A Landscape of War:
On the Nature of Conflict in South Lebanon

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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation is an inquiry into the naturalization of war. It examines forms of life in a rural borderland that is also a battlefield through an ethnographic exploration of the intertwining of war and everyday living on Lebanon’s southern border with Israel. Life in these parts, for the most part, revolves around tobacco farming, olive cropping, goat herding and other forms of agricultural practice generating subsistence and income and underpinning an ongoing presence in place. The southern borderland is also entangled in an ongoing war condition that cyclically erupts, disrupts, destructs, (re)constructs, and has done for generations now. War in South Lebanon has come to be inhabited as “natural”; it is by now a part of southern life, or better yet, insistently generative of a kind of life that continues – in whichever ways and outside of moral judgments – to be viable here. My inquiry unfolds as a journey through landscape as a place of simultaneous dwelling and warring and concerns itself with what constitutes ordinary living in a rural borderland that is also a battlefield. In what follows I explore how the tobacco-farming village communities of South Lebanon inhabit a long-term and ongoing condition of war in its ordinary, everyday and also violent guises. How do the pathways and rhythms of living in a rural-agricultural margin mesh with the materials and space-times of war? How are military conflicts past, recent and expected recognized, resisted, claimed, encountered, nurtured, inhabited as tabi‘i natural and ‘adi, habitual, normal? I conceive of this work as an attempt to place war in life; that is to think of war as a condition as generative and constructive (of life) as it is also destructive. What follows then is an
ethnographic attempt to give breathing space to the life that goes on in a place of enduring war.
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For

Mom and Tata
Prelude

The Hidden Life of War

We are loath to believe that a time of destruction and ruin lies in wait for the world. Even when we witness the tottering of mountains. And were the winds not to drop, no power could pull creation back from collapse. But in fact they die down and grow violent in turn, first rallying and then charging before being repulsed once again. And so catastrophe threatens more often than it occurs; the earth buckles but recovers, and having toppled regains its balance.

(Lucretius Carus 1996)

We need to step from the wreckage – the crude industrialisms, capitalisms, technologies, ideologies, theologies, identities that have crashed so dismally (not least ecologically) rather than remain within them trying to patch them up, or worse still, fighting over the ghastly ruins of it all.

We need to salvage what is useful, rebuild and move on.

(Jones 2008)

And the time will come when you see
we're all one, and life flows on within you and without you.

(The Beatles “Within you without you”)

Figure 1 Broken door. Beirut. Photograph by Rola Khayyat.
Life and war

Growing up in the context of the Lebanese civil war that began the year before I was born, it naturally took some time before aspects of my childish sensorium and experience were cobbled together to compose an idea of “war” that I could identify and talk about. Driven by a desire to grasp what I came to understand to be the defining condition of my life-world, I developed a picture of war in the child’s imaginative laboratory of a thousand questions and ten thousand answers that in time seemed to fit a passable grammar that only needed minor adjustments here and there as the war years unfolded and I grew…

The civil war ended when I was fourteen, and soon, as my childhood imperceptibly receded into more distant country, this “thing” called war that I had quilted from the fabric of the world, its experience and stories, frankensteined into something with a life of its own, embodying accessible perspectives and narratives, which were often utilized to elucidate a (trans)forming identity… at the same time that it quietly fell out of touch and feeling … except at certain Proustian moments, like when I open a cabinet in my grandmother’s house in Saida¹ and whiff that shadowy-dry-warm-sweet, cedarwood-and-sugar smell …

Then I am back there in a time and place that I cannot recognize from the outside (let alone call normal or strange)…

… when my grandmother and her neighbors were forced out of their homes by the militia boys, including the younger sons of Tanios, the shopkeeper from downstairs, with

¹ Sidon
whom we used to play among the olives and along the broken wall. My old grandmother, her neighbors and their young children were roughly up by the armed youths and thrown out into the street in the darkness of dawn, and the building was ransacked, and she and her neighbors from across the landing and the floor below were evacuated by the Red Cross and came to live with us for a spell. What a fun state of affairs! We played lots of Atari with the neighbor’s son. Months later, when the occupation ended and the militia partisans had been dealt an ugly retribution in that endless cycle, we accompanied my grandmother back to her beloved home where she had vowed to die (and would die years later), carrying her up the six stories because she was too overcome with emotion and her poor old knees would not carry her (and the elevator was, as usual, broken). Excited, we swarmed through the open front door, shrapnel and glass and gravel coating the gray marble floor, glittering like quartz and crunching underfoot, the dusty velvet furniture overturned, a shell hole in the balcony, a bullet through the gilt-framed portrait of my dead grandfather, a reserved smile on his lips, as in life, as always. And the Czech crystal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling in the salon presided impassively upon the scene of destruction, expressing suspended, frozen teardrops.

The destruction and disorder was nothing unusual – we often played in the picked-over ruins of homes – and we were only marginally concerned with the feelings of the adults (who thought nothing of bringing us here in the first place, so natural were such returns) as we climbed over disemboweled sofas and collected spent bullets…

… digging for pottery shards and rainbow-glass in the dead yellow heat of a summer noon in an ancient Phoenician gravesite freshly uncovered as yet another
unregulated building went up next door… before it was dynamited to make way for the building’s foundations…

… Swiss-cheese scenery, faded signs, abandoned businesses, flayed, frozen, disintegrating structures abandoned to the elements and yet embroidered with clingy shreds of care – a picture on the last standing wall, flowery curtains framing shattered windows… plants on abandoned balconies gone wild and then relentlessly scorched by the sun year after year, empty birdcages… endless traffic jams at innumerable checkpoints, toffees wrapped in golden paper, mismatched felt pantoufles, the gluey darkness of nights with no electricity, the irritating buzz of the long neon bulb in the kitchen, boiling water for baths on the gas stove, rooms piled up to the ceiling with broken furniture and beguiling boxes of accumulated junk, the tightness and tenseness of extended families living under one roof, flickering, grainy TVs deviously ensnaring Israeli and Cypriot airwaves to watch reruns of American programs, the smell of diesel and kerosene and the shine of candles on cold terrazzo floors, tangerine peelings, the rhythmic patter of shooting and the thud and boom of bombs willfully imagined away as thunder on winter nights…

Fragmented scenes, collaged materials of a now distant childhood formed within war: a nostalgic and natural history (of destruction).

(Post)War
The post-war years crisply unfolded in an old-new world, where the new was loud and insistent and in-your-face and the old was silently resonant and strangely invisible.

General amnesty was declared, gauzily blanketing the violent acts of the past and transforming their perpetrators in to state-sanctioned political players. The media (and everyone) lauded the Lebanese phoenix, the re-birth, the rebuilding, and soon we adjusted to new parameters handed down from above: Greater Beirut (and Lebanon), Peace, Government, Regulation, Law, Unity, Reconstruction, Prosperity, Paved Roads, Electricity (traffic lights!), overlaying all those newly declared no-no’s: militias, protection rackets, thuggery, corruption, sectarianism, suspicion, burning hatred, resentment, fear, weapons. These were the officially designated ruptures, New Beginnings defining “Peacetime” as opposed to “War”. Of course, things unfolded differently and much less (if anything) changed at the level of contiguous, continuous everyday life, where few at first even (if ever) recognized that the war was over, where all those no-no’s were inextricably tied up with living and loving, being(s) and dwelling(s), identity and politics, somatic, affective orientations absorbed into the enduring, resonant materials of this world.
Living in Beirut as the nineties became the new millennium, the Swiss-cheese structures were slowly (quickly!) torn down, and those that weren’t fell out of visible consciousness. Attention was directed towards the Lebanese “miracle” and everyone was breathlessly caught up following the latest dramatic twist in the ever-troubled political arena (the ongoing, acrimonious contest dubbed the “cold civil war”). Yet people continued to inhabit unsung practices, perspectives and places forged in the crucible of the war years. It is a stale observation by now, but for example the services of Beirut, those battered old Mercedes taxis that ply set routes throughout the city, still attend to a divided urban geography – with few crossing the now non-existent but once-deadly Green Line dividing the city. To get to the other side of the city one has to take a service to an unmarked place where West meets East, cross over by foot, exactly like in times of war (but perhaps without the stomach-clenching anticipation of imminent death), to take another service picking up the severed thread on the other side. Another example: our rooftop apartment was not easily rented out, and our landlord was at his wits end by the time we came along, for Beirut rooftops are never desirable dwellings in a place of
(imagined, anticipated, recurrent, eternal, potential) warfare: they are unsafe during bombardments and often commandeered by militias. Thus it took tenants (like us) not existentially tuned into such potentialities to want such a place. War lives on in spatial and temporal practices, affects and affections, in a myriad of entangled networks, in matter, in the sensitive, sensuous lives of humans and plants and animals, because these are what war is when it is – and also when it isn’t. War is not defined (solely) by treaties and ceasefires and politics and The News or that ultimate decider: the presence or absence of violence. It took an unexpected season of war to blow over us for the hidden life of war to come back (briefly) into the open.

Ghosts

In 2006, in the summer of my thirtieth year, war returned to life. I was living in Beirut, nurturing an infant and contemplating a dissertation, unheroically embroiled in the daily life of a city tangled up in the brash and new and moneyed and the muted but resonant remains of the many wars that silently and not so silently live on…

We were living in Kantari, an old popular quarter of Ras Beirut on the edge of Clemenceau, a more affluent neighborhood, not far from the American University of Beirut on one side and the exclusive (rebuilt, reinvented, reinvested) Downtown on the other. Our quarter gathered remnants of some of its old, pre-war and civil war buildings and inhabitants together with the newer post-war crowd and modern apartment blocks, living together yet apart under the enduring and palpable yet strangely invisible shadows of two ruined ghosts, two ghostly ruins. When we came to the neighborhood in September 2005, the quarter had already entered a phase of accelerated transformation: daily flattening into car parks of graceful, silent, old dwellings faded to dusty pinks and
yellows ensconced in wild gardens with fragrant trees, largely abandoned structures home to antiquated dwellers or neighborhood cats – most of whom (cats and humans) became my close friends. Still, as the old quarter was progressively decimated, some gossamer threads of old-time being and continuity endured in the living and nonliving materials of the place, as the destruction-through-construction gripping the capital since the end of the civil war gathered momentum.

Our apartment was on the third and last floor of a 1940s building whose high-ceilinged, terrazzo-floored spaces and many green-shuttered windows opened up to the sun and the sky, the street and neighbors, and especially an old rubber tree that spread its sturdy branches and thick, glossy leaves above the dead-end alley, spanning the distance from our kitchen to our bedroom window, and reaching across the narrow traffic-less back alley like a protective canopy. This was the quieter, more intimate side of our living space and it contrasted like night and day with the riotous front of our home, where our small balcony hovered across from the sheer face of a massive apartment block, a few meters above honking school-related traffic jams twice a day, continuous corner-store sentry-duty, parking scuffles channeling neighborhood power-struggles, catfights (real cats I mean), rhythmic cycles of hawkers, construction work, and such assorted, boisterous day-in-the-life activity.

In the back-alley oasis underneath the rubber tree lived a collection of beings: an Armenian old lady, Madame Alice, with her calico cat and brood of borrowed grandchildren were ensconced in a small, damp, leafy dungeon below street level; a sisterhood of spinsters cattily ruled a once grand but now disheveled rooftop apartment; Coco, another sprightly, sharp-eyed old spinster kept discerning watch over the alley’s
narrow entrance from her balcony that jutted out from an old abandoned building where she was the only resident; she regularly harangued the slick-haired young men who loafed under her balcony around their lovingly refurbished, brightly-painted, seventh-hand, outdated, roaring sports-cars. Toward the center of the alley, its large terrace forming a kind of courtyard, was a pink two-story structure housing on the ground floor a colony of Filipino migrant workers who regularly sang karaoke, and a collection of transient students with eventful love-lives on the upper floor. A family of southerners squatted an unclaimed ground-floor space connecting Coco’s building and the pink house, a place awkwardly cobbled together in weird angles and discontinuous materials but strangely embellished with a lushly laminated, real-wood front door with a large gold knocker. The alley ended at an ugly, boxy 1970s building inhabited by conservative, mainly Kurdish residents. Parked cars clogged the narrow street and were used alternatively as sun-beds or parasols by the alley’s many cats.

Figure 4. Car Kitty. Beirut. Photograph by Rola Khayyat.
As mentioned, our neighborhood was bookended by two of Beirut’s greatest ghosts: the burnt-out hulk of the *Holiday Inn* that was destroyed in the opening chapter of the fifteen-year civil war in 1975-6, during what came to be called the “War of the Hotels” when the armed (leftist and right-wing) factions battled for the control of the capital in its famous and glamorous nest of luxury hotels. After this phase, Beirut’s “Golden Years” were gone for good, and the demarcation line bifurcating the city was pushed further east to the old city center, where it stabilized into the infamous Green Line. The Holiday Inn remained a strategic military position throughout the war and collected its many scars, which it bears today: blackened walls, massive blooms of shell-holes especially along its eastern flank, rashes of bullet holes. The Holiday Inn stands empty and strangely invisible today, cordoned off at its base by the Lebanese army to prevent entry. The other ghost is Murr Tower (*Burj al Murr*, which ironically translates literally as “the tower of bitterness”); it was being built to become the Beirut Trade Center by the prominent Murr family when the civil war erupted, and has remained – then and now – a massive grey cement shell. Then the tallest building in Beirut, during the civil war it transformed into a landmark of terrible strategic importance in the transformed, militarized urban geography as it soared over what became the divided city’s frontline, exposing surrounding areas. Tales of terror and torture (and many tossings) interleave its many identical storeys; it remained frozen in the post-war landscape and – like the *Holiday Inn* – promptly disappeared from everyday view.

Embroiled in its daily, endless unfoldings in the invisible shadows of ghost-buildings and other worldly and otherworldly objects and beings, our neighborhood was an example repeated across the city and land, one of many such resonant, ruined,
regenerating landscapes. Thus we existed there in the scrum of life in Beirut, fifteen years after the end of the fighting, living in our little building, our little quarter, in an ordinary landscape animated and configured by wars still palpable in its thriving life and resonant, affective matter. To think about the (hidden) life of war in such a setting required a move of simultaneous distance and immersion and the insistent clamor of the everyday I ordinarily inhabited made that hard to do. But the summer war of 2006 brought subterranean movements, perceptions, orientations and sensations out of the woodwork; it sharpened the picture for me and set me on the path of this dissertation.

*Opening the box of war: harb tammuz*\(^2\), 2006

One July morning we woke up and there was this empty feeling in the air. The excitement of the World Cup Championships that had just possessed us all for a month and climaxed in the violent final between Italy and France featuring the infamous headbutt on the pitch was just over, and our daily rhythms and emotional scales were readjusting to an amorphous everyday lacking the anticipation of football matches and their accompanying peaks of excitement. It was a Wednesday, one of those mornings when the humid Lebanese summer has really started to boil. Short tempers, horns and shouts from the street, the ever-present drum of construction work near and far, the smell of frying onions, boiled lentils, exhaust, street cats, neighbors on balconies, the persistent growl of generators and the buzz and drip of ACs: summer in Beirut.

Over breakfast, we heard some news blowing in fresh from the South and rippling through the city: Hizbullah had just kidnapped two Israeli soldiers in an ambush along the

\(^2\) “July War”
border. It was a newsworthy occurrence to be sure, but just another event in an ongoing story that had been unfolding already for decades with different twists and turns, since before (my) life began… so nothing to choke on, we thought.

We thought wrong. All of us misjudged where this incident would take us – even Hizbullah, it appears. A little later, we watched the first press conference after the kidnapping with Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary General of Hizbullah, projected on a large screen to a roomful of media people. Nasrallah, a familiar personality to us all, displaying his usual mix of sweet smiles and angry defiance, appeared relaxed and unperturbed as he exchanged friendly banter with some of the journalists in the room. Nasrallah’s message was reassuring: soon after the kidnapping that morning, Israel had retaliated forcefully with bombing attacks and a few botched incursions across the southern border zone, but Nasrallah seemed to think that after this show of force there would be no further military escalation. Instead he reminded us that this morning’s abduction was the first step in the realization of a “True Promise”3 (al wa’d al sadiq) he had made to bring back Lebanese and Palestinian prisoners – including remains of fighters and prisoners – being held in Israel. Hizbullah was ready for war, Nasrallah said, but this abduction was not a declaration of war: the abducted Israeli soldiers were to be used as bargaining chips in a forthcoming prisoner exchange. And so it seemed to us all that this was indeed another twist in the ongoing struggle with Israel that defines the larger and finer grain of life and politics and the parameters of our moral landscape – our existence, in short – in this part of the world. As neither side had played the military escalation card for some time – the last major encounter was the devastating “Operation

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3 Also called “The Covenant”
Grapes of Wrath” in the spring of 1996 (and we didn’t even count the repeated Israeli attacks against Lebanese infrastructure in 1998 and 1999) – we were easily assured that this event would play out in the sphere of negotiations and political quid pro quo – not war.

By the break of the following dawn, the bombardment that would not cease for thirty-four days had begun. With the bombing of Beirut airport we were instantly boxed into a new war. I speak for myself, but I sensed it all around: the barely closed containers of emotional, bodily, temporal, existential modes and orientations that stirred beneath the blunted, fuzzy, everyday textures of “post-war” life in Lebanon reopened and took hold…

As the war unfolded, during the hours that the electricity was cut and there was no TV or Internet news to follow, I relied on the sturdiest of war companions, the battery-powered transistor radio, for updates. I listened in my kitchen where the reception was best. Sitting at the open window listening, I idly observed the back alley through the branches of the big old rubber tree. During this war the southern family, who lived in the patchwork structure with the massive wooden door in the back alley, sprung into action. Ordinarily they practically lived on the street, socializing outside on their doorstep in village fashion; the interior of the house was used for cooking, washing, eating, sleeping – routine, intimate matters. Everything else took place outdoors under the sky and in communion, in a way or another, with their environment: human, animal, plant, stone. The entrance to their place formed a rectangular walkway flanked by a riot of greenery, both decorative and edible, planted in old powder-milk tins; there was always a constant stream of people entering and exiting. The permanent residents of the household were the
wily and able Im Hussein, who smokes incessantly, and her two thin and docile blonde daughters, one of whom tied her headscarf at the back of her neck in old-time southern village fashion (now almost entirely usurped by the more severe – and impractical – Hizbullah fashion across most of the Shi’i South). The three women worked as servants and cleaners in nearby affluent households and businesses, and represented the remains of a much larger and much younger family who came as refugees to the neighborhood during the civil war when they left their village close to Bint Jbeil along the southern border, during the first Israeli invasion of 1978. The Amal militia that was in charge of our neighborhood by the mid-1980s had put them up here; now they were among the last of the neighborhood’s *muḥajjāreen* refugee-squatters⁴, hanging onto the space between two buildings, as good a home as any.

*Im* Hussein was a close friend of *Im* Walid, my beloved Egyptian neighbor from downstairs, who burned the flame of Bastet⁵ by caring for all of the neighborhood’s stray cats (and I was her loyal assistant). The two women had cemented their alliance as residents of the civil wartime neighborhood and visited each other often. In the spring, *Im* Hussein brought *Im* Walid bagfuls of fresh dandelions and other edible delicacies gathered from wild southern meadows on weekend visits. Once, *Im* Hussein recounted to me her virgin brush with warfare during that first springtime Israeli invasion in 1978 when she escaped on foot in the darkness of dawn with her five tiny children under a rain of bombs to the next village, carrying those who couldn’t walk, with the others grabbing onto her skirts as she ran. That was a long, long time and many, many wars ago. And

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⁴ Internally Displaced Persons

⁵ The Ancient Egyptian cat-headed goddess.
now, like many families from the South, her children were grown up and distributed across the country and even abroad, here and there, making a living, while her husband farmed tobacco back in the village, which was liberated in 2000 along with the rest of the occupied border strip. *Im* Hussein continues to work in the capital, maintaining and depending on the networks that she forged during the war years to make a living.

Now in the summer of 2006, *Im* Hussein’s family was re-collecting in Beirut, once again a place of refuge, as another season of war took hold in the South. A man, a son or a close relative, set himself up on a plastic chair among the potted plants and cats outside their doorstep in the back alley, having arrived from the South or the southern suburbs on the day the war began. Manning his cell-phone, he kept track of the movements of his various family members as they made their way out of the warzone to places of lesser danger and ultimately, and if possible, Beirut. The man would garner the locations of his relatives as they fled and report back to others as they also made their way toward safety. The complicated and urgent logistics echoed off the narrow walls of the alley and floated up to me framed in my third floor kitchen window sitting by my radio among the leaves of the steady rubber tree...

This was just one family among many across the capital and other Lebanese cities gathering its members to a place of safety – a familiar rhythm that had played out many times in years past across different times and geographies, depending on the mutable and capricious configurations of danger and safety. In the first days of this war, as the city filled up with the displaced and the war proceeded apace with more death and destruction accumulating daily, everyday work-a-day life was temporarily suspended in favor of the immediate events at hand and the need to secure the basics for successful wartime living
in the current safe-zone. Residents and refugees alike, many of whom had lived through the Lebanese civil war and several Israeli campaigns and invasions, smoothly fell into practiced step. They did not know what would happen next, but they assessed the facts at hand and accordingly adjusted to the alternate rhythm re-introduced to their realm of being with the return of wartime.

Experiencing war from a safe-zone is very different from experiencing war itself, even if that safe-zone exists within or adjacent to the theater of violence. This is something that people who have inhabited the complicated quicksand geography of the Lebanese civil war know well, and it is something that they readjusted to during this round of warfare after the first few days. Thus what was both strange and special about this war was that although it was a very destructive war and like all things potentially unstable, it soon became clear that the areas of battle had been delineated and stabilized\(^6\), and that those outside the danger zones could indulge in observing the war unfold\(^7\).

\textit{Wartide}

The war washed over us, reviving the war-beings in us: reminding us of its rhythms, readjusting our existential parameters, reacquainting us with subterranean emotions and submerged life forms… And then it receded. But like any sudden low tide, it left in its

\footnotetext[6]{During this war, it became clear that Israel was directly targeting Shi‘i areas. The South and \textit{al dahiyeh}, the southern suburbs of Beirut, were pounded and pulverized. In a short time, people began to operate on the assumption that anywhere not Hizbullah-affiliated was “safe”.}

\footnotetext[7]{The explosion of bloggers who expressed their experience of this war (for most of them their first) is an indication of this exciting combination of dramatic, attention-grabbing, yet non-threatening violence close at hand, and the enabling position of (largely) middle class connectivity and connectedness. This empowered perspective was not lost on me; still this did not stop me from keeping a log of those days.}
wake a scene of devastation and stranded things usually concealed from view by the muddle of the everyday, now high and dry and for all to touch and feel and breathe and see. It was a little like seeing (friendly) ghosts.

As I said, in the thirtieth year of a life that began in war, this thing called “war” that had become hard to see – too distant yet too close, meshed in life and living, mediated by too many scripts and by who knows what or whose memories – was once again thrown across my path. The 2006 war opened a box of stuff that cannot be summoned unless lived, like love or pain. This war threw me back into the life of war... and onto the path of inquiry that led to my dissertation. Appropriately then the study begins with a moment of historical destruction, but unlike Benjamin’s Angel of History whose wings are helplessly caught up in the gale blowing from Paradise, this (wingless) anthropologist followed in reverse the path of the storm to poke among the ruins for things that do not (only) live in words.

Figure 5. Pink Bullets. Beirut. Photograph by Rola Khayyat.

I. Introduction

Figure 6. Wild meadow with spring flowers and barbed wire along the border in South Lebanon. Photograph by author

i. Inquiry

This dissertation is an inquiry into the naturalization of war. It examines forms of life in a rural borderland that is also a battlefield through an ethnographic exploration of the intertwining of war and everyday living on Lebanon’s southern border with Israel. Life in these parts, for the most part, revolves around tobacco farming, olive cropping, goat herding and other forms of agricultural practice generating subsistence and income and underpinning an ongoing presence in place. The southern borderland is also entangled in an ongoing war condition that cyclically erupts, disrupts, destructs, (re)constructs, and has done for generations now. War in South Lebanon has come to be inhabited as “natural”; it is by now a part of southern life, or better yet, insistently generative of a kind of life that continues – in whichever ways and outside of moral judgments – to be viable here. My inquiry unfolds as a journey through landscape as a place of simultaneous dwelling and warring and concerns itself with what constitutes ordinary living in a rural borderland that is also a battlefield. In what follows I explore how the tobacco-farming
and livestock-keeping village communities of South Lebanon inhabit a long-term and ongoing condition of war in its ordinary, everyday and also violent guises. How do the pathways and rhythms of living in a rural-agricultural margin mesh with the materials and space-times of war? How are military conflicts past, recent and expected recognized, resisted, claimed, encountered, nurtured, inhabited as tabi‘i natural and ‘adi, habitual, normal? I conceive of this work as an attempt to place war in life; that is to think of war as a condition as generative and constructive (of life) as it is also destructive. What follows then is an ethnographic attempt to give breathing space to the life that goes on in a place of enduring war.

In South Lebanon¹, war’s ever-presence entwines with that of the rural-agricultural taskscape: agricultural cycles and seasons of war are interwoven, enmeshed and together these ongoing creative forces generate spaces and rhythms of living along this borderland, margin and long-term battlefield. Here both life and war are premised upon land in terms of livelihood and geography, and hence landscape, as temporal anchor and material substance of being and becoming, is both the portal and the substance of my inquiry. Defined by Ingold as “the world as it is known to those who dwell therein, who inhabit its places and journey along the paths connecting them” (1993), landscape, as the

¹ South Lebanon (Janub Lubnan) refers to the province of South Lebanon stretching south of the Awwali River bounded on the west by the Mediterranean coast encompassing the ancient port cities of Sidon (Saida) and Tyre (Sur) all the way to to Ras al Naqura on the Israeli border and then inland from the Mediterranean Sea along the Lebanese-Israeli border through the Western Bekaa to Mount Hermon (Jabal al Sheikh) on the Lebanese-Syrian border, encompassing Jabal ‘Amel the historical heartland of Lebanese Shi’ism. But in this dissertation when I refer to the South (al-Janub), unless indicated otherwise, I am referring to the 10 km deep stretch of borderland encompassing more than 150 small towns and villages that was occupied by Israel from 1978-2000. This area is also referred to locally as “the border strip” al shareet al hududi. I also use the term “the zone” in reference to the “occupation zone,” what the Israelis referred to as the “security zone”.


organizing framework of this dissertation, enables me to explore the ways in which life and war, often conceived as opposed and antithetical, are experienced as continuous, interwoven, entangled, interactive, constitutive, fused, one. The medium of landscape as encountered and unfolded from a “dwelling perspective” allows me to gather together a briefly stable object of contemplation and analysis across multiple scales, temporalities, orders and affects. Illuminating an inclusive, ecological, holistic, breathing place of being and becoming within and across the twin forces of destruction and creation, landscape enables me to get a sense of the place of life in a space of war; to this end this study is an ethnographic engagement with the ways in which war has shaped life in these parts (and vice versa). Hence my inquiry is not directed at an inert, passive, abject(ed) landscape upon which human history is merely performed and inscribed. Rather it explores an enchanted, active assemblage of beautiful and hale, half-remembered and forgotten, base and broken materials and beings of this world that come together – sedimenting, tangible-izing, resonating, crumbling, inhering and residing – through ongoing cycles and seasons of warring and living… to compose this particular place.

To get a sense of how agriculturally based livelihoods premised on known and predictable cycles of seasons *mawasim ziraʿiyi* are sustained – and survive – across and through seasons of war *mawasim harb* – that is in a context of less predictable rhythms – this study cleaves close to the dominant agricultural practices propelling and structuring daily life in border villages, and looks at the ways in which spaces of agricultural and military activity intersect and overlap. In staying with the realm of life and the ordinary, in this work I trace the cultivation and cycles of the major cash crop tobacco and the
keeping of livestock, and explore the way their “taskscapes”\textsuperscript{2} entangle and merge with, inform and shape the “warscape”\textsuperscript{3}. The process of cultivation and harvests, the profits as well as the risks involved always relate in prosaic ways to the ongoing condition of war despite intermittent periods of calm. For example, mines and unexploded bombs continue to be a source of loss and debt among locals long after bouts of acute violence have died down. These deadly objects determine spaces and practices of cultivation and impact life-choices – and livelihoods. Fields that are littered with explosives become off-limits and alternative spaces for cultivation are used – usually at a price that eats into already slim profits. Known minefields often revert to wilderness, but some areas that are known to contain unexploded ordnance often continue to be used by those who cannot (afford to) avoid them as they go about securing their livelihoods and surviving in an insecure and potentially lethal setting.

Figure 7. Deadly dance: olive grove and minefield. Dhaira, South Lebanon. Photo by author.

\textsuperscript{2} In Ingold’s terms the “taskscape” is the set of tasks and activities that constitute landscape, “the landscape is the congealed form of the taskscape” (1993:162).

\textsuperscript{3} Adapted using Appadurai’s popularization of the “scape” suffix, (1996:33) “warscape” was formulated by Carolyn Nordstrom (1997:78) to indicate landscapes “unmade” by wartime violence.
The risks are known; they are navigated, accommodated, domesticated. These acts of navigation, accommodation and domestication (and others) are creative everyday acts\(^4\) that respond to the “multiple narratives” (Massey 2005) that both converge upon and constitute this place of living (and warring). As the authors of “The Geography of Warscape” (Korf 2010) argue “[n]avigating in perilous and life-threatening warscapes demands actors to redraw trajectories, strategies and tactics of agency. With increasing navigation experience, these tactics and strategies become ingrained in specific everyday praxis” (389). Likewise, my approach draws attention to conflict as a place of living and to the agency of warscape dwellers as seasoned inhabitants of conflict. As one borderland dweller sputtered in exasperation as I continued to interrupt him to ask about mines as he described to me how he cared for his olive trees along the borderline: “ya binti, al mawt bi rizq al insan! Daughter, death is in human livelihood!” That is simply the way it is. “From the sea to Metulla\(^5\)! From here to the very end of God’s earth min il bahr lal mtulleh, min hon la akher ma’mar allah! Khalas what can you do?” Far from illustrating a fatalism often ascribed to “passive” peasants, the quintessential subalterns or more famously the “weak” (Scott 1985) such “acceptance” of the dimensions of surviving in this place, of “making do” (Certeau 1984), of just continuing to live here indicates agency, an active form of place-making, life-making. It shows us the everyday “art of

\(^4\) Michel de Certeau writes “…the goal is not to make clearer how the violence of order is transmuted into a disciplinary technology, but rather to bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of ‘discipline’. Pushed to their ideal limits, these procedures and ruses of consumers compose the networks of an antidiscipline…” (1984:xv).

\(^5\) An Israeli settlement on the borderline facing the Lebanese town of Kfar Kila in the Eastern Sector of the border zone.
doing” (*ibid*.), the deft ability of ordinary people on the margins of the nation-state (Das and Poole 2004) – of history (Trouillot 1995), the social, economic, the political but at the center of often violent action, to navigate an always potentially lethal terrain that is the primary place and source of life and means of continued survival.

In South Lebanon war in its tangible and intangible forms and objects is domesticated, managed, inhabited, accepted and resisted and thus naturalized as a normal aspect of ordinary worlds where lives are painstakingly, prosaically lived out. One of the central goals of my project is to rethink war as an extraordinary, irruptive and bounded occurrence and to unsettle its distinctive, “exceptional” status vis-à-vis normative-hegemonic understandings of “peace” as default category. I do this by grasping war from its ordinary dimensions and thus subtly weave it into my ethnographic narrative. War here is grasped as a condition: its temporal and spatial boundaries are extended to include expanses normally ascribed to ordinary life\(^6\). Thus this dissertation critically engages literature that conceives of war as both extra-ordinary and primarily violent. Some

\(^6\) This observation stems from my childhood in war where “war” was the condition of my first awareness and “peace” a strange conceptual elsewhere. I start from war as default condition.
scholars have focused their analysis on the centrifugal role of violence in war, its dramatic scenery and destructive potential (Feldman; Nordstrom 1997; Nordstrom and Robben 1995). When accounts of war are conceptually organized around violence, then violence becomes the primary determinant of all warscape agency and action, space and time. As recent anthropological work in African and other warzones (Lubkemann 2008; Richards and Helander 2005) has shown, the waging of everyday life in war is obscured by a primary focus on violence and its effects. This is not to say that the inhabitants of war do not experience recurrent or even extreme forms of violence, but for the most part, as I see it, inhabiting a state of war – like “peace” – is about the challenge of pursuing everyday concerns and continuous and continuing life projects within a given social context; war is (or can be) as ordinary as life itself, and is navigated in similar ways. (Conversely, ordinary life must be understood as always potentially unstable).

While violence – a sudden sensual jarring of the deadening routine, blunted sensorium, and complacent to and fro of daily existence – is an attractive, productive and exciting material to work with, I argue that war encompasses much more than just violence, rupture and destruction. Far from making the claim that war is a good thing (although sometimes to some people it is), I see it as dimension, framework and context generative – and not merely destructive – of life. Those who need to survive in the midst of war thus also influence its conduct, processes, beings and formations; its dimensions are dimensions of their ordinary worlds and are as such accommodated, adjusted (to), domesticated, harnessed, resisted, lived. As Richards puts it: “Anthropologists who work in the growing number of societies in which armed conflicts span entire lifetimes need to trace the unfolding of social relations and cultural expression through the social condition
of war, rather than treating it as a period in which social process is suspended” (Richards and Helander 2005). To think of war in this way places it upon a continuum with peace; war and peace are no longer conceived as antithetical, opposed. With Richards then, I advocate an ethnographic approach that “stress[es] that war is a social project among other social projects,” and with him I assert that “[w]e do the ethnography of war best … not by imposing a sharp categorical distinction between ‘war’ and ‘peace’ but by thinking in terms of a continuum” (ibid.: 5). The art of living extends itself across the existing, existential terrain, uniting war with peace7. And war – like peace – is comprehended and claimed as a context for life and not merely its destruction. This work thus remains in the realm of the non-violent and the ordinary while it seeks to detect war’s continuous, ongoing, domesticated and yet also uncanny, haunting and wild presence in ordinary life.

Some may ponder why it is that I went to such a place of high drama to study insistently “ordinary” themes. It is precisely because I contend that high drama and ordinariness are commensurate, continuous, qualitatively the same to those who must live in such places. My point here is that the attention-grabbing condition called war can be better thought of as an intensification of the forces flowing through, contained in, composing the humdrum world of everyday habit and habituation, and neither their destruction nor their negation (but often their re-configuration). War hence brings out in starker relief the powers always inherent (yet often invisible or unremarked) in the habitual, taken-for-granted grind of daily living. The seamless continuum between war and peace, violence and the ordinary, may be hard to imagine, but should not be so.

7 As Korf, Engeler and Hagmann (2010) write “It is … difficult to draw a clear line between the social conditions of war versus those of non-war as social actors continue to struggle throughout both conditions in a peace-to-war continuum” (386).
Kleinman has approached this subject by uncovering the shocking “invisible” violence hidden in the blunted structures and practices of ordinary middle-class western living (Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004), I choose instead to explore to the everyday taskscapes and topographies of marginal others whose lives continue to unfold along the fault-line of one of the planet’s most violent and intractable, long and ongoing conflicts.

This dissertation was researched in villages along the Lebanese side of the Lebanese-Israeli borderline in the immediate wake of the devastating summer war of 2006 and for three years after. The area in which I worked saw the biggest ground battles and was meted massive destruction by the Israeli war machine from air and sea during the 2006 war. But not all of the borderland’s villages were equally impacted; some were flattened and some were spared. This has much to do with geography and demography: in general Shi’i villages were the ones directly targeted, invaded and destroyed, although the inhabitants of the entire borderland (and beyond) regardless of geography and demography were under constant mortal threat for the thirty-four days of the conflict. As this war occurred at the height of tobacco season, everyone’s livelihood was affected. This war resulted in massive losses in the agricultural sector that forms the backbone of life for those inhabiting, enlivening the southern Lebanese marches and margins. Barely was the final ceasefire declared when the devastated villages were doggedly back to life, with villagers picking up the pieces and carrying on, constantly shrugging off the latest violent irruption as “normal”, “habitual”: ‘adi, ta’awwadna. This dissertation seeks to

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8 This extraordinary sense of the ordinary is evoked by a journalist who visited Bint Jbail in the immediate wake of the conflict: “I got the same response from almost everyone we interviewed. "Normal" seemed to be the consensus, but the clear signs of destruction, the fear of unexploded bombs and an uncertain future indicated a place that was anything but normal.” Kevin Sites ‘Revisiting Bint Jbail’: http://hotzone.yahoo.com/b/hotzone/blogs23989.
grasp the dimensions and materials of this ‘normalcy’ – to see the ways in which life has accommodated war and war has accommodated life in South Lebanon. The commensurate, combined, enmeshed nature of these orders (if one can see them as separate at all) and enterprises has been long in the making, for this area has been a frontline of war for more than sixty years.

