 2014 (CSKC, 2017). The targeting of the Lebanese Army helped Hezbollah seize the opportunity to bring its own expertise to deal with such actors in a series of counter-attacks in order to free several soldiers and gain legitimacy in shielding the State against "takfiris." Although this term has not been used by the army, it has been ratified through a common operation that was revealed during the summer of 2017[7], carried out to trap ISIS militants and free the remaining group of 16 Lebanese soldiers. This event underscored the "security assemblage" (Hazbun, 2016) or partnership between the LAF and Hezbollah and their agreement on the narrative of this fear in that eastern borderland region. In recent years, another common figure of fear between the army and Hezbollah has replaced the Salafi-jihadists: spies. Defined simply by the label "spies of Israel," they *ipso facto* pose a security threat identified by the state security apparatus as a significant "network of people that Israel bought"[8]. This led the state to demonstrate its intelligence capabilities by organizing an operation to apprehend more than 100 individuals and then publicly explaining the modus operandi as a narrative to warn the Lebanese population against this "perverse danger," especially given the difficult life conditions most citizens have faced since 2020. While less dangerous for the entire population, the presence of such spies among the population, though not new in Lebanon's recent history, increasingly served as a means for Hezbollah to control citizens' political

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[5] *L'Orient Today*, 4 December 2023.

[2] *L'Orient le Jour*, 5 November 2020.

[7] *Al-Monitor*, 23 August, 2017.

[8] *L'Orient le Jour*, 29 June 2022.

views. Several of the suspected spies turned out to be merely political opponents, clearly illustrating the State's strong adherence to such a rigorous policy on spies[9].

The last prominent fear relates to the Syrian refugees (SR): This category refers to the regime of fear linked to foreign elements subverting national and territorial homogeneity. Almost all the political parties are key providers of the definition of this threat, alongside officials: Syrian refugees are "invading the country," "profiting from it," "stealing goods," "breaking Lebanon's economy," "disturbing the peaceful life in villages," and basically since the outbreak of the economic crisis, they have been perceived by large number of citizens as being responsible for this crisis. The construction of Syrian refugees as a burden on the Lebanese state started rather quickly in the aftermath of the arrival of tens of thousands of Syrians in 2012 and 2013, which compelled the Lebanese government to ask for international support instead of ignoring the crisis (Knudsen, 2014). The repercussion of the growing influx of refugees crossing the border without any restrictions appeared in early 2014 with a U-turn policy on the Syrians – initially, by closing 14 unofficial border crossing points along the Syrian–Lebanese dyad, and then, by implementing administrative restrictions measures to access Lebanon. Far from affecting only those who were trying to enter, these measures intended to regulate the presence of the Syrian refugees with new rules regarding the renewal of their residence permits. It ended up creating a growing sense of marginality among these refugees, who simply could not afford such administrative measures. The adoption of this ruling by the Council of Minister in October 2014 clearly stated the goal of this new policy was to decrease the number of SR in Lebanon by reducing their access to the territory and encouraging them to return to Syria (Janmyr, 2016). Despite a high percentage of Lebanese favoring an encampment policy for the SR, the 8-March alliance parties (FPM, Hezbollah, and Amal) advocate for a non-encampment policy. They base their stance on security concerns, pointing to the state's weakness in managing such gatherings, which could provide safe havens for political opponents of the Syrian regime and potentially destabilize the local sectarian balance (Turner, 2015). Therefore, identified as potential security threats, the Syrian refugees were gradually defined as troublemakers, and the following years saw more and more statements by officials accusing the Syrian refugees of increasing insecurity. While some municipalities introduced illegal restrictions of movements or curfews, the Lebanese Armed Forces have hit hard the Syrian camps hard, forcing them to destroy the shelters built with bricks[10] and even deporting refugees to Syria[11]. This shift in access to Lebanon for Syrian citizens marks a change in the Syrian–Lebanese relationship. It represents an inflection point in the traditionally unbalanced relationship between the two states, particularly during the post-civil war era, which was characterized by Syrian tutelage over the Lebanese political scene from 1990 to 2005.

[9] See, for instance, the case of Kinda el-Khatib, an activist on social media against Hezbollah sentenced to three years in prison for 'working with Israel.' *Al-Monitor*, 16 December 2020.

[10] https://www.rfi.fr/fr/emission/20190615-liban-camps-refugies-syriens-destructions-constructions-dur-ersal

[11] See OCHA's https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/joint-statement-lebanon-halt-summary-deportations-syrian-refugees-enar

The second shift appeared in 2017, with the return policy articulated by Hezbollah and then institutionalized as a state policy to "solve" the issue of SR. This new policy appeared in the aftermath of the three-year Arsal siege (CSKC, 2017), which blurred the lines between refugees and Salafi-jihadist "terrorists." In the years that followed, the fear of Syrian refugees morphed into a fear for the survival of Lebanon in the circumstances of the economic crisis the country has faced since 2020. The caretaker Minister of Social Affairs Hector Hajjar talked about "multidimensional losses" for Lebanon when continuing to host the 1.5 million refugees on its soil[12]. The state security apparatus then promoted voluntary return to Syria as a policy. It faced strong opposition among UNHCR officials, who reminded Lebanon of the need to respect the non-refoulement policy (UNHCR 2022) and that Syria is still largely underprepared to face a massive return of its citizens because of the damage to infrastructure and the lack of security guarantees the Syrian state offers to returnees. Still, these fears, mixed with the lack of concern for their Syrian neighbors (partly also due to the dramatic economic breakdown of the state since 2020), brought the security apparatus of the Lebanese state to continue to identify some Syrian refugees as terrorist suspect, sometimes with fatal outcomes for those who were interrogated, thus revealing the use of torture during these investigations[13]. This type of behavior shows that Syrian refugees continue to be identified with a potential high national security risk by the Lebanese state.

2. Borderlanders' fear

How do local actors in borderland regions deal with fears, and how does fear as a narrative and as a regime impact borderlanders' identity construction? In what sense are state borders having any effect on the shaping of fears and what are they? Below, I will explore such questions in the three borderland regions of North, East, and South, starting with a quick return to the historical roots of these territories becoming borderlands and the process of their territorialization. The latter refers to the (individual or collective) relationship to a territory, that is to say, the sum of the representations associated with it and the practices of which it is the object (Antonsich, 2017; Bédard, 2017). However, one must acknowledge that this process in Lebanon has taken a problematic turn.

The creation of Greater Lebanon in 1920 through the addition of territories around Little Lebanon of Mutasarifiyya (1861–1918) marked the territorial advent of the Lebanese State in the form we still know it today. The territories of Akkar and the city of Tripoli in the North, Bekaa in the East, and Jabal Amel and the city of Saida in the South were unilaterally attached to it by the Paris Conference (1919). This enlargement was the result of both pressure from Lebanese nationalists on the French government and the desire of some senior French officials and decision-makers to create a state that is

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[12] *L'Orient Today*, 4 December 2023.

[13] The fate of Bachar Abdel Saoud in August 2022 is typical of the way of dealing with Syrian suspects. Cf. *L'Orient le Jour* 7 December, 2022.

viable in terms of resources and would preclude a repeat of the famine of 1915. The political issue was, however, different and was based on an identity desire of the Christian Maronite community to establish a state over which it would have control, at least on a numerical level. As a result, the advent of Greater Lebanon created two types of citizens, as Ahmad Beydoun (1994) cleverly puts it: the unconditional Lebanese, predominantly Christian, and the conditional Lebanese, predominantly Muslim. The second category obviously refers to those who reside in territories located outside the historical melting pot of Mount Lebanon. From the outset, being a Lebanese citizen was definitely not obvious for those residing in the borderland regions of the new state.

The decision on the territorial contours of Lebanon (or Greater Lebanon) was ratified by orders 299 and 318 of the High Commission of the French Republic in Syria and Lebanon, opening the issue of border delimitation and Lebanese authority over the new territory. However, if one refers to the theory of border development (Prescott, 1987; Bothe, 1992), three stages are necessary: allocation (assignment of a territory to a state), delimitation (description of the route of this physical border in a written document) and demarcation (markings on the ground). Given the imprecise language of the text, which only mentions Ottoman administrative subdivisions, the caza, for the region of Baalbek, Beqaa, Rachaya and Hasbaya which were never clearly demarcated, the borders of Lebanon remained at the stage of allocation. This point can be explained by the fact that for France, the mandatory power in Syria and Lebanon, most of the border division defining the Lebanese entity was nothing more than an administrative line separating a French mandate from another French mandate. After independence, the absence of Lebanese desire to advance the border delimitation and the absence of Syrian desire to demarcate their common border in order not to recognize the Lebanese State (Lundgren Jörum, 2014) reinforced the territorial vagueness and the uncontrolled cross-border fluidity, fueled by a chronic absence of the State in most Lebanese–Syrian borderland regions.