The inhabitants of this rural front have since 1948 weathered recurring cycles of violent conflict including decades of intensive guerrilla warfare and Israeli attacks in the 1960s and 1970s, two major Israeli land invasions (1978 and 1982), two massive Israeli bombing campaigns (1993 and 1996). Recurrent and persistent violence punctuated a simmering war of attrition between the Israeli Army (and their local allies) and the various local guerrilla resistance groups that lasted throughout (and beyond) the twenty-two year (1978-2000) Israeli occupation of the 10 kilometer-wide strip of Lebanon’s borderland. The conflict outlived the Israeli-Palestinian struggle in Lebanon and became a local one (Lebanese and southern) instead. Along the southern marches of the country the conflict encompassed repeated Israeli scorched-earth tactics on the agricultural communities eking a living from the arid highlands of the border zone – tobacco-farming country – as well as other modes of attack, counter-attack, aggression, occupation, exploitation and vicious/paranoid military control that played into the sectarian faultlines fracturing the communities inhabiting this edge. In the early war years locals started out as witnesses to yet overwhelmingly innocent victims of a battle between Palestinian guerrillas and Israel, but they eventually inevitably got involved on all sides. The different communities inhabiting the borderland reacted to the shifting terrains of power in different ways.
increasing adeptness of Hizbullah, the Shi‘i guerrilla organization that eventually took
over the tradition and practice of guerrilla warfare in the South resulted in the sudden
collapse of the occupation over two days in May 2000. Beginning in 2000, Hizbullah
took over the borderland as a brief period of stagnant calm reigned until the 2006 “July
War”. During this latest war Hizbullah – virtuosically some say (Matthews 2006; Brun
2010) – fought the Israeli army to a stalemate and demonstrated to all that by now they
own this conflict and terrain: militarily, politically, historically, socially, existentially,
culturally. The mode of warfare that they have developed in this hilly terrain and excel in
has been dubbed “hybrid” (Hoffman 2007) in military circles for its novel assemblage of
low-tech guerrilla tactics and techniques innovatively combined with classical warfare
maneuvers. In the aftermath of the 2006 war Hizbullah proclaimed a “Divine Victory”

Back on earth, that is the ground, life goes on throughout seasons of war and
throughout seasons of life war goes on; people live on in this place, and cultivate this
earth themselves. It is an unremarkable, peripheral village life premised on the land, in
particular the household-based labor of tobacco farming combined with olive cropping,
goat herding and subsistence agriculture. Strung along a barbed constellation of
difficulties (stemming from war but also the grinding structural violence of poverty and
life in a state margin) and upon a thin and rocky topsoil and uneven terrain, it is tobacco –

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10 This phrase plays on the name of the Secretary General of the Party, Hassan Nasrallah.
Nasrallah translates as “God’s victory”.

11 Often farming income is combined with remittances from family members living in the cities or
abroad.
a global market commodity and Lebanese state monopoly – that thrives and sustains those who live here. To the handful of people still inhabiting the frontline villages of South Lebanon, the accumulated tasks of the tobacco year always pick up and carry the pace (and the economy) of daily living again – as always – as yet another round of awaiting *al harb al atiya*, “the coming war” ticks by, and regional storm clouds grow gloomier and ever more imminently threatening. And so it is whether by intention or as a result of the constant wars that they have had no choice but to live with and through that the inhabitants of the borderland can be thought of as the “war society” *mujtama’ harb* called for in the early days of Shi‘i mobilization. How has war become a part of their lives? How has it tangled with agricultural and other practices? In what ways has it shaped their horizons, livelihoods and space-times? How are life and war on this volatile margin materially and discursively entangled and interwoven? How do people ordinarily inhabit the space-time of war? These are some of the leading questions of this dissertation.

**ii. Landscape**

*Gathering landscape*

Landscape is tension. The concept is productive and precise for this reason and no other. An admirable picture and an uncomfortable bed, something distant and intimate all at once, powerful image and patchy matter … the cogency of landscape lies exactly in the creative tensions it threads between such apparent irreconcilables. Central to this is the tensions of presence/absence, and of performing, creating and perceiving presence. The

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12 This dissertation focuses upon those who still permanently inhabit the towns, villages and hamlets of the borderland although the much bigger story is one of migration that has been addressed by Munzir Jabir (1999) in his encyclopedic tome on the occupied border strip.
nature of presence (as a horizon, a marking, a dwelling, a construction), and the issue of how presence and absence emerge and entwine (produced, embodied, perceived, affected), is the problem of landscape (Wylie 2006)

Figure 9. Denuded tobacco fields on border. Photograph by author.

Once Galilee, now divided, the landscape remains a crumpled, thorny stretch of crimson earth hugging a borderline where the highland plateau defining the southern ridge of Lebanese territory tumbles into the lower rolling hills of the Israeli north. A hardy Mediterranean maquis\textsuperscript{13}, whose ravaged and meager appearance belies a nurturing resilience (and conceals a resistance) (Pearson 2008), this landscape has thrived on/through (natural/ized) rhythms of destruction and regeneration and seasons of battle for more than half a century now. This is janub lubnan, jabal ‘amil and jali\textsuperscript{14}, heartland of tobacco farming and of warfare.

\textsuperscript{13} Maquis (French) or macchia is a Mediterranean shrubland consisting of dense evergreen shrubs such as oak, sage, juniper, olive and myrtle. Maquis is by definition natural but its presence is mostly the result of the destruction of forest by recurrent burning that prevents saplings from maturing. Maquis tends to grow in arid, rocky areas where only drought-resistant plants can survive. The word comes from the Italian macchia. The extremely dense nature of maquis made it ideal cover for bandits and guerrillas, who used it to shelter from the authorities. It is from this meaning that the Second World War French resistance movement the Maquis, derived its name. In Italian darsi alla macchia means “becoming a fugitive”.

\textsuperscript{14} Galilee
Unfurling along a militarized border and mined frontline into rocky elevations crackled with deep and crooked gorges, the borderland is dotted with villages whose homes condense along the glittering slip of main road, perch on hilltops, and crouch in valleys. In winter the hamlets are quiet, all but empty, the earth is deep red and the vegetation tender and pools of rainwater collect in crevasses and hollows and quietly mirror the sky. The cold air is clean and sharp and smells of pine and thyme, earth and wood-smoke. Spring approaches as the sky takes the water back from the earth, yet relents often in passionate, restorative showers. As the world warms, the soil is ploughed in preparation for the planting, exhaling ancient sighs of loamy breath. Flowering wild meadows sweetly offer themselves to all beings. Summer is tobacco. The mean green weed saturates every flat surface from front-yards to cliff-side terraces: its bright electric color pops out of the ochre and brick palette and draws the topography together in a unity of vision, practice and purpose. Villagers are yoked to the time-space of tobacco. Outside every household women and children cluster in pools of shade and rhythmically, endlessly through the three months of high summer, thread the rubbery, black-blooded leaves for drying. Earlier harvests are strung in geometric rows near homes and on rooftops in a spectrum of green to gold and dangle from ceilings in loops like tinsel. The sweet poison of tobacco dust suffuses all interiors. Olive trees sparkle like blessed silver halos around villages, filling the middle ground between built up habitation and the

\[15\] In counterpoint to tobacco the “profane” cash crop, fruit trees like olives are considered a divine blessing. They are referred to as *rizq* – livelihood – which is invariably linked to divine provenance *al rizq min allah*. *Al-razzaq*, the livelihood-giver, is one of God’s ninety-nine names.
bristling border fence. In the *tashareen* the laden branches of the trees are beaten with sticks to release the fruit that rains onto burlap sheets spread on the ground to be pressed for oil or pickled. Tangles of thorns, wild pistachio, thyme, sage and brambles coat the rocky slopes along the borderline, and solitary figures of oak, carob, juniper, hawthorn, fig and laurel trees stalk across the pastureland where flocks of hardy goats are herded from sunrise to sunset. Dovetailing with those pastures and all along the border fence are minefields where the purple grasses grow. Beyond them begin the phalanxes of cypresses along the final border, Israel.

It is a hard task, let me tell you, to get away from the romantic, pastoral, rustic, rural, simple, wholesome, biblical imagery insistently offered up by this bucolic countryside at the very edge of the earth. Yet those dreams have been and are shattered often enough. Not only is this place an oft-evoked and instrumentalized but practically forgotten margin of a troubled and neglectful state where tobacco farmers toil for their miserable upkeep; but also since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, this strip of earth has been a battleground. Since the 1960s, the southern borderland has been used by successive groups of guerrilla fighters as battlefield and stronghold. In “intimate” (Raffles 2002) alliance with the knolls and valleys, natural caves and ancient fortresses and the thick, resilient, ever-regenerating maquis shrubland coating the terrain,

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16 October and November
17 Like the Crusader-built Beaufort Castle and the Crusader ruin at Blat.
guerrillas/fighters have enrolled the earth of South Lebanon in their project and practice: it is their haven and their weapon\textsuperscript{18}.

For a while now the presence and practice of war has been entwined with the thrum of life and the lay of the land, its patterns of vegetation and habitation, in tune and turning with its seasonal rhythms. For today, underneath and above and across and through this pastoral pastiche and seemingly rural idyll several military formations continue to flirt and co-habit: Hizbullah, the Lebanese Army, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and the Israeli Army (there are other networks unknown of spies and smugglers and other murky things). The fighters/villagers tangle with goats and fields and rocky wilderness, villagers and orchards (Erlich 2006). In the earth, especially along the borderline, are planted mines from previous rounds of war and in woodlands and commons nestle unexploded cluster bombs that were rained from the sky by the millions, most recently in 2006 (but on many other occasions too). Subterranean battlefields are an open secret in the current phase of battle or preparation for the ever-expected “next round” (Blanford 2007; AP 2011): nature reserves (\textit{hima}) and maquis scrubland (\textit{wa’r}) outside villages are invisible military spaces, villages are organic barracks and vernacular/elastic defensive fortresses – and their human population an always ready supply system/life-line to “the boys” in the field (Norton 2006). War is thus prosaically

\textsuperscript{18} The intricate entanglement between “civilians” and “combatants” has posed a serious problem to the Israeli Army in its many wars in South Lebanon and has time and again resulted in serious harm to innocent civilians who could not by any stretch of the imagination be actual combatants. The dilemma is ongoing as evidenced in a recent article in \textit{Haaretz}: http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/special-idf-units-preparing-for-mass-lebanon-incursion-if-war-breaks-out-with-hezbollah-1.423178
and seamlessly woven into/part of this fertile countryside, sutured into its natural/ized life forms: a landscape of war (and of living).

So how does one best grasp a naturalized battlefield, a life-world strung between the arts of cultivation and the sciences of devastation (not to mention histories of oppression and politics of apocalypse)? What practical and conceptual tools are suitable to the task? How can one re-present without violence a place constituted by violence?

To explore the ways in which life and war are materially, temporally, existentially entwined in South Lebanon, this study proposes landscape as medium and material for gathering the diverse and often contrapuntal aspects and matters of rural living in a context of ongoing, recurrent conflict. Rural living is premised upon the land, dependent on the seasons and local networks, long traditions of practice and knowledge, conventions, trust, defined by cyclical rhythms, geographic formation. War here is also premised on the physical terrain and upon local networks and is dependent on traditions of practice and knowledge, but characterized by the element of surprise, shock, sudden shifts, ruptures and obstructions. Landscape then is the medium, material and metaphor through which I collect, access and examine the peculiar synergy of life and war here. Embodied and unfolded in dwelling practices, landscape allows me to ethnographically illuminate war’s continuing presence in the warp and weft of living long after conflict has abated. When one contemplates the South Lebanon landscape from the perspective of dwelling, one enters an existential realm akin to an impressionist painting where edges and colors and textures blend and blur, or better, a place (and moral space) akin what Primo Levi has called the “gray zone” where actors and morals, oppressor and oppressed, friends and enemies, humans and non-humans take on ambiguous roles and colors in a
space of intensified power conduits – a charged nervous system, ever so much a place of “epistemic murk” (Taussig 1986). It is hard to distinguish where one order begins and the other ends here in a bucolic battlefield at a nation’s physical and existential edge; and yet despite the entanglement, there is a polarizing undercurrent. Whereas the Israeli military and the fighters on the Lebanese side who these days are Hizbullah (who segue into “villagers” in confusing ways from the perspective of the enemy) enroll the landscape in their war dance, effectively transforming it into a weapon, those whose livelihoods are tied up with farming the land (who are and are not separate from those doing the warring), seek in ways available to them to reclaim the landscape as the site and source of living (Khayyat 2012). The landscape enables, undergirds, structures and engages the performance of life and war. The combinations and collisions (and collusions) of these networks and projects results in interesting configurations: ambiguous yet resistant formations that cannot be easily parsed, judged, attacked – or annihilated. Just like the fire-resistant, nay fire-dependent (Kadmon 1999; Malkinson 2011), maquis that coats the terrain (Tomaselli 1977; Carmel 2003).

But landscape, with its roots in the emergent capitalist order of sixteenth century Europe (Buttimer and Seamon 1980; Hirsch and O’Hanlon 1995; Schama 1995; Cosgrove

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19 The Mediterranean landscape and eco-system is an earthly mirror reflecting and undergirding these flows, rhythms, practices. Shaped by and adapted to pastoral and farming practices and to recurrent conflagration (like summer and autumn brushfires) – even dependent on them – the evergreen sclerophyllous and phrygana ecosystems also known as maquis shrubland can thus be seen as responsive (resistant) to brushfires as to phosphorous and napalm: a life-form premised upon powerful forces of destruction, thriving even. It is no surprise then that the French Resistance during World War II took the name of this hardy scrubland that assisted and enabled their fight against the occupiers Pearson, C. (2008). Scarred Landscapes: War and Nature in Vichy France. London, Palgrave Macmillan.
1998; Matless 1998; Casey 2002; Mitchell 2002; Olwig 2002; 2005; Nancy 2005; Wylie 2006; Wylie 2007) is a heavy term to wield without qualification and hence must be made specific if I am to proceed further. So why have I chosen it to be the medium, metaphor and material of this inquiry?

Between the eye and the land

There is no word for landscape in Arabic20. While in the field, this realization (and reality) lent itself productively to my project, underwriting my intention to open myself fully to populating my object with practical references, performances and enactments. Conceptually the lack of such a term in Arabic (the local language) forced me to self-consciously begin from the “ground” combining experience generated from my immersion in the field with conceptual tools and bric-a-brac collected “alongly” (Ingold 2009) my long academic journey to shape a unique and novel assemblage. In Arabic the two words that come closest to the sense of landscape are on the one hand manzar which means “view” and is derived from the Arabic root n-z-r which relates to seeing21, and on the other hand ard which means “earth” or “land,” the inert physical stuff underfoot (and when grasped in the hand and held to the lips, the heady stuff of nationalist rhetoric). While in the field I found myself time and again trying to explain the “lacking” concept of landscape using turns of phrase (say: “the life of the land,” or “living on the land,” or

20 In a similar but not identical way, one notices in the South that “war” harb is rarely used to refer to a generalized, abstracted condition, but rather is expressed to reference idiosyncratic detailed events and processes, felt impacts on an array of things, as an unfolding. When I would say “the war” the most common response would be: “which war?”

21 Or mashhad which can mean “scene” from sh-h-d the root for to witness (there is also masrah which refers directly to theater and mada which indicates a prospect or extent).
the “relationship of people to the land”) that were on the one hand quite longwinded and by the same token made people look at me funny. And so it was that I soon decided to discard clunky abstractions and to pose my problem in practical terms, which simplified and clarified things (to me in particular) more often than not. It was then that I came to realize that the object of my interest was precisely that which both fell outside – or in between – the two Arabic terms manzar and ard, that which is grasped with the eye and land, that which is underfoot: a practiced place perpetually unfolding and always in the process of “becoming”: a way of being (here), of dwelling, a moment of feeling, a surrounding fog, a familiar horizon, a twisting path.

Land ard is a powerful material, metaphor and medium in South Lebanon both as a source of life (and a place of death), a source of identity and (em)power(ment) and as property, possession. A dominant theme in the history of oppression and dispossession as narrated by “peasants” vis-à-vis the big landowners and the state, land and claims to land occupy a prominent place in local discourse and long histories of power struggles and transformations both between nations and between social classes (Khayat 2004). Land as it transforms into property becomes a basis for new social orders, its possession another way of claiming/making place. During my time in the field in the post-2006 era, the land of the border area was undergoing a cadastral survey for the first time. I observed the strategies employed by villagers in claiming land. War fuelled class struggle over the generations, transformed the consciousness of the peasants of South Lebanon and (in many cases) improved their social and political standing; it also aided their struggles to

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22 This process was begun after the establishment of the British and French protectorates in 1923 but it was suspended after the establishment of the state of Israel as the borderland became a warzone.
(re)claim land from their long-absent former overlords. The actual and metaphorical paths of most discussions I had with people in villages led inevitably into the surrounding countryside, where people, events and places were located within a narrative and a landscape. Certain places in the landscape gather stories, hold them (and generate them!) and it was to those places that I was taken and returned to time and again, physically as well as discursively. I paid close attention to the way the landscape was inhabited, inherited, enacted, claimed, related, resisted, recounted.

Landscape gathers across fractured spaces and multiple times. This dissertation uses landscape to gather together strands of life as lived and felt and narrated. Both a picture and what is in the picture, landscape lends itself to the act of framing but also seduces our senses and pulls us in onto ever unfolding paths. Through landscape we sense our way to a kind of understanding by way of bodily perception; we encounter affective objects, uncanny spaces, haunted places. Through landscape we are allowed to encompass, to embrace; to enact and perform; to grasp somewhat what lies beyond the words of a narrative. Quite apparently, my approach to landscape is phenomenological; it grew out of my very ordinary, vexed, confused, sensorially overwrought, and under-thought experience of this particular place as I dutifully fulfilled the fieldwork component of my anthropological formation and training by accompanying my various interlocutors as they led me into their worlds. In time I began to see what I was being shown. Landscape soon most satisfyingly addressed my dilemmas in finding decent enough ways to grasp and to invoke in writing what it was I had witnessed along with my dweller-companions, what it was I suspected I knew. A phenomenological approach to landscape “in its devotion to concrete description, has the advantage of honoring the actual
experience of those who practice it. In this regard it rejoins not only the anthropologist in the field but the native on the land: both have no choice but to begin with experience” (Casey 1996). In looking for a common ground and a place from which to launch my anthropological journey I found (myself in the midst of) landscape. Landscape thus allowed me to ease sideways into the thorny (maquis, “wartorn”) terrain of my subject matter. In placing myself in a landscape alongside (or stumbling alongside) its habitual dwellers I begin to make out features defined by what appear as patterns, practices, tendencies, rhythms, proclivities, loves, edibles, interdictions, imaginaries, desires, fears. Those make themselves apparent to me in time. They tease out the peculiarity of this place, composing it.

Landscape as dwelling

In an article entitled “The Temporality of the Landscape” (1993) Tim Ingold elaborates what he calls a “dwelling perspective”, an approach to knowledge that attends to the practical activity of the dweller, and through this attention gathers knowledge about the world, knowledge that is more often than not, not only un-expressed but inexpressible. A dwelling perspective uses objects encountered by the dweller – and the observer as dweller-companion – as enchanted entry-points into life-worlds, as it composes a kind of narrative. Landscape, the place of temporal unfolding, embodies its dwellers’ living passage through this world, and silently treasures their unspoken stories. Landscape here is the textured, tangible stuff of life enfolded and unfolding in tangles of practice; it is a metaphor for the tactile, affective, resonant material that the researcher must be fully alive to in the pursuit of knowledge about the world within which she thinks and dwells (and writes). Ingold’s dwelling perspective moves against conceptualizing landscape as
an idealized cultural system enlivening an inert material (“natural”) world that has no agency of its own, upon which we (humans) alone act. Drawing on Heidegger (1977) and Merleau-Ponty (2002) and Bachelard (1994) and others, Ingold argues the world is not for us or by us and we are certainly not at its center; rather we are but a miniscule part of an intricately, infinitely interconnected and always becoming universe. We are formed and always fully immersed within a resonant, rhythmic, tactile, temporal swirl of being, and there is no outside, omniscient, God-like perspective. We, as anthropologists, are urged by Ingold upon the path of dwelling: to do as “native” dwellers do and practice our art by “gathering” stories from the world. In this work I utilize a dwelling perspective to meditate upon and move with/in the landscape alongside its dwellers. I understand landscape in terms of in-habitation, experience and embodied practice, and encounter it as the resonant, layered, always becoming, un/enfolding sediments of being in this world. “For anthropologists to adopt a perspective of this kind means bringing to bear the knowledge born of immediate experience, by privileging the understandings that people derive from their lived, everyday involvements in the world” (Ingold 1993:153). Tactile, material landscape portals thus usher us into a persistently enchanted world that is constituted and composed of myriad rhythms, processes, agents, affects: humans and their discursive webs, structures, life-worlds, but also non-humans and pre-discursive registers of being.

_Landscape as nervous labyrinth_

In this dissertation I want to have my cake and eat it too. At the same time that I want to illuminate in cozy firelight the thatched peasant hut in the black forest, I want to point out that the hut with all its rustic gemütlichkeit exists on a deadly precipice. How to hold on
to both existential dimensions – dwelling and danger – without reducing one to the other?
That is the challenge. Landscape as a tensive concept helps me address this dilemma. But
what kind of landscape am I working with here? How do I take this wholesome, romantic
concept (a characteristic I am not ashamed to admit is part of its charm to me) closer to
the razor’s edge?

I am quite taken with Rose’s landscape as labyrinth (Rose 2002), that he borrows
from Bataille (1985). Writing against closed, structural explanations of phenomena, Rose
proposes a more dynamic inquiry where “the source of landscape’s presence is excess.
The overabundance of life in general” (460). Thus instead of thinking in restrictive,
vertical terms we are urged to think horizontally upon what Deleuze and Guattari (1988)
call a “plane of immanence” or a “plateau” to understand “the economy of practice in
general”. “The general economy includes that which is always emergent within practice.
It accounts for what economies of explanation exclude and acknowledge the excess that
is perpetually present” (Rose 2002). Understood this way and not stifled in explanatory
frameworks, practice is now understood as “a living of life itself” (ibid.). But what of
repeated human attempts to “hold onto a world that always overwhelms their grasp”?
(ibid.). These attempts to lift ourselves out of the infinite blackness crowding the limens
of thrown mortality are what Bataille calls “pyramids”, practices of restriction that
“people attempt to cultivate, nurture, believe in and, in the process, hold onto a world that
does not stop being excessive” (ibid.). The challenge that arises then is to give expression
to the world without enclosing it. “In other words, how to mediate (in words and/or
speech) systems of representation without trusting them. How to acknowledge the
functionality of certain acts without believing that the work of such acts is attributable to
the act itself. How to tour the confines of the restrictive economy (its operations of functionality) without forgetting the entire system’s embeddedness in the intrusion of excess” (462). Rose proposes the concept of “overdetermination” to get us out of this impasse, a recognition that things are determined by a “multiplicity of overlapping contexts” (ibid). Hence “pyramids” are better grasped not as the implementation of discourse or ideology, an enclosed system of explanation but rather “through the active process of being given form … because they are constantly, though not consistently put to task” (462). Rose recognizes these tasks, these practices “through which the world and its objects are continually stretched and pulled in multiple directions at once” (ibid.) as the labyrinth.

Between the pyramid and the plateau there is a labyrinth: a set of incongruent practices invested in the landscape and making it matter. In suggesting that the landscape exists through the labyrinth I am suggesting that the landscape’s being is constituted through the unfolding practices that surround it. Its presence is not engendered by features in the landscape itself but by the various ways it is called forth and put to task. In this sense the only thing that the landscape ever is is the practices that make it relevant. While it appears as a material definable space, its materiality is constituted by the totality of possible performances immanent within it: the constitutive potential of the unfolding labyrinth (462-3, my emphasis).

Encountering the nervous labyrinth as it is called forth and put to task, gesturing at the inhabitability and earthly textures and existential and physical limens of such a condition of life in such a place, in what follows I unfold a landscape of war. W.J.T. Mitchell (2002) has sharply illuminated landscape’s inescapable relationship to power, but landscape can also be grasped as an assemblage of comparatively unremarkable tasks that compose and unfold an everyday inhabited world – the dwelt underbelly of that power. My study plays out along the limens of this encounter – of pyramid with labyrinth, of two enemy nations of state power at loggerheads, at capitalist enslavement and exploitation,
at the present with the past. This dissertation ultimately aims to be an account of the life that thrives along the limen or *barzakh*, “betwixt and between” (Turner 1970) the push and pull of powerful forces. And it is through an understanding of its practiced multiplicity that I have assembled an account of landscape where arts of dwelling entwine with those of warring and continue to unfold, tightly twisted. In my account, acts of dwelling as encounters, performances, narratives are the Ariadne’s threads I grasp to navigate this ordinary space of exception, and in line with Benjamin’s famous diagnosis “The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that ‘the state of emergency’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule,” we edge into landscape as nervous labyrinth. Dwelling practices unfold the South Lebanon borderland (a powerful, violent, physical limen) through seasons of war and of relative calm and it is through these unremarkable tasks that I attempt to bring out the arts of everyday living along a frontline in counterpoint to the heroic edifices constantly offered up to speak in their place.

*Landscape and power*

We have known since Ruskin that the appreciation of the landscape as an aesthetic object cannot be an occasion for complacency or untroubled contemplation; rather it must be the focus of a historical, political and (yes) aesthetic alertness to the violence and evil written on the land, projected there by the gazing eye (Mitchell 2002).

But we must never forget power, especially here in South Lebanon whose inhabitants can be described as peasant-proletarians (and occasional warriors) making a living from the land along a depressed state margin, a fault-line of warfare and long-occupied place.
Landscape is (all about) power. It embodies, channels, enacts, imposes and above all naturalizes power as Don Mitchell (and many others) tells us. It is the ordinary places where everyday life unfolds but it is also where power is generated, rendered visible and where power-relations take shape, play out. Where “reality” is in “effect” produced (Mitchell 1991). What we grasp as landscape already has us in the thrall/grasp of its power, a productive power that composes it as such; a point I will return to and illustrate throughout this dissertation. Arguing with Said (1994; 1994) that landscape and imperialism are indelibly entwined, W.J.T. Mitchell in the introduction to Landscape and Power writes “The aim of this book is to change ‘landscape’ from a noun to a verb. It asks that we think of landscape not as an object to be seen or a text to be read but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed” (1). To think of landscape as a verb renders it as no longer an inert object but rather an activity; this allows the ethnographer access to it as a doing, a performance, an action. Matless (1998) has described landscape as a “shuttle” that weaves together various realms of theory and practice (moral, economic, political, scientific, aesthetic etc.); thus it transcends persisting (epistemic, physical etc.) rifts. This dissertation interrogates landscape as the site where social relations are played out and power is naturalized: it examines the
landscape as the immanent site and material testament of this struggle, which is the struggle of life ongoing. These “cycles of emergence and decay… that are… always connected to violence” (Santner 2006) are congealed – and investigated – as landscape.

On another border of Lebanon, Michael Gilsenan (1996) encountered something unsettlingly close to what I found congealed (or barely concealed) in the landscape of the South four decades later. Through the landscape, and in particular the ruin of a once grand villa at the heart of it, Gilsenan ushers us into a world on the cusp of cumulative and cataclysmic change. Standing up on high on the balcony of a once-grand villa from where a once-powerful family ruled chic and supreme (and roughshod), we are made to gaze from the perspective of power upon dominion. But it is a power that has already waned as Gilsenan arrives at his fieldsite and is taken by village youths into the ruined palace. He writes:

The villa with its presence and absence, its living force and its dead, its fullness and emptiness, preoccupied my thoughts, then as now. It stands at the entry of this book as a mark of the problematic character of power in that universe. Built to demonstrate the domination of a dynasty and its continuity over time, the building seemed to show how unstable and provisional power might be, its reproduction in the next generation brutally cut short. Violence and the narrative of violence were enshrined on the landscape (Gilsenan: 32).

23 The opening chapters of Lords of the Lebanese Marches Michael Gilsenan’s account of another Lebanese borderland (the northern one) and of another time (before the Lebanese civil war) are entitled “Figures in a Landscape: One” and “Figures in a Landscape: Two”.

24 “From his place high on the open balcony of the palace the Minister looks down over the tight cluster of flat-roofed village dwellings that stretch out in a thin ribbon along the hill immediately below him. His gaze follows the ordered lines of the olive trees covering the wide, fertile valley the village […] commands and moves on over the low hills that descend gently on their other side to the coastal plain. The Mediterranean sea, bright in the sunset, stretches beyond to a horizon lost in the summer haze. His eyes move right and north, over the sweeping curve of the broad bay and the widening plain towards the Syrian frontier twenty kilometers distant. The mountains are at his back” (Gilsenan 1996:3).
Like Gilsenan, I encountered a similarly haunted ruin early on in my fieldwork in Taiybe, a village in South Lebanon, the former bastion of the once powerful and fearsome As’ads who ruled the southern marches until the beginning of the war-era. Their power is in shambles today although narratives of their erstwhile might still circulate. I was taken to the ruins of their palace by a self-proclaimed supporter of the family, who nevertheless did not vote for the representatives of that family in the last elections. The old palace sits on a prepossessing hill overlooking in surround the lower lying plains, the village proper and fields of Taiybe that once were the heartland of the As’ads’ former dominion. The palace (and the As’ads) once commanded an all-encompassing perspective on a landscape, a perspective reflecting and producing brute, unchallenged power, a perspective of power evoked in Gilsenan’s opening passage. Today, like the villa at the heart of Gilsenan’s narrative, the palace *qasr* of the once fearsome As’ads stands dead, smashed, graffitied, empty, hollowed, haunted. Echoing with the events of the past and resonating with a physical story of lost power: a vanished world that still has resonant presence.

Gilsenan begins with the totalizing perspective of power\(^{25}\), the powerful subject’s powerful gaze upon the (*his*) landscape. Although my account must be narrated from my perspective, it holds the tension inherent in landscape by striving to tell the story of power’s ordinary immanence. I conceive of my account as both a complement and a sequel to Gilsenan’s. Gilsenan recounts the north and I explore the South, two extremities

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\(^{25}\) Perspective is seen as landscape’s most defining characteristics and stems from its most commonly received definition as a genre of painting beginning in the Europe of the sixteenth century. Landscape paintings are seen as complicit in naturalizing in peaceful pastoral scenery the position of the powerful and propertied.
of a tiny and troubled nation-state. Gilsenan unfolds a world through (male) narratives of violence. Mine seeks to strike through the everyday fields (of power) \(^{26}\) and to tell the story not from on high, but closer to the soil of the ordinary. My account grasps the other end of Gilsenan’s ethnographic thread.

### iii. war

![Figure 11. Post-2006 destruction in Bint Jbeil. Photograph by author](image)

**Thinking war**

In this dissertation I understand war as a dwelt condition that inheres in environments, resides in objects, resonates in affect, molds subjects, place, space, time. By apprehending war in/as lived environment, my approach foregrounds the creative dimensions of war while at the same time recognizing it as a force of destruction (Benjamin and Osborne 1993). The unity yet tension of those forces as contained in being, time and matter defines my landscape project. In a place like South Lebanon

\(^{26}\) The tobacco-workers of South Lebanon are mostly women and children.
where a state/condition of war has existed for generations now and where wartime events (sometimes violent but also otherwise) have often impacted life and land (and where even in times of calm the potentiality/reality of war constantly looms), it is thus only fitting that war is treated as generative as well as constitutive of the ordinary realm. To invite war into the ordinary and to recognize its creative powers, however, requires us to do two things: to disentangle war from its operative category, violence, and furthermore to refine and extend the frame of violence itself to include more than just destruction.

War is many things to many scholars. Some, in line with the most famous war-theorist of them all, explore war as “the pursuit of politics by other means” (Clausewitz 1993); some attend to its ideological dimensions, mythologies (Lan 1985), metaphysics (Anidjar 2003) and memory (Haugbolle), while others explore its materials and meanings (Ferme 2001) or detail its sensuous (Genet 2003), confusing and complex unfolding (Yermiya 1983; Taussig 2003) (See also “My War Diary,” Appendix I) some map its global-economic networks (Nordstrom 2004), explore its spatial dimensions (Hirst 2005; Weizman 2007), elucidate its relationship to the state (Das and Poole 2004) or dwell on its changing nature in a post-Cold War (Kaldor 1999) and post 9/11 (Butler 2009) world; still others theorize it as constitutive of identity (Appadurai 1998) and subjectivity (Feldman 1991; Mbembe 2002). These approaches all capture diverse and significant dimensions of war and not all sit comfortably with one another. There is one thread, however, that runs through most of these accounts – and that is violence. For most students of war it is hard to let go of violence – and for good reason: to any outside observer violence is war’s most defining, dominant or compelling characteristic. Yet I believe, following some recent studies (Richards and Helander 2005; Lubkemann 2008)
and based upon my observations in South Lebanon, in the case of warzones the focus upon violence, although useful in many respects, ultimately – and for the same reasons that it is attractive as a tactile, sensuous object of knowledge – obscures as much as it reveals.

*Addressing the tyranny of violence*

Because of its sensual, tactile, attractive qualities violence in its destructive capacity often takes center stage in many accounts of war. Violence becomes the dominant frame of analysis, coloring all else: agency and action, subjectivity, space and time. War and violence appear to be so intertwined that Nordstrom, an ethnographer of the Mozambican warscape, argues that “it is in the act of violence that […] that the definition of war is to be found (Nordstrom 1997); violence has – to some – come to saturate war’s very definition, to exhaust its essence. In such views the very presence of violence entails a qualitative transformation, a dismembering or an “unmaking” of the world. As Nordstrom writes in her account of the Mozambican civil war: “For the vast majority of Mozambicans, war is about existing in a world suddenly divested of lights. It is about a type of violence that spills out across the country and into the daily lives of people to undermine the world as they know it. A violence that, in severing people from their traditions and their futures, severs them from their lives. It hits at the heart of perception and existence” (132). Violence, as we can see, is the central, operative defining category in Nordstrom’s (and others’) definition of war.

Lubkemann counters (in particular reference to Nordstrom, whom he takes to task) that such a violence-centered perspective leaves us with a picture of war that is
dominated, driven, saturated with “violent things”. In *Culture in Chaos: an anthropology of the social condition in war* Lubkemann writes, “Processes (such as war) that are so implicitly and interreferentially intertwined with violence tend to be discursively constituted as analytical objects of a particular sort. Violence is not only highlighted as their central feature, but the analytical framing itself is more often than not imperceptibly altered so that the object considered seems to coincide only with that part of itself that is violent” (10). Furthermore the violence-riveted analytical gaze on war not only highlights “the most acute, outrageous manifestations of violence” (10) but also illuminates “only certain capacities of violence, most notably its capacity to unmake and undo – to hyperactively disorder, disorganize and destabilize – with little if any reference to other possible effects” (Lubkemann: 11). But what about the other myriad processes that no doubt continue to unfold throughout wartime? In such framings, they are subsumed, effaced, overwritten by the fixation upon violence that organizes all else around it, an attention that flattens and reduces unfolding life worlds in all their complexity, color and confusion to undifferentiated violence-driven monocultures that Nordstrom ropes together into “warzone cultures” (1997). Not only is the contingent emergence and unfolding of war as a historicized, contextualized process and occurrence precluded in such a view but also, in reducing war to its violent essence, other processes and happenings that possibly and commonly and ordinarily take place in violent “warzone cultures” are not given any space or place to unfold, any air to breathe.