To the south, in its negotiations with Palestine, the negotiated border did not correspond to the reality on the ground. However, it did reach the second stage of orogenesis: delimitation. At the end of negotiations with the British, which lasted two and a half years, the border line was demarcated in February 2023 and is known as the "Paulet–Newcombe line," named after the two French and British plenipotentiaries. It is an authentic territorial compromise between empires, leaving the British with Palestine, along with the finger of the Galilee/Houlé depression (access to water resources and Jewish community settled in Metulla), while the French side gave up nothing on the lower Litani basin, limiting the depth of its claims of the South to the northernmost Jewish settlements in Palestine. Nonetheless, at the end of this agreement, local populations from various sects and ethnic groups continued to use the Houlé depression to graze their livestock and cross the border for family, commercial or agrarian reasons (Kaufman, 2014).

The territorialization of the new power under the French mandatory authority did not proceed without resistance among the local populations in the regions attached to the Lebanon of Mutasarifiyya (or Little Lebanon). Resistance to the "leban-

onization" of their territories mainly manifested itself in a passive manner through non-cooperation, which was particularly evident in the massive boycott of the first census of 1921 amid the doubts of the French authorities regarding this territorial enlargement (Zamir, 1985). By comparison, the success of the second census of 1932 signaled the progressive influence of the Lebanese nation-state project (at least among local and traditional elites), the disconnection from Syria, and the incorporation of Muslim elites in the political game (Picard, 1988).

In short, both from a territorial point of view and from the point of view of the legitimacy of the national territory in the eyes of its citizens, it is illusory to think that the territorialization of Lebanon was achieved at the time of independence in 1943. The massive popular mobilization that year had less to do with the affirmation of collective Lebanese belonging and more with the desire to get rid of the influence of the French mandate (Zisser, 2000). The Lebanese territorial project was politically still largely contested by pan-Syrian or pan-Arab groups that had emerged precisely in these state margins where they recruited their supporters. In tune with a strategic conception of the weak State among Lebanese elites (Barak, 2017), the post-independence era introduced a double dynamic: the peripheral regions remained marginal in the interests of central actors yet played a significant role from the civil war in 1975, serving functions of domination over territorial segments of Lebanon for the two neighboring States, Syria and Israel.

2.1 In the North

In the Northern borderlands of Lebanon, the impact of the three regimes of fear is largely absent from the narratives of the individuals I met along this segment, which extends from Arida to Wadi Khaled. Here, security concerns are primarily viewed through the lens of the Syrian uprising and the Syrian regime's responses – particularly, the shootings on the Lebanese side in 2012 and 2013 intended to intimidate the borderlanders and deter collaboration with the insurgents[14]. It was more the outbreak of war in Syria that deeply affected the borderlanders in this northern region, traditionally linked to Syria for trade exchanges. Most of their revenue comes from legal and illegal business dealings with Syria. At the individual level, this trade across the border, mostly tied to contraband (*tahrib*), was "a way for us to have a dignified life," as Abu Oweiss[15] put it, with regrets of a vanished Golden Age of the border trade, under the full coverage of the Syrian army until its withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, and later on with the approval of the local political forces (al-Mustaqbal, the Hariri movement) up to the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011. The absence of the Lebanese state institutions here is blatant: aside from the municipality, no local presence of the state, except for the few civil servants of the customs at the new border crossing point on the bridge, down the road at the end of the village.

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[14] Interview of Yahyah, a former soldier who lives in Qochloq, a small village along the border with Syria, 9.03.19.

[15] Interview with Abu Oweiss, a shopkeeper in the border town of Abboudiyyeh, one of the three crossing points in North Lebanon, 21.06.18.

This state's absence from this borderland region can be explained by several factors, the first going back to the lacunar state territorialization process, as seen above, that has been translated locally by an absence of the manifest exercise of sovereignty by the Lebanese authorities. Indeed, according to several actors along the Lebanese–Syrian dyad, the absence of any Lebanese military presence during the post-civil war era and until the popular uprising in Syria (2011) had become an objective sign, already long-standing, of Beirut's lack of interest in its poor, poorly served, and therefore distant territorial margins. Thus, Homs and Tartous became the cities of reference for many villages in northern Akkar, to the detriment of Tripoli (Picard, 2016). This marginalization became a local resource for the extension of Syria's influence after its tutelage over Lebanon following the end of the civil war (1990–2005). According to some local contacts, the poor state of the roads and the lack of infrastructural development or national investments in this northern region can be traced back to the political domination imposed by Syria since the late 1970s. This domination defined the region as a Syrian zone of influence, effectively placing it beyond the reach of Lebanese authorities.

A clear demonstration of this domination over the region is seen in the fate of the local population of Wadi Khaled, the most isolated Lebanese village within Syrian national territory. The community of 30,000 residents there today descends from tribes that settled in the 19th century and refused to be counted by the French mandatory authorities in 1932 (Trombetta, 2016). This group, which values a narrative that breaks away from traditional Lebanese confessional affiliations to highlight its Bedouin identity, takes pride in its distinctiveness. And for good reason: Until the mid-1990s, neither Lebanon nor Syria recognized its members as their nationals. Effectively stateless, they maintained a non-national tribal identity, particularly as the region became a hub for smuggling between Lebanon and Syria from the 1960s onward. In the mid-1990s, when Syrian-occupied Lebanon finally granted citizenship to the residents of Wadi Khaled, the closure of the market town of Buqay'a by Syrian authorities – a trade route that had significantly contributed to Wadi Khaled's economic presence and benefited the region's inhabitants – pushed the development of smuggling at the expense of legal trade (Mouawad, 2018a and 2018b). This activity was tolerated by both states as it generated profits for officers of the Syrian intelligence services and an emerging trading class on both sides of the border. The outbreak of war in 2011, followed by the closure and militarization of the border by Damascus, highlighted the fragility of this development model, which relied too heavily on Syria. Today, many Syrian refugees live and work in Wadi Khaled. One refugee mentioned finding a safe haven in Wadi Khaled thanks to its previous trading partnership with the local inhabitants[16]. In a café, a local explained there is no difference between Syrians and Lebanese here because of the long history of shared trade and interests in this borderland region[17].

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[16] Interview with Mukhtar, a Syrian worker in Wadi Khaled, 09.03.19.

[17] Interview with Muhammad, a café owner at the border town of Wadi Khaled, 10.03.19.

As seen, the absence of the state led the local population of the northern borderland to deal mainly with Syrian cities and the Syrian hinterland, thus shaping a specific Lebanese belonging and strengthening ties with Syrian colleagues, friends, or relatives on the other side of the border. Local fears in the northern borderland region seem less influenced by the regimes of fear from the center and more by their local concerns in terms of a lack of resources. In sum, the identity of borderlanders here is not impacted by the dominant narratives that shape the three regimes of fear detailed above.

2.2 On the East

The study conducted from al-Qaa down to Anjar does not cover the entire Eastern border of Lebanon but provides several points of observation stemming from different sectarian groups (Christian, Sunnis, Shi'ites). Here again, the regime of fear differs from the dominant narrative. Apart from the Masnaa border crossing, where the fear of an Israeli strike refers to the strategic use of in-between spaces between states by Israel during a drone attack against Hezbollah operatives in the transit zone[18], the Eastern and Northern Beqaa flanks are more concerned with jihadist attacks. Episodes of confrontation occurred in al-Qaa (2016) after a tense period of Syrian shelling to deter the northern Beqaa borderlanders from supporting the Syrian insurgents, in Arsal and its outskirts over three years (2014–2017), and briefly in the Armenian village of Anjar (2013). In each case, there is a need to mix such fear-inducing experiences with the Syrian refugee issue to either show links or highlight the absence of links, depending on local perceptions.