In his approach, which informs mine, Lubkemann elaborates a different perspective. He argues that the complex waging of life in war is obscured by a primary focus on violence and its effects. This is not to say that inhabitants of war do not
experience recurrent or extreme forms of violence, but rather, for the most part, inhabiting war – like “peace”27 – is about the challenge of pursuing everyday concerns and life projects within a certain social context that draws its specificity from the fact that is often violently disrupted. Lubkemann, who worked in the same “warscape” as Nordstrom, takes issue with her equating war with violence and her description of the warscape as “the world unmade”. He suggests instead an approach that orients us away from a “violent ordering of things” that would allow us to “recapture the full drama of […] war-time existence” (13). Instead of “focusing on the violent contest for political power” or “framing war as a violent condition” Lubkemann finds it more fruitful to think in terms of continuity rather than ruptures and hence follows the unbroken threads of peoples’ lives to examine war as a “social condition” (14). The object of his study then becomes “everyday social life and the process of its realization” (ibid.). Lubkemann’s perspective opens up a richer, wider, more dynamic life-world in war than one in which all we see is cracked by the “destructive” handiwork of violence. For example when violence (understood as destruction) is the prime driver of war, it comes to define warscape agency and thus all we see in terms of actors on the war-stage are either perpetrators of violence or victims of violence (and the observer/analyst inevitably takes on the powerful role of doling out moral roles for these players with sympathy falling almost always upon the “victims”). Yet when things other than violent ones are considered, then new forms of agency emerge and a more historicized, nuanced, and ordinary landscape (warscape) comes into view.

27 As Aretxaga has argued, “Peace and war are not so much two opposed states of being as they are multi-faceted, ambiguous, mutually imbricated areas of struggle” (quoted in Richards 1997: 4)
For war may bring death and destruction but it also by the same token brings creativity and change. In this vein Lubkemmann makes the important point that war, far from being a singular source of calamity, can in many cases actually be the path to empowerment of formerly disenfranchised groups or persons. This was something often pointed out to me by inhabitants of the South Lebanon warzone who perceive themselves, and accurately so, as the “wretched” of the Lebanese state. War economy brings with it money and often power, recognition, attention, opportunity. Another point that Lubkemmann makes that I find insightful especially with regards the fact that South Lebanon is an impoverished margin of an already small, weak and largely dysfunctional nation-state, is that conflating violence with acute violence over-writes an analytical grasp of its more mundane and structural dimensions. Hence Lubkemmann prefers to understand war as a “deepening of structural violence” (37) rather than an explosion of acute violence. As Kleinman (2000) has argued, structural violence is often overlooked because of its mundane, non-dramatic and “non-violent” qualities. The ordinary face of violence is even harder to grasp in a warzone where acute violence offers itself up in many easy-to-see manifestations and formats to the interested observer. But according to Lubkemmann (and this accords with my observations in South Lebanon) it is precisely these ordinary/structural forms of violence that ultimately prove the most lethal in a war situation. “The most pervasive and perverse effects of acute violence were not necessarily realized in the moment of their performance but through their indirect effects on sociality and subsistence” (Lubkemmann 2008). To extend this perspective a little we can now see violence (both acute and structural) as generative of lifeworlds insofar as people act, re-

Lubkemmann focuses on migration as a strategy and he sets out to reclaim agency for such warzone categories like “refugee” that have been traditionally perceived as passive victims buffeted by the violent waves of war.
act, accommodate, adapt, live. Hence one could consider these violences as also productive and generative instead of single-mindedly destructive.

In his re-framing of war as more than just a destructive and savage condition and to claim it as particular to and formative of a certain African subjectivity, Mbembe has suggested “Getting beyond a consideration of its empirical aspects […] the state of war … should … be conceived of as a general cultural experience that shapes identities, just as the family, the school, and other social institutions do” (Mbembe 2002). Such an approach apprehends war as more than violent events and their immediate effects and (where applicable) as a long-term inhabitable and inhabited condition. In such a view we get away from purely destructive formats and more into inclusive and generative frameworks. We also think more in terms of continuities rather than ruptures (Richards and Helander 2005). And that is a good thing, for life in war is not only, or even primarily about violence. Some things – life say and its various ongoing projects – remain (adamantly, steadfastly, heroically or, most likely, hayk “just so”) ongoing in war: “non-violent” things continue overwhelmingly to concern those inhabiting a place of war; the challenge becomes how to maintain the relative success of these projects (or alter, extend them) within a war-setting. Thus what needs to be investigated is how the changes and events that relate to war (including violence) affect, effect, entwine with, or reconfigure/rearrange these processes; but also, and crucially, how these key life-giving projects and processes impact and configure the playing out of “war”. So if we see violent events as an aspect of a condition of war we can see how along with other aspects it blends into as well as re-constitutes the “everyday” social field, but is also structured
and ordered by this everyday. People have come to inhabit this condition\textsuperscript{29}. War then as a category gets opened up to include much more than violence; it is opened up to embrace life in its myriad phenomena and dimensions. Thus we begin to comprehend war as a condition (for life), a life-world, a deeply historical social formation, continuously, creatively/destructively unfolding.

In thinking war, violence should be put in its place – which is not to say that it should be let go of. For those who use it to think (Feldman 1991; Nordstrom and Robben 1995; Kleinman, Das et al. 1997; Appadurai 1998; Das 2000; Ferme 2001; Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004; Das 2007), violence can perform key conceptual services by embodying the visceral link between entwined yet qualitatively distinct registers of thought and of being, illuminating forms of power immanent in or concealed within subjects, objects and narratives, and thus productively, creatively reorienting the analytical gaze\textsuperscript{30}.

\textit{Writing (a landscape of) war}

Encountering violence, its rearrangement of the world, its traumatic and often lethal impact on mortal lives, is a shock to the senses. Yet this shock says more about the researcher’s expectations and habituated, normalized sensibilities than it does about those

\textsuperscript{29} If we let go of violence as a central category in the definition of war what is it then that comes to differentiate a condition of “peace” from that of “war”? Reiterating the premise that these “conditions” are not separate but rather exist along a spectrum of intensity, I would venture that existence closer to the “war” pole of the spectrum is necessarily a more creative one in the sense that there is less space for complacent normativity to thrive…

\textsuperscript{30} It is the creative, generative, sensual, tactile, mobile, excessive qualities of violence that Taussig contends with in \textit{Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man} and elsewhere. I am indebted to Taussig’s writings on violence for this perspective.
who experience and inhabit these cycles and waves of violence, especially over protracted periods. For those who inhabit these cycles, violence presents itself differently. Of course this is not to say that violence is not terrible, or to underplay its often deadly reality, but rather it is to say that the intellectual challenge is to conceptually reconcile it with the cohesive/continuous, creative/generative, organic, dimensions of being. For those who inhabit violent landscapes, violence is a prosaic dimension among others – and it may also, like those other resources, processes and phenomena sometimes have existential relevance.

The jarring sense of sensual and existential shock one experiences when faced with the seemingly extraordinary worldly work of violence as destruction and yet the persistent intuition that it (violence) must be brought back into the ordinary somehow, reinserted, reclaimed, is a difficult task. Daniel asks in *Charred Lullabies* “How to give an account of these shocking events without giving in to a desire to shock?” (3); “How does an anthropologist write an ethnography […] or anthropology of violence without its becoming a pornography of violence?” (4). Daniel’s book takes the form of fragmented chapters strung together as discontinuous recoveries of meaning, that powerfully and carefully document and evoke the textures continuous time-spaces of Tamil workers in the tea plantations of Sri Lanka and others in and through eruptions of violence through their words, work, poetry, narratives; here violence takes its prosaic yet vital place in a dense weave of life and words.

Das (2007) also voices the dilemmas that grip scholars of war and violence in her important book *Life and Words: violence and the descent into the ordinary.*
In contemplating [...] much recent work on violence, I am struck by the sense voiced by many scholars that, faced with violence, we reach some kind of limit in relation to the capacity to represent. Often this argument is staged through the trope of “horror.” We are then invited to consider how human beings could have been capable of such horrific acts on such large scales, as in Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia. [...] It appears to me that we render such acts as shocking and unimaginable only when we have a given picture of how the human subject is to be constructed. Thus these descriptions serve to reaffirm the boundaries between civilized and savage, while allowing our picture of the human subject to remain intact (79).

In my work I took an early lead and inspiration from Das’ poignant and important leading question “What is it to pick up the pieces and to live in this very place of devastation?” (6). Her account concerns itself with the ways in which violence as event – in this case the widespread communal violence that unfolded in the wake of the Partition of India in 1947 and the Delhi massacre of Sikhs in the wake of Indira Gandhi’s assassination in 1984 “attaches itself with its tentacles into everyday life and folds itself into the recesses of the ordinary” (1). Das makes sense of her long-term and intimate encounters with the subjects of these violent events by drawing on Wittgenstein’s understanding of language, that is that rather than being containers of meaning, words enact the world in their telling.

Although my question is somewhat the same as hers, the terrain of my research, my subjects and objects are quite different, but what I take from Das that is crucial to my account is her argument that

in the lives of communities, the manner in which [...] violence [...] was folded was shown (sometimes with words) rather than narrated. Words were spoken but they worked like gestures to show this violence – to draw boundaries between what could be proclaimed as a betrayal, however delicately, and what could only be molded into a silence. The[ir] memories [...] were then not in the nature of something gone underground, repressed, hidden away that would have to be excavated. In a way these memories were very much on the surface (10-11).

The “surface” that I work with here is what I am calling “landscape”. The funereal sense of mourning (in the sense of circling around an unresolvable trauma) that suffuses Das’
text is absent in mine and yet we approach our material and subjects with a similar
inguition. She describes the post-massacre scenery in Delhi where she came face to face
with the remnants of violence: “In freezing these moments of the funereal landscape, I
want to convey the idea of how objects and gestures were stranded, strewn about, torn.
The brutal and telescoped violence had blasted out these spaces from their usual
normality (which was itself marked by an everyday violence, but which hardly ever made
it to the newspapers) and brought them to public attention” (13). Despite the tensed core
of trauma that reverberates throughout her account, she still effectively shows us the
ordinary (after)life of those extra-ordinary events through tracing the “tentacles”
connecting these violent events to the ordinary lives of those touched (marred) by them.
Her ethnography gracefully and deftly shows the ways in which these “dead” past violent
events continue to reside among the living. Thus in her account violence as destructive
event is extended/retheorized as continuously constitutive of the subject. It is in this
generative sense that I conceive of violence in my account.

And so, to those of us who (must) write, Daniel’s questions above remain
pertinent. All of us who truck with violence must guard against becoming overwhelmed
by its sensual, riveting qualities and the ways in which it comes to dominate any account
it inhabits. Thus we must remain attentive to its “tentacles” in the ordinary, the everyday.

My research was conducted in the wake of a violent firestorm – the 2006 war on
Lebanon where Israel unleashed the might of its arsenal to destroy and devastate
“Hizbullah,” their kith and kin, their fields and valleys, their homes in the Lebanese
South and in the capital and elsewhere and through this annihilating force, to force the
Lebanese state to do something about Hizbullah (as if they could). In the wake of this war
(many dead, much destroyed, cluster bombs everywhere) I went deep into the field, following the path of destruction and surveyed a smashed moonscape where villages once were, crossing makeshift bridges and gingerly navigating crackled and cratered roads to get there. In villages with fresh graves, hidden explosives and recent violent events, experiences, encounters I could have focused my energies on gathering stories of death and devastation and made easy use of frames like trauma or violence as many a woman was standing before her smashed home just waiting to share her terrible story. But something held me back. Something said to me that what I was beholding should not be grasped as one-off, unique event but rather approached as condition, or even better, as a way of life or best, as landscape (I am not trying to justify this assault by normalizing it, but trying to point to the way it does not merely disrupt but rather folds into the ready grammar of a certain kind of being that has taken shape over long time in these war-seasoned parts). So despite an early attraction to violent tropes and themes, in the wake of this war I firmly felt that what I was beholding was better comprehended outside of these frames, outside of words, even outside of selves. Like Das I am interested in showing as much as telling. In *Life and Words* memories of violence are fenced in on the surface of language where they hide and are revealed in the broad light of speech as act. It is Das’ task to recognize these word-gestures instead of just plumbing their communicated meaning – to grasp what her subjects were *showing* by telling (or not-telling) their stories. I take my cues from Das (as well as many of those mentioned above) and turn toward life-as-action to take seriously the tasks, objects, human and non-human beings composing a time-space (landscape) of war. Together, it is in their configuration,
temporalities, forms, substances, that “war” is shown or brought to life – outside of violence and even in/across times of calm.

Here in South Lebanon, along this rural periphery where we will dwell awhile, war is as generative and structuring a phenomenon as it is destructive – a force whose powers and materials and beings have constituted ways of living and of making a living, ways of embodying time, moving through space, making place and other creative existential modalities configuring in-habitation along this sliver of meager earth. Likewise, dwellers of this earth have found ways of domesticating war and manage to continue to inhabit and to (re)create their life-worlds across and through seasons of destruction. War here merges with life and is naturalized; it is also creative of subjectivity, space and time, embroidered into the tangible and intangible fabric/textures of oft-resurrected villages, embodied in the flora and fauna of cultivated fields and wild pastures, embedded in the shapes and stories of the land. Tracking the unfolding of the ordinary in a/the place of violence, moving through home, village and countryside with their dwellers, my study displaces violence as the bloody centerpiece of war, and the everyday textures of life in a warscape – as a place where people actively go about the business of living across times of violence but also calm – comes into view. My dissertation illustrates how life is waged (within a space of war) and how war is lived (in a place of life). Grasping the ordinary dimension of war – the object of my research – the way it inheres in subjects, objects, practices and places, I believe, brings us closer to an understanding of war as creative of lifeworlds and not necessarily the singular path to their annihilation.

iv. Dissertation Overview
What follows then is an anthropological account of life and war in a rural margin. It aims to provide a textured and contextualized account of rural life on a border and battlefront, to suggest the everyday as an entry-point into the life-world of war and to argue for an understanding of war as creative of lifeworlds. It pulls those tensive strands together through the medium and matter of landscape. The dissertation is structured as follows.

The following chapter describes the dimensions of the field that I worked in and details the difficulties I encountered in entering it and the ways I managed to turn apparent obstacles into advantages and how this led to the “landscape” form this study ultimately took. It details the paths into knowledge that presented themselves to me, as well as the strategies, methods and sources I employed, cajoled and investigated in this thorny quest.

In chapter three I unfold a history and genealogy of the border area including the creation of the border between Lebanon and Palestine in the Mandate period, the beginning of warfare after the creation of Israel in 1948 and the resulting social transformations that ensued. This chapter focuses on dominant tropes in local historical narratives as well as time frames: oppression of the peasants by the Ottomans and their local henchmen the tax-farmers and later landowners; the modernization of land ownership and the dispossession of peasantry of their land; the creation of the Lebanese state and the border; the advent of the French, the creation of the “enemy” state of Israel, the beginning and continuation of war(s).

Chapter four explores the entanglements that mesh and give shape to this “battlefield pastoral”. Military analysts have called the kind of warfare that Hizbullah
excels in “hybrid” for the way in which it combines both classical and guerrilla warfare forms. I would like to suggest that the “hybrid” aspect of this kind of warfare is more than simply an innovative combination of military methods. It is something more (or better, less): it is about gathering humans and non-humans into a living network/field of battle through a practiced nexus of dwelling. Interlinked local and global networks of capital and kinship configured and cross-cut by forces of dependence/alliance and enmity converge on this hilly geography and depressed periphery and come into view as forms of life whereby the military and the mundane are deeply and tightly interwoven, and possibly indistinguishable. Thus I argue they should probably not be prized apart by theoretical inquiry, which is possibly in this case, once again, an act of violence – if epistemic this time. I then proceed along this track by exploring the entanglement of life and war through the agricultural taskscapes that are the main source of subsistence and livelihood along the southern borderland, tobacco farming and the keeping of livestock, namely goats. Walking the warscape with goatherds we cannot but stumble across mines and cluster bombs, the deadly remnants of wars seeded across the pastureland of the South. I show how such warscapes are navigated and domesticated through a several ethnographic encounters. Ultimately though, goat herding is a dangerous and often deadly art in a borderland and front; many are giving it up to lean ever more heavily on the guaranteed income of tobacco.

Tobacco farming is the most widespread and long-standing institution and practice across the southern borderland outside of war. I trace and link the various levels of the industry by ethnographically exploring the crop in its various manifestations and guises, as a task that underpins and structures life in South Lebanon and as a global
market commodity. Who are the tobacco farmers of South Lebanon today? Peasants or proletarians or both? Following Victoria Bernal’s observations about the hybrid nature of peasant labor in the Sudan I argue that its enduring success, ongoing proliferation and ubiquity indicates its adaptability to the structural impositions of living in a war-ridden, neglected, exploited and depressed periphery. Hence tobacco is interesting to investigate: it materially and discursively embodies both the convergence of life and war and a capitalist market economy on a rural periphery along a state margin and warfront.

I begin chapter five by exploring the recent foray of Hizbullah into cultural landscape production with a visit to Mleeta, their newly inaugurated and hugely successful “Resistance Tourist Landmark” in the hills above Saida. The landmark is a lavishly and cleverly landscaped “natural museum” (their words) built into the soaring hilltops where Hizbullah fought the Israeli occupation until 2000. The landmark embodies a new departure, theme and format in the prolific repertoire of Hizbullahi cultural production and provides a lucid, salient, poignant – and loaded – counterpoint into the more organic landscape forms I examine in this dissertation. I suggest that this recent emergence of landscape in the cultural discourse of Hizbullah re-packages and mobilizes powerful yet untamed experiences of inhabiting the rural South. Hizbullah is drawing on – and thus also reformulating, overwriting – untapped yet deep and powerful reservoirs, increasingly silent repositories, of communal rural traditions and practices of rural dwellers who have long encountered a landscape imbued with good spirits and moral forces, a landscape pregnant with life.

Chapter six enters the epistemic murkiness of a borderland. By borderland I mean both the physical border that structures, defines, limits and overpowers Lebanon’s
southern marches but I also mean the murkiness of the moral and political, affective and existential orders that keep this place awash with ambiguity, silence, stories, mystery, love and pain. This chapter is presented in ethnographic fragments to impart the tactile sense of the nature of the socio-political in a landscape that is physically, emotionally, narratively continuous and yet also, always violently fragmented, fractured.

The dissertation ends with a reprise that brings us back full circle into landscape. This is not the carefully designed landscape of cultural production, but the landscape of everyday life and ordinary living. It takes us on an impromptu village tour narrated by a “village son” ibn al balad and presents in “real-time” the way the landscape spontaneously unfolds and is related (to), narrated, the way it is loved and resented, eaten, the way it is stumbled upon, the way it is lived.

Figure 12. Ribbon of road in South Lebanon. Photo by author.

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31 This is inspired by the opening chapter of Stefania Pandolfo’s magical book Impasse of the Angels.
II. Research at the Edge of the Earth

But what sort of sense is constitutive of this everydayness? Surely this sense includes much that is not sense so much as sensuousness, an embodied and somewhat automatic “knowledge” that functions like peripheral vision, not studied contemplation, a knowledge that is imageric and sensate rather than ideational; as such it not only challenges all critical practice, across the board, of academic disciplines but is a knowledge that lies as much in the objects and spaces of observation as in the body and the mind of the observer. What’s more, this sense has an activist, constructivist bent; not so much contemplative as it is caught in the media res working on, making anew, amalgamating, acting and reacting. We are thus mindful of Nietzsche’s notion of the senses as bound to their object as much as their organs of reception, a fluid bond to be sure in which, as he says, “seeing becomes seeing something.” For many of us, I submit, this puts the study of ideology, discourse, and popular culture in a somewhat new light. Indeed the notion of “studying,” innocent in its unwinking ocularity, may itself be in for some rough handling too (Taussig 1992).

Fieldwork

My fieldwork commenced in the summer of 2007, a little under a year after the devastating July War of 2006, as (re)construction, fuelled and funded by a flood of international aid, boomed. Fieldwork continued for two years until the summer of 2009 with a brief return visit in the summer of 2010. This was a time of dusty and frantic (re)building in the South, where many villages were literally bursting forth from the rubble. This was also a time of political upheaval in Lebanon where the fallout of the February 2005 assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and the subsequent withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon after decades of presence and harsh rule, merged with the repercussions of the 2006 war and resulted in an acutely volatile environment that erupted into the “mini civil war” of May 2008, as well as other kinds of explosions and eruptions. The pressing issues, alive since the brittle closure of the civil war, even now continue to gurgle menacingly and at present are being taken to yet another level of
volatility and potential violence in the context of the turmoil in Syria unfolding before our very eyes.

In the context of the 2006 war’s aftermath, I went deep into the country away from the city to the margins (Das and Poole 2004) of the nation-state to look for answers to my questions about life and war. Though the effects of this war were felt in the metropole as well as in the margins and its reverberations continued in Beirut (and elsewhere) in eruptions of violence throughout the entire period of study, I turned my back on ongoing orchestrations of political contests and rivalries, on organized, “model”, utopian (violent, centrally designed and implemented) reconstructions as much in the Beirut Central District Solidere as in the southern suburbs al dahiyeh (Sawalha ; Makdisi 1997; Fawaz 2009 ), and headed to the physical and existential edges of the nation-space, perhaps taking cues from, among others, Bataille who wrote “life must be examined in its empty and peripheral forms rather than in the monuments and the monumental vistas that are at its center” (1985). So back-tracing the path of the Benjaminian war-storm I traveled deep into the “epistemic murk” (Taussig 1986) of a “gray zone” (Levi 1988): the well-seasoned battleground of South Lebanon.

I traveled into the homeland of war where a repeating historical cycle of cultivation, devastation, ruination, regeneration had composed a curious countryside collage where unevenly inhabited almost rudimentary villages or remains of villages subsist side by side with intact sections of the same villages, or entirely new villages actively sprouting from the rubble or upon abandoned agricultural land: ruined/brave new worlds along the very edge of the earth. It was my hope that at the edge I could grasp what was obscured at the center: that in the creative destruction of the violence just
revisited somethings could be discerned that would lend themselves to a less scripted account of such happenings. That was my hope. But also my problem.

![Image](image-url)

Figure 13. UN APC drives past tractor laden with hay in South Lebanon. Photo by author.

Awareness of the kind of terrain I had to trespass in study and observation were vital in shaping the object of inquiry, its medium and methods. Fieldwork focused on a strip of the border encompassing several neighboring so-called “frontline villages” dovetailing with minefields and the highly militarized border fence. An arid highland of rolling scrub-covered hills overlooking the lower elevations of Israeli Galilee, these villages constitute the heartland of tobacco farming and asymmetrical warfare.

The southern borderland is a semi-closed military zone under the control and surveillance of several militaries including the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), Hizbullah, the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) to name the known ones. Only Lebanese nationals are allowed in and out of this area without a military pass
and everyone is considered suspicious. These sensitivities are not unfounded: during my
time in the field several spy networks were uncovered. In time and with some strategic
effort and growing familiarity, I managed to achieve relatively unhindered freedom of
movement and inquiry around the villages I researched in. I pursued several simultaneous
research trajectories that fleshed out the dimensions of the everyday along a fault-line of
war in a rural margin.

*Context: shifting sands*

I cannot underline enough that the South Lebanon border-strip where I conducted
fieldwork is (*also*) an active warzone/warfront/battlefield watched over, fought over, and
jealously cared for by several armed networks. This reality, placed within the constantly
bubbling Lebanese socio-political cauldron, spiced with ongoing brinkmanship and
peppered with as of yet still rhetorical shows of force, made the already confounding
work of fieldwork just that much more delicate, dangerous and difficult to navigate. Yet
being Lebanese, I do not find such contexts insurmountable, merely existential, and thus
to me, the delicate task of researching along an active frontline where violence is not
currently acute had much to do with sensing sensitivities and allaying suspicions,
treading a treacherous path of least resistance and aggression and always nurturing a
sense of personal integrity in the face of constant challenges and questionings.

One day I was driving with my sister and we were heading to R., the village that
came to be a home base of sorts in the wild wild South. I would often take companions
along in my lonely, poetic, and sometimes possibly madcap journeys and adventures in
the Southern marches. Today we took the coastal road south of Sur\textsuperscript{32} and drove along the coast until we hit the end of the land in Naqura where the UNIFIL headquarters have taken over, turning inland away from the infinite sea and eastward to trace the borderline (a coastline, but of a different sort) (Wylie 2006). Ever since my first moments of encounter with this route more than ten years ago, I have never ceased to be amazed and inspired and weirded-out all at once as I dip and rise through the (un)hallowed hills of northern Galilee and trace the southern extremity of Lebanon that feels like the very edge of the earth, so pretty and precipitous, so idyllic and wholesome, so lonely and cracked and sinister all at once.

We reach Naqura, a seedy town on the last rocky outcrop of the Lebanese coast overtaken with UNIFIL-mania; once a tiny fishing village it is now a booming center entirely overtaken by the tacky shops and restaurants emitting false cheer and cheesy and misspelled expressions of welcome in “English” catering to an international mix of UNIFIL personnel, who work in complexes hermetically sealed behind tall fortified walls. We climb a hill sprinkled with little homes entangled in nests of grapevines, roses and jasmine. As we crest the hill, a sea of scrubland heaves to our right and then is suddenly and inevitably interrupted by the border, indicated by aerials stabbing at the sky. Israel: The End. We turn northeast and pass a UNIFIL position hunkering down into the desert-colored bedrock and leave it behind with the borderline cutting through the geography to our right, and follow the asphalt, its rubbery smell mixing in with whiffs of thyme, to a tiny village named Alma. It is a Christian village and although it is partly abandoned – falling-down stone houses and overgrown gardens tell that story – it still

\textsuperscript{32} Tyr
retains some present life because many of its current inhabitants work for UNIFIL. Thus the roads are paved and the inhabited houses are pretty, painted and well tended. After a brief visit to the municipality, where I made a few inquiries, we stopped to take a break at a roadside mini-market with a few plastic chairs scattered in a front garden under some trees. We bought some water from a woman and sat in the warm embrace of the morning sun. Soon the market’s owner joined us by sitting at a nearby table, and eyeing us, he asked us who we were, where we were from and what we were doing here. We told him our names, said we lived in Beirut and I told him I was doing research. He had an aggressive demeanor and a cynical look on his bearded, blunt-featured face. He was smiling but it was an unfriendly smile and his eyes were glinting, calculating and hard.

He said: “Well if you want to know anything about this place let me tell you something about it: half of this village is over there in the ‘dear sister,’” pointing with his nose behind our shoulders in the direction of Israel. He was referring to members of the South Lebanon Army (SLA), Israel’s auxiliary militia during the occupation, who were abandoned by Israel on the eve of their withdrawal from South Lebanon in May 2000, some of whom managed in their desperation to escape over the border in a headlong, haphazard rush in the wake of the sudden collapse of the occupation order. When the Liberation-frenzy subsided, and realizing that they would not be vengefully slaughtered, many eventually returned, but a handful – those with good reason to – remain there to this day bundled into camps in northern Israel, finding no way back home outside of an official pardon or political settlement after their long-term but ultimately short-sighted complicity with a ruthless enemy and, in some cases, unforgettable past acts of brutality.
The man continued: “Every time there are elections some politician comes and says that he will bring them back, but no one does and in the meantime they are stuck there. A girl who was ten when she went there with her family is now twenty years old. Who is she going to marry? It will have to be either a Palestinian or an Israeli!” [subtext: both choices are horrible]. He asked us again what we were doing here and I repeated that I was doing research and elaborated a little on my theme of everyday living in a warzone indicating my interest in agricultural practices to lend my research a hint of tangibility. I added that we found the village charming and that we were going to take a walk around.

“You can’t,” he said abruptly. “You know, our villages are closed to outsiders and people aren’t accustomed to seeing people, strangers, walking around. People will stop you and ask you what you are doing. This area is no place for tourism.”

His message was clear – he was pushing us into the category of outsiders, “strangers” and closing the door of friendliness before our very noses. I, of course, chose to ignore this, text and subtext and said “But you must be accustomed to strangers here.” I was referring to the UNIFIL, the “interim” multi-national peacekeeping force that has been patrolling the borderland since 1978. I don’t know if he deliberately misunderstood me but he got decidedly agitated and cutting me off said: “Do you think that we haven’t seen anything? Do you think we are living in jungles here and haven’t seen anything of the world? What do you take us for, savages?! We have been to Israel and have seen civilization!” That was an open taunt. Speaking baldly of any contact with Israel is still very much taboo, but he apparently felt secure enough in his own garden sitting with two “strange” women to test the limits of discourse and explore our reactions. He was unable to figure out our sectarian identity from our already disclosed names and place of origin,
the usual “casual” way of knowing but he simply had to know, since that is usually all
that is needed to uncover much about a fellow Lebanese citizen, in particular affiliation in
the fractured political landscape. He was trying to provoke a reaction to figure out who he
was talking to.

I did not bat an eyelid. I did not faint from shock neither did I respond by
throwing my lot in with him, but repeated levelly and with a pacific smile that that was
obviously not what I meant and that what I had intended to say was what with all those
UNIFIL soldiers about, inhabitants of the former occupation zone must be used to
“strangers” (foreigners, outsiders) wandering about their villages. He didn’t back down
but instead pursued his track: “Well the UNIFIL are strangers but they are like us,
Christians as you know, and if you don’t mind me saying, this is a Christian village. You
are obviously Lebanese and we aren’t accustomed to Lebanese strangers wandering
about. You know you might see a woman dressed as you are walking down the street and
further down the road she will go into a shop and come out veiled. [Subtext: you may be
Muslim for all I know]. You never know who people really are.” He added: “I’m not
from here. I moved here fifteen years ago from the north during the days of Aoun and
Geagea [the last major conflict of the civil war in 1989-1990]. There was a nun here who
is related to me and so I came. I was an outsider but now I am considered a fellow
villager, especially since I stayed here during the [2006] war making bread for people.
Now I have a badge of honor and I am considered one of them. I also plant tomatoes and
cucumbers in my garden, want to watch me?” he sneered.

My sister and I took our leave without satisfying his curiosity as to our (“true”)
identity. We did not heed his advice or succumb to his unwelcoming commentary and
still went for a wander through the village, peering into ruined stone houses and reading the writing on the wall: “Bye bye hara” (old neighborhood). As we wandered down a narrow road crowded on either side by thick, towering cacti bearing subbeir prickly orange fruit and crowned with pink flowers, a woman came out of her home and offered us freshly picked baby strawberries from her garden, cradled in her palms. She smiled at us and did not appear in any way ruffled by our “strange” appearance on her doorstep. Behind her sweet little home with a vegetable patch beside it from where the strawberries came, began the land of Israel\(^{33}\). The road ended in a clump of shady pines sheltering a Lebanese Army roadblock. Impasse.

Those two encounters in one tiny hamlet indicate aspects of the social and physical terrain I would constantly navigate in the field. Both encounters reflect the conditions and realities defining the borderland: suspicion and bitterness and anger, spontaneous generosity and unquestioning, equanimous welcome. Later that day as we drove back toward the coast, we heard on the radio that they had caught a guy in Alma who was suspected of spying for Israel\(^{34}\). The ongoing war is never far in space or time.

\(^{33}\) This village has major land disputes with Israel. The villagers claim that Israel has swallowed up acres of their legally owned land.

\(^{34}\) This was a period where many spy networks were being uncovered and like all things in Lebanon such ‘discoveries’ had a political motive and played into the political game at the center. As usual, those at the margins and their lives were harvested for whatever use they could be put to but otherwise left to wither on the stalk or dry out in the field: the story of the margins in Lebanon is a story of political exploitation and actual neglect (see Gilsenan). The overemphasis on the political center is part of what I am trying to address and redress in this dissertation where I would like to turn my full attention to the neglected life in these marginal spaces. South Lebanon, unlike other marginal spaces, embodies an even more powerful discrepancy between political use and actual disregard. As I will discuss later, it is simultaneously both a powerful symbol of national mobilization and pride and a site of profound state neglect.
It is up to those inhabiting the here and now to find a way/a place to be within the prickly givens.

Navigating minefields

It is not easy doing research at “home” (Altorki and El-Solh 1988). To counter the relative access afforded by a lack of language barriers and a more intuitive understanding of the realm of the unspoken, many other thorns emerge that make the going rough. Familiarity, inclusion in a socio-political system breeds its own set of problems. I have recounted the above encounter, but there were many like it differently configured that constantly presented themselves throughout my research: shifting sands of traps and taunts that I had to manage. Personal, more accurately, sectarian, identity is key to social navigation/access in Lebanon as it has in the wake of the civil war, the demise of ideological parties, and more and more become shorthand for social and political identity. During the time I was in the field, the Sunnis, to whom I out of no agency of my own belong to within the Lebanese sectarian system, were overwhelmingly represented by the March 14 bloc led by Saad, the son of the slain Prime Minister Hariri, and they were in alliance with the right-wing Christian factions championed by Samir Geagea, the former “Savonarola” (Hanf 1990) of the ultra-nationalist Forces Libanaises (with whom our friend above I believe sympathized). The Shi’a, dominated by the then-opposition camp of March 8, were (are) championed by Hizbullah and in alliance with a populist-statist swathe of Christian supporters of the former General Michel Aoun. As it were, I was among a minority in Lebanon whose sectarian identity was not prescriptive of my political leanings; more accurately, it was antithetical.
But in the field I was a pragmatist: when prodded, I would enhance my identity markers differently (yet always truthfully) depending on who my interlocutor (interrogator?) was. (In Sunni-land) I was a Sunni from Saida whose mother is Saudi, (among Christians) I was married to a foreigner (a German “Catholic”) and (with Shi’a) my paternal grandmother (my namesake, my guiding light) was Shi’a. Thus I pretty much had most camps covered across the various constituencies that I poked about and wandered/stumbled around in. I would never strongly disagree with a perspective I personally found problematic, and when opinions converged I would gently participate in some celebratory social/political effervescence. But in terms of difficulties, that was not all. To add to the sectarian/political minefields I also had to manage the burning resentment of social position. My obvious place of privilege was not lost on anyone. I straddled this uncomfortable gap with much heartfelt empathy and respectfulness and always insisted on deferring to others in terms of age, knowledge and experience. As a final hurdle, my place of study, the United States, was not very high in most peoples’ popularity lists. My way out of that one though was to crack the joke among those who would find it funny (it was originally said to me in jest in a Shi’a village when I identified my university as Columbia) that I studied at the University of Ahmedinejad.

**Defining the field: knowns and unknowns**

[T]here are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don't know we don't know. (Former United States Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld)

From the outset it was clear that my field was composed of areas (in grudging reference to Rumsfeld who as a man of war probably knew what he was talking about) I am calling

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35 In reference to the talk given at Columbia University by Iranian President Mahmud Ahmedinejad
knowns and unknowns. These swaths of epistemological and methodological access and obstruction defined the field for me in large strokes and put me on the path of observation, inquiry and experience that composed my research and produced much of the material and memories I now have at hand to work into this dissertation.

The knowns emerged from the guiding questions of the research project that revolve around the ongoing entanglement of war with life. Presumably in a place just (re)visited by war those would not be too hard to find. But the difficulty of my endeavor was underlined to me early on by two illustrious scholars of (and from) the South Munzir Jabir, the author of an exhaustive encyclopedic tome on the occupation of the border zone (Jabir 1999) and Ahmad Beydoun (Beydoun 1989; Beydoun 1993), the famous Lebanese sociologist who has written beautiful semi-autobiographical pieces on the South among other highly-regarded work on Lebanese society and politics. When I told Jabir about my project and my research he looked at me with a mixture of empathy and pity and said that one of the most difficult things about doing social research in the South is that people there “know how to talk”. So long have they inhabited the harsh realities of war and so often have they rehearsed political ideologies of oppression that they are by now old hands at representing themselves in ways that people have become accustomed to receive and perceive them. A sentiment echoed by Beydoun, who in addressing my questions about the history of tobacco farming and the historical wretchedness of the southerner, said that the story of the “disinherited and dispossessed” was such a common and established trope of southern social and political identity that it had become something of
a “song” the southerner regularly sings. And I knew what they were talking about. So, not wanting to be recurrently caught up in refrains I already knew the words to, I decided that the key to my approach would be to orient myself away from such topics, tropes and themes, but how? Das provided a clue. She writes on her work on the Partition of India, “I never in fact asked anyone for their stories of Partition. It is not that if asked people could not tell you a story, but simply that the words had the frozen slide quality to them” (11). Das chose to inquire into ordinary matters. And I, for my part, resolved too to edge sideways (“obliquely”) into my field through mundane, unremarkable portals, advice that was given to me in my first year in graduate school in Chicago by the wonderful Rolph Trouillot. I also constantly reminded myself of what Mick Taussig had advised: to square my research on tobacco farming in South Lebanon. In this way I found myself on a practical path of discovery that began with the daily concerns and activities of the inhabitants of the southern borderland as they went about their lives. And that really led me places.

The unknowns that came to define my method and the reach of my investigation, had to do with the warzone realities that define the strip, the borderland, the former occupation zone, my field site, today. Because of the reigning state or condition of war, because of the twenty-two year occupation that ended not so long ago and the difficult predicament of those who “collaborated” with the enemy, because of the (openly?) secretive nature of ongoing guerrilla warfare, there were so many things I could not

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36 This is what Das calls the “frozen slide quality of narrations or ‘non-narrations’ of the violence of the Partition”. Her strategy to access what was “unsayable” was to attend to “various kinds of performative gestures and through storytelling” Das, V. (2007). Life and words : violence and the descent into the ordinary. Berkeley, University of California Press.
know, and should never ask – even if I were dying to! The bald truth of the matter is that it is a highly problematic and also sometimes dangerous thing to poke around and pose pointed questions in a live battlefield where knowledge is a matter of life and death, steadfastness/resistance or annihilation. Constantly then, I was afraid of taking that one step too far of being considered too ignorant of what I could know or too clumsy and curious, a liability or an object of suspicion that would lock me out of my field. This is another reason why, as will become clearer, the landscape (O silent speaker!) (Ustundag 2010) became the object of my research.

With respect to the borderland and former occupation zone: in the first instance no one is allowed freely in to this semi-closed area except Lebanese nationals. Anyone without a Lebanese passport has to apply for a permit from the Lebanese Army in Saida and gets stopped at each and every checkpoint throughout the zone to verify their papers and answer questions as I found out when I took my German husband along on one of my trips. Secondly Hizbullah, the organization in de facto control of the borderland usually requires researchers or anyone conducting any business from outside the zone itself to make themselves known to them and to get either a written or spoken permission from them. Apart from a visit to their research headquarters, the Consultative Center for Studies and Documentation, during my preliminary research in the summer of 2004, I did not ask for their “official” stamp of approval as I edged into the field. The reason for this had something to do with my desire to avoid as much as possible politically endorsed and scripted narratives. Hizbullah’s research arm and cultural production sectors are highly developed, canny and competent and I did not want to be coerced, even if gently into reproducing what I recognized as their hegemonic tropes and narratives. Although I am
sympathetic to Hizballah’s cause and project, in particular in South Lebanon, I felt that there was something more ambiguous, complex, mysterious, magical and layered to be accessed outside of their political will in their well-organized and well-monitored battleground.

Ways in

The South, being a warzone for most of its existence, has not been extensively explored by anthropology. Other than Emrys Peters’ (1977) ethnography of an unnamed southern village in the 1950s and 60s not very much else in terms of anthropological fieldwork has been conducted there. Gilsenan relates in the introduction to Lords of the Lebanese Marches that he had wanted to research there in the early 1970s but was discouraged because of the guerrilla war ongoing there and thus he ended up on the northern marches instead. So I did not have much to build upon in terms of literature or established networks to plug in to, so it was hard going at first both to find my theoretical bearings and practical footing and to break in to the field.

My actual way in to the field was, like many things in this research, serendipitous. One day in the summer of 2007, I went to meet Rabih Shibli, an architect and urban planner, who had set up an NGO to assist southerners in navigating the cutthroat reconstruction market that had boomed in the wake of the 2006 war and the millions in international aid that were flooding into the South for this purpose. After chatting for a while Rabih asked me to come with him to meet Jala Makhzoumi a professor of landscape architecture at the American University in Beirut with whom he was setting up a collaborative project and in which he thought I could take part. At that very moment I simultaneously met two of my closest collaborators and companions in the field.
Through following the work of *Beit bil Jnoub* (House in the South, Rabih’s NGO) for the UN Habitat-funded project “Good governance in Post-war Reconstruction in South Lebanon” and my participation in Jala’s AUB observatory team that assessed the impact of this project in the South, I gained exposure to people and places across the war-impacted South. My role within Jala’s team was to interview villagers about their participation in this project and assess its impact. Through this project’s uneven and sometimes rocky unfolding and its ultimately (in my opinion) unsatisfactory outcome, my eyes were opened to the deep problems both faced and created by the international development and humanitarian aid sectors in South Lebanon37. But this experience and interface eased me into my field. It was through the many experiences afforded me through my participation in this project that the borderland came into first focus. Through extended trips in the South and conversations with Rabih, himself a southerner, the borderland unfolded in its textured detail, its many contradictory facets. In particular it was under the guidance of Jala, an architect and landscape designer, that I developed my first ideas: it was she who first led me to the conceptual utility of landscape and it was from her that I first heard that wonderful word *maquis*. Frustrated at times by what I could not ask and what was (loudly) not being said, I began to look at and question and probe the landscape its beings, forms and features. Nazan Ustundag echoes these methodological dilemmas in her moving piece on Turkish Kurdistan “A Landscape of Violence” (2010). She writes “In this absence of words and stories, which is at once an overwhelming abundance of the untold, the untellable, a void too full, one trains her ear to the landscape itself”.

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37 Although this is not a focus of this dissertation, it has to be said that this is a pressing topic in urgent need of study.
After a few forays into the borderland I had established and revived enough contacts to provide me with the interface I needed for my research to extend itself and proliferate in fruitful ways. As time went on and I did not find myself obstructed or interrogated in any profoundly jarring way, I decided that this meant that my presence was not considered threatening, nor was my inquiry raising any red flags (it is impossible that my presence and investigation went unnoticed, for the “Hizb” knows of everything that goes on in the borderland). I took this as a good sign and followed the oblique, ordinary, organic trajectory that I found myself upon, and it led me down interesting, colorful and varied paths. I am not entirely sure why I was allowed to roam so freely but I was (if indeed my roaming was at all free).

I did not take up extended residence in the South, but instead would go for short visits, either staying in the hopping coastal city of Sur or sleeping in friends’ homes in R., the village that became like a home base for me. The reasons for this also had to do with the pressing problems of warzone research in a conservative village setting. I felt that the problems gained by staying – a woman, alone, not related by blood or marriage to anyone, a true outsider – for extended periods in a village would eclipse the value of access afforded. But in the two-to-three-day rhythm of forays into the field, I scored many fruitful encounters and in my time away I allowed myself time to digest them. In most cases I would go and meet someone in their village, in their home, in their workplace, and we would begin by talking. Inevitably this talk would lead us into the landscape and we would start walking and in walking we would arrive at new paths, places, revelations, meetings, encounters, clearings. It is fascinating how often this occurred. It emerged then, in an unremarkable and also unremarked sense, that the
landscape was a crucial medium, a necessary object, practice, performance, experience and metaphor for staying, surviving, speaking, just being in South Lebanon: landscape generated and gathered life, made its unique local cadences tactile and material.

So I spent my time in the field talking and walking: observing village life, dwelling and farming practices. In the villages I conducted interviews, compiled oral histories, explored webs of kinship, listened to stories of the land, agricultural wisdom and local lore, discovered a fast ebbing world of customary law relating to land use, encountered cultural ruins; I saw patterns of daily and seasonal rhythms emerge across the seasons, both sacred and profane. I was shown memory places, holy places, haunted places and ruins; I visited homes, shared meals, gingerly skirted minefields and slinked along the borderline, encountered known and hidden military sites and spaces; I visited mosques, shrines, churches and monasteries; I examined the Regie the tobacco monopoly, from the experts in the field buying tobacco from villagers, to the warehouses, regional and national headquarters; I sat in gardens, visited fields and orchards, walked hills and valleys, petted donkeys, was herded with goats, ate wild fruit, collected herbs, prayed at graves and communed with trees. I kept a field diary throughout this time, recorded many interviews, took many pictures and made some drawings. I had to rely on written notes and memory when things just happened (as things tend to do) (Stewart 2008) or when I sensed a recording device appeared unwelcome or counter-productive. Often, I would head off on my own, to revisit places I had been to before to see if there was something more I could discover unaccompanied, or simply to uncover new places and unearth new paths, new experiences and encounters. I also benefited from the expertise of professors, researchers, practitioners in development and humanitarian sectors and NGOs, heads of
municipalities and those involved in reconstruction, some politicians. Their narratives, concerns and insights added new layers, angles and contexts to my fieldwork.

And thus my research rolled on. I am not sure exactly when I was doing crazy things, traveling alone across miles of emptiness, wandering through fields alone with men I was not related to in a setting where women did not move alone very often if at all, wandering too close to the technical fence defining the borderline, taking too many pictures of Israeli Humvees dustily zooming past on their rounds. My little blue car must have been a common sight to Israeli soldiers on border duty as I drove up and down the borderline (not to mention the Hizbullah and UNIFIL guys on our side of the border); I often wondered what kind of intelligence they had on me. In general though, I used my common sense and applied a few basic precautions, like never walking across an unknown field (to pick red and purple poppies in spring say no matter how beautiful, innocent, colorful or inviting they were). And so through many serendipitous encounters and winding paths and lots of black coffee, sweet tea and various homegrown and fresh homemade edibles, and many, many stories, I came to inhabit and better know my field. As I came to inquire about the practices, processes, objects that gather life around them in the borderland I was led into landscape. Thus a landscape of war and dwelling slowly unfolded in its multitudinous detail. And this is how the landscape became the material, medium and metaphor of my research.

*Full circle: (the Hizb)*

Toward the end of my field research phase when I felt I had exhausted the field on my own (or rather just exhausted myself, since the field is never exhausted), I decided to
(re)approach the Hizb. I went back to their think tank (which in the meantime had been pulverized in the 2006 war and relocated from the cramped streets of al dahiyeh to shiny new premises right off the Beirut Airport road) to speak to the new director, Abdelhalim Fadlallah a bookish academic who had recently taken the reins of the institute after his predecessor Ali Fayyad a formidable and intense intellectual, had been elected to parliament. Fadlallah commiserated with me on the lack of attention on South Lebanon (on all fronts) in comparison to thatlavished on Beirut and its southern suburbs and directed me to Ali Khalil his head of surveys and research. A kind and soft-spoken man, Khalil listened to my long-winded description of my research so far and said he would hook me up with a local who could take me around. He said that this would take a few days and that once he had found someone and okayed my research with the powers that be, he would give me a call. A few days later I got a call from him and he said he was setting me up with someone who could take me around, someone who had herded around researchers before and someone who was from the very village that I had spent most of my time in the field! I took this coincidence to mean that my intuition and careful reading of the field has indeed landed me in the right place. Of course it also probably meant that the Hizb was (as I had sensed) perfectly aware of my research all along and were more than happy to endorse it in its present form. Which leads me finally to what connects me to South Lebanon and this particular village in South Lebanon.

My stakes, my passion, my South

*Al shamsu tashriqu min al janub*  
(“The sun rises from the South” a call to arms and resistance during the bloody days of war in the South in the 1970s and 80s)

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38 Hizbullah, “The Party of God”, is also commonly known as “al Hizb” simply, “the Party”. 
As is quite obvious, this is not only an academic project as it also stems from my life as a witness to and (former) inhabitant of war. So it is also a life project. Its questions are simultaneously sourced and directed toward my experience of the Lebanese civil war (that encompassed the Israeli Invasion of 1982, when I was six) and what came after, including several Israeli bombing campaigns, ongoing struggles within the Lebanese theatre and most pivotally (for this dissertation), the 2006 war. As described in the prelude, this project was conceived after – and unfortunately probably also made possible by – the war of 2006 during which I found myself for the first time in a temporal, spatial and emotional place that enabled me to grasp war as an object of study.

My first contact with the border strip began a long time ago (circa 1985) when Abu Jalil, a poor man whose wife had just died followed soon after by their ailing son, came to our door with his youngest daughter to ask for work. He had left his village on the very last inch of Lebanon as a young man, years ago, turning his back for good on a place no longer (and never really) home to him or holding him, to seek (eke) a living in Beirut. He was one of a wave of ongoing out-migration that began, continued and swelled in the wake of a borderline that put the South on the edge of the nation and in the middle of war. He brought with him to the misery of city life his young children and his wife, who was from Tarbikha, one of the lost “Seven Villages” of South Lebanon39, once just

39 The qura al saba’ or Seven Villages are a cluster of seven Shi’a (and Maronite) villages that fell within the borders of British Mandate Palestine. Their sectarian make-up is anomalous in Palestine where most Muslims are Sunni and most Christians Orthodox. The inhabitants of these
over the ridge from his village, R., but now sunken out of existence and of reach in the high blue grasses behind the border.

During the “Golden Years” of Beirut in the 1960s and early 1970s when the well-heeled couldn’t decide whether it was Paris or Switzerland, Abu Jalil worked as ticket collector and janitor at the Rivoli, one of downtown Beirut’s plush, ultra-modern cinemas. When the civil war broke out and downtown became a battleground and the Rivoli a snipers’ nest, he and his family began the hard downward journey into abject poverty: hunger, homelessness and dependency. They would return to their village when there was truly no income or place to stay elsewhere, falling back on family, living off the land, planting tobacco throughout the opening chapters of the civil war until the 1978 Israeli invasion. With that invasion they were flushed out of the village and after spending some time in a Red Cross camp for the displaced in Sur, they (by now six children in total) eventually made their way away from the occupation that had swallowed their village and back to the “misery belt” of the capital where the civil war continued to rage. Through some more years of difficulty and into the early 1980s they, along with several other families from their village, eventually squatted an empty place in Doha, on a low hill a few kilometers south of Beirut hovering above the Mediterranean, where a few affluent families had built villas and then abandoned them as they fled the war in Lebanon to comfort-in-exile abroad.

villages almost all left and came to live in Lebanon when Israel was created. As they shared sectarian identity (and family connections) with Lebanese just across the border many married Lebanese and eventually got Lebanese papers although they still hold land deeds for their homes and fields that are now part of Israel.
Then in 1982 came the second Israeli invasion that swept up viciously toward Beirut. Through the rotten, sweltering months of June, July and August the Israelis camped on the outskirts of the wretched city and laid upon it a deadly siege. And one of the Israeli’s top-brass headquarters with a birds-eye view of southern Beirut was Doha, where my uncle had bought a home when he got married in 1979\textsuperscript{40}. The siege was burning hell and the occupation of Doha is counted among the worst days of this family’s life as they survived on barely more than a piece of bread a day. Soon this time was somehow also survived and this family continued to occupy this house (and do until this day) with Abu Jalil making a living as caretaker of some of the empty villas for a while and then living off the goodwill of the handful of better-off families that took up residence in Doha after the Israeli withdrawal to Sidon in 1983\textsuperscript{41}. This is where our families’ paths converged, as we moved back to Lebanon from Abu Dhabi in 1983 and my parents rented one of the empty houses on this empty hill near my uncle’s villa\textsuperscript{42}. My mother employed Abu Jalil as gardener and caretaker and his older daughters also came to help with the housework (we were also a family of five children in a war albeit with many more means). One of his daughters, Dunya, who although only twenty-one years old was already married and divorced and estranged from her infant daughter, who

\textsuperscript{40} Uncannily enough this particular phase of the 1982 Israeli of Lebanon invasion is portrayed in the animated feature \textit{Waltz with Bashir}.

\textsuperscript{41} The Israelis would remain in Saida until 1986 before withdrawing to their “Security Belt” until May 24, 2000.

\textsuperscript{42} For more on this period see my mother’s memoir Basrawi, F. (2009). \textit{Brownies and Kalashnikovs a Saudi woman's memoir of American Arabia and wartime Beirut}. Reading, South Street Press.
remained back in the village with her father, who had taken a second wife. It was through Dunya’s painful attachment to a village that lived in her broken heart and clung to her shattered dreams that brought R. into first focus to me as I became aware of the world and of war.

It was not until May 24, 2000 on the day of liberation that I clapped eyes on the borderland, R. and what lay beyond, for the first time. During that time I was working as a journalist. The day before I had been in Majdal Silim, a pretty village built on a sloping hillside and its verdant agricultural plain that lay adjacent to the border of the occupation zone. On the front of the occupation, the village had absorbed much bombardment, including phosphorous and cluster bombs – munitions banned by international conventions – throughout the years as the war of resistance against the occupation gathered force and momentum. That day I was accompanying Tony Birtley a freelance war journalist (who now works for English Al-Jazeera), who was completing a piece on the occupation and had just spent a week inside the zone. I saw some of his footage of his evening drinking and dancing at a café, as the sun set on the occupation, with some Christian youngsters in Marjayoun who spoke of their attachment to the occupation order43 – the only one they knew. To give his story balance and context, he wanted to

43 It is important to point out that the lines of allegiance to the occupation by no means only followed sectarian lines. It is true in very bold strokes that the Israelis favored the Christian populations of the borderland and leant on them in building up an occupation administration and their proxy militia (SLA). But it is equally true that many Christians refused this occupation, suffered from it death and imprisonment and interrogation as it is true that the Shi’a (and Sunni and Druze) were also co-opted as stalwart local allies and foot soldiers. In some of the Shi’a villages that I worked the villas of infamous “collaborators” remain as landmarks (often scoffed at for their ostentatiousness) even as their occupants have fled over the border to Israel and will never return. Also, generally speaking, it was the Shi’a, who are the most populous constituency in South Lebanon, who made up the rank and file of SLA foot soldiers (as many were volunteers as coerced into service). This was a very big factor in the exodus of the youth from the South: to avoid serving in the SLA and families paid accordingly.
interview a family of a martyred Hizbullah fighter from outside this “comfort zone”, and that is where we were that day the occupation ended. As we were speaking to the father of the martyr, who Tony had placed in the camera frame sitting alone on a chair under the picture of his dead son (“our son was martyred to liberate our soil, our other son is now in the Resistance wa al-hamdulillah”), the steady sound of shelling began. Usual fare in these parts, so we didn’t pay it too much attention, but it would not abate; instead it intensified and there were several Israeli fighter-jet over-flights. The shador⁴⁴-clad daughter-in-law whose husband was the brother of the martyr and now also a resistance fighter – turned on the radio. “People are marching on the zone! Qantara has been liberated!” she exclaimed excitedly running towards us her black robes flapping like batwings. When the interview was over and before we left for the long drive back to Beirut, I asked to use the bathroom. The old man discreetly directed me to his daughter-in-law. She took me upstairs to her home, built atop of her parents-in-law’s ground floor level, a neat, freshly furnished flat, adequate for a young family with a young child. As she opened the door to the bathroom she turned to me and looking me in the eyes said: “Don’t be scared!” I looked back at her quizzically wondering what she meant. But as I stepped into the bathroom, I instantly understood: the bathtub was piled high with ammunition, battle gear, machine guns, grenades and small rocket launchers. Her husband, the resistance fighter’s weapons cache. I didn’t tell the journalist.

As the occupation swiftly crumbled, Tony’s story for BBC Channel 4 fell apart around his ears, much to his chagrin, and a larger team was sent to cover the bigger story. Headed by Gaby Rado, a renowned war correspondent who later died in Iraq during the

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⁴⁴ The black head-to-toe covering of Hizbullah-affiliated women emulating the garb popularized in post-Revolutionary Iran.
2003 U.S. invasion, I joined his team the next day and we returned. But we were not the only ones heading South that day: almost everyone in Lebanon was. It was a magical experience, a truly festive occasion, spontaneous celebration bubbling all around as a hated occupying power crumbled and withdrew like foxes in the night and locked the border gates behind them, a move that struck me as queerly domestic, like someone bolting a garden gate.45

The traffic was appropriately monstrous. The feeling was appropriately giddy: the feeling of power crumbling is positively, physically electric. People were silly with emotion. Of course, those jaded journalists I was with were impatient to get their take and get out. But then we reached Kfar Kila and the Fatma Gate and there it was: the border! And more than that, what lay beyond the border: Palestine! A landscape that I had seen in my mind’s eye for so long and lived under the political imperative of my whole life was unrolling before my very eyes. I could barely breathe. It felt unreal. As if I were looking at a painting or a picture, that thing that had solidified in my imagination over many years. I blinked: there it was. People around me were equally overwhelmed and in a similar state of shock and disbelief. There were shouts of: “Palestine! Look at Palestine! That is Palestine!” as people shared the moment. A guy next to me smacked himself on the forehead and staggered backwards then turned to his companion and pulled urgently at his sleeve. It really was quite an overwhelming state of affairs and the feeling has still

45 I have long mused at the wild contrast between impersonal global wars and the personal snugness of local context – the contrast plays out a little like the theater of the absurd. The quaint domesticity of such global power struggles has always struck me growing up in a warzone reading stories about my hometown, the context of my life in newspapers printed in New York; I was reminded of this as I encountering the southern border-strip. What is played out in soaring tones and black and white shades in the global media is usually a more practically muddled, emotionally charged shade of gray in local terms.
not left me. I still feel the same ripple of excitement and disbelief when I look across that border – even after all those years. I never imagined that I would be so close – to touch with my own eyes! – a place that had all the concentrated emotion and tactile reality of a fairytale (or nightmare) in my life thus far.

The next day I lost those awful, unfeeling journalists, who had spent the evening after filing their stories griping about how the event’s relevance was dropping like a hot potato because none of the expected (desired by the media!) violence had erupted. Instead I connected with people who felt the occasion like I did. With my mother and sisters and with Abu Jalil’s daughters (Dunya and her younger sister Ghida who was eight months pregnant) we headed to R., their beloved village. As we entered the village Dunya felt her heart was going to explode with happiness. She walked through the streets with her arms held up in the air, embracing the world all around her. Finally the village she had yearned for years was underfoot. In nearby Dhaira we saw Palestinian families who had been separated for more than fifty years tearfully (re)connecting across the barbed wire border fence with relatives lost to them for so many years. They were patrolled by young Israeli soldiers, who were put to immediate work by the excited families ferrying bonds of shared blood and affection in cups of thick black coffee across the border fence, at once an intimate new interface and deadly un-crossable divide, brimming with love.

One scene will never leave me: a frail old woman, pale, ethereal and waif-like and dressed entirely in white was being carried up the hill by her two strong sons, seated in a chair. Like my grandmother returning home, she was also returning to as close to home as she could, to see her homeland at least once more before she left this bitter earth. It broke my heart to see it. She was urging her sons, who were overcome with emotion, to
be strong: Palestine has been given back to me falasteen ri'itli she said with soft
determination. Elsewhere across the now-free zone: the tangible paraphernalia of a
collapsed oppressive order was everywhere and we collected what we could\textsuperscript{46}. We
flocked to the infamous Khiam prison that had only yesterday been emptied of its
prisoners. What a stinking hellish pit, so raw: the rags of incarceration, the stuffed rooms
with stacked narrow cots, the writing on the wall of those detained indefinitely. The
previous midnight I had stood under the stars with crowds in Haret Hreik in \textit{al dahiyeh}
and watched as Hassan Nasrallah, who would still appear among the crowds in those
days (he has been underground and out of sight since 2006), welcomed those prisoners,
kissing each one on both cheeks under the stars. There are so many stories and feelings
from these days, but I cannot recount them all here. I just want to describe the feeling of
what the South was/is to me.

I grew up with the idea of the South as a beloved homeland, an unconditional love
for the South (\textit{“ya habibi ya jnoub”}), the cause of the South. The suffering of the South.
“The sun rises from the South,” the poetic life affirming mantra throughout the (endless)
cycles and seasons of war. The inescapable identity of the South as a place of suffering
and of steadfastness. Hence the moment of its liberation was huge. To me, it redeemed
the suffering of the war years and the death of my grandparents: my grandfather died
during the Israeli invasion of 1982 believing Lebanon was Palestine lost all over again,
and my grandmother, the true southerner among us, born into a peasant family from Kfar
Melki a village in mountains above Saida, died in 1994, before the South was fully free.

\textsuperscript{46} We have an impressive collection of paraphernalia from this day: papers, IDs, license plates,
empty weapon boxes, photos of Antoine Lahd, IDF fatigues, helmets, Israeli candy and soda
packages…
This enigma of the South, this love of the South as an imaginary object is part of what has driven me to examine it as a tangible and ordinary place and in particular to explore its ambiguity, for maturity also brings with it a sneaking awareness of the strange flatness of such beguiling “songs”.

And finally R. again: as strange as it sounds, I reconnected with this village serendipitously as I was exploring the field. Driving along the borderline one day with Rabih, we saw a woman sitting by the side of the road under a large picture of a martyr. We were beguiled by the closeness of the border that for a change rode on an elevated ridge that walled in this village$^{47}$ on one side, so we stopped the car and asked her where we were. “R.” she answered. I couldn’t believe it! I had never seen her before but after exchanging a few words she looked searchingly at me and declared that I looked familiar. It was Zahra. Hers were among the families that had lived for a spell in Doha with the family of Abu Jalil during the years of exile, and she had recognized me somehow. Soon her older sister Khawla arrived and took up the thread of the conversation; she became one my main interlocutors and companions as I got lost in the labyrinth of South Lebanon.

Ethical questions

$^{47}$ Although the Israelis are well known for eating land to their strategic advantage i.e. taking refuge in elevations along the Lebanon-Israel border, their territory begins where the high elevations of Jabal ‘Amel begin to melt into the low hills of Galilee. Although their border is located atop ridges in as many cases as they could manage for the large part along this border they occupy the low-ground geo-strategically speaking. This is clear when traveling this border and is part of their long excuse for their “security belt”. In R. though the Israelis occupy the high ground of the B. outpost that glowers over the village. As everyone in R. can tell you: “our village has no military-strategic value”.

So my status as “outsider” was attenuated by the threads of connection from the past that
tied me to my field site. Yet doing research among fellow humans (let alone plants or
animals) left me with a constant, awful, bitter feeling of betrayal. I was a kind of insider
(respectful of boundaries and of the reach or limits of knowledge) but also an outsider
(constantly desiring the transgression of those boundaries and reaching for forbidden
knowledge), a friend and yet a tireless, perpetual inquisitor, a professed equal but one
with an objectifying purpose.

Further embittering the persistent feelings of betrayal that dog big-hearted, well-
meaning, world-loving anthropologists (and other seekers) like myself was the fact that I
was able to roam around in a place not many others could, and that I had access to
knowledge that many would love to put to purposes I would never condone. For example
I have since read many studies conducted by both the U.S. and Israeli military on South
Lebanon and its feted guerrillas (in particular, their perfection-in-performance of “hybrid
warfare” is the object of much soul and strategy searching among the most advanced
militaries in the world) and saw that many of those sharp and well-placed researchers
were consistently barred access to the borderland as well as to the organization in control
of it. I recognize how much remains outside of the grasp of such avid students and I
realize that much of what I saw and did in the field could be considered of good use to
such knowledge-seekers and the powers behind them, much to my displeasure and
discomfort. In a similar way to how knowns and unknowns shaped my field and my
grasp, I have fashioned this dissertation to be as gentle a presentation of what I explored
and witnessed and discovered in the warzone of the Lebanese South with regards to how
the information it contains can be further used or mobilized. I do not want to feel more of
a betrayer than I already am. To put it another way: let us just say that maybe the purview of my research as well as the form it has taken in this dissertation is the best compromise I could find between the presentation of a certain witnessed knowledge and full disclosure.
III. Once Upon a Wartime in South Lebanon:

Genealogy of a War Formation

Our story is not written in books
It’s illuminated in the nights of people without histories
(Marcel Khalife Speak Up)

Those who speak today are not the ones who have gone.
The wretched of the earth are always the same.
(Ziad Rahbani al muqawama al lubnaniyya/The Lebanese Resistance)

The earth has the face of massacre
And the sky rains gray
There remains no branch but pillaged
There remains no face but destroyed
(Marcel Khalife Ard al Janub/the Land of the South)

O flower of the South! O bird of sorrow! O little one, speak to me…
(Fairuz Zahrit al Janub/The Flower of the South)

This chapter traces the genealogy of a formation I am calling a “landscape of war” from the dusk of the Ottoman era, gaining in detail after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, through the many wars in South Lebanon, the Israeli occupation of the Lebanese borderland until its collapse in May 2000.

i. The “Song” of the South

The land of the South where southerners dwell enfolds a past often described as bitter. Although this adjective – wretched and dispossessed are others – is for the large part quite accurate, the second half of the twentieth century saw the gradual formation of a “war society” not far from what was called for in the early years of Shi’i mobilization (and continues to be called for), but also a much more ordinary formation encompassing agricultural practices in a rural periphery (but also military formations, installations,
networks). The events comprising the remembered, recounted, not so distant past of the South, at least since the era of warfare began – although harsh by any standards – has fashioned, through seasons of war and cycles of seasons, what I speak of as a naturalized landscape of war, that is a place where the networks/formations of warfare and of “ordinary” living are generative of one another, inextricably entangled with one another, possibly (and I propose) one. This statement holds for the Shi‘i community of the borderland more than the others (who nevertheless are also densely imbricated in war matter(s)) for the Shi’a are the group generative of Hizbullah, who have inherited the South’s “wretched” earth and the war, and at the present time control and patrol the borderland. Thus the account that follows looks at the emergence of this everyday and organic war formation by tracing in large part the formation and mobilization of the Shi‘i community of South Lebanon.

The beginning of warfare in the borderland that followed on the heels of its creation as faraway/remote and isolated state margin and warfront crystallized and catalyzed an unexpected process: namely the transformation, mobilization and militarization of the Lebanese Shi’a, historically populous, poor and powerless, into a political force to be reckoned with within the Lebanese theatre and throughout the larger Middle East. The creation and consolidation of the Shi’a as political class, social movement and national and regional power has been studied extensively. Their transformation is key to grasping the specificity of the South(ern formation) for nowhere else in Lebanon did the old feudal elites lose their footing so completely as to have no present presence in the political landscape of their former stomping grounds. Along the southern marches something new came into being. This story/narrative is relevant insofar
as it gives us a sense of how Hizbullah, the present/current inheritor and consolidator of this process, is of, with and emergent of the people (and the land) it champions, cultivates, cares for and herds in ways that other political leaders in Lebanon are not. It also allows us to perceive the role that this geography has played in the unfolding of this contingent formation, that takes the shape of a rural-based identity, a resistant and resilient countryside. For more importantly this history and genealogy expresses and embodies the unexpected and empowering outcome of years of war and suffering emergent in part from the (“steadfast”) attachment to land and place of those with few better choices, showing the creative powers of forces of destruction and illustrating my argument that war and its hegemonic, violent face is also a force of creation, generation (and regeneration).

Thus in what follows I shall trace a genealogy of successive configurations of being and power beginning not long before the end of the First World War that have shaped the South Lebanon borderland into the formation we encounter today. This story is defined by a doubled, contrapuntal movement of simultaneous marginalization and mobilization, and is echoed in the harnessing of (this) place to a socio-political identity that constantly shifts from one dominant theme/trope to another. As one moves from center to margin the narrative shifts: at the center the narrative is unified and coalesces around a powerful, mobilizing, morally prescriptive/compelling cause directed against and toward the bloody history of Israel, the widely hated national enemy, in (South) Lebanon. But along the edges of the nation-state the narrative shatters into to myriad voices, objects, times and spaces embodying a range of contradictory, ambiguous and unexpected (as well as expected) perspectives, realities, and tropes. The margin of the
nation exists in a gray zone of violently contested systems of power, overlapping orders of being. On edge, if there is a unifying gathering narrative and movement it is one directed against the center: the “song” of enduring state neglect and persistent/consistent/perpetual abandonment.

The account that I unfold below is not intended as critique or a re-writing of history. What I recount is built around/concordant with the dominant historical narrative strand that informs the present-day climate and condition in South Lebanon.

_Invisible Subjects: “the Wretched of the Earth”_

They are all in rags, except some of the Sheiks, and are all mendicants. They will come and stand round the cooking which goes on in the open air, and if one is asked to go and get some eggs, he will shrug his shoulders, and when told he will be paid for his trouble he answers “there is none.” If another is asked to sell a sheep or fowl, he answers “its not mine.” The filth is revolting. It would seem as if they took particular pride in exhibiting their rebellion against the law, originally proclaimed from Horeb and afterwards from Mecca, both in regard to their person and the cleanliness of their villages.

(Uruqhart quoted in Norton 1987: 14).

The historical, germinative, geographical heart of the area that is present-day South Lebanon (the administrative borders of then and now are not identical), stretching from the inland and upland of Sidon along the coast and inland toward the highland plateaus, mountains and ridges that geographically define the borderland today is historically known as Jabal ‘Amil, after the Arab tribe from which locals claim descent. A landscape of high hills and plateaus, craggy mountain peaks, fertile plains and gushing river valleys this landscape has historically been (as it is today) protective of its dwellers, who – if in the absence of anything else – draw sustenance of sorts from the earth and take shelter in the natural fortresses of this geography.
Since at least the twelfth century Jabal ‘Amil has been inhabited by Shi’a communities coalescing around their clerics (‘ulama). With the advent of Ottoman rule the Shi’a fell into a wayward (mutawali) status vis-à-vis the reigning Sunni orthodoxy that did not recognize them as a separate sect of Islam. Shi’i “invisibility” was complicated when in the sixteenth century the Persian Safavid dynasty adopted Shi’ism as state religion to avoid being subjugated by their rivals, the Ottomans, and employed ulama from Jabal ‘Amil to implement the mass conversion. As the Safavids were longtime rivals and foes of the Ottomans, this did not bode well for the Shi’a remaining in the Ottoman world. Thus, during the long reign of the Ottoman Empire that began in these parts in 1516, the Shi’i inhabitants of Jabal ‘Amil were at best invisible subjects of the Sultan and at worst horribly crushed, exploited or disposed of in the endless struggle for governance, dominance, rule and pacification. Throughout this time and with the help of local rural-based henchmen, the Shi’a inhabitants of Jabal ‘Amil formed a collection of meek and scattered peasant communities and remained thus until and beyond the final disintegration of this empire.

Depending on the strength or ruthlessness of the governors walis of Acre and Sidon, the local administrative seats of Bilad al Sham, Jabal ‘Amil would alternately fall under their jurisdiction. The region contained a few medium-sized market towns like Bint Jbeil and Nabatiyeh where trade caravans would halt on their way to and from the coast, yet Jabal ‘Amil, like much of the countryside of Bilad al Sham, was difficult to control unlike the largely placid and governable urban centers. To bring the countryside into the net of Ottoman governance, power was farmed off to local middlemen who would do the ruling and taxing on behalf of the Sultan across the untamed rural swathes of fertile earth
that the Ottomans depended upon for grain, cash crops and expendable manpower. These “lords” (Gilsenan 1996) or multazims came either from the powerful merchant families of the coastal cities like Tyr and Sidon, but more organically they were tribal chieftains. Although technically mere local Ottoman agents, these lords or zu’ama (singular: za’im) behaved and were regarded as ruthless local despots, exploiting land and people to their benefit, pleasure and gain (Ajami 1986; Norton 1987; Gilsenan 1996; Jabir 1999).