In al-Qaa, there is an Orthodox Christian village with a former border crossing point; today's border crossing point lies 15 km north, after the buffer zone near the Syrian entrance border post. The memory of periods of insecurity, due to either Syrian shelling or later jihadist attempts to penetrate Lebanon and detonate four jacket bombs in the village, remains vivid[19]. However, the current issue revolves around today's expectations upon the return of the Lebanese Army Forces (LAF) at the border, following the jihadists' defeat in the 2017 confrontation in Arsal, 30 km south of al-Qaa. Here, there are no fears or security issues related to the Syrian refugees who are a cheap labor force, most of them gathering and working in the former buffer zone north of al-Qaa. This discreet and profitable arrangement dates back to before the war in Syria but turned to the advantage of a growing number of refugees seeking refuge in this strip of Lebanese territory along the extension from the Syrian city of Homs. Agriculture and vast terrains require a workforce, and the traveler can observe hundreds of people working in the fields owned by landowners from al-Qaa. Among them, Naji, a 60-year-old native of al-Qaa, explained that "without the presence of Syrians, [there would be] no agriculture in Lebanon"[20].

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[18] *L'Orient-le-Jour*, 16 avril 2020.

[19] *Al-Monitor,* 28 June 2016.

[20] Interview with Naji, a landowner in al-Qaa, 18.03.19.

In Arsal, a Sunni city of 40,000 above the Beqaa Valley, the jihadist abduction of more than 40 soldiers in 2014 and their occupation of the surroundings of Arsal for the next three years left a strong imprint on the inhabitants regarding the state's presence but not the presence of the nearly 140,000 Syrian refugees. The issue of intercommunal relations is primarily expressed in the village's relationship with the Syrian regime and neighboring Syrian villages. As Melhem, a cousin of the mayor, says, "It's an agricultural region where farmers have always worked together; there's no difference between us"[21]. In fact, the neighboring Syrian villages of al-Mara, Flita, Jreijr, Qara, and Hissia Breiji are connected by road or mule tracks and actualize this symbolic extension of social ties with numerous intermarriages. Beyond these connections, or rather to explain them, the topographic situation of Arsal, which has long been a mountain village isolated from the plain and, therefore, more connected with Syrian cities than those of Lebanon, and the community geography (Arsal is surrounded by Shiite or, more rarely, Christian villages) illustrate the foundation of the strong links that have been forged with Syria. However, the tolerance – even the cooperation – of the Syrian services in the face of the extensive trafficking that has developed in this border region does not make this a pro–Baathist regime town. Likewise, its support for the Syrian insurgency from the end of 2011 does not make it anti-regime or pro-insurgency. As Obeid (2010) points out in her study on the quest for the state in Arsal, the village's geographical position since the emergence of modern states (Lebanon and Syria) provides both resources and constraints. It serves as a rampart against forms of authoritarianism and a nodal point for exchanges while also being an isolated and cornered space where residents must adapt to border closures or the transformation of the village's surroundings into a jihadist stronghold. Here, as in Wadi Khaled, another space between the two states, borderlanders have a pragmatic attitude, adapting to their economic needs and geographical constraints.

Among the Christians in the Beqaa, the Armenians hold a unique status as a community established here in 1939, maintaining a cordial but distant relationship with most of their neighbors, primarily the Syrian regime, which took control of the region in the late 1970s and set up a command center for its secret services in Anjar, using some abandoned houses, in 1984. This village is also situated at the crossroads of tensions that traverse the Eastern region, balancing openness to Syria with sectarian isolation. More broadly, Anjar's position and its recourse to Lebanese and Syrian authorities during a land dispute with the neighboring Sunni community (Bennafla, 2009) underscore the ambiguity of sovereignty on the fringes of Lebanese territory, which has affected the Beqaa for decades, rendering it a territorial in-between, a "soft belly" or strategic depth for Damascus (Picard, 1988), far from a Lebanese sovereign space. For its part, the experience of the Armenians of Anjar, both historically and more recently in this border region, is entirely unique and carries the mark of community and ethnic refuge deep within it. Today, this very small community of 2,500 borderlanders is prone to perceive any external group as a potential threat. The experience of a ji-

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[21] Interview with Melhem, a cousin of Arsal mayor, Arsal, 19.03.19.

hadist threat during the summer of 2016, as one member narrated to me[22], was lived as a frightening event that led the entire community to develop a system of collective mobilization to cope with any attack of this type. Syrian refugees have been (and probably still are) perceived as a potential threat, requiring the intervention of the police or LAF patrols. One of the residents of Anjar explained his contrasting experiences: On the one hand, he denounced Syrian refugees crossing the border on foot, and on the other hand, he discovered the complex situation of a Syrian friend trying to escape Syria and the Lebanese police to survive his ordeal[23]. On both topics, the regimes of fear here align with the dominant narrative detailed above, although proximity to Syrian people may lead to confusion between norms and social realities.

The Eastern borderlands observed here are only partially concerned with the regimes of fear from the center, namely those related to the Salafi-jihadist groups that have threatened places and villages along this border zone. The fear of Syrian refugees as one of the key regimes of fear is entirely opposed in this region of Lebanon, for reasons obviously stemming from the marginalization of such territories and the subsequent links and trade they developed with their Syrian neighbors. As Lebanese, their sense of belonging, like in the northern region, is shaped by these experiences and explains why their identity construction is only partially impacted by the dominant regimes of fear.

2.3 Down to the South

The history of the southern border region attests to the relative neglect of this area by the state, characterized as an agriculturally marginal and impoverished area with a majority of Shiite inhabitants, which rendered it uninteresting to state power. The contrast is striking with the region's past before the border closure following the creation of Israel – a transit zone where significant links developed with Palestine, then a rich and prosperous region compared with a Lebanon that had just emerged from the great famine of 1915. This region of Jabal Amil, along with the Galilee, formed a coherent economic zone and a hub of human circulation where the Paulet–Newcombe border line (1923) appeared in profound contradiction with local dynamics – notably economic exchanges, a closer relationship with Palestinian Haifa than with Beirut for residents of the South, and social relations such as intermarriages – as much as with its deep-rooted definition, marked by harmonious confessional pluralism (Hof, 1984). In other words, the local identity of the inhabitants was more local than national, even after the creation of modern Lebanon. The introduction of a crossing permit allowed temporarily normalized or even obscured this border until the British reinforced it with barbed wire in 1936 to prevent the infiltration of fighters and weapons in support of the Palestinian uprising, shortly before the creation of Israel in 1948, which led to its closure.

Elizabeth Picard (1988) noted that, following independence, the marginalization of the South and the delayed development of its infrastructure, notably the electrific-

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[22] Interview with Koko, a teacher and artist of Anjar, 20.03.19.
[23] Interview with Berj, a forest guard in Anjar, 20.03.19.

ation of its villages and the asphalting of its secondary roads, did not occur until the 1960s. Predominantly Shiite, this region has long been under the political control of its local notables – large landowners who governed the territory like feudal lords, imposing their laws while keeping a large part of the population subjugated. The political changes of the 1960s, despite the national integration efforts of Chehabism (1958–1964), particularly with the emergence of the Disinherited movement (*harakat al-mahrumeen*) led by Imam Musa Sadr, sparked a resurgence of Shiite identity and the politicization of this sect (Beydoun, 1993; Picard, 1985). Once allied with Palestinian fighters (*fedayeen*), this ultimately redefined the South as a bastion of revolutionary struggle, which transformed the southern zone into a sanctuary for their cross-border anti-Israeli military operations (Meier, 2016).