Around the seventeenth century, tobacco was introduced to Jabal ‘Amil to be cultivated by the peasants for their various overlords as a cash crop for the globalizing Empire. Thus until the dawn of the Lebanese nation state and beyond, Jabal ‘Amil was a land of wretchedness, tobacco and toil, where peasant sharecroppers, and laborers huddled in villages at the mercy of a handful of local lords and under the sway of Ottoman governors with nicknames like jazzar “butcher”, or so the story goes.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Ottomans instituted the tanzimat (or re-orderings) in a last ditch attempt to transition to an aspired-to, emulated, compatible and competitive European modernity. As part of these re-orderings, land law

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48 “Plunder and cruelty intruded upon this Shia domain […]. Folklore related the cruelty of Ottoman officialdom; it taught the futility of political action. More objective histories did not differ much from the folklore. C.F. Volney, French author of one of the great eighteenth-century travel books about Syria and Egypt, passed through the Shia lands after one of the ruinous Ottoman military campaigns; he recorded the existence of a “small nation” a “distinct society”. ‘Since the year 1777,’ he wrote ‘Djezzar, master of Acre and Saide [Sidon] has incessantly labored to destroy them… is probable they will be totally annihilated, and even their very name become extinct’” (Ajami 1986: 780).

was reformed to enable peasants to register parcels of land that they farmed in their own name. This move largely backfired on those it intended to empower as many fellahin did not register their lands for fear of taxation, conscription and most often the intimidation or dictate of their overlords. The zu’ama registered these lands in their own names instead and in this way accumulated massive privately owned estates from formerly amiri land50. The descendants of those lords (in the South namely the families of As’ad from Tayibe, al-Khalil from Tyre, al-Zein from Nabatiyye and Osseiran from Sidon), consolidated their domains and power in the name of Ottoman modernity, and soon with their French “protectors” became the authors and founding pillars of the Lebanese state as it was established with the final disintegration of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I. The peasants were left with nothing. But they were left on the land.

Modern Lebanon: the binds that tie

The drawn-out process of transition during the extended death of the Ottoman Empire and the beginnings of European inroads and influence through to the final moments of the bloated empire’s expiration, and the take-over of European power, forms and practices of political being and governance, has been extensively examined (Anderson 1991; Mitchell 1991; Messick 1996; Mitchell 2002; Asad 2003). Maps were drawn and nations were born, histories were (re)written and new socio-political categories and identities were generated through the (violent) practices of the modern state that created docile new citizens and subject populations. The outcome of such modern order(ings) were transformative and cataclysmic and much was left by the wayside. Messick in particular

50 “The vast majority of rural land was considered as ‘amiri’ a type of land which real ownership (rakaba) rested with the state (the sultan or ‘amir’) while individuals were enjoying a variable possession (tessarouf) (Khayat 2005: 12).
draws attention to the ways in which modernization formalized a more fluid dynamic of social, political, religious practice, making imaginable and manageable new subjects and objects of governance (Makdisi 2000).

As the fetal Lebanese state was conceived from the ruins of an historical Ottoman order, incubated under French tutelage, formalized and finally recognized, the sectarian system that defines Lebanese politics today came into being. Although genealogically linked to the millet system that defined religious communities in Ottoman times, the sectarian political order that is still very much in place today in Lebanon (brought into starker relief, burnished and hardened in the flames of the civil war) was created by the French under the ascendance of the Maronites, their local clients, with the eventual cooptation/cooperation of the other sects represented by their respective zu’ama. The Shi’a were among the most populous, fragmented and poor of the constituencies that fell within the borders of the new nation-state of Le Grand Liban. Although they were formally “represented” in government by their zu’ama (and thus even more bound to them) the overwhelming majority of the Shi’a population continued to live in abject poverty, submission, dependence; they were socially, politically and economically bound to an oppressive and neglectful order.

Parallel to the formation of a zu’ama-led sectarian political order in Lebanon was the transformation within the state system of land traditionally configured/shaped by communal customary practices (like the musha’ system) (Firestone 1990) into privately owned property (Khayat 2004). The Mandate powers, upon surveying the landscape of power upon which they would build their new order, identified the “latifundia,” the vast estates concentrated in the hands of the powerful feudal lords the “latifundists” (Gilsenan
Building on the only partially “modernized” remains of the Ottoman order (and thus formalizing and transforming more fluid patterns of land use practices emergent from the Ottoman system), the French introduced property law based on the cadaster, and in this way enshrined and immortalized the shifting patterns of power defining the *rif* countryside of *bilad al sham* (in particular the massive power differentials) in the cold legal ink of the *Code Napoleon* (Timothy Mitchell describes this process as it unfolded in *Colonising Egypt*). Thus the vast estates accumulated by the *zu’ama* throughout the years of Ottoman rule and land reform, were registered as their own private property in the modern nation-state of *Le Grand Liban* and the workers of the land, roped into the snare of modern Lebanon, were reified as landless, dependent citizen-vassals.

As Gilsenan puts it

> [T]he ‘immemorial’ was fully constituted at that time under the French. Land and property were crystallized into legally established private estates. State powers were personalized. The possibilities for at least proto-capitalist rationalizations of agriculture, technology, investment and labor controls went together with a systematic incorporation of physical coercion exercised through the use of attached staffs or status groups into local and national power. The subjected subsistence cultivators, laborers and sharecroppers, deprived at this stage of whatever holdings they still possessed, were more thoroughly bound to the persons of landowners… (300).

But like most things in the rocky modern history of Lebanon, this process was uneven, especially in the South: for although cadastral surveying and land registration began under the French Mandate in 1923 and continued after Lebanese independence in 1943, the cadastre had not reached the southern Lebanese borderland by the time military operations began heating up there and tugging the borderland into battleground. Hence, by the time the borderland was invaded and occupied by Israel in 1978 and thus
effectively cut off from the rest of Lebanon for the next twenty-two years, the larger part of the borderland remained only patchily touched by the modern/disenchanted gaze of the cadastre – and remained so until after the 2006 war. To add confusion to the matter, a devastating fire destroyed the land registry in Saida in 1976 and with it many precious land deeds went up in smoke and ash (Khayat 2004).

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. At this time, when Lebanon was created and defined as a nation state the Shi’a of South Lebanon⁵¹ found themselves (or so the story goes) officially/formally doubly marginalized and bound as brand new citizens and subjects of the modern French-designed nation state Le Republique du Liban.

**ii. Galilee Divided: Defining a Border**

Needless to say, along with all this came some geo-political restructurings. The southern borderland was drawn and defined on the ground beginning in 1923 by the Great Allied Powers of France and Britain, who created and administered Lebanon and Palestine respectively in the wake of the First World War. The area that came to be Lebanon’s southern frontier was historically the hinterland of Palestine’s coastal cities and its market towns burgeoned as vital nodes linking Damascus and the Syrian interior to the coast.

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⁵¹ It must be added here: the South is by no means only populated by the Shi’a although I have taken up their historical narrative thread here because they are the most populous sect in the area and now dominate the borderland politically and thus it is significant to relay their transformation from powerless populace to political powerhouse. The borderland is home to Druze, Christian (Maronite and Greek Catholic), and Sunni communities that have been as profoundly affected by the history being recounted, but in different ways due both to the role of institutions like the Church, geographical locations, social positions, political alliances and many other factors that I cannot get into here. During my fieldwork I explored Shi’i, Sunni and Christian villages. But because the combined rhythms of seasonal war and daily living were my concern, I spent more time in Shi’a villages because it was those villages that were most affected (more accurately, destroyed) in the last season of war. The Shi’a (and the Bedu whose numbers are much less) depend most heavily on agriculture for subsistence and livelihood.
Networks of trade, governance and kinship extended throughout the entire region. With the definition of the border creating the nation-states of Syria, Palestine and Lebanon, the South Lebanon borderland was cut off on all sides. From that moment began the modern chapter of South Lebanon as trapped, impoverished periphery (and soon battleground) a period from whence the South’s present day geopolitical, social, historical, moral formation and identity is genealogically traced, sourced, narrated.

The drawn-out considerations and deliberations concerning where the border would fall, like most border-drawing events, had much to do with the geo-political interests of the powers doing the drawing and nothing to do with the concerns and livelihoods, families or fields of the people and lands being drawn upon. As Hof (1985) puts it in *Galilee Divided: The Israel-Lebanon Frontier 1916-1984*:

> It is not likely that the British and the French diplomats who partitioned Upper Galilee and the adjoining regions imagined the impact their action would have on the inhabitants of the area. Had they known, it is even less likely that they would have cared. The area was an economic and social backwater, a depressed region populated almost entirely by Arabs (except of course for those few Jewish settlements around the Hula valley) engaged in subsistence agriculture. It hardly seemed possible that the drawing of an international boundary through such an area would have much of an impact, positive or negative, on anything (17).

Little did they know. After a struggle between the British and the French to control the territory that would best suit their geopolitical interests, the Great Powers finally decided upon a border whose passage through the landscape was based primarily upon the Iraqi oil pipelines (Tapline) that were evenly distributed along the Lebanese and Palestinian coasts, and secondarily on rail networks and water resources (a key concern of the Zionists who were pressuring the British). In 1923, the Great Powers signed the Anglo-French agreement defining the borders of their respective protectorates, and the French
Mandate of *Le Grand Liban* and the British Mandate of Palestine were simultaneously born.

At first the impact of the new geo-political reality was not dramatically felt on the ground. The borderline was largely ignored by the locals, who continued dwelling in the new borderland as if there were no such thing as a border. In 1926 the Mandate powers grudgingly accommodated this situation by signing the “Agreement of Good Neighborly Relations” which gave privileges of (controlled) movement to the inhabitants of the Palestine-Lebanon frontier, even as the Powers proceeded to mark on the ground the line separating their territories and, when the occasion arose, to educate the local population about the border’s conceptual, political and physical existence and reality.

This era of border-demarcation is a foundational moment in the generation of the South in its current geo-political-demographic formation. Hence it often manifests as a beginning point in narratives. Slapstick stories of this era of border-demarcation were often recounted to me throughout my time in the field, especially by the older generation whose lifetimes span this period, and those stories usually involved villagers following the accustomed routes of their lives and livelihoods to be pounced upon by British troops on a civilizing mission. Many stories involved border markers being casually moved by locals unsatisfied with their position: “It looked better in my neighbor’s field”. One story related to me by a man in Aitarun, a member of a band of brilliant ageing communists who only half-jokingly call themselves “the marginalized” *al muhammasheen*. They gather every day in Abu Gebrans’s tiny bookshop facing the municipality of A.; they were more than happy to share their wisdom and many stories with me. Laughing, this man, let’s call him Rida, declared that his father, Abu Rida, was South Lebanon’s first
shaheed (martyr) for perishing with the first shot fired across the border in 1948. Before his untimely death and around the time that the British and the French were mapping the shared border of their dominions on the ground, Abu Rida was arrested and taken to a police station in Acre for a sound, civilizing lecture by disgruntled British officers about the consequences of casually transgressing the newly realized frontier. Abu Rida, a cameleer, was suitably perplexed at what he had done wrong for he had been apprehended by the unamused ingleez (English) at a place he had traversed with no issue his whole life. He could not for the life of him fathom why this “border” had suddenly materialized, let alone why the British would not let him cross it. Abu Rida allegedly told the magistrate, or whoever it was who was impressing upon him the existential and practical dimensions of this new political reality, “Who are you to decide what a border is?” Grabbing a pencil from the desk of the official he continued demonstrating with the pencil on the desk, “You can’t simply move a border from here to there the way one can move this pencil from here to there!”

Well, they could and they did. So it was that perhaps because of this encounter and his resistance to the idea of ajanib foreigners dictating and enforcing unwelcome, unwieldy new earthly and existential realities that when the first shots were fired in May 1948, as Israel declared itself a state on the former land of Palestine and moved on the Lebanese borderland, Abu Rida ran home and collected his ancient blunderbuss to defend his (national, village) turf. He ran up to the highest hill of the town beyond which lay what was Palestine only yesterday but no more… and was summarily shot dead. This event – and not the comic retelling of this man’s encounter with the stuffy British officers that elicited guffaws from his listeners – comes ever so much closer to the powerful
repercussions of this border situation upon the newly minted “southerners” and
generations of southerners to come. The border was not at all a funny affair. It was a
violent – if local, everyday – line of power that caused major disruptions across the entire
region and would for years to come.

But for a line of power that has caused so much disruption, the curious thing is
that this border has never been completely marked on the ground nor has it been ratified
as border by international agreement. This is because the two states that need to agree
about this border have been officially at war ever since one of those states’ inception in
1948. During the 1948 war, Israeli forces entered Lebanon and took control of eighteen
border villages and when they withdrew an Armistice Demarcation Line was drawn over
the 1923 boundary. In the period between 1949 and 1967 the Israel-Lebanon Mixed
Armistice commission (ILMAC) was set up to continue marking the border under the
observation of UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organization). But by the
time the 1967 war began and ended six days and a whole new world later, only twenty-
five non-contiguous kilometers of the border had been marked and signed by both sides.
Like other things (like the cadastre), this border-marking process was suspended, and
remains so today despite the fact that the various confrontations and wars that those states
have been involved in have left a rainbow of colored lines legally interpreting this border:
the Green Line is the 1948 line; the Purple Line, the ceasefire line at the end of the 1967
war; then there was the Red Line that defined the northern edge of the twenty-two year
Israeli occupation that collapsed in 2000; after which the UN added a Blue Line (that is
heavily disputed but will have to do for now) (O'Shea 2004). All these lines have left
various traces on the ground and in the lives of communities upon which they were
imposed. Until the 1967 war the border had remained more or less porous to civilians and smugglers and other kinds of border beings (like sheep and goats) and largely quiet. The UN “actually has a report form referred to as a ‘Sheep-rep’ or ‘Goat rep’ because of [their] frequent coordinating role to help shepherds recollect their flocks that transgressed the lines” (Norton 2006). But by the late 1960s the blood-red star of guerrilla warfare was on the rise and the border was well on its way to becoming a frontline and the borderland a battlefield.

**iii. Borderland, Battlefield**

*War, poverty... and power*

The following is a passage taken from an account that was penned a few months before the first Israeli invasion of 1978.

The South is the poorest area of Lebanon for many reasons: the lack of services and infrastructure, the economic exploitation of its main crop tobacco, and the disinterest, indeed lack of awareness, of the rest of the nation. According to official Lebanese Government statistics (1974), the South has about 20 percent of the total population, but it receives less than 0.7 percent of the State budget. It has the fewest paved roads per person per acre. Running water is still missing in all villages and towns although water pipes were extended to many areas in the early sixties. Electricity networks were erected at about the same time, but they are inoperative most of the time. Sewage facilities are available only in large towns and cities. Outside the larger centers telephone service is completely absent except for a single manual cabin, which is usually out of order. Doctors visit the villages once a week and sometimes only once a month. Clinics are maintained only in large villages and do not function regularly. Hospitals and pharmacies are found only in the larger population centers. Elementary school is usually run in an old unhealthy house provided by the village. Intermediate schools were introduced to the large towns in the mid-sixties. The entire South has only four secondary schools (in Bint Jbeil, Tyre, Nabatiyyah, and Marj’uyun). There are two other schools in Saida (Sharif: 10-11).

Because of the geopolitical ramifications of the border between Lebanon and Palestine and the advent of war(s) with the birth of Israel, compounded by a declining agricultural
sector, the rural peripheries of Lebanon entered an era of precipitous socio-economic decline. The lords, who had historically provided the only link between the peripheral peasants and the central powers of the state, all but abandoned their estates and the people attached to them (a process beautifully recounted by Gilsenan for the northern border of Lebanon in the same era) and moved to the cities where power was centered.

Those were dark days in South Lebanon when grinding poverty reared its ugly head. This is when the migration\(^\text{52}\) that would eventually depopulate the South began to gain momentum. Men and youths from other more connected and less numerous constituencies than the Shi‘a found their way into the army or police force, or government clerk jobs (that operated on a quota system based on power-sharing at the center), securing mean jobs in the city or making their way overseas to find a living. Many Shi‘a did too, but many stayed or were left behind due to their numbers and to the fact that they were heavily disadvantaged in educational terms, a situation compounded by the immense social abyss separating them from their zu‘ama, who felt no need to cultivate political loyalty when they could simply order it\(^\text{53}\). Thus the many Shi‘a peasants still living off the land in the “neglected” villages of the Lebanese frontier

\(^{52}\) Migration is a silent story in this dissertation. It has been well documented elsewhere (see Bazzi 2008). But the networks originating from South Lebanon and extending across the globe is a crucial one to understanding the present day in the villages of South Lebanon. Every house has a son abroad. Some villages are almost all abroad and some less so. Those who have found success have built ostentatious mansions in their villages. These global networks enable fragments of families to reside in the village home and to till the earth. The global thus is part of the endurance and steadfastness of this population in their locale, their place of origin.

\(^{53}\) A story often recounted tells of the village folk of Tayibeh approaching their za‘im Ahmad al Asa‘ad, who was speaker of parliament from 1951-1953, to request a school for the village. “What do you need a school for? I am educating my son Kamel for you,” As‘ad infamously responded.
extended their networks abroad, for many who left never cut the ties that bind, sending remittances back to their relatives.

So by the time the borderland was segueing into battlefront the inhabitants of the villages continued to ply livelihoods premised on the land (albeit undergirded in many cases by a network of migration both local and global): those local and global formations would intersect with and blend into the war-order that was forming on this frontier. Thus migration, the continued presence of villagers in what would soon become a major battleground, the palpable absence of their former lords, and the advent of guerrillas and war are few of the factors that would transform the South into the agricultural-military formation it is today.

The fall of the lords

As I have mentioned, the advent of wars and soon occupation resulted in a potent constellation along Lebanon’s southern marches the result of which was the uneven incorporation of this poor periphery in the structures and infrastructures of the (“absent”) state. More accurately those structures were put in place with respect to the ruling elites who were by now firmly ensconced in faraway Beirut, but it was their position (and that of the state) on the ground of South Lebanon that came into critical question and eventual almost total (social and political) elision as wars heated up. I say wars for on the one hand I refer to the wars of various guerrilla groups with Israel that began in the late 1960s along this borderline and still has not ended and secondly I indicate the Lebanese civil war (also composed of many wars), which officially ended in 1990. And of course the many wars that continued to erupt after this date. Those wars are temporally overlapping
and intrinsically, multiply and complexly interlinked and they engendered a double-stranded social process crucial to the account at hand. The first strand, relating more to the establishment of the nation-state and the border and the beginning of war with Israel, configured the bleak demographic situation described above where only the poorest villagers remained *in place* on the land of South Lebanon, their only source of livelihood; this was related to the withdrawal of the elites from the rural South, their former stronghold. The absence of the elites is linked to the second process that played out throughout the years of Israeli aggression on the South that resulted in the transformation of a historically meek peasantry into a resistant strain of steadfast war-seasoned beings (and warriors). The emergent formation, represented by new kinds of leaders rising from the bog of peasantry and the fog of war soon staked out a new political role throughout the years of conflict to take their place as powerful present-day participants in Lebanese government, but most significantly to this account, the present-day inhabitants, those in *de facto* control of the borderland.

The old lords of the South find themselves powerless in South Lebanon today, “unable to even step one foot into their old villages,” as Timur Goksel, who for twenty-five years was the UNFIL spokesman in South Lebanon put it to me. Goksel spoke in particular of the As’ads of Tayibe\(^5^4\), arguably the most powerful of the southern feudal lords.\(^{54}\)

\(^{54}\) As’ad Abu Khalil writes: Paramount among the local political elite, or *zu’ama*, the large landowners who exploited the poor inhabitants of the region, was the As’ad family, which had monopolized political representation of the Shi’a for centuries. Its leader during the first half of the twentieth century, Ahmad al-As’ad, once bragged that a “stick” would win a parliamentary seat if it ran on his list. His son, Kamil al-As’ad, who held various ministerial positions in the 1960s and was speaker of parliament for 1970 until 1984, was well known for his (mis)treatment of the people of the region and for his willingness to sacrifice their interests in order to preserve his speakership position. Beholden to the whims and inclinations of the As’ad family and other southern *zu’ama* the government in Beirut neglected to develop the infrastructure of the south, leaving the region without basic necessities (89).
families around whom tales of glorious deeds and hateful acts still bubble and swirl. “The As’ads got out with the invasion and the occupation and their abandoned servants had to find a way to survive on their own somehow and they did.” Goksel was describing the realities that the fellahin who stayed on the land had to contend with when the rural landscape upon which they had subsisted for years under the yoke and “protection” of their lords transformed into a battleground beneath their very feet, and in the absence of their masters; something was broken and something new grew in its place. Goksel pointed to the daily realities and micro-practices of survival of people living under an occupying power, acts often deemed immoral by the prescriptive moral judgment of those in control of the borderland today. He insinuated that survival is a gray zone that cannot be morally judged. But most of all, Goksel, a careful, empathetic and involved observer throughout his long tenure and beyond, spoke of the remarkable social revolution that was catalyzed during these years of exception and extremity in South Lebanon.

The power that came in their place is of a different genealogy and technology.

iv. Once Upon a Wartime: Formations of Battle

Guerrilla genealogies: fida’iyeen in South Lebanon

With so much attention focused on Hizbullah who are the present-day peasant-warriors of South Lebanon, other less illustrious narratives and histories get silenced and subsumed by the strength and color, baroque pomp and circumstance of Hizbullahi spectacle and compelling existential and moral power of its politics and the compelling (hegemonic) nature of their rhetoric. The period of Palestinian resistance in South Lebanon, that began
to take shape by the mid-1960s and was finally eradicated and usurped with the second Israeli invasion of 1982, consecrated the South as battleground. And although their story ended badly (locally, nationally, regionally and internationally – so far), these freedom fighters (called \textit{fida'iyyeen} singular \textit{fida'i}\textsuperscript{55}) must be given their due, for their successes and their failures are an intrinsic and critical part of the South’s (and Hizbullah’s) genealogy, landscape, story and socio-political formation.

Of course, outside of the historical and geographical continuity of what is now South Lebanon and what was once Palestine, first contact so to speak between Lebanese southerners and Palestinians was during the Palestinian \textit{Nakba}/Catastrophe, when Palestinians from the Galilee and beyond came streaming over the border to take refuge in Lebanon’s closest villages from the armed Zionists “sweeping” them out of the Promised Land (Khleifi and Sivan 2003). Many of the older southern folk recall the time when the Palestinians lived among them. As it was late spring, the Palestinians sheltered under the trees in southern orchards, or those with relatives, among relatives. Naturally, everyone thought the situation was temporary. Some Palestinians would sneak over the border at night to visit their emptied villages and some remained there (the family of the famed Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish is among those who did so). Days stretched into months and months stretched into years and it did not look like they were going back home any time soon. So in the early 1950s the Lebanese state rounded up the Palestinians still scattered across the South and put them into refugee camps, empty lots appended to the large coastal cities, where they (or rather many of their descendants) remain in

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Fida’i} means the one who will sacrifice oneself, for the intention of those fighters was to free Palestine or die trying.
sprawling, walled, concrete jungles, in a permanent temporary state, until today (Sayigh 1979; 1993; Khalili 2005; Peteet 2005; 2007)

The Catastrophe/Nakba that brought the refugees to South Lebanon brought the first taste of political/historical injustice to an as of yet unmobilized, meek and powerless Lebanese peasantry. A common cause was transmitted from the displaced fellahin of Palestine to the fellahin of the South Lebanon borderland.

The Palestinian presence led to a better political awareness among the masses of the South. It made the Palestinian problem and the danger of the state of Israel a living issue. It awakened the national and social consciousness of the people and made the South a more fertile land for political activities compared to other parts of Lebanon. The Palestinians themselves with their suffering were important raw material for rebellion and unrest and were fast to answer the call of the revolution after 1967 (Sharif 1978).

Before they were given carte blanche by the 1969 Cairo Agreement to operate militarily in South Lebanon, the armed Palestinian guerrilla groups needed to tread a delicate warpath. So throughout the 1960s and until 1969, the Palestinian fighters depended heavily on the sympathy, hospitality, and most crucially the practiced knowledge of the terrain possessed and offered by the local inhabitants of the borderland. The guerrillas recruited local guides who intimately knew the many hidden footpaths into Palestine (that were formerly used for trade and other networks)\(^\text{56}\). The fighters also blended into the villages to escape the Lebanese authorities who at this stage did not approve (to put it lightly) of free-roaming armed Palestinians operating along their frontiers (let alone Palestinians truth be told). The guerrillas used the villages of the South as organic bases and as inconspicuous places to conceal their weapons. Yet the harsh crackdown of the Lebanese authorities, especially the feared and hated Deuxieme Bureau, the intelligence

\(^{56}\) This was related to me by Abu Gebran.
wing of the Lebanese Army, on the Palestinian militants and their supporters could no
longer be sustained after the Arab defeat of 1967, which gave birth to an Arab Nationalist
firestorm that the Palestinian Revolution managed to harness.

At this time

hundreds of Lebanese militants, especially from the South, poured into Fateh
training camps to prepare for the next armed struggle against Israeli occupation. From August 1967 until mid-1969 Palestinian armed presence and activities in southern Lebanon grew slowly on stable ground. This was counteracted by many Israeli mass retaliations on towns and villages accused of cooperating with the “terrorists” (Sharif 1978:15).

By now the Palestinian Revolution (al-thawra), headed by Fateh, had coalesced under the PLO into a powerful and extremely generously funded political movement with massive popular support. And when the PLO was expelled from Jordan in the wake of 1970’s “Black September”, there was nowhere to go but Lebanon (Hirst 2011). And thus the Palestinian Revolution entered the disheveled and disempowered landscape of the Lebanese South. Suddenly the poor villagers had a cause. More importantly they had cash flow; suddenly men could replace their yokes and maybars\(^{57}\) with AK 47s and RPGs; suddenly South Lebanon was a strategic geography and was taking on a vital military role with existential significance to the region and reverberations around the world. War had come to stay; it was digging in, making itself a home. It reconfigured the landscape of the South, transforming it from an ignored, marginalized place of poverty to one of regional and global power games and international media (and monetary) attention.

*Killing fields*

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57 The long flat needle used to thread green tobacco leaves on twine for drying.
The Cairo Agreement of 1969 inaugurated South Lebanon as battlefield. This agreement, among other things freed the Palestinian Revolution from the persecution of the Lebanese authorities, and most significantly for this account, gave the Palestinian militants use of South Lebanon borderland as base for military missions against Israel. Although this was at best a mere formalization of what already existed on the ground, it gave the Palestinian guerrilla presence in the South unchallenged authority and free rein, a combination – that with the moral sanction that goes hand in hand with revolution, weaponry, machismo (Genet 2003) – cultivated an attitude among the militants who came to barely recognize the existence of the lowly peasant-villagers plying their earthly toil upon their – the guerrilla’s – battleground. Soon the guerrillas established effective control of the border area. The \textit{fida'iyeen} militarily reconfigured the borderland, dividing it into three sectors. These sectors continued to more or less organize the Israeli occupation and are still utilized as an orienting framework today.

1. The eastern sector called Arkoub is formed of rugged mountains overlooking Israeli settlements. Here the Palestinian Revolution was given complete freedom; the Lebanese Army withdrew completely leaving even the strategic defense of the area against Israeli raids in the hands of the Palestinian resistance.
2. The central sector, less hilly than the east, extends to the edge of the coastal plain. Here the Lebanese Army was to undertake the strategic defense against Israel while the Palestinian armed presence equipped with light weapons was restricted to certain locations and limited to supply and early warning functions.
3. The western sector, or the coastal plain, was kept under complete Lebanese army control; no Palestinian armed presence outside the Palestinian camps was allowed. The Fedayeen were to use this sector in emergencies only (Sharif 1978:16).

Of course on the ground the Palestinian guerrillas and their local allies did not adhere to these rules; at best they paid them lip service as they spread out across the borderland in
varying levels of visibility and invisibility\textsuperscript{58}. The weaving of Palestinian resistance into the daily life and landscape of the South altered it in many ways: giving an economic boost to many languishing towns and impoverished villages, and a new military meaning and utility to landscape; ideas of social and political empowerment were planted and disseminated among the disempowered peasantry. During this time many village youths joined the resistance. Many of the highest cadres of Hizbullah today had their first taste of warfare and their first military training among the Palestinians.

\textit{The weed of dearth: “the crop of steadfastness”}

Throughout the time that the guerrilla war in the borderland was heating up, tobacco farming kept people on the land when all other options were voided, or if none were considered in the first place and life continued along its already well-known and well-worn paths. But as the \textit{zu’ama} lost their hold on the South, a shake-up of the tobacco order followed suit. Like most things in the South, the tobacco industry, predating the Lebanese state by centuries, was almost entirely in the hands of the \textit{zu’ama}, who acted as private stakeholders of the Lebanese state. As Traboulsi writes “In the south, the Regie had become a private reserve of the traditional \textit{za’ims}, who packed it with their clients and controlled cultivation licenses, which they distributed to their friends or rented to farmers (Traboulsi 2007). In 1973, aided by the leftist forces riding the coattails of the fiery Palestinian cause in Lebanon, the southern villages staged a tobacco revolution, demanding the re-distribution of tobacco licenses by the Regie, the state monopoly. On January 22, 1973 thousands of tobacco laborers occupied the regional offices of the Regie.

\textsuperscript{58} Goksel half-jokingly says that compared to the Hizbullah fighters of today, the Palestinians took no care to blend into the landscape or cover their traces and when the Israelis invaded all that was missing were neon signs pointing out their positions and locations.
in Nabatiyeh, demanding an increase in the purchase price of tobacco, an end to the speculation in tobacco licenses, limiting the area of cultivation, and nationalizing the Regie that was still French-owned. The tobacco movement snowballed and soon those demands were met, setting in place the order that defines the tobacco cultivation sector and its relationship to the Lebanese state that exists today (more on this in chapter five).

_A bitter harvest_

As mentioned, the southerners at first welcomed the guerrillas into their midst, providing them with invaluable support especially in terms of facilitating their blending into the terrain. But the relationship eventually soured and a crucial local alliance and symbiosis broke down. As Palestinian funds and hubris grew, and as the fighters dug into the South transforming it into a battlefield, their consideration for the impoverished and endangered lives of the villagers among whom they were conducting their warfare (and who were also critically enabling their warfare) diminished. Their presence came to chafe at the limits of village tolerance. After September 1970 as guerrilla presence and activity intensified in South Lebanon (by now the only guerrilla interface with the Palestinian/Israeli interior) so did Israeli attacks.

The Israelis began their practice of relentless strikes against the guerrillas operating from southern villages exacting high death tolls (Goede 2009)\(^\text{59}\).

\(^\text{59}\) “From 1948 until around 1970 the main threat [to the Israelis] consisted of infiltrations by Palestinians [...]. Israel responded to these attacks with reprisals, by way of incursions into the neighboring countries. Initially these raids were directed against civilians, resulting in mounting numbers of casualties. [...] The operations steadily increased, growing out of proportion with the actions to which they were a response. The risk of escalation rose accordingly and so did the losses. The perpetrators of the anti-Israeli actions often proved to be elusive, which caused the operations to be directed against the environments of the opponents. The inhabitants of the
The Israelis stated that their “punishment” would be directed at the whole village if one family helped the Palestinians. Israeli retaliation in the South took many forms: blowing up houses, burning of crops, retention of citizens, air raids, remote shelling by field artillery from inside Israeli territory, and massive incursions into Lebanese territories. From June 14, 1968 to June 10, 1974 (2188 days) UN observers reported 3,036 violations by Israel, including 12 major operations; a total of 226 Lebanese were killed, 566 were wounded, hundreds of houses were demolished, the crops of many villages were burned to ashes, and tens of Lebanese citizens were taken hostage; some were returned later after torture and humiliation (Sharif 1978:16).

Thus, it was an Israeli tactic from early on (and still is) to undermine guerrilla activity through attacks on non-combatants. The logic was that this would weaken the incentive of villagers to aid and abet the guerrillas. As the Palestinian guerrillas were also actively contributing to their own diminishing popularity among the Lebanese villagers this “circular pressure” tactic began to work. The ties – of class, of cause, of Pan-Arabism, of anti-Zionism, of kinship, of political being and agency, social mobility, manliness, money – binding the Palestinians guerrillas to their Lebanese counterparts began to unravel as the violence increased in frequency and intensity. It began to be said that the Palestinians would continue to fight Israel until the last Shi’a (Abu Khalil: 90).

Les Miserables: gathering al mahrumeen

villages in which it was thought the actions had been undertaken, were in fact on the receiving end of the reprisal actions. Pressure on the environment […] would bring pressure on the opponents. This was later called “circular pressure” and it is still a principle with which Israel tries to gain control over opponents like Hezbollah today. Usually, however, it is questionable whether the environment is in a position to do anything against the fighters. Often circular pressure operations have an adverse effect, when Israeli fire power prompts firing on Israeli citizens. Besides “returning fire to the source of fire” often causes innocent victims in view of the way in which the opponent often operates, which then fuels the hostility. So circular pressure has not brought a solution, and an alternative does not seem to present itself for the time being” (de Goede 2009: 206).

60 “The disinheritied” al mahrumeen, was the self-describing epithet that the Shi’a used as their political rallying cry.
“The people of the south, including the Shi’a, have given the Palestinian cause more than all the Arabs combined have given it. They have given the cause their land, their children, their security, their orchards – everything but their honor and dignity” (Norton 1987).

The shreds of burning resentment and resulting increasing alienation of Shi’a villagers from the Palestinian cause were gathered into a movement that initially coalesced around the luminary/charismatic figure of Musa al-Sadr an Iranian-born Shi’a imam of distant Lebanese descent, who appeared on the scene in the 1960s. Sadr’s initial success and popularity had to do with staking claims for Shi’a presence in Lebanese government and politics, stepping into the role neglected by the oppressive and exploitative old feudal families61 – and also, probably most significantly, weaning the mobilizing Shi’a, who were drawn into the Palestinian and leftist thrall, militias and payroll into a new sect-based political tradition and formation. As Norton argues in Amal and the Shi’a: Struggle for the Soul of Lebanon (1987) “Musa al Sadr set out to establish himself as the paramount leader of the Shi’i community, and his arrival could not have been more timely. He did not single-handedly stimulate the community’s political consciousness, but he capitalized on the budding politicization of the Shi’a invigorating and rationalizing it” (Norton 1987:39).

Sadr drew his rhetoric from the leading thematic tropes of Shi’ism, their (the followers of Ali or ahl al bayt) historical and ongoing dispossession at the hands of the power-hungry (Sunni) establishment and their subsequent massacre, suffering and impoverishment, exile and dispossession. Sadr was the first modern-day political figure to give Lebanese Shi’a peasantry and urban poor a personalized political voice that drew

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61 For example, in 1969 Sadr instigated the formation of the Higher Shia Islamic Council that would articulate Shi’i demands in Lebanese governmental matters; up until this point Shi’a religious representation in the state had been subsumed under the Sunni council.
upon the potent mixture of their sectarian identity, perceived and real historical oppression, socio-political dispossession and recent militarization. Sadr launched *harakat al mahrumeen* or “the movement of the dispossessed” in a massive rally in Baalbek in 1974. With the run-up to the civil war gaining intensity and the increasing militarization of Lebanese politics, Sadr’s movement begat a military arm *afwaj al muqawama al lubnaniyya* (detachments of the Lebanese resistance) better known by its acronym Amal (which means hope). Amal was the first Shi’a-based resistance movement in South Lebanon and although its first adherents were trained by Fatah it soon eclipsed and then overtook the secular-leftist alliance of Palestinians and Lebanese in the borderland and elsewhere (by the time of the second Israeli invasion of 1982, some Amal villages were in a nasty and often petty open war with the leftist-Palestinian guerrillas). The movement gained force and momentum with the beginning of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 where many poor Shi’a were expelled from the Christian areas of Beirut and flocked to the protection of their “own” militia.

Norton sums up this process:

As the conflict in Lebanon progressed, the Shi’a were increasingly isolated as a community. In the early stages of the civil war, the Shi’a provided the cannon fodder for most of the groups aligned with the PLO. Indeed, as a dispossessed people they were often and aptly described as the natural allies of the Palestinians. However, they increasingly became the communal victims of the Palestinian-Israel war for Palestine-Israel. In a mean dialectical process, the Shi’a found themselves targeted by the Israelis for their geographic propinquity to the *fida’iyin* and viewed with increasing contempt and suspicion by the *fida’iyin*, from whom they attempted to distance themselves. It needs to be stressed that Israel’s campaign would not have been nearly as successful had it not been enhanced by the unpopularity of the *fida’iyin*. The IDF’s intensive campaign, beginning in 1978, served to bring the latent contradictions and tensions to the surface, and the resultant alienation of the Shi’a from the Palestinian resistance served as a fertile context for the growth of an organization, Amal, that promised to fill a most basic need, security (Norton 1987:51).
Be that as it may, in the first phase of the Lebanese civil war Amal remained a relatively weak military presence and political player as a newcomer to the field of battle and still in the process of wresting its constituency from the feudal lords and the leftist pro-Palestinian parties. As a rubric for the disenfranchised Shi’a in the process of forming a political identity and place for themselves in the Lebanese theater it was robust and well funded by merchants, the small agrarian middle class and overseas Shi’a (Norton 1987:61), but its infrastructure was weak, it was disorganized militarily and its supporters and adherents were scattered. Yet three occurrences within less than a year of each other reinvigorated and consolidated the sweep and goals of this movement. These were the first Israeli invasion of March 1978 followed in August of that year by the mysterious disappearance of Musa al Sadr in an official state visit to Libya and finally the Iranian revolution in January 1979. Within the context of the ongoing civil conflict in Lebanon that was being increasingly waged by sectarian-based militias, Amal’s popular support, political strength and military expertise began to grow. Amal thus formed the first wave of Shi’a resistance in Lebanon from which the kernel of Hizbullah formed in the bloody crucible of the second Israeli invasion (1982) and subsequent occupation. Sweeping away the last vestiges of feudal structures across the South and undermining the burgeoning leftist alliance across the borderland, the movement of the dispossessed consolidated a Shi’i social revolution and set the coming stage for communal politics in South Lebanon ever since.

*Christian cadres*

The Shi’a were not the only group in the borderland who had developed disaffection for the Palestinian guerrillas and the war games and power politics being played out at their
expense and in their villages. In addition to fraying through acts of violence the already
fraught/fragile alliance between Shi’a villagers and Palestinian guerrillas, Israel had been
making inroads in the deteriorating sectarian situation across the border villages by
pandering to the Christians. Playing on the boiling opposition of rightist Christian forces
to Palestinian presence and activity in Lebanon (where a nasty war had been raging
around this explosive theme in the capital since 1975 already), Israel had been courting
the South’s Christian villagers with a “good fence” policy while simultaneously building
up a military force of local allies around a core of Christian Lebanese Army officers (the
1st Infantry Battalion stationed in Marjayoun) who had splintered with their men from the
Lebanese Army when it disintegrated with the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war. In
addition, many demobilized military men had flocked back to their villages (the Christian
border villages had provided many sons to the Lebanese Armed Forces) when the war
erupted in Beirut, and they too became the objects of Israel’s recruiting drive for a local
proxy to wage their ongoing war against Palestinians and their Lebanese allies. By 1978,
Israel’s practice of divide and conquer had worked its way into the multi-sectarian
villages of the South and by now the borderland was divided into a pattern of enemy
village enclaves wrought along sectarian lines.

1978

A little after midnight on March 15, 1978 Israel launched “Operation Litani” its first
large-scale land invasion of Lebanon. Heralded by barrages of artillery that began just
after midnight, armored columns of tanks and around 30,000 Israeli ground troops
barreled over the border and into South Lebanon flattening fields and villages, sweeping
terrified human and other beings ahead of them, setting orchards and fields alight as they
went. The guerrillas swiftly withdrew to the other side of the Litani, and it was the sleeping villagers who bore the brunt of this massive mechanized military assault.

Sweeping across the landscape without facing insurmountable resistance, the Israelis achieved their stated objective – to flush the Palestinian guerrillas from the borderland and establish what they called a “security belt” along the entire border, ten kilometers deep. It was the beginning of spring and the earth was in the process of being sapped of its winter moisture and the tender tobacco seedlings were quivering on their stalks; in many fields the planting was still a work in progress: the red earth was freshly churned and awaiting its “bitter crop”\(^\text{62}\). Those who worked this land were asleep to get up before dawn when the dew was heaviest, softening earth and vegetation, to begin another labor-intensive day of transferring the tobacco shoots to fields. Throughout the seven day operation around two thousand people died, a quarter of a million people were displaced and around two thousand five hundred homes were completely destroyed across a hundred villages. Particularly devastated were a small cluster of Bedu villages on the eastern edge of the Western Sector. These villages were wiped from the map and their inhabitants (supposed “militants”) were massacred and/or displaced (Hirst 2011). On March 19, 1978 the UN Security Council passed resolution 425 that called “upon Israel to cease its military action against Lebanese territorial integrity and withdraw forthwith its forces from all Lebanese territory” (Nasrallah 1992). It also established “immediately under its authority a United Nations interim force for southern Lebanon for the purpose of confirming the withdrawal of Israeli forces, restoring international peace and security and assisting the government in Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority

\(^{62}\) Tobacco
in the area, the force to be composed of personnel drawn from member states of the United nations” *(ibid.)*

The “forthwith” would take around twenty-two years to be honored, and UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Forces in Lebanon) has been renewing its “interim” status in the border zone every year ever since then. That same day, with the operation supposedly over, the Israelis suddenly broke out of their newly created buffer zone to reach the Litani River, demonstrating their regard for such international resolutions. Finally on June 13, 1978 Israel began its withdrawal. It left behind it a ravaged field of battle and significantly for the first time a landscape strewn with unexploded cluster bombs, weapons that they would use time and again, re-seeding the Southern landscape, to target the cultivator, casual dweller, the unarmed and thus enhance the lethality and price/cost of pursuing an ordinary agrarian-based living on this (coveted?) land. As the Israelis withdraw they suddenly stopped ten kilometers from the borderline and turned over the entire swathe of borderland to Lebanese Army Major Saad Haddad, who led the pro-Israeli militia that would come to rule what would come to be called “the strip” *al shareet*. Then named the Free Lebanon Army (FLA), it was the precursor of what would later become the South Lebanon Army (SLA). Israel supposedly withdrew then leaving a proxy force in its place to ensure a Palestinian (and UNFIL) free “security zone” on 700 square kilometers of Lebanese land. In any case the Israelis would soon be back.

Thus began Israel’s long occupation of South Lebanon.

1982: “Making Enemies in South Lebanon”

“It is a fact that with the conquest of the villages and hamlets of southern Lebanon, we were received with rice and flowers. Now we are received with grenades and explosives. Something
has happened to the Shi’a sect. Our tanks and armored personnel carriers have not left them indifferent and smiling. The joy about our arrival as people liberating them from the terrorists’ burden has changed with time into burning hatred. This is not something to be surprised about: We have behaved as a military government, with all that involves, and caused much suffering to the population” (Israeli journalist quoted in Norton 1987: 117).

Between 1982 and 1985, during Israel’s second invasion of Lebanon and subsequent three-year occupation, Israel expanded the border strip to include offensive geography and consolidated it with the establishment of the SLA under the command of General Antoine Lahd. The 1982 offensive, the infamous 1982 “Operation Peace for Galilee” was a long prepared for assault (Israel’s “chosen war”) that set out to exterminate the PLO once and for all from Lebanon (it had other “hidden” goals of setting up an allied order in Beirut, which failed). This time an invading force of 90,000 men, with 1300 tanks and 1500 armored carriers, covered by the Israeli Air Force and the navy carpet-bombing humanity into submission and cities into rubble, ploughed through the country in a three-pronged attack all the way to the gates of Beirut. There they were halted at the Khaldeh junction, on the coast ten kilometers south of Beirut, by a valiant and temporarily effective resistance comprised of Palestinian and leftist militias who had formed themselves into the Joint Forces, a rag-tag but determined defensive fighting force. At this point the invading Israelis stalled and regrouped, with some officers taking up residence in the plush homes on the low hills overlooking Khaldeh and Beirut (among them my uncle’s villa, where they shot and killed his dogs before entering – just as described by the narrator of the animated account of this invasion Waltz with Bashir).

From there the Israelis launched the infamous siege of Beirut that many Israelis see as a turning point in Israeli military history (according to Israeli military historian Martin Van Creveld). The invaders demanded the “disappearance” of the PLO (Hirst 2011) and after
seven weeks of strangulating blockade and a relentless bombing campaign that made the city synonymous with living hell, Beirut exhausted and depleted and in the throes of a full-blown humanitarian disaster, finally gave in. The PLO got out; Sharon implemented his (hidden agenda) puppet-government plan, which ended in nought with the September 14 assassination of the young Lebanese president elect Bashir Gemayel. The monstrous massacres of Sabra and Shatila (September 16-19) soon followed, facilitated by the Israelis and implemented by Bashir’s Forces Libanaises (Lebanese Forces). The death toll of “Operation Peace for Galilee” topped 19,000 souls. The absolute number is quite large but for a country of a mere 3.5 million, it is huge.

The 1982 invasion has been called by Israeli military historian Martin van Creveld Israel’s “greatest folly” (Van Creveld 2002), for in entering the “quagmire” of Lebanon, Israel through unspeakable acts of violence and destruction, tarnished the “pure” military reputation they had forged in the numerous Arab-Israeli wars; most crucially they created their most formidable foe to date. Israel entered Lebanon to fight one foe (the PLO) and upon defeating it rode a wave of hubris and created another much more dangerous and effective one (Hizbullah).

It was Israel itself that changed the Shiites, which turned rice and flowers into grenades and homemade bombs. Indeed, observers never ceased to marvel at just how thoroughly unnecessarily and counter-productively it managed to achieve this. At bottom their metamorphosis was a completely natural – if initially delayed – response to what Israel had done to them, beginning with the invasion itself. They had not been the specific target of that, but they had nonetheless suffered more than any other community if only because, as inhabitants of the South, they stood directly in its path. Mainly theirs were the villages – nearly 80 percent of them – that were damaged and destroyed, theirs the majority of the 20,000 killed. They formed the overwhelming bulk of yet another great exodus from the South, further swelling the capital’s ‘belt of misery’, and contributing to the fact that in the massacres of Sabra and Shatila, perhaps a quarter of the slain were actually Shiites, not Palestinians (Hirst 2011).
After Sabra and Shatila, Multi-National Forces (MNF) took over the capital Beirut and Israel withdrew in stages leaving carnage in their wake as the various Lebanese factions went at each other’s necks in the ensuing vacuum. The Israelis eventually entrenched themselves in the southern half of Lebanon beginning from Awwali River outside of Sidon (this is when my personal experience of war first came into focus – we would often cross the Israeli checkpoint to visit our grandmother in Sidon; we were, like everyone, roughly handled by red-eyed, olive-clad occupiers, stranded for hours, pushed around, taunted, humiliated, made to feel expendable, like animals, threatened). In the vacuum of the PLO’s withdrawal and the continuing messy and violent Israeli occupation of the south of the country, a context was created for a homegrown Lebanese resistance to come into its own; Norton calls it “making enemies in South Lebanon” because that is in fact what the Israelis did. Overstaying their “welcome” by a stretch and through their heavy-handed dealings with the southerners, they personally crafted an enemy they are still unable to get the better of.

Thus, among the seasoned militants and resisters already on the scene, a new group made an appearance. Hizbullah, then still known then as Islamic Jihad. A core of Iranian inspired clerics and Amal cadres – among them the present day Secretary General of Hizbullah Hassan Nasrallah – who broke with Amal and recombined, taking their followers (what came to be Hizbullah) with them, it was catalyzed in the vortex of rampant violence (“the economy of terror”) (Taussig 1986) visited upon Lebanon and particularly the South during this invasion. They literally burst onto the stage in November 1982 first with an attack on the Israeli occupation headquarters in Tyr (Sur) and then with the October 1983 suicide-attacks on the US embassy and the US Marine
and French soldiers, who were part of the MNF “keeping the peace” in Beirut in the wake of the Israeli withdrawal from the capital. The double attack on the barracks near Beirut Airport took the lives of 241 American marines and 58 French troops and ended the presence of the MNF. As Hirst puts it “It was an impressive debut for this latecomer among Lebanese militias which would in due course surpass and then long outlive them all” (Hirst 2011). In 1985, for the first time in its military history thus far Israel unilaterally withdrew from an invaded Arab country under pressure of armed resistance. In Norton’s words:

No other facet of Israel’s misadventure in Lebanon is a clearer case of bad judgment and self-defeating policy than Israel’s mishandling of the Shi’i population of south Lebanon. […] Of all the blunders committed by Israel in Lebanon, those committed in south Lebanon were the most unnecessary, the least easily excused by the dumb luck of history, and, perhaps, the most far-ranging in effect. For the first time in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the IDF was defeated, and not by a standing army, but by a loosely organized, poorly equipped resistance force (Norton 1987).

I remember watching people dancing in the streets behind the retreating troops. A young girl my age was dancing and singing behind a line of armored tanks carrying its sullen, expressionless soldiers away.

v. An Occupied Place: Normalizing the Exception

The “zone” […] stretches from the mist-shrouded foothills of Mount Hermon, with its apples, walnuts, and cherries, through lower-lying olive and tobacco-growing regions, down to the Mediterranean and a lush coastal fringe of oranges and bananas. More than just a ten-kilometer-wide “defensive” buffer zone, it includes a salient, offensive in nature, running north to the mountain resort of Jazzin. It comprises a good 10 percent of the country, with about 150 small towns and villages. Its mix of religious communities – overwhelmingly Shi’ite, but including Sunni Muslims, Druze, Maronite, and other Christian sects – is perhaps even more intricate than in the rest of the country (Hirst 2011: 6-7).

“The […] zone runs for 70 km from Al Bayyadah on the Mediterranean coast, south of the ancient Phoenician port of Tyre, eastwards to the slopes of Israeli-held Mount Hermon, where the borders of Lebanon, Israel and Syria converge. The 2,224 m peak is of exceptional geostrategic
value because it provides a commanding position overlooking south Lebanon, the Golan plateau and much of northern Israel and Southern Syria. The eastern border of the security zone abuts the northern end of the occupied Golan Heights. At its deepest point, the zone is 15 km wide. At its western end, a thumb-shaped salient juts northwards to the mountaintop Christian town of Jezzine close to the Awwali River, the northern boundary of south Lebanon. The country is rugged, cleft by ravines and studded with craggy mountains and hills: classic guerrilla terrain” (Jane’s Intelligence Review: 411).

As mentioned, in 1978 Israel did not withdraw completely but rather ensconced itself in an expanded and improved “buffer zone” (including offensive geography now), the occupied borderland that came to be known as “the Strip” al shareet al hududi al muhtall. By now the Israeli occupation of the South Lebanon borderland ensnared 1,200 square km, around ten percent of Lebanese national territory.

The Israel-funded and controlled militia formerly known as the FLA had been until 1984 composed of around 3,500 men with six battalion-sized formations, a tank battalion and an artillery battalion. In 1984 Saad Haddad the FLA commander died of cancer and many members of the surrogate military force defected in the wake of the 1985 Israeli Army pullback. This is when Israel restructured, reorganized, revamped the force under former Lebanese Army Officer Major General Antoine Lahd, renaming it the South Lebanon Army (SLA). The SLA ruled the small towns and villages of the borderland, fielding around 2,500 soldiers who were mostly drawn from the villages of “the Strip” – ideally one from every village beit “house” or family. Some formerly disenfranchised or merely opportunistic souls jumped on the bandwagon to participate in militarized empowerment and others were forcibly conscripted.
In 1989 two new brigades were formed with three territorial battalions each (three infantry battalions, two batteries of artillery and two tank companies). The brigades corresponded to the two regions of the zone the Western Brigade under the command of Colonel Aql Hashem (a Maronite) and the Eastern Brigade under Druze command. The Western sector (encompassing the Central sector of the Cairo Accords) extends from the...
coast to Bint Jbeil and is the area that I conducted my fieldwork in. It was the more turbulent sector of the zone, with the largest concentration of Shi’a villages. The military headquarters of the zone was Markaz 17 (“Position 17”) that was housed in the former (and today once again) Bint Jbeil hospital, in its time a terrible place of fear and (tales and practices of) terror where many were taken for interrogations, beatings and detention and imprisonment. This part of the Strip is also the heartland of tobacco farming. Its high elevations and lack of irrigation make only rain-fed and dry land crops viable.

Geographically it is crinkled with deep valleys and gorges – some which extend into the Israeli north, facilitating guerrilla warfare (the kidnapping that launched the 2006 war happened in one of those sharp and deep border valleys). The administrative headquarters of the zone were housed in the former Lebanese Army barracks of Marjayoun, a graceful Christian town on the side of a hill overlooking a wide fertile plain that extends north into the Bekaa and then Syria and south into Israel and beyond. Antoine Lahd, the commander of the SLA inhabited a stone villa not far from the barracks (that I visited, among other freshly de-occupied places, on the first day of the withdrawal). This sector of the zone is mainly Christian and Druze with a pocket of Sunnis around the Wazzani springs area and the currently disputed Sheba’a farms. Across the fertile and irrigated plain on a low hill right on the border perches the town of Khiam. There the SLA established their infamous Khiam detention center in the building of a French Mandate era barracks, where the inhabitants of the zone were dragged and imprisoned: men, women and children. It was a place of fear and terror and a site of control and power that also generated stories of terror and enhancing the occupation’s “economy of terror” (Taussig 1986).
The occupation zone was separate from the rest of Lebanon with several tightly controlled crossings where people could enter and exit. Only those registered as residents of the villages there were allowed regularly in and out and even they needed permits that were issued by the SLA administration; the permits, issued and permanently revoked at will were an insidious mechanism of governance and control. All kind of movement in and out as well as within the zone was severely restricted and monitored.

The Israelis for quite some time maintained that they were merely overseeing their “Security Zone” and not directly involved in an occupation, but this conceit did not hold out. It may be true that at first they did not involve themselves in the day to day control and governance of the occupation zone – that was the job of the SLA – but they provided the means, around 32 million dollars a year and more to cover the five hundred to six hundred dollars average monthly salaries of the SLA soldiers and other sundries of military occupation; they maintained 1000 to 2000 troops there ensconced in fortified highest-hilltop locations, in particular those where the hundreds of years ago the Crusaders had built hardy fortresses like Beaufort and Blat. More involved in the daily developments in the zone were the various Israeli intelligence agencies that cooperated closely with the intelligence arm of the SLA to keep a heavy lid on the local inhabitants.

The occupation was a paranoid and violent order that harassed its subjects constantly. Monopolizing the skies, the Israelis utilized their technologically advanced arsenal to compose a detailed intelligence picture of the south and depended on the SLA to rule the villages as they saw fit. Yet

Despite their overwhelming firepower, SLA and IDF troops fear the South Lebanese bandit country. Villages in the security zone are subject to curfew and
most nights are disturbed by artillery and small arms fire as jumpy sentries sound the alarm. In retaliation for attacks, SLA compounds rake nearby villages with small arms fire. IDF artillery fires warning salvoes at or around suspect villages and Cobra helicopter gunships use TOW missiles to destroy buildings used by Hezbollah or other militias (Jane’s Intelligence Review).

Hence one could argue that structure the occupation inherited and slipped into a structure of power in this borderland that did not deviate radically from the patterns of years gone by outside of the changing of actors: farmers in villages living off the land with some more entwined with the ruling order and some less so and at the mercy of armed thugs doing the bidding of those in power. People often repeat that there was an atmosphere of pervasive fear, suspicion and insecurity throughout the hamlets and villages; a situation that was exacerbated the more Hezbollah infiltrated into the area, with increasingly painful blows against the occupation. It was during the occupation that the tables began to turn in favor of the guerrillas and the transformations described above emerged as Hezbollah honed its warcraft and consolidated its social base; it soon gained the upper hand.

“Rain or shine”

Yes, the occupation was a paranoid and violent order, a time of de-population, expulsions, house demolitions, interrogation, imprisonment, and militia/military rule, but on the other hand, for some, it spelled a time of relative peace and prosperity. For those remaining on a slip of land that had up to that point been ceaselessly wracked by multiple forms of violence and warfare for decades, the post-1985 occupation inaugurated a more or less stable framework, a period of relative calm. For those who for whatever reason threw their lot in with the occupiers and those who simply remained in their homes and on their land because they fell outside the snare of the militia and the military in terms of
service and suspicion (those would generally be old men, women and children), the
Israeli occupation was simply another chapter in an ongoing cycle and they
accommodated themselves to it accordingly. Bou Sahel who remained in his village in his
home throughout the years of occupation, farming tobacco, olives, grain, and consistently
practicing a form of passive resistance, described this play of life and war to me as “rain
or shine”. Some things were better and some things were worse he said stoically as a
controversial murmur rippled through the younger crowd sitting around him, whose more
ideological and less inhabited sense of wars and occupation did not allow at all for shades
of gray. Bou Sahel puts it thus:

First Lebanon was under the Ottomans and then the French and then when the
French left it became a great place where MEA brought passengers from all over
the world. Then the thing with Palestine happened and they [the Palestinians] all
came here. And Beirut and the South were swimming with money. Those were
good days. And then the Palestinians left and the SLA came and again the area
was swimming with money and income [“for those who stayed!” a younger man
sporting a Hizbullah beard interjected accusingly]. But these days are gloomy.
These days we are marginal, poor and no one cares about us. There is no money,
everything is expensive and the municipality is split between the Hizb[ullah] and
the Harakeh [Amal] who are so taken up with their petty internal disputes that the
village has no water and no electricity and people have to buy water from Dibl [a
nearby Christian village] at 30,000 a delivery and in order to watch Nur [a
popular Turkish soap opera] my daughters have hooked up our TV to a battery.
Life here alternates between rain and shine.

Bou Sahel has lived most of his life in his village. He was born there in 1931. He was a
teenager during the Nakba when Palestinian villagers from over the next hill settled in
and around his village (where they lived for almost a decade before they were rounded up
by the Lebanese state and taken to refugee camps in 1957 only to return as fighters in the
1960s). As a young man Bou Sahel left his village briefly to work as a laborer in Libya
and also tried his hand as a construction worker in Saudi Arabia but that did not last long
and he came back to his village where he got married and began a family. The only son
of an only son he inherited a few pieces of land around the village. On one he expanded
upon his fathers stone house where he still lives in today with his wife and his three
unmarried daughters (he has three sons and six daughters). His home is on the main road
that runs parallel to the border at one of the entrances of the village. In the 1960s when
the guerrilla war was heating up Bou Sahel joined the Baathist strand in the leftist
colalition backing up the Palestinian guerrillas. He would go for training in Syria and was
part of a local village fighting force. He recalled this time or cyclical retribution upon the
villages of the borderland:

When the Palestinian resistance began Israel decided if it got a hit from near our
village, then it would destroy our village, its houses, and take people and things
like this. People were shaken by this and many people left and those who found
something to do out there never came back…

Many people were leaving the South by now but Bou Sahel stayed. Why? I asked him.
His answer is telling: “Walla hayk! Well really just so! ‘anda arid wa
mnizra’ wa mniflah. We have an orchard and we have land and we plant and plough the
land. Living for a cause, a person has to suffer. Of course if we had wanted to leave we
could have.”

Then the 1978 invasion came and went. “What happened then?” I asked him.
“Nothing much, the Palestinians left the borderland” is his response. But in fact he was
displaced from his village with his family. They did not return until a year after the
second Israeli invasion (in 1982) when the Israeli occupation of the borderland had more
or less “stabilized”. He continues, “the first thing I did when I came back was to ijruf dig
up a piece of land and plant an orchard of fruit trees. I planted myself here and never left
again”. Back from five years of displacement, squatting homes in Beirut, Bou Sahel was
back in his village and here he intended to stay, demonstrating his intention by planting
an orchard of fruit trees that by now is rooted and prolific. Fruit trees need time to take
root and become prolific. He wanted to claim that time and make a place. “He who has
some land, has a path, has a home,” he says with conviction.

Bou Sahel remained in the occupied village with his wife, daughters and youngest
son but his two elder sons did not return to the occupied strip to avoid conscription in the
SLA. From the village they would send their sons in Beirut provisions that they had
generated by working their land. The idiom of life and landscape are deeply intertwined.
One gives the other matter, meaning, temporal shape, presence:

When the boys were in Beirut we could send them from here smeed semolina and
oil from the orchard. We would work me and the girls and the hajeh and so we
stayed. Any work requires effort ayya ‘amal baddo jahid. With flaha ploughing
one ploughs in the freezing and in the cold and the rain to plant the ground, and
one harvests in the heat! But we chose this difficult path because we wanted to
continue to live here. And it wasn’t only us who stayed! Those who could, stayed.
Life wasn’t easy for Bou Sahel under the occupation. Although he was too old to be
conscripted into the SLA, he was constantly harassed by the occupiers to “cooperate”
with them. He says that his household was “disliked” by the occupiers and their allies
because they were known to be uncooperative.

During the time of Lahd\(^{63}\), the time of Israel, and even during the time of the
muqawama like now there are always shawa ‘ib transgressions. For example if
you are going to move around you have to pay the price. Israel were like this: if I
am sitting here in my house they won’t bother me. But they came when? If they
see me going and coming they will come and say give us information. But he who
plays gets caught up halli byil‘ab byil‘a’. Under any order ‘ahd even now in the
time of the state, collaborators are emerging and they are the ones who pay the
price. I came back and stayed here and I was humiliated a little a’adit hawni wa
yaani itbahdalit shwayyi.

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\(^{63}\) General Antoine Lahd was the commander of the SLA. The SLA was commonly called jeysh Lahd “Lahd’s Army”. 
They kept coming to me and saying your children are not here and so we want something from you. They took me to Israel twice. It was about this time of year, a guy came and took me and went. I went in there but I am not sure where we went, me and the officer. We went toward the west. It was dark. They met with me and asked me to work for them. We sat there in two rooms and we and the officer that we met at the crossing – the car that took me stayed and the car that we went into Israel continued. He asked me would you work for us? He said we don’t want anything from you but if you could tell us a few things… At this time all they wanted to know about was Hizbullah. This must have been two years before the Liberation, yes it must have been around then because toward the end they really started needing people to work for them. So I told them no I can’t do it. I am now over seventy years old. You told me to leave [the Strip] and I am just sitting here minding my own business. Yes there were some pressures on us but we didn’t give in.

To Bou Sahel, like many who inhabit it, war is a process, a condition and one that is by definition (and necessity) inhabitable:

I watch on TV how Japan and America or Britain were at war and you see scenes how when they fight in boats the sea turned red from the blood. There were wars but then they reached a point that they finished. Now in European countries there is calm. Here you don’t know how things will end. War is ongoing. There is a sectarian struggle. There is the struggle of capitalism. There is the struggle to power. There isn’t a leader who comes to power who cares about the country as a whole. And that is how the story goes. We have gone through a war, through two, three, four. Israel entered a first time, a second time, a third time, a fourth. Maybe another war will happen, but what will be the result of that war? What more could happen? We have no fear.

Bou Sahel pointed to the building boom in the wake of the 2006 war as proof of this lack of fear for what another war could bring and a sense of complacency on behalf of those for whom war is an inhabited condition, a potential of violence, but also a domesticated part of life and not counter to life.

* A landscape and laboratory of war

Throughout the occupation the active warfront moved north where a war of attrition and guerrilla infiltration began and gained momentum. A set of tacit rules (that became explicit after the 1996 April Accords) or “rule box” (Norton 2006) emerged through the
long dance of war between the opponents that defined the terms of engagement.

According to these “rules” the border strip was defined as battleground, the Israeli occupiers and their local allies were legitimate (so to speak) targets of the Resistance and the vice versa. These rules implied that Israel would not target Lebanese civilians or civilian targets and that the Resistance would not target Israelis in Israel. These rules defined the deadly dance for a long time.

The occupation thus was a laboratory of war where Hizbullah practiced and honed its war craft and transformed into the virtuosic fighting force it is today: because of their technological inferiority they had to fall back on their earth-boundedness to succeed in this domestic battleground or “natural” theater of warfare. They harnessed the geography, blended into the landscape, walked with goats and among olives to thwart heat-seeking technology, extending and activating kinship networks bolstered by the low-tech versatility of tobacco farming to make inroads into the mercenary power structure of the occupied strip. “Of course the occupation had been a fantastic training ground, during which Hizballah became an incredibly effective fighting force. By the end of the occupation it had managed what is virtually unheard of in guerrilla warfare: it was basically at parity with Israel in terms of casualties: for every Israeli (or allied SLA militiaman) killed, a little more than one Hizballah fighter died. Typically the ratio of guerrilla to conventional army losses is ten to one” (Norton 2006).

It went from strength to strength, soon tripling the number of its operations from, from an average of about 200 a year before 1996 to 1000 a year thereafter, peaking at 1500 in 1999-2000. Perhaps more telling still was the dramatic decline of Hizbullah’s casualties in relation to those if its enemy. According to its own calculations, it lost 1248 men in action against Israel and the SLA between the 1982 invasion and 1999. The Israelis put their own losses, for the period between their 1985 pull-back and mid-1999 at 332 […] However the SLA’s losses at an
estimated 1,050 for 1982-2000 were much higher than the Israelis’. So when these were taken into account the total for both sides was not that far apart (Hirst 2011: 263).

During the occupation Hizbullah innovated their most successful weapon, what is called an Unidentified Explosive Device (UED) in military terminology: usually a Claymore, a jumping mine of American origin, hidden underneath a fiberglass rock to go off as an Israeli or SLA patrol goes past. They were also known to hang explosives from trees and blow them up remotely as patrols focused on the ground passed through: strange fruit indeed. To counter this threat encountered in the environment Israelis and their allies occupied the high ground (Weizman 2007), like the prophets of old (Thubron 1990): many hills concealed disguised bunkers that exposed surrounding territory. The military roads were paved and all undergrowth on either side was cut down and burnt away. As was forest cover. The Israelis in fighting the “low signature” enemy, attacked the landscape (vegetable, animal, stone): “the Israelis have destroyed about 10,000 square meters of forest, not by cutting down the trees, but by bulldozing them into an impenetrable mass; they worked by arc lights at night” (Hirst 2011:12).

Because of their fear of landscape-savvy guerrillas, the Israelis constantly attacked the physical terrain: ensconcing themselves upon hilltops, they uprooted entire forests of pine, pistachio and ancient olives, burned broad swathes of woodland, mined the red earth south of the borderline and maintained vast areas as no-entry zones.

The landscape tells the story. Years of violence upon the earth resulted in soil erosion and desertification\(^\text{64}\); in an area already water-hungry, many sources have dried up or are full of unexploded ordnance, and of course the scourge of landmines. These

\(^{64}\) Information I got from the Ministry of Agriculture
emerged after the liberation when people, finally free of the vise of occupation, sought to explore and recover their forgotten earth. As they spread out across the landscape to reclaim family plots, discover new pastures, or revisit the woodland, an important site of village life, the extent of the problem emerged as more and more people fell victim to concealed explosives. As minefields little by little became known, they were marked and cordoned off with barbed wire. Yet the very presence of bombs in the earth serves as a constant reminder that this strip of land, or place of living, is equal parts battlefield: a landscape of war. The mundane lives and the often difficult loves of people here both thwart and are thwarted by this militarized order, resulting in an impossible tangle.

Yet despite Israel’s scorched-earth tactics and increasingly desperate measures, in time the resistance got too good at playing within the rules and so Israel played without them by launching two major assaults on the rest of Lebanon in “Operation Accountability” July 1993 (140 dead, 350,000 displaced) and “Operation Grapes of Wrath” in April 1996 (165 dead, 500,000 displaced). These two operations inaugurated a shift in Israeli war-practice from ground-war to air-war. But in spite of it all, it was a vicious cycle: control of the skies, flaunting the rules of war and clamping down ever more violently on the inhabitants of the zone, the resistance was only getting better at its game. Israel’s rule wavered, paranoia and insecurity increased. Eventually the whole system collapsed.

vi. Collapse/Liberation and “Interregnum”

65 Tekimiti Gilbert UNMACC, interview
The long occupation of South Lebanon collapsed over the course of two days; it was a long time in the making but the end came swiftly beginning on May 21, 2000 and ending at dawn on May 24. The Israeli Army withdrew unilaterally from the borderland they had ruled – violently and expensively – for more than two decades. In the end, no political deals were won by Israel, and in the final run to the border the great Israeli war machine could barely cover its rear. Many proclaimed it as an ignominious rout. Yet most Israelis were relieved to be out. And surely Hizbullah, who trumpeted and proclaimed the withdrawal as their greatest victory to date and themselves as the authors of the liberation (tahrir) of the long-suffering South, rejoiced. And moved in.

The end of the occupation had been heralded and foretold for some time, ever since Ehud Barak, the then-Israeli Prime Minister was voted into office and found himself having to honor his election-campaign promise to leave Lebanon by July 2000. The promise created a nervous arc of anticipation that resulted in a spiral of insecurity and fear especially among the SLA foot soldiers (who by the time the occupation ended were seventy percent Shi’a), who were not sure that their Israeli masters had any secure future for them in mind (or if they had them in mind at all). The existential core of the border strip had been doubly shaken in the past year or so first with Hizbullah’s targeted (and filmed) assassination of Brigadier General Erez Gerstein, commander of the Israeli Defense Forces in South Lebanon, whose armor-plated Mercedes was blown up by a roadside bomb near Hasbaya in the eastern sector on Feb. 28, 1999, and the assassination (also filmed) less than a year later of the SLA commander of the Western Brigade Aql Hashem outside his home in Dibl in the central sector. Defections and surrenders began to eat at the rank and file of the surrogate, mercenary militia and morale continued to
plummet. Seeing that their network of control was fraying, by the spring of 2000 the Israelis began evacuating forward positions and heavy weaponry along the northern border of the Strip (having already left the Jezzine salient in the hills overlooking Sidon the year before); these moves only added fuel to the fire of collapse that had already taken over the occupation order. On May 21, 2000 an entire brigade of SLA soldiers in the central sector surrendered, and by the next day villagers from the village of Qantara along the northern edge of the central sector of the zone simply walked past the UNIFIL roadblock, across the border separating Lebanon proper from the occupied strip, and back to their long lost homes, paving the way for the Hizbullah fighters and the rest of the country. An inexorable collapse was at hand. Israel scrambled to get its troops over the border as they destroyed their fortified positions behind them. Full-blown panic took hold of the SLA with entire families fleeing across the border into Israel. The remaining shreds of this overwhelming panic was in full display by the time I entered “the Strip” early the next day, the first dawn of a free South Lebanon. The border fence at the Fatima Gate was strewn with abandoned cars, luggage and especially clothes, a rainbow of colors festooning the barbed wire fence separating and containing the enemy territories like disembodied bunting. It was an unnerving sight, the suspended clothes made of cheerfully colored material hung like effigies, deflated scarecrows, mutely expressing the terror spurring the chaotic, headlong rush across the border. Full-blown celebration gripped the rest of Lebanon with people streaming South in a spontaneous “return” (for many, like me, it was their first time). Civilians streamed across the zone, with crowds rushing to the abandoned prison in Khiam accompanied by TV crews who documented
live the freeing of the prisoners by their families, bare hands tearing at stone walls and metal grilles. It was an absolutely astonishing moment.

The moment of collapse was also a moment of intense uncertainty, for no one knew how it would unfold, whether there would be spontaneous acts of retribution, looting and pillaging and the things expected in the wake of such precipitous crumbling of entrenched power. But none of that happened (much to the chagrin of the media). The return of the borderland to Lebanon after twenty-two years of occupation, of the southerners to their villages, although spontaneous, chaotic and somewhat uncontrollable was something that Hizbullah appeared already ready for. Among the effervescing celebrations, rice and rose-petals and ululations, the strewn-about, abject paraphernalia of hastily retreating troops, some wary villagers lurked along the walls of their village squares, and took in the advancing crowds with wide, scared eyes; these villagers were starkly juxtaposed with the hysterical borderline encounters of long-separated families (amongst the Bedu and Palestinians) ordering young IDF soldiers to ferry cups of coffee across the uncrossable divide, joyfully pledging sons and daughters in betrothal as if that act would bring them back together across impossible political divisions. Hizbullah quietly inserted itself in the power vacuum (and one could argue that they were already in there by the time of the collapse) spreading out across the landscape, securing arms depots, herding together and handing over surrendered, disoriented, disheveled SLA soldiers to the Lebanese authorities, marshalling the crowds, policing the border, consolidating their grip on the(ir) borderland.

Hizbullah remain ascendant there to this day, everywhere and nowhere in the borderland, everyone and no one: through the July 2000 deployment of UNIFIL to the
borderline (in fulfillment of the twenty-two year old Resolution 425) and the post-2006 
beefed up UNIFIL presence as well as the belated Lebanese Army deployment to the 
border after 2006 (today the border zone is patrolled by 11,000 UNIFIL troops and 
15,000 Lebanese Armed Forces who monitor compliance with the post 2006 UN 
Resolution 1701 forbidding “any armed personnel, assets and weapons” in the frontier 
area south of the Litani).