The story of the South is marked by the long and brutal Israeli occupation (1978–2000) that left a deep imprint on the lives and imaginations of local inhabitants, both Shiites and Christians. Most of the testimonies collected in the South regarding the notion of fear and the meaning of the border are linked to this dark period. Many people recounted their fear of Israeli troops and their local surrogate militia, the South Lebanon Army (Jaber & Jaber, 2007). Only some Christian individuals in villages like Qlay'at, Merjayoun, or Rmeich remembered that period as a relatively positive one for Christians due to their collaboration with the Israeli army, and also their fear of the Palestinian *fedayeen*. However, other Christian villages like Ebel al-Saqi, with a communist tradition, perceived the *fedayeen* as a positive force and feared the Israeli troops. In the narrative of Khiam residents, a multisectarian village, its pro-Palestinian orientation led to a massacre perpetrated by the SLA in 1978 and the closure of the village for several years (Kassir, 1994), which created a deep feeling of hatred toward Israel[24]. Such traumatic events are not unique and tend to repeat themselves in the aftermath of the civil war, with the 1993, 1996 and 2006 Israeli invasions and wars that impacted the Southern borderland region and population. Local memories, representations, and identities tend to be largely structured by these events and polarized the political mindset of the its inhabitants between Israel and Hezbollah. Maroun, a young Christian from Qlay'at, explains: "The security issue is not the main factor but one of the components of the tension here. For Christians, the war with Israel is not their war"[25]. Today, Christians living in the former pro-Israeli stronghold (Merjayoun-Qlay'at) are openly talking about their fear of the Shiite movement Hezbollah, mentioning some intimidation and a political reordering of the region, as well as the subsequent departure – sometimes emigration – of many from the Christian population. The hegemony of Hezbollah in this part of the state also partly explains the close impact of the regime of fear toward Israel on the local identity and narratives, with the exception of some Christian villages historically linked to the SLA.

One should note the absence of the Syrian refugees in the narrative of the southern borderlanders. This regime of fear is relatively low, partly due to the small number of refugees in the southern cazas compared with other regions of the country (UN-HCR 2023). According to local informants, it is also due to the tight control organized

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[24] Interview with Abu Yasser, a retired teacher native from Khiam, 17 June 2018.
[25] Interview with Maroun, a young humanitarian worker, Qlay'at, 30 March 2019.

by Hezbollah's municipalities, which aim to make the refugees invisible to borderlanders and to keep them under surveillance. In the 8-March coalition parties, Syrian refugees are mainly seen as potential "takfiris"[26] – terrorists who need to be monitored. This perspective introduces the second official regime of fear in this predominantly Shiite region. One must remember the car bomb attacks that struck Shiite regions and suburbs in 2013 and 2014, while a large number of Syrians were crossing the Syrian borders to reach Lebanon, including through the mountainous zone of Jabal al-Sheikh to the caza of Hasbaya (UNHCR, 2014). This regime of fear linked to Salafi-jihadists is a strong identity component for many borderlanders in the South, as it has become part of the main rhetoric of Hezbollah since the onset of the war in Syria, as a way to label any opponents of the Syrian regime.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, I raised three questions to explore the relationship between identity, borders, and fear: What are the current dominant threats and fears in Lebanon? How can one explain some of the differences in how these threats and fears are perceived between the heartland and the borderlands? How do these perceptions impact borderlanders' identity construction?

To answer the first question, I proposed relying on the notion of a "regime of fear," which is a social, symbolic, institutional, and ritual process through which fear is shaped at a certain moment in time by a ruling power. Three regimes of fear have been identified as key narratives identifying threats and security issues in Lebanon today: the Israeli danger, the Syrian refugee threat, and the fear of Salafi-jihadist combatants, which are seen as the primary vectors of insecurity according to the main ontological security providers, i.e., the Lebanese state and Hezbollah. In borderland regions, in the North, the East, and the South, my inquiry highlighted significant discrepancies between the dominant regimes of fear and the borderlanders' perceptions and identity. Despite some differences, a common narrative emerges, which is never mentioned as a regime of fear: the fear of pauperization, poverty, and marginalization reflected in many comments heard across all the borderland regions when analyzing the daily issues people face in their lives and their future prospects.

Such differences in perceptions between the heartland and the borderlands can also be explained by the lack of state presence in these marginalized territories. I have shown that this prolonged absence of the state has had consequences in shaping local identity and the contours of the 'others.' The very weak presence of the state in the North and the East, unable to spread its own vision and narrative of fears, contrasts with the strong (recent) presence of Hezbollah in the South, where the party has shaped a common vision leading local people to share two of the main regimes of fear: the Israeli and Salafi-jihadist threats. Identity construction in the borderland regions of Lebanon is thus revealed through the contrasting behavior toward the dominant regimes of fear spread by the most powerful actors in the country.

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[26] Literally means 'those who practice excommunication' (takfir), a radical practice of Islamist movements rooted in the radical Salafi movements (Bauchard, 2015).

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