Six years of dead calm⁶⁶ ensued in the former occupied borderland in the wake of 
its sudden liberation. At first people jubilantly swarmed back to their long-lost villages 
with dreams of reclaiming a lost and long-yearned for way of life but quickly realized 
that those dreams had nothing to do with reality. The borderland had altered dramatically 
in the intervening years of constant war and heavy-handed occupation and could not be 
miraculously reconnected, revived or restored: the vital dimensions of the borderland 
were finely attuned to the reality of the unresolved and ongoing war situation that had 
been suddenly removed ten kilometers to the south. The persistent war condition, now 
into its sixth decade, kept this raucously reclaimed sliver of Lebanese sovereign territory 
nervously apart from the rest of the nation. South Lebanon continued to embody/occupy a 
liminal space and “gray zone” in time, space, politics and practice. Aside from the droves 
of ‘umala “collaborators” who had escaped over the border when the occupation 
collapsed and uncomfortably burdened their former masters with their unwelcome 
presence, there remained everybody else who had simply lived under Israeli and SLA

⁶⁶ In war terms the period between 2000 and 2006 was the quietest that this border has seen 
practically since its inception. Norton has dubbed it an “interregnum” as that phase does in 
retrospect (post 2006) seem to be a kind of interlude or a waiting/preparing for the next round. 
During this time the tentative border separating the longtime enemy nations, the Blue Line, was 
defined by UNFIL (by July 2000).
rule, how did they fit into the new political-moral environment? A new order – that of Hizbullah – was taking over the border-strip and there were (re)arrangements to be made. Hizbullah wasted no time in taking over; they consolidated their hold on the strip both politically and physically, literally digging into the earth and activating its geo-strategic potential (Exum 2006).

In the meantime municipal elections were held in the former occupied villages in South Lebanon and the Western Bekaa⁶⁷ – 158 villages in total – for the first time since 1963. Such more or less rhetorical moves of “reuniting” the neglected southern margins with the sovereign body of the nation proceeded apace. But at the same time that South Lebanon was clasped close to the beating heart of the Lebanese nation’s glory in victory over its longtime foe, it remained a marginalized and neglected agricultural backwater whose main function was as battleground and whose inhabitants regarded the central state with more than a little suspicion and quite a lot of dislike. In short, in the wake of its sudden liberation, not much took place in terms of political, economic or infrastructural development in South Lebanon and it was left, as always, to wallow in its many and assorted miseries and, as always, to make do. Loudly-trumpeted pledges of international aid during a massive donor’s conference⁶⁸ held right after the end of the occupation never materialized and thus, after the collapse of the occupation economy even more people, especially the youth, migrated out never to return. So despite returning to the national fold, the South remained a politically exceptional, economically marginal and

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⁶⁷ Which I covered as a journalist.

⁶⁸ I attended this conference as a journalist.
infrastructurally underdeveloped place with war constantly clouding the next horizon despite an unprecedented period of calm – what one could think of as “peace”.

To evoke Das again, how did people pick up the pieces of their lives? Many in fact did just so, moving back to their villages to rebuild their homes… to plant tobacco.

And in the meantime Hizbullah was hard at work preparing the ground. The selfsame ground that southerners lived from and all but the most down and out were increasingly physically abandoning. The guerrillas extended their physical and non-physical networks. Tangled up with the lives of the villages and among (and of) the villagers. They dug in. Built up. Hunkered down. Got ready. “Melted like salt.”


The morning was warming already when Samira heard the first shots. She was sitting on the flat roof of her home in the village of Aita ash-Shaab, like all mornings at this time of year, threading tobacco, this morning’s pickings. The July sun, intense even in the antemeridian, was beginning to warm her bowed head as she threaded the leaves. Suddenly a plume of smoke rose from the valley just below where she sat. She heard the crackle of gunfire and heavier artillery. The kidnapping that launched the 2006 war was underway.

The attack began shortly after 9:00 am. Hezbollah waited patiently until the two Hummers appeared from around a bend in the road and were completely exposed.

69 “Hizballah spent the years leading up to the 2006 war improving on the favorable topography of southern Lebanon to better resist an invading army from the south. As one Israeli general put it, Hizbullah has spent the years from 2000 until 2006 thinking about the coming war in tactical terms. That is Hizbullah thought about its defense of southern Lebanon with an eye toward how the IDF would fight and what weapons, personnel, fortifications, and tactics would be needed to stop the IDF or at the very least slow its progress” (Exum 2006:3).
As the second Hummer passed the highest point and began descending, it was attacked by heavy machine gun and anti-tank fire. Hezbollah’s holding link, which had positioned and hidden itself among thick undergrowth on the opposite bank (on the Lebanese side of the fence), disabled the Hummer so that its crew could not come to the aid of the first vehicle, which was moving down the slope 110 meters ahead of it. … Hezbollah focused mainly on the first Hummer. A small force that had crossed the border into Israel during the night shot two RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) rockets at short range at the Hummers, which took most of the flak on the right side. … Hezbollah, it appears, went up to the Hummer and pulled out the two wounded Israelis, Goldwasser and Regev… With the two captured soldiers, the abductors boarded the civilian jeeps awaiting them across the border and headed north to the nearby village of [Aita ash-Sha’ab] (Harel and Isacharoff 2008).

It was a deft operation long in the planning and was designed to fall within the strict grammar defining the war dance along the borderline and to further the realization of the “True Promise” al wa’d al sadiq made by Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary general of Hizbullah, to bring home Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails. But it came at a volatile moment. It provided the spark needed by a highly combustible configuration: an inexperienced Israeli leadership and hubris-swelled military establishment confident of its forcefully put de-constructive powers of annihilation (Matthews 2006; Brun 2010). Together they launched a massive war against the very weave of life70 shaping the social-natural-political-material assemblage we call al-janub the South in order to destroy their existential foe Hizbullah, a hybrid fighting force organic to southern Lebanese geography and demography (Erlich 2006; Hoffman 2007).

The form of warring that Hizbullah developed in the laboratory of South Lebanon over several decades was recently dubbed “hybrid” (Matthews 2006; Hoffman 2007; Friedman 2008; 2009; Bearman 2010; Brun 2010) for the way it combines guerrilla-type tactics with classical battlefield practices. Perhaps we can use the concept of the “hybrid

70 This weave of life is by now the “enemy” that the Israeli war-machine targets in their wars against South Lebanon.
as elucidated by Callon and Law (Callon 1995) to extend the “hybrid” nature of this warfare beyond the purely military to include those who not only fight but also dwell here. For converging on this hilly geography are forms of life where the military and the mundane are deeply and tightly woven, sometimes indistinguishable. Reminiscent of my encounter with a domestic bathroom arsenal back in 2000, it is clear that many fighters and their instruments are intrinsic – domestic – to village networks, as organic to the place as the maquis that coats the southern hills. As ordinary inhabitants of these villages, who make ordinary livings in times of calm, these fighters are not only military beings for they conduct their lives and livelihoods in the self-same spaces that they also fight in times of conflict.

It is well known that those doing the fighting are not all professional soldiers. Many of them are in fact regular villagers who go through periodical trainings and in times of war become part of the village defenses. As Norton notes: “One of the salient features of the system […] is that the permanent full time cadre [is] quite small. During the occupation period it was 450 or 500 men. Today it is probably between 1,000 and 1,200. Basically, it is a reserve system. People undergo periodic training and when they go out on an operation they just close their shops and businesses. It’s an accordion and drawing on reserves it can stretch rather large (Norton 2006). Exum also observes that “In contrast to its political wing, Hizballah’s military wing is horizontally organized and can be divided into two types of fighters: the so-called “elite” or regular fighters – numbering around 1,000 men and often given advanced weapons training – and the village fighters, whose numbers cannot be estimated…” (Exum 2006). Fighting thus, to these fighters, then is more than a military career or a dreaded draft. It is their very
ordinary lifeworld that is often at stake, their livelihoods, loved ones, livestock etc. The low-tech military strength of localized power was demonstrated in 2006: “Hizballah’s tenacity in the villages was… the biggest surprise of the war. …The vast majority of the fighters who defended villages … were not, in fact, regular Hizbullah fighters and in some cases were not even members of Hizbullah. But they were men… who were “defending their country in the most tangible sense – their shops, their homes, even their trees” (10).

Seeing nothing but the enemy (Erlich 2006), in 2006 the Israeli war machine let loose against the very weave of life south of the Litani river: they smashed the intricate, layered, ancient cores of every village (Al-Harithy 2010) targeting home and field, tobacco and livestock and as they withdrew they coated the landscape with cluster bombs. In thirty-four days of massive bombardment from air, sea and land as well as several ground battles, many southern towns and villages along the borderline (and the southern suburbs of Beirut) were pulverized, flattened, and large expanses of the agricultural/rural geography scorched, ravaged and rained with unexploded bomblets (FAO 2006; HumanRightsWatch 2008). The 2006 war was peculiar in several respects, not least its magnitude of destruction (some argue it was the most destructive war ever waged in Lebanon). Lasting thirty-four days in the form of an Israeli naval and air blockade, incessant bombardment from the air and sea – with a particularly annihilating focus on the South and the southern suburbs of Beirut – and in the last week of the conflict ground incursions along the borderline and toward the forever and always desired Litani River, it continued until a United Nations-brokered ceasefire went into effect on the morning of August 14, 2006 and then formally came to an end when Israel lifted its
naval blockade of Lebanon on September 8, 2006. In those thirty-four days of warfare 1,123 Lebanese civilians were killed, thirty percent of whom were children under the age of thirteen; 4,409 were injured, fifteen percent of whom were permanently disabled according to the Lebanon Higher Relief Council (HRC). Material damage was assessed at 3.6 billion dollars and comprised: 640 km of roads, 73 bridges, and 31 other targets such as Beirut’s International Airport, water and sewage treatment plants, electrical facilities, 25 fuel stations, 900 commercial structures, 350 schools, two hospitals and 15,000 homes. Another 130,000 homes were significantly damaged. The Lebanese coast was left in dire environmental straits with an oil slick that resulted from the bombing of the power station in Jiyye whose damaged storage tanks seeped 15,000 tons of oil into the sea, the largest ever oil spill in the already threatened, fragile and dying Mediterranean Sea. Another 25,000 tons of oil burned at the station creating a toxic cloud that rained oil downwind and upon the beleaguered landscape.

Samira and the many like her existentially tied to the brief but intense tobacco harvest that was peaking in July, was at first hesitant to leave home and field despite the quick and violent escalation of the conflict. Right away, as movement became the recipe for instant death, she and those like her no longer had the choice to leave and stayed put. Samira, like many female tobacco workers, is unmarried and hence did not have to think of the safety of dependents and so she stayed in her village for as long as she could, keeping an eye on the homestead and baking bread for “the boys” with whom she also shared her larder. She also occasionally acted as lookout, warning the fighters concealed in the intricate built environment of their village when she saw enemy movement. Samira – and many like her – played a small if not pivotal part in the war events unfolding in the
landscape of her everyday life. Her – and other civilian – presence in the field of battle contributed to Hizbullah’s moral (and to a certain extent military) victory in this war.\(^{71}\)

Much of the ground engagement of this war was fought in and around Samira’s village, Aita ash-Sha’b, among the houses and between the streets. It was subsequently almost entirely flattened, in particular its layered, intricate and ancient core (Al-Harithy 2010). The Israeli war machine recognized the difficulty of fighting in the dense weave and tangle of ancient village streets and subsequently flattened all old village cores in the last days of the conflict as they withdrew their ground forces. When the Israelis (symbolically) took the town in the last week of fighting Samira finally left to the nearby Christian village of Rmeish, where many Shi’i villagers from the surrounding area had taken refuge from the incessant shelling. Christian towns were pockets of safety in this warzone because they were not directly targeted. Of course the influx of Shi’a refugees stretched the resources of even the biggest Christian villages, which despite not being targeted, were also caught in the middle of this massive armed conflict.

*Destruction and (re)construction: reaping the rewards of disaster*

As always in the wake of violent eruptions like 2006, a period of return and recovery ensued while the international community scrambled to do good by the latest global humanitarian disaster. This time though, the amount of international attention in particular in the form of hard cash was absolutely unprecedented. The South exploded

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\(^{71}\) The presence of civilians in the field of battle presents a problem for the Israeli war machine vis-à-vis the international community who no longer allows for the sustained killing of Lebanese civilians over long periods of time. One of the reasons quotes for Israel’s “defeat” in this war was the fact that they had to “restrain” themselves from excessive and senseless killing for little military gain after pressure from the international community. Still more than a 1000 civilians died in this war.
into a (re)construction frenzy as the international community fell over itself to pledge millions of dollars of direct aid to the blighted villagers to assist them in rebuilding their homes. Every eligible southerner jumped at the chance of hard cash and thus many villagers actually assisted in completing the destructive work of Israel as they went about destroying the remains of their old family homes to get the maximum compensation prize of 40,000 US Dollars per residence unit. Thus many truly ancient village quarters were wiped from the map of history by the bulldozers of the postwar (re)building boom. This humanitarian-fuelled frenzy – that also included short-lived campaigns to rid the South of unexploded ordnance – lasted as long as such attention lasts: about three years. Frenetic activity has ground to a halt again by now although the war-conditioned dimensions remain: a looming threat of war, lack of infrastructural development in the shape of an uncoordinated and wild and now stalled (re)construction drive, lip-service governance in the shape of impoverished, understaffed and incapable municipalities, unexploded cluster bombs and mines still seeding the southern earth, a complete lack of any economic activity outside of short-lived, show-case development projects donated by Western countries, like one or two Italian donated olive presses and a scattering of cracked and torn and unused USAID PVC-covered water reservoirs. I do not go into this here although it was the (dusty) context of my fieldwork. The (re)construction of South Lebanon is the subject of another project.
Figure 15. UN map showing “events” in South Lebanon in the closing days of the 2006 war.
IV. Farming the Frontlines: Cultivating Life in a Place of War

Figure 16. Tractor with pilfered “Danger Mines” sign in R., South Lebanon. Photo by author.

i. Wargriculture: tobacco, life and war

The countryman, the peasant, is someone whose occupation is the country and the land. He occupies it and takes care of it and he is occupied with it: that is, he takes it in hand and is taken up by it. *Occupy* comes from *capio*, “to take, to grasp.” Being a peasant means taking in hand the place and the time of the country. Its culture and cultivation, as one says; that is, the fashioning of one by the other – the occupier and the occupied, the toiler and the toiled (which are by turns the one called “the peasant” and that which surrounds him which is called “the land,” the countryside [*le campagne*],” in the sense of the the field [*le champ*], which for its part, is also a corner or piece of earth, but opened, extended, cleared by and for the occupation of growing and grazing). The peasant is the one who occupies himself with the land, but he is not, for all that, necessarily someone who works in agriculture. He can be the landsman of all sorts of lands, languages, peoples. What defines him is that he is occupied by or with belonging. (Nancy 2005)

In fact no systematic effort has been made to account for the indispensability of place in the evolution and presentation of cultural institutions, beginning with the fact that the very cultivation at stake in culture has to occur somewhere… Given that culture manifestly exists, it must exist somewhere, and it exists more concretely and completely in places than in minds or signs. The very word *culture* meant “place tilled” in Middle English, and the same word goes back to Latin *colere*, “to inhabit, care for, till, worship.” To be cultural, to have a culture, is to inhabit a place sufficiently intensely to cultivate it – to be responsible for it, to respond to it, to attend to it caringly. Where else but in particular places can culture take root? Certainly not in the thin air above these places, much less in the even thinner air of pure speculation about them. (Casey 1996)
A working country is hardly ever a landscape.
(Williams 1975)

“Al-nabti lamma ti’tini feeha tid’eelak la tul al hayat. The plant, when you care for it, blesses you for the rest of your life”
(Southern Lebanese saying)

Figure 17. Partially harvested tobacco plants along the Lebanese-Israeli border, South Lebanon.
Photo by author.

If there is one thing that is growing and flourishing in South Lebanon it is the monoculture of tobacco. Tobacco agriculture has a long history in this most troubled periphery and has throughout its long efflorescence\(^2\) been continuously imbricated in the

\(^2\) Tobacco was introduced by the Ottomans to the highlands of Jabal ‘Amil in 1625. According to Rami Zurayk in his blog Land and People:

“Tobacco cultivation became a state monopoly under the Ottoman Empire in 1884. The “Societe Anonyme de Regie Co-interesse Libano-Syrienne de Tabacs et des Tombacs” was created in 1935 and given effective legal monopoly of the tobacco trade in both countries. After independence, it became known as the Regie Libanaise des Tambacs et des Tombacs and retained the exclusive trading rights for tobacco imports and exports and local trade. The Regie has been under [Lebanese] government control since 1991.

Tobacco subsidies were initiated by the French Mandatory Government in 1936 primarily for rural development purposes, especially to reduce rural-urban migration. Tobacco gained importance in the [19]60s and [19]70s, declined during the war and picked up again in [19]96-[19]97, especially in the Southern qadas of Marjayoun, Bint Jbeil and Sour.

Tobacco cultivation contributes to the livelihood of 24,000 farmers, in addition to more than 1000 seasonal laborers. Moreover, the Regie counts 1,500 employees. In the year 2001, nearly 92,000 dunums (9,200 ha) were planted in the whole of Lebanon. 64% were in the South, 20% in the Bekaa and 16% in the North. During the same year, the South produced 5,800 tons of tobacco (62%), the Bekaa 1,870 tons (20%) and the North 1,740 tons (18%), for a total Lebanese production in 2001 of 9,410 tons. The best tobacco (Saada-6 variety) is grown in the South.”
various configurations of life, power and politics that have taken shape here. Longer than its modern existence as borderland and battlefield, South Lebanon has been traditionally yoked to cultivating the “bitter crop” as tobacco is known, for the now Lebanese state-owned tobacco monopoly the *Regie Libanaise des Tabacs et Tombacs*, previously and successively owned by former Ottoman and French masters. Today tobacco farming continues to thrive and it appears to do so in counterpoint to the clamorous discourse of disenfranchisement, underdevelopment and marginalization – the “song” of the South that continues to rise in pitch. The way I see it is that tobacco’s continuing success and spreading ubiquity suggests that it is simply – despite its bad reputation as the bitter and laborious lot of the poor – the most viable and sustainable undertaking in such a time and place. It occupies a sustainable niche in the peculiar configuration of life (and death) here alongside other livelihoods that both entangle with war and extend beyond the village, as other local farming practices and modes of making a living fall out of memory and practice.

Figure 18. Homestead in South Lebanon with laundry and tobacco hung out to dry. Photo by Rola Khayyat.

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73 And the Lebanese government knows this as it continues to subsidize tobacco farming. Tobacco is the only subsidized crop in Lebanon.
Tobacco is a global market commodity farmed by households across the borderland. Its continued success points to homogenizing capitalist encroachment upon and concomitant exploitation of the southernmost margin of the Lebanese state and its peasant-worker-villagers. But as Bernal (1994) has shown for Wad al Abbas, a cotton-farming village in Sudan, such all-encompassing rational, capitalist narratives do not account for the entire story. “Households survive by combining the fruits of unpaid family labor on their farms with the incomes earned by household members engaged in wage-work or self-employed in the informal sector. Market and nonmarket relations and wage and unwaged labor are, thus, intertwined and the logic of peasant production reflects this complex reality” (Bernal 1994). The constellation of reasons for the rise and success of tobacco farming encompasses converging strands of history, geography, genealogy, climate, ecology, economy, politics, kinship, warfare, state and society in South Lebanon. One cannot understand the continued spread of tobacco farming at the expense of other forms of rural living and livelihood only as a proletarianization of the borderland’s inhabitants (into a “peasantariat”), laboring their lives away for a global market commodity as they increasingly let go of other ways of making a living that do not adapt as well to the multiple fraught realities of war and that do not translate so easily and predictably into cold hard cash. The rational capitalist explanation may seem to account for the whole story, but to those who plant it (and even to the children of those who planted it, who no longer plant it), tobacco is much more. It is a way of life, a lifeline, a source of life and a livelihood. It generates space and time here. Above all it enables those who remain in the rural battlefield of South Lebanon to sustain and maintain themselves in place.
Many tobacco farmers have said this to me and I would probably also venture that if it were not for tobacco here, the southern borderland would have transformed into an uninhabited battle-zone long ago, and its inhabitants into landless wage laborers swelling the already bloated numbers of destitute urban poor. Thus it is not for nothing that the tobacco plant, dubbed the “bitter crop” by those who plant it and live for and by it, has come to stand (in) for life in South Lebanon – materially, discursively, practically. In large part it is thanks to this weed and its value as a global commodity that rural life is still viable in this enduring battlefield and continues in its ordinary, earthly practice and idiom despite – or perhaps because of? – persistent and ongoing onslaughts, uncertainties, insecurities, and difficulties, a concatenation of factors that would otherwise destabilize or completely eradicate less hardy/resilient/steadfast forms of life and life forms. Of course tobacco is not alone in sustaining the life that continues here through seasons of conflict and eruptions of violence and the constant harsh realities of living in the margins of a neglectful and weak state and along the border of an aggressive, oppressive and invasive one.

Tobacco combines with networks of non-local wage labor that extend throughout the urban centers of Lebanon and across the globe. As Bernal argues for Wad al Abbas:

The labor market assigns different values to different kinds of labor; not all labor-power is equally rewarded or equally saleable. The household, in contrast, supports all its members, even the very young, the aged, and the ill, who cannot labor. It is through the interaction of these two systems that farming takes the form it does in Wad al Abbas. Farmers generally are individuals who have little or no market outlet for their labor and who depend exonomically on other household members.

In addition to competitive labor markets that define some of their labor as unmarketable, Wad al Abbas households face rising costs of living, uncertain, poorly paid employment, and unstable food markets. The response of Wad al
Abbas households is to seek to have some members employed off the farm while at the same time struggling to hold onto their land and grow some of their own food (Bernal 1994).

This also accurately reflects of the situation in South Lebanon where village households continue to survive through a combination of various forms of farming and labor, some closer and some farther from the rationalist capitalist model. The hybridized aspects of labor and networks of kin in and beyond the village as well as the specificities of tobacco as a crop and cycle adapt to the demands of the warscape in a sustainable and resilient configuration. In what follows I explore tobacco farming as an activity that underpins, generates, propels and structures life in South Lebanon; although tobacco is a global market commodity, I argue that in this place of margins and wars, it cannot be understood as only that. So who are the tobacco farmers of South Lebanon? What is it that they do and why do they do it? How does this most infamous and undesirable of crops (especially when it comes to international development agencies, who shun having anything to do with it) still hold out and even continue to proliferate in South Lebanon? How does it sustain life here? How does it relate to and intersect with the reigning (and often raging) war-order? Following Victoria Bernal’s observations about the hybrid nature of peasant labor in Wad al Abbas, I argue that tobacco’s enduring success, ongoing proliferation, sustainability and ubiquity in this admittedly most inhospitable of environments indicates its adaptability to the vicissitudes of life in a war-ridden, neglected, exploited and

74 “The peasant households that are the subject of this study evidence both a strong commitment to market involvement and a strong commitment to subsistence production. Moreover, counter to evolutionary expectations regarding the rise of market relations and the decline of subsistence values, market pressures, as will be seen, not only have failed to transform subsistence production into commodity production, but are also one of the driving forces behind subsistence farming. Households survive by combining the fruits of unpaid family labor on their farms with the incomes earned by household members engaged in wage-work or self-employed in the informal sector. Market and nonmarket relations and wage and unwaged labor are, thus, intertwined and the logic of peasant production reflects this complex reality” (Bernal 1994: 794).
depressed periphery (and of course the geography and climate). Hence tobacco, like the humans it employs and sustains, is interesting to investigate as an interface as it embodies both the convergence of life and war and a capitalist market economy on a peripheral and “traditional” rural “gray zone” along a state margin and warfront.

*The “bitter crop”: the crop of life*

![Figure 19. Israeli outpost on border to the left, cypresses to the right. Tobacco field in foreground. Photo by author.](image)

Since the end of the Israeli occupation in 2000 and especially since 2006, tobacco has boomed as other practices, projects and livelihoods – outside of the military and those related to the postwar building boom – that prove unsustainable to the temporal, spatial, material demands of the war condition slowly peter out. The boom in tobacco farming can be described as the continued exploitation of the rural workforce in the underdeveloped margins of an ever-troubled state in the throes of free-market capitalism.

Tobacco’s durability can be chalked up to the mutually beneficial convergence of a hardy weed with global market value and the arid topography of an underdeveloped periphery inhabited by a peripheral, subaltern\(^{75}\) population of rural dwellers shaped by a history of 

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\(^{75}\) The work of tobacco is the work of household “dependents” that is the work of those who do not participate in the wider labor market, namely women, children and older men. The gendered aspect of tobacco labor also reflects the demographic profile of most permanent residents of the
rural exploitation and neglect. Add to that a government monopoly that buys tobacco at a fixed price and that completes the big picture. As things stand, these broad strokes provide the structural armature of the industry and suggests why tobacco farming endures and flourishes as an economic practice, but the broad strokes do not answer questions about what tobacco does for (or to) those who grow it (apart from providing them income). Tobacco farming today provides a livelihood for those left behind in the sparsely populated villages of the borderland, those who are not among the many who have migrated abroad or taken up permanent residence in the erstwhile hizam al bu’s “belt of misery” encircling the capital city.

Abhorred as enslaving, enchaining, exploitative toil, tobacco farming has a long and harsh history in South Lebanon and has become synonymous with and symbolic of the plight of the poor, suffering southerner. Yet today it remains the last recourse of the poor, the widowed, the unmarried, the old, and in many cases it is pursued out of habit as much as for needed income. But through its labor, tobacco is what continues to tie people to place, interlacing their livelihoods with the land, their lives with the landscape. Its pull returns people to the land who would otherwise not. It keeps the southern frontier of Lebanon alive. Through its lifecycle, tasks and steady market value it drives, shapes and structures life and dwelling along the rural southern borderland where not much else

“frontline villages”, who are mostly the elderly and women and children. Men either work in the cities or abroad and those who remain in the villages rarely actively work the tobacco. The male member of the household will only get involved in the manly task of plowing the fields.

76 Now the densely populated and recently rebuilt and ever more “steadfast” – moderately prosperous rather than miserable – stronghold of Hizbullah better and simply known as “the suburb” al dahiyeh.
other than warring and (peacekeeping and a smattering of short-lived development projects) takes place. Tobacco’s time is the time of life in these parts, and its tasks its tasks. Its income gives people an option to stay on the land. Years are tobacco years and time is reckoned according to the tasks relating to the tobacco cycle, *fleha* (plowing), *zira’a* (planting), *‘iteefi* (picking), *shkek* (threading), *tasfeet* (packing/ordering), *tasleem* (handing over), close to what Evans-Pritchard (Evans-Pritchard 1969) observed among the Nuer vis-à-vis cattle77 and accords with Bourdieu’s observations about Algerian peasants (Bourdieu 1977). Tobacco binds people and land into a shared present and presence, and its dance and rhythm unfolds a community of being and time – a way of life – as well as a distinctive landscape.

As a dwelling activity, tobacco farming comprises what Ingold calls a taskscape, the collection of tasks that together form “the constitutive acts of dwelling” that unfold according to their various cycles and rhythms as landscape (Ingold 1993). Ingold argues that it is through the unfolding and interlinking of such activities as performed by dwellers that landscape is composed as a temporal-material document or “testimony” of being and of time, constituting the present and linking past and future. “Indeed it could be argued that in the resonance of movement and feeling stemming from people’s mutually attentive engagement, in shared contexts of practical activity, lies the very foundation of sociality” (Ingold: 160). This resonates profoundly with the prime of place and practice of tobacco farming across the Lebanese South. Tobacco farming is the motor of life in

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77 “In my experience Nuer do not to any great extent use the names of the months to indicate the time of an event, but generally refer to some outstanding activity in process at the time of its occurrence, e.g. at the time of the early camps, at the time of the weeding, at the time of the harvesting, &c., and it is easily understandable that they do so, since time is to them a relation between activities. During the rains the stages in the growth of millet and the steps taken in its culture are often used as points of reference” (Evans-Pritchard 1969: 100).
Jabal ‘Amil and hence it hence allows me to bridge the spectrum of peace and war, ordinary and extraordinary. The taskscape of tobacco entangles with that of war, enabling and propelling life in and through seasons of conflict and calm.

I argue that tobacco is formative of the life world of southern farmers more than anything other than war itself, meshing productively with the realities of war both acute and long term in several interesting – and sustainable – ways. Tobacco has come to stand in for security in this most insecure of places and is a placeholder for a certain kind of (agri)culture in this rural margin: it embraces the far ends of the spectrum of war and peace – and continues to make life viable. I have clumsily called this practice “wargriculture” for the way in which it tangles with wartime and warspace. Hence my inquiry encompasses the practices that coalesce around the agricultural practice of tobacco farming as well as the discourses around this practice and the way it squarely places this objectively exploitative, ethically questioned, unhealthy (Van Minh, Bao Giang et al. 2009) and ecologically unsound industry (Geist 1999) at the heart of (continued) life in the warzone of South Lebanon. I do not seek to sing the praises of tobacco farming but rather, to soberly point out that in a place where death is a part of life, even a dubious (and deadly) capitalist crop is generative of place and life78.

In what follows I trace the tangle of tobacco and life and war in South Lebanon and dwell for a while upon its practice and present efflorescence. I want to understand

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78 Many well-meaning souls have come up with more ethical “alternatives” to tobacco in South Lebanon – like thyme and many development projects refuse to address the plight of tobacco workers. But no one is ready to let go of tobacco as recent study shows. This is much in line with my observations in South Lebanon where many bemoaned their fate as tobacco farmers but were not ready to begin thinking about alternatives for the income and security this livelihood brings. Bazzi, A. and N. Kabbani (2008). Raw Tobacco Price Subsidy: Implications for Farm Income and Natural Productive Resources. Beirut, American University of Beirut
tobacco’s persistence and the role it continues to play in a troubled place wracked by many violent forces both acute and structural. I argue that tobacco may be the last recourse of the weak and vulnerable but it is also an agricultural practice tying people to their homesteads, allowing them to hold onto their land, to remain in place, and thus somewhat insure against a life of urban poverty by providing a modest yet sure income that makes the inhabitants of the southern marches resilient that is, able to survive – and remain – in a place of perpetual uncertainty and recurrent violence. Tobacco also generates attachment and belonging and a way of life on the land that I am terming landscape. Tobacco farming is what shapes South Lebanon – even more than wars do. Tobacco is the daily bread of South Lebanon. It is the fourteen-month “tobacco year” that compels and propels, structures and orients people’s life-times, tasks, activities, subjectivities, space and places, and undergirds livelihoods and continued survival across seasons of war. Tobacco also weaves a horizontal affect among the workers on the land regardless of sectarian identity and the vertical and divisive structures of Lebanese politics – even occasionally undermining such politics\textsuperscript{79}. Echoing and developing an argument I have made elsewhere (Khayyat 2012), I suggest that this continued cultivation of the land (for something that ultimately goes up in smoke as we will see), regardless of the (exploitative capitalist) ends it may fulfill, currently sustains a form of life: it cultivates attachment, generates belonging and sustains a landscape of living in a place of recurrent and enduring destruction.

\textsuperscript{79} This “peasant” or fallah affinity was politically harnessed across the sectarian spectrum in the heyday of Leftist politics in the rural South, but no longer finds effective traction after it was usurped by sectarian based social movements like Sadr’s harakat al mahrumeen. Tobacco in particular was adopted as an issue by Sadr who wrested it from the Leftist parties when he declared it was qadiyyat al gadaya “the issue of all issues”
The “crop of steadfastness”
Tobacco farming is the mainstay of South Lebanon and has been for centuries. Relying largely on the unpaid labor of women and children in a neglected, war-ridden margin where many youths and men travel elsewhere to find and make a living, it is relied upon to augment incomes, enabling families to live a less dependent life and to resist the irresistible pull of urban poverty and social dependence for those with few other choices. What makes tobacco so critically and existentially important to the people who plant it is that, as opposed to all other forms of agricultural production in Lebanon, it is subsidized by the Lebanese state. Unlike any other crop in Lebanon, it is protected from price fluctuations on the regional and global market. As long as someone holds a license, the amount of tobacco allowed by the license is always bought by the state monopoly at a guaranteed price, once a year. Licenses/permits are issued by the Lebanese Ministry of Finance per family and can be inherited and are often rented out (when families have given up farming). Each license enables the holder to plant four dunum\(^80\) of tobacco (although the older licenses allow less). Each dunum produces around 100 kilograms of tobacco and the kilogram is bought by the monopoly at an average of eight US dollars a kilogram, which comes to about 3,200 US dollars per license, per year on average. Many households have more than one license as relatives and neighbors move away and no longer plant, or they rent unused licenses and pay the license owners a rental fee\(^81\). To

\(^{80}\) 1 dunum = 1000 square meters

\(^{81}\) “In 1968, the issuing of licenses was discontinued and replaced with special permits for extra production on a yearly basis to help farmers. Ministry of Finance Decision No. 10412/1, dated September 27\(^{th}\) 1994, gave the Régie Libanaise des Tabacs et Tombacs…the exclusive right to import and export tobacco leaves and products and to produce tobacco products. Regie Memorandum… #35 in 1997 with the approval of the Minster of Finance restricted the areas of
southerners at the mercy of many powerful forces and acclimatized to a life of potential insecurity, the certainty of this income is incentive enough to stay in place and to work the land, and come what may. The profit turned is meager but is made more generous by southerners’ heavy dependence on subsistence farming and extended-family living arrangements where no one pays rent; the profit turned is enough to keep it alive year after year. One farmer explained to me the philosophy of surviving in the South off a tobacco income: “We depend on the land for subsistence crops and lessen our dependence on cash money as much as possible. We barter and budget. We eat what we plant. We tighten our belts. The price of tobacco is not enough. It stays the same as other prices soar. A kilo of tobacco should be the equivalent to a kilo of meat but it is not. We increase our profit by living more and more frugally, reducing our dependence on cash which means depending more and more on the land and on each other”. In South Lebanon cash is a luxury, it supplements a life premised upon subsistence agriculture – and the state tobacco subsidy.

Additionally, tobacco is a hardy weed that flourishes in the arid topsoil of the southern Lebanese highlands. Rami Zurayk, professor of agriculture at the American University of Beirut in his blog “Land and People” argues:

Most tobacco farmers are small and poor. Half of them plant less than 4 dunums (0.4 ha, just under one acre). The Regie only purchases tobacco planted by farmers having permits, and only one permit is allowed per family. A farmer

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tobacco production to (i) 15 dunum (1 du=1000 m²) or 1.5 hectare maximum for licensed farmers with 100 Kg/du as a ceiling for maximum production of tobacco leaf variety “Saada 6”; and, (ii) 4 du maximum for farmers with special permits in the South with a maximum ceiling of 100 Kg/du. Regie Memo #35 restricted the issuing of tobacco production permits to farmers who actually plant tobacco. It further specified that farmers’ permits are restricted to one village and that only one family member can apply for a special permit” (Bazzi 2008).
cannot plant or sell tobacco without a permit from the Regie which specifies the area to be planted and the crop volume expected.

Tobacco is a very labor-intensive crop, requiring 610 workdays per hectare per year. For comparison cereals require 25 days per hectare per year, and irrigated vegetables cultivation 242 days per hectare per year. The gross income of the average 4 dunums plantation in the South was $3,210 per year in 1999, five times greater than that for wheat (another dryland crop)... While tobacco is important for the livelihoods of farmers from all over Lebanon, it is especially crucial for the Southerners. A survey dating from 1999 indicated that tobacco provides 25% to 85% and sometimes 100% of the total income of farmers...

Tobacco farming increased by 24% after the liberation of the South in 2000, especially in the cazas of Bint Jbeil, Marjeyoun and Sour. Tobacco cultivation has been vital in the livelihood rebuilding process that followed liberation, both for those who were in the resistance and for those who were in the pro-Israeli South Lebanon Army. Moreover, a number of farmers from villages on the border used to work in the Israeli settlements and had to stop their activities after the liberation. Tobacco offered a post-war alternative and an opportunity to re-adapt to working in Lebanon.

In the South tobacco is called “the crop of steadfastness”. Had it not been for tobacco and its subsidies, the South would have witnessed more intensive migration and emigration, and Israel would have easily reinvaded Lebanon in July 2006. Tobacco subsidy may have been a central factor in determining the outcome of the war.

This is apt and is a widespread observation among tobacco growers and industry employees. Tobacco is seen as the main activity keeping people in place and allowing them to resume their lives after episodes of acute violence. Tobacco farming has also provided support to the structurally vulnerable in other ways. In the wake of the 2006 war the southern borderland underwent a cadastral survey for the first time. Surveying teams working with the land registry in Saida went out to the villages to delimit land parcels and register them as property. Relying on a mixed bag of evidence, but largely on the knowledge of the elders of the village in collaboration with village municipalities, surveyors sliced up the villages of the South into private parcels. The most reliable proof of ownership was of course a land deed, but many people did not have those and made claims on land based upon proof of prolonged cultivation, “facts on the ground” like
homes and stone terraces, and of course the testimony of fellow villagers. Those who had never left their villages and who continued to farm tobacco for the Regie especially during the occupation had the strongest claims in such cases. There are many disputes resulting from this process but one of the main outcomes is the ongoing transformation of village commons musha’ into private property (Khayat 2004).

The bitter life

It is a cold bright morning and the start of another long day of tasleem “tobacco buying” in a dusty warehouse, really an otherwise unused cement structure, where tobacco farmers are bringing in their bales of tobacco to sell them (sallim – hand over – is the local term) to the state-owned monopoly the Regie Libanaise des tabacs et tombacs. It is early in the year, January or February, the usual time for the Regie to collect its property from those who grow it and to issue its paltry payouts. It is also the beginning of Lent. In Rmeish, the Maronite village where the warehouse is located and where the farmers from surrounding villages are coalescing as the morning brightened from surrounding villages to sell their tobacco, I observe deeply-grooved faces that speak of toil in the sun, the same color and texture as the freshly ploughed earth in the fields outside. Some of the farmers have ash crosses on their foreheads, others not, but no matter, their sectarian difference is belied and obscured by the deep undertow of shared labor upon this earth. The young man I am with today speaks of this to me, and I heard it echoed often across the South

82 “On the other hand it is quite easy to appropriate land belonging to others, and it is always a matter of time to secure the land. Once you spend enough time on a parcel, be it yours or not, it becomes yours! Things like that are common with the Mchaa [musha’] parcels, belonging to the municipalities or the State. If you own a land bordering a Mchaa parcel, it is quite easy to push the fence little by little and to appropriate a large part of the Mchaa. A lot of people did this here.” Quoted in an interview published in the report Khayat, T. (2004). Overview of Land Use and Land Property Issues in Liberated Southern Lebanon.
where once in the (global) hey-day of Maoist revolutionary sentiment, a class-based peasant-consciousness was cultivated that even began to gain force and momentum before it cracked and dissipated into distrustful sectarian enclaves herded once again by their respective overlords (inhabiting the vertical power-structures of the Lebanese state). Often it is repeated to me how in the city it is easy to tell Christian from Muslim, but here in tobacco-growing country everyone looks the same: “We look like the earth”. The “wretched” are yoked to the earth through the seasons and to the brief life and long toil of tobacco by virtue of a license possessed by a named person for the duration of life. Once a man recounted how his mother was getting too old to work the tobacco herself anymore. He told her “Come on yamma, give me your license!” and shook her head and said “Son, I am not dead yet”. When tobacco is over so is life it seems. Another man was being jokingly chastised by the regional representative of the Regie for packing his bales with lowly pickings and the man protested laughing: “Sir, I have ten children and I love them all the same. Would you have it that I treat some better than others? It is the same with my tobacco”. The lifetime and family metaphor is strong with this crop. It may be the “bitter crop” but it is also the crop of life here in South Lebanon.

Fig. 20. The khabeer stabs the tobacco bale with the ma’liqa to inspect its contents. Photo by author.
Here at the warehouse each burlap-wrapped bale, handled by strapping young men is heaved onto a low arched wooden platform for the old inspector (*al khabeer* “the expert”) to price.

Figure 21. Abu Fawzi uses a *ma‘liqa* to inspect a tobacco bale before pricing while farmers look nervously on. Photo by author.

“*Yalla ya ibni yalla ya habibi, ya ‘ayuni*” (quickly my son, quickly my dear) says the older man to the young as he brings the bale of densely packed tobacco leaves weighing between twenty to thirty kilos from the pile that reaches the ceiling to dump it onto the platform between the feet of the old *khabeer*. The bale lands with a puff of glimmering tobacco dust that curls and sparkles in the cold winter light oozing in from a glass-less
window. The owner of the bale – a woman – is summoned in booming tones by the
khabeer’s assistant; she comes and stands behind the right shoulder of the expert, hands
folded demurely, head bowed awaiting fate’s decree, a demure yet eager expression on
her face excitedly anticipates the imminent yet long-awaited rustle of money the end of
this transaction will bring. The khabeer, handling a smooth wooden pick (al-ma’aliqa
“the spoon”) to separate the densely packed golden-brown leaves, bends over the bale to
inspect their quality, picking out small stacks of leaves here and there, caressing the
powdery gold stuff between his fingers like the money it will soon become, smelling
them, holding them up like gems to the light from the window illuminating his pink,
cheery face.

The khabeer evaluates the tobacco leaves according to a scale from jayyid
excellent that is priced at 15,950 L.L. a kilo, wasat medium at 11,550 Liras a kilo,
mutadanni low at 4550 L.L. a kilo to ‘adeem worthless, price-less. In a calculation
involving percentages the expert combines those values in a single bale and multiplies
them by the total number of bales to come up with an average price for all the tobacco
being sold by one person. Then the khabeer’s assistant/accountant tallies up the numbers
and prints out a paper with the breakdown of the assessment and total price, which is now
read out to the license owner to her or his pleasure or chagrin. When the price is declared
and the paper is printed and stamped and delivered to the crumpled farmer, hopes dashed
(and so ends and begins another “tobacco year”) I am reminded somewhat of a
courthouse: the meek acceptance of the accused of the sentence illuminates the
unquestionable, unshakeable power handed down from on high. The farmer takes his
crumpled paper and shuffles off to the maktab office next door to receive the money\textsuperscript{83}.

Then the bales are placed in piles around the warehouse according to their quality category: A1, A2, A3, B1, B2, B3 and K.

![Bales of tobacco piled high to the ceiling of the warehouse contain 14 months of toil.](image)

Fig. 22. Bales of tobacco piled high to the ceiling of the warehouse contain 14 months of toil. Photo by author

Each bale contains a fourteen-month year of toil composed of tasks, times, activities and anticipations that compose the warp and weft of life in tobacco country with small variations from village to village\textsuperscript{84}. As those dry leaves are being sold the new crop that will be dead and sold by this time next year is greenly sprouting in the tobacco nurseries (mashatil or masakib) across Jabal ‘Amil. The tobacco tasks unfold upon the earth that brings the tobacco forth and with the sky, in accordance with steady round of seasons and agricultural cycles that nevertheless fulfill their promise of money and are occasionally inter-spaced with chords of violence. Thus tobacco grows, is picked and threaded and dried and packed and sold by families across the arid, war-ridden borderland. So it has been for a very long time in the South. Despite all that has transpired and much that has changed, some things stay the same.

\textsuperscript{83} As the Regie moves toward more comprehensive digitalization the payouts are no longer transacted in cash at the point of sale but rather through bank transfers.

\textsuperscript{84} In Rmeish for example leaves are packed differently from other villages.
Here in R. life teeters on the cusp of summer. The tender growth of spring already
burnished by the summer sun, with a few tenacious wild blooms hanging on as tangled
yellow bushes that bunch across the rocky hills and steadfastly channel the color of
springtime. The air is warm and nature is raspy, tender tobacco seedlings are already
growing up in the fields; they are still short and shy, not yet the confident and sure bright
green army that marches across every horizontal southern surface big or small and
frenetically works every household in another short month. Now we are sitting in cracked
plastic chairs in the cool courtyard of a family home drinking hot, sweet tea under the
fragrant dried leaves of tobacco strung over our heads in loops of beaten gold while the
women thread freshly picked tobacco leaves at our feet. They – three unmarried sisters
and their mother – rose with the call to prayer in the darkest hour of the dawn while the
dew was still heavy on the rubbery stalks making them more tender for picking. Working
their way through their family’s plots they collected this morning’s harvest by twisting
off small handfuls of leaves, stalk by stalk, field by field. In the twilight of dawn they
returned to the house on foot, carrying the tobacco in big cloth bundles slung over their
shoulders, broke their fast, and as the sun made itself at home in the ante-meridian sky,
and still in their work pajamas, began the work of shakk (piercing or tobacco threading),
the tiresome labor of women and children, and occasionally the old.

On this morning, like every morning at this time of year, they are sitting on the
cool stone floor among fragrant drifts of fresh tobacco, their legs splayed open before
them. They work at a fast clip bending forward rhythmically with the movement: quickly
selecting handfuls of leaves from the pile in their midst and expertly impaling them on
the sharp *maybar*, the long, flat, pointy needle they hold wedged between their body and outstretched limbs, shoving the green ruffles down the shaft onto an attached length of twine that trails off behind them. Sap bleeds out of the tears in the rubbery leaves, coating their cracked, red fingers in sticky black tar. All this is done with barely a look toward the work of the hands, as it has been practiced since these hands were able. This is the dance of every summer morning here in tobacco country when tobacco is ripe for the picking…

The men of the household sit around and drink tea. This is not their practice although they acknowledge the life-giving force of tobacco: *al dukhkhan ma'ayyashna* “tobacco is our livelihood”. Anyone in these parts attributes origins, success, survival, to tobacco. The acknowledgement and regard for tobacco is neither sentimental nor frivolous nor (only) symbolic: the ubiquity of the crop, its will to live and wily ability to survive in such terrain, its brief lifespan, its reliance on many household hands, its possession of stable market value jive with the geography, climate, family-structures and kinship patterns, of those “neglected” and recurrently violated southern marches. More and more is southern life squaring on this bitter crop as poverty and marginality take over the southern borderland.

Khawla and her two younger sisters Zahra and Nawal, are the three unmarried ones of Bou Sahel’s seven daughters. They (including their mother who does less these days due to the onset of age-related aches and pains) are the tobacco planters of this family. To be a tobacco worker you need not be a woman (or unmarried) – but many are. To work tobacco is to be married to it in a sense. It is a demanding crop. But the reasons for this gender bias in tobacco-labor relates to the demographic realities of the villages and towns of the borderland that are largely inhabited by individuals who do not or
cannot enter the wage labor market (or fight): the elderly, women (daughters, sisters, wives) and children; those people hold onto place while their kin make money (or war) elsewhere. Tobacco work is the main source of cash and for those inhabiting the rural margins but it is not the only source as extended families are distributed across the country and the globe and provide those back in the village with supplementary income when needed. Migration has been the main survival strategy of Lebanon’s border villagers to the extent that the borderland today is sparsely inhabited. Men and youths are a rare breed in these parts as most of them have abandoned their villages for more profitable wage-pastures in the cities or overseas. It is largely women who work the land, keeping agriculture alive and villages semi-populated. Tobacco is the lot of those who stay. It is the crop of continuity in a place of many ruptures. In a world teeming with exploited urban migrant wage laborers the ability for those on the rural margins to remain in place and depend on the fruits of their own labor is a good thing. What are the dimensions of their existence here? Tobacco is the major occupation, especially along the border and highlands where I did my fieldwork.

Khawla has worked tobacco her whole life – to the extent that today it is her life – she is tied to its life and its labor. Small, compact with a round face, light eyes and small hands, Khawla is unmarried and lives with her parents and her two unmarried sisters in

85 While recognizing migrations importance to those continuing to inhabit South Lebanon’s battlefields, my focus is different: those who stay. As Bou Sahel told me about his village R. which compared to many villages in South Lebanon is rather well-inhabited because it has not been so terribly violated, relatively speaking, because as I was often reminded, it has no strategic value either in terms of geography or in terms of demography: “Many people left the Strip. Look at the registers R. has about four thousand people. Do you know how many live here permanently? Two hundred and fifty. Many people secured jobs [abroad] and here there is nothing but tobacco. What are my sons or the sons of my neighbors going to come to the village to do? In the present time Bint Jbeil has 80,000 registered inhabitants. Do you know how many actually reside there now? Three thousand only.”
the house that they grew up in a stone’s throw away from the borderline. She and her family were displaced in 1978 but returned in 1983 during the Israeli occupation and have been here ever since living off the land. Khawla admits that life during the occupation was not easy but that the pull of living off their land was stronger than the push of war and occupation. Khawla’s family plants six dunums of tobacco as permitted by the licenses owned by her parents the old hajj and hajjeh, who inherited them and will pass them on in time. These six dunums generate an income of around 9 and 10 million Liras a year for the family who permanently reside in the village (the hajj and the hajjeh and their three unmarried daughters). The married daughters live in their husbands’ villages and come by with their children to help their sisters and mother with the tobacco work. Two sons live in dahiyeh and are employed in construction and are close to Hizbullah. One brother left to Brazil when he was a teenager and resides and works there still, sending home remittances when necessary. Tobacco allows the most economically vulnerable members of the family, the old folk and the unmarried women to rely on themselves and to continue to inhabit the family home that remains as anchor and point of re-collection to the widely dispersed family in the cities and overseas. Tobacco as taskscape, as temporal frame, as livelihood and landscape is what ties them to their village home.

The “tobacco year” begins in February when the powdery tobacco seeds harvested from the dried tobacco flower at the end of the last season are scattered in the earth and sprinkled with water and left to sprout under protective nylon called maskab or mashtal. After fifteen days the shoots begin to show; after twenty days soil is sprinkled over the shoots, which begin to get sturdier as they grow. This phase lasts through the
months of February and March. In April begins the zre’, the planting when the larger shoots are picked from the mashtal and transferred to the thrice-ploughed fields. Khawla’s family pays a neighbor to plough their fields, as their father Bou Sahel is now too old. The labor-intensive phase of planting is completed throughout the months of March and April with help from the extended family, who come back to the village from the cities with their children to help. By the 15th of May the planting is complete and the earth has lost its spring moisture and by late May begins the phase of ‘iteefi plucking that lasts for the rest of high summer. In the southern highlands mornings are cold and dewy and the tobacco plant draws its sustenance from the morning dew, needing no irrigation. The tobacco plant stands about a meter off the ground, a green stalk with leaves stacked along the stem. The plucking, which takes place at dawn when the stalk is heavy with dew and more tender, proceeds from bottom to top with the value and nicotine content of the leaf increasing as one proceeds up the plant: tik’eebi, thanwi, saleeb, raqabi and tarbuni. The tarbuni, the last leaf most small and tender, is thick with syrupy black nicotine. These five “pluckings” are gathered throughout the months of high summer: June, July, August and should be done by September. The drifts of green tobacco gathered at dawn are then sorted throughout the rest of the morning and threaded and hung out to dry in the saqqali, lines of threaded tobacco slung in rows to dry outside the home. These drying lines are covered every evening at sunset with sheets of plastic to protect them from the morning dew, because the dew makes them black and that affects the price paid by the Regie for them.
After about fifteen days the strands of dried tobacco leaves, now golden, are removed from the *saqqali* and hung in groups of seven threads in loops called *kboosh* in a protected shady area around the family home, from ceilings and rafters, on porches and garages, and there they remain above the heads of the tobacco households, shedding invisible sweet tobacco dust on everyone and everything until the end of the harvesting and drying season.

In September begins the packing season and now the loops are brought down and taken off the thread and resorted according to size and packed into square wooden frames and
then bound into burlap. Each bale cannot exceed thirty kilograms in weight. Most bales weigh 20 to 25 kilograms as that makes it easier for the tobacco farmer to calculate the amount permitted for him to sell as limited by his license to four dunums of planted land. Each dunum of land produces 100 kilograms of tobacco and that is quartered into four bales, as each license permits the sale of 400 kilograms of tobacco per holder. As olive season takes over in October and November the tobacco tasks have been completed and the bales are piled up in a cool dark place in the household awaiting the time of tasleem, “handing over” or selling which begins around Christmas and continues into the New Year.

_The Regie_

Outside the warehouse whose towering ceilings, dusky corners and cold stone walls remind me of a church (or perhaps of the stable where Jesus was born, not far from here, maybe because of the biblical rural surround and the ashy forehead crosses), the peasant-farmers huddle in murmuring, restless, hunched, smoky clusters of smothered dissatisfaction which they try not to show to the face of the old _khabeer_ to whom they always present their best self and pray for the best price. But once the price is declared, tempers can flare. One farmer who had just received 4,400,000 Liras\(^{86}\) for his 400 kg of tobacco (an average price) spoke up: “I have six kids I can’t support them with this money!” So I asked him “why do you plant tobacco?” and he looked at me blankly as if I had asked him if pigs could fly. In a few seconds he gathered his wits again and replied: “Not plant tobacco? How can I not plant tobacco? There is nothing else”.

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\(^{86}\) Around $ 3000 US Dollars
The “experts” khubara are the human interface between the state owned tobacco monopoly and the farmer in the field who plant the commodity that is later bartered on the global market by the Regie. The expert here today Abu Fawzi has been working this job for eighteen years, since the end of the Lebanese civil war. This is his last round dawra as he will be retiring at the end of it. I visited him several times during his fifteen-day stint in this village after which he will rotate to another. As this season will be Abu Fawzi’s last, he is training the younger man who will be his replacement next year. I sat at Abu Fawzi’s side for hours as he picked through around 200 bales and priced them, inhaling with him and everyone else there the dizzyingly sweet tobacco dust as it puffed and swirled in the creamy light, listening to his directives to the khabeer-in-training “my son, ya ibni...” Suddenly a farmer who had just “handed over” many bales burst out shouting. “This is unfair! We pay 50,000 [Liras] for chemicals! This is impossible! The prices have never been so low! Just take them all for free and don’t humiliate us!” Abu Fawzi flinches, his back to the angry shouter, but he does not stop smiling. It seems his face is made that way: ruddy, freckled, smiling and sweet. He is used to this. The shouter continues: “You are pricing other people better than us! Just because they have wasata! [subtext Shi’a with connections to the speaker of parliament who controls most of tobacco sector get better prices compared to Christians]. As the outburst subsides, Abu Fawzi finally responds in calm tones: “I price the tobacco for what it is worth. Give me good tobacco and I will give you a good price.” “Have pity! You should be ashamed! haram alaykum!” the farmer beseeches hands open palms up and arms extended. Abu Fawzi’s clerk is a Christian inhabitant of this village and himself a tobacco farmer who has sold 1000 kg of tobacco from nine dunums to the Regie. He watches the scene
impassively and then murmurs to me: “This guy is probably a damin [someone who rents other people’s defunct licenses in order to sell tobacco on them]”. He concludes this because the man had handed in around 100 bales, and no one person could own so many licenses. Most people hold permits that were issued in 1994 that allow the holder to plant four dunums of 100 kg each. Four dunums equal around 16 bales – called a shkara for it is the average amount that one license-holder sells. If the farmer produces more than this the Regie takes it without paying for it. There is a flourishing middleman economy that takes advantage of the many licenses that are not in active use. Middlemen who rent licenses can also assist those who have land and no licenses – who sell their tobacco to license holders or renters for a fixed price and the license-holder earns the difference. But the middleman economy alters the existential dimensions that propel and compel most tobacco farmers – and transforms tobacco work into a purely moneymaking venture, a business. This man who just lost his temper did so because he did not receive the hoped-for return of his investment – and unlike the farmer who could think of no answer to my question about why he plants tobacco – that was all that he was in this for, money masari.

Abu Fawzi admits to me that his job is a thankless one, that he is caught between a rock and a hard place. “I feel for the farmers and love them I do. I try to help them within the limits of possibility – but I cannot do anything out of line. I don’t love them more than I love myself!” he says with a twinkle in his eye. His deputy tells me: “We are the human front of the Regie, the institution that is the ministry of finance and the government in its highest echelons. The price of tobacco has not risen since 1994 but the price of living has gone up. I know it is not fair, but what can we do?”
I heard so much about the Regie. It was quoted by everyone and referred to constantly. A kind of omnipresent, anthropomorphized institutional presence across the tobacco-farming South representing an authority, the state, Beirut, an elsewhere. The southerners refer to it as *al hasr* “the monopoly” or as *Regie* but in their pronunciation it sounds more like the French pronunciation of the man’s name “Roger,” taking on even more anthropomorphic tones. I decided to meet “Roger” myself. The headquarters is housed in a behemoth of modernist architecture in Hadath, a largely Christian suburb of Beirut, and to get permission to speak to any representative of this institution is no easy matter – but eventually I got written permission to go and I did. There I was introduced to J. who is director of the Regie’s South Lebanon headquarters, a wonderful person who became my tour guide to this enduring labyrinthine institution.

A few days later I visited J. in the regional headquarters building and factory in Ghaziyeh near Saida’s southern exit and he took me on a tour of the premises where all the bales of tobacco that are “handed over” in Lebanon converge. And here they are split, dumped and resorted in an assembly-line operation worked entirely by women. Tobacco work it seems is almost entirely the work of women from seed to weed to market commodity. And yet it is largely men though who earn the money at the level of the village and employees of the Regie’s overstuffed administrative levels (which like all public institutions in Lebanon is staffed in return for political allegiance by those in government as per the Lebanese state’s clientalist logic). At the factory I got a quick lesson from a resident *khabeer* who explained to me the art and science of tobacco leaf drying, preservation and sorting. Not a shred of tobacco goes to waste here. The women working the belts first dispose of all “extra” material, stuffing that is hidden in the bales
for “free” weight, junk that has nothing to do with tobacco. Then the line workers sort the leaves from highest to lowest quality and market value. Further along the belts the leaves get smaller and smaller. In the end there is nothing left but the crushed tobacco dust – and even this is collected for resale! Nothing goes to waste. It occurred to me while I observed these women hard at work that they were in effect working against the toil of those doing the growing and packing - their job was to undo the work of sorting and packing that takes place in the household tobacco “production units” in the villages at the end of the land.

J. explained how the tobacco monopoly worked. The Regie operates under the authority of the ministry of finance and is technically a part of the Lebanese state; its administration and finances are under the supervision of the ministry. Through its international trade in tobacco it generates money for the Lebanese state (the state does not spend money on the Regie). The Regie covers its expenses by operating in three distinct spheres: trade, production and agriculture. The agricultural sector operates at a loss, the production sector (that produces local cigarettes named Cedars smoked only by those who cannot afford anything else) breaks even and the trade sector makes a profit. The profits made from trade cover the costs of the production and agriculture. The Regie subsidizes 13,000 to 14,000 tobacco farmers at the expense of around 20 to 30 million US dollars a year. According to J. tobacco is bought from the farmers at more than double the international market price of around four US dollars a kilo. This differs from other places where there is tobacco agriculture like Turkey and Bulgaria where farmers sell their tobacco for the market price. “Before the Liberation tobacco farming was a defiant nationalist project as 45 percent of Lebanon’s tobacco was still being grown in the
occupied strip and sold to the Regie. It was a practice of resistance! Now it is largely a supplementary income that women and children work while husbands work elsewhere – but the Regie wants to change this,” says J. He hopes to see tobacco as more than just a supplementary household income and more of a large-scale industry. The trade side of the equation is international barter. International tobacco companies like Philip Morris and British American Tobacco that want to secure segments of the Lebanese cigarettes market, have to buy the equivalent percentage of the tobacco crop of Lebanon. The Regie profits from the sales of the cigarettes and the Lebanese state profits from the taxes on cigarettes. The profits generated thus finance the agriculture (and production) component of the monopoly. Ironically at the end of the day, what it comes down to is: the Lebanese smoker who purchases and smokes imported cigarettes finances the whole industry. And what do those tobacco multinationals do with the Lebanese crop? A crop that is toiled at by families across the Lebanese South, constituting incomes, livelihoods, taskscapes, landscapes, life-worlds? Many people – those who work it – assert that Lebanese tobacco is among the best in the world. But the moment they hand over the fruits of their intensive labor the tobacco is no longer their concern as they are already preparing for the next agricultural cycle. An employee of a multinational tobacco company that buys up around 30 percent of the Lebanese crop told me that the Lebanese tobacco crop is simply too uneven, of inferior quality due to a lack of systematic informational support to the farmer on behalf of the Lebanese government. Its fate is one of the absurdities of the capitalist economy: Lebanese tobacco is bought up by the multinational tobacco companies for a corresponding percentage of the Lebanese cigarettes market and is subsequently destroyed. In this rather absurd fate of the painstakingly grown, dried and
packed Lebanese tobacco crop as it is transformed into a commodity I believe, lies a clue to the necessity of tobacco farming in Lebanon and its key relationship to place and landscape. This cash crop produced by thousands of farmers along the poor margins of Lebanon that provides livelihoods and allows continued presence in place in a war-ridden periphery, crosshatching the landscape in times and tasks, rhythms and patterns of life ongoing is necessary as practice and not product. The tobacco subsidy is the vestige of a brief moment in early 1970s when the state was coerced by a labor movement to redistribute the privileges of the zu’ama and remains in place today for reasons having to do with the demands of clientalist politics in the post-civil war era. In a tense space opened up between politics and capitalist profit blossoms a kind of life in thin topsoil and across fractured time and space. Premised on family networks and labor, a rudimentary and makeshift infrastructure, and a resilient cash crop with a fleeting life-cycle, livelihoods are sustained and life-worlds continue despite constant rupture.

As Khawla puts it:

In the frontline villages there are no means of livelihood other than tobacco and hence people have to depend on it. Otherwise anyone would look for an alternative! The work is tiresome and takes so much time and we get paid only once a year. Look at the fruit orchards in Israel just across the border: apples and peaches and pears! But there is no water here, no infrastructure, no support. The only viable crop in the given circumstances is tobacco. It’s what gives us life.

*War storms, strange fruit and the persistence of practice*

The 2006 war came at the height of tobacco season and that year almost the entire crop was destroyed (FAO 2006) and no one was compensated for that loss (only destroyed homes were compensated). But the pull of the tobacco cycle left no one idle as they
returned to their homes at the end of the month-long war, salvaging what they could and resuming where they left off, albeit in even more difficult circumstances.

Fatima sits in the intense heat of a July morning under a makeshift canopy outside her home one year after the 2006 war, threading tobacco. Her village was for the duration of the Israeli occupation of the South Lebanon flush with the northern edge of the occupied zone overlooking a deep and narrow, leafy-green valley containing several freshwater springs. The valley defined the occupation’s northern border and was rife with resistance activity, murky comings and goings. Throughout the occupation Fatima’s village was targeted regularly by artillery fire coming from within the occupied zone, and it was pounded and pulverized during the two Israeli blitzkrieg operations of 1993 and 1996 (and 2006). One could say that such violent rhythms have made themselves at home in Fatima’s life and she has found a way to continue to live with and through them, always yoked to the practiced time and steady income of tobacco, the weed of dearth. She was born in the village and grew up here and married here and bore and nurtured six sons here. Today, a year after the last of such violent eruptions/destructions – the July War of 2006 – where she subsequently lost her husband, flock and fields, she is threading tobacco. In fact, within hours of the final ceasefire she was back in her home, removing cluster bombs from her garden herself, nursing her dusty and shaken fruit trees back to life.

On that July morning in 2006, when the latest war began, Fatima was sitting where she sits now, like every morning at this time of year, threading tobacco. She heard the mosque loudspeakers blaring and thought to herself as she continued threading that they were about to announce the results of the official school exams. Instead the
louder speaker announced that morning’s kidnapping of Israeli soldiers by the Hizbullah. Soon after, the bombing began. Her husband was at pasture with his goats like all mornings at this time of year, when all of a sudden he found himself lying on the ground, his animals scattered. Gathering himself together he collected his herd and returned home with them, only then realizing that his hand pained him. Washing off the soot he found a small black piercing in the skin that didn’t look too bad although it continued to smoke and burn even after he had washed it. He had been hit by a white phosphorous bomb, known locally as harrag [the burner], a weapon banned by the Geneva Convention. Yet despite his injury and his pain and the bombs that continued to fall, he and his wife stayed put. She could not leave her tobacco plants that require daily picking and threading, and he would not leave his fifty-five goats who need equal amounts of a more pastoral kind of care. Fatima and her husband had weathered such storms before: the existential yet ordinary pull of their livelihood, their livestock and their homestead outweighed the push of the explosive violence that had just reappeared in their lives. And so they, like many across the rural South, remained where they were for the duration of the conflict. There are no bomb-shelters across the South, despite decades of recurrent bombardment and thus, like everyone else they weathered the war from within the flimsy walls of their single-level, flat-roofed village home, which like most village homes in places of giving earth and gentle climate, is built to embrace and let in rather than block out the outside world. Since it was a phosphorous wound, the black hole in her husband’s hand continued to burn and only ceased consuming him when he held it under water. They continued to weather the incessant bombing, “Every bomb that fell, we couldn’t see or breathe from the dust. We didn’t have any doors left to close! And no windows either!
We crouched behind the cracked walls of our home as the war went on outside. Divine power is what kept us,” Fatima says pointing with her finger straight up towards the heavens. There was no light, no food or water, it was sweltering summer, and they were unable to step outside. By the end of the second week of the war they were soaking barely from their larder with tea in cold water and drinking it for sustenance. They finally left their house when they had run out of water, when the tobacco had already dried on the stalk and the goats would just have to fend for themselves. “We left thinking we were dead.” It is clear that it was only when they had given up on themselves that they abandoned their plants and animals. They walked along blasted roads and eventually made their way to a hospital; there they found that the phosphorous had burnt her husband’s arm to the blackened bone. “His body was poisoned and after a few days, he died. His time was up,” Fatima sighs. Fatima is very tiny and her black-socked feet look like those of a child. Her face is smooth and almost expressionless yet it is suffused with a mixture of resignation and sorrow. She is determined to carry on and although she does not say it, she shows it as she continues to thread tobacco, leaf after leaf after leaf from the pile beside her. After her husband died, she sold the remaining goats that had managed to survive in the village on their own in their absence and now her life is squared entirely upon tobacco. It will keep her here and keep her alive. And although even that source of living has been made more difficult, the difficulties are – evidently – neither un-navigable nor insurmountable.

Like most southerners who made it out of the killing field at some point during the month of ceaseless bombing, Fatima was back in her home and on her land from the minute the war ended. Hence, in the aftermath of the war the biggest threat to the
villagers emerging from or returning to their homes were those cluster bombs. “We people of the South *ahl al janub* whatever happens we hold on to the land,” she says clenching her blackened fingers into a fist. “We don’t have anything else.” Fatima is not talking in mere subsistence terms, although that is a major component, there is a powerful sense of existential communion too for these practices and their rhythms define and compose and form her life-world: “You need to just sleep one night here and breathe the air here and you will understand,” she says to me.

Fatima’s village was flattened and heavily cluster-bombed. She found two bomblets in her garden hanging from her apricot tree and harvested them with her own hands, a strange and deadly fruit, but she did not hesitate and did not fear: “Who still has time will not die,” she says with quiet conviction. These bombs, a parting gift on behalf of the retreating Israelis to the people of South Lebanon87, were lobbed at the places where life, livelihood and landscape unfolds, and many reclaiming their homes and lives in the wake of the war encountered them – to often deadly outcomes. Soon, after many people literally took affairs into their own hands, de-mining teams came to Fatima’s village and began clearing the land by priority: first the village proper and the homes, then the agricultural land. The woodland and other such areas were deemed of low priority and were not cleared. But bombs remain in the land – “the de-miners keep coming back! They say this piece of land is now ‘clean’ and then someone finds a bomb and so they come back. Fifteen times they have come back to clear the same piece of

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87 In the final hours of the 2006 war, as the ceasefire ending the hostilities was agreed, the Israelis re-seeded South Lebanon with around four million cluster bombs. These were rained down in the millions from the sky, “flooding” the geography/terrain, coating the earth in areas like Fatima’s village, transforming landscape into a deadly weapon.
land, but it will never get clean – the bomb gets hidden in the land. And in order to plant tobacco one has to dig into the earth, so one never knows… The land is dangerous now! Most of the land of the village is dangerous now! We can’t gather wood anymore – we can’t go to the woodlands. The last person to die from a cluster bomb was a young man collecting wood in the wa’r. During that first winter instead of wood, we collected junk from ruined houses, slippers, clothes anything that burns.” The violence of the war was felt in the difficulties encountered as everyday life was resumed. People adjusted their spatial parameters and daily practices accordingly to pursue their lives as before, if somewhat altered or adjusted to suit the challenges at hand. Fatima has seen many wars but she says this one was the worst war by far because its prime target appeared to be the landscape itself: the social-material nexus comprising not only people’s livelihoods, but the forms and rhythms of their very (ordinary) being. “This war was worse than when they reached Beirut,” she says, referring to the 1982 Israeli invasion. “Before they killed only people, but now they have taken our land from us, which is worse.” Her observation is apt because during the 1978 and 1982 invasions the Israelis were after the Palestinian guerrillas and what happened to the people of the South on the way to that goal was epiphenomenal (what the US Army today calls “collateral damage”).

In this war, Hizbullah was perceived by the attacking Israelis as inalienable from the southern landscape: organically woven into the fabric of the South, geography, people, livelihood, land, villages. Hence the entire densely woven fabric of southern life and living was targeted for annihilation by the Israeli war machine. But it was the Israeli’s mistaken assumption that this relationship could be broken by force. Hizbullah, a

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88 Lubkemann argues that suffering in war comes more from its impacting sources of livelihood than from acute violence.
homegrown fighting force, was catalyzed and created during the 1982 Israeli invasion and continued violent occupation and hence cannot be simply eradicated by the same powers of destruction more forcefully put. Moreover, over the long years of recurrent war, a landscape of dwelling – what I call a landscape of war – has taken viable shape in the borderland: life here is premised upon a livelihood adapted to war, a rural-agricultural landscape that is also a battlefield. Tobacco, planted and packed by those who remain in place despite seasons of war and mainly because there is nowhere better to go, enables them, in some way, to continue to be in and through seasons of violence.

Figure 25. The hands of Fatima are stained black by tar bleeding from the green tobacco leaves she is threading. Photo by R. Shibli.

Now it is one summer after that war and Fatima is back working tobacco like all the summers of her life through wars and wars. This year she rents land to plant tobacco and since she no longer has a large family anymore she hires help – women workers who cost less than men – over the span of four days in spring to transfer the little tobacco shoots from the protective tents in which they germinate to the fields. During the three-month
tobacco harvest time like now, she gets up before dawn and collects the picking of the
day and comes back home with the leaves to thread, threading until around noon. To
augment her diminished income she also threads tobacco for others on top of her own and
they pay her by the string. Because of her added expenses, she makes a net profit of about
half of the four million liras (around $2700 US Dollars) the Regie pays for her tobacco at
the end of the “tobacco year” and this is what she lives from. But since it is only herself
she needs to support these days, she remains self-reliant and independent, a human-
tobacco hybrid: again the old refrain “al dukhkhan m’ayashna” (tobacco is what keeps us
alive). The whole time we were talking she did not miss a beat with the long flat
threading needle the maybar and the tobacco leaves and as I got up to leave she
continued, leaf after leaf, thread after thread, year after year, until her time is up.

Fatima’s unherioc and ordinary struggle to remain in place and to continue her
practice of tobacco farming cannot be explained solely in material terms. There is the
sense of honest living, self-reliance – defiance even – that comes into play. But more
powerful yet is the pull of habit. She was born in this village and married here; her loved
ones are buried in the ground. Her life, its times and places are woven into the very fabric
of the village and its environment – the landscape. She has planted tobacco her entire life.
It has sustained her materially, but equally importantly it is tied up with her very
subjectivity: its temporality defines her horizons, its work her daily practice, it gives
structure to her year, purpose to her presence. The village and its land are as much a part
of her as she is a part of them – together they shape one another and come into a tangle of
being(Casey 2001; Crouch 2010).

Wargriculture
The landscape unfolds with the taskscape of tobacco that blends with the tangible and intangible impositions of the warscape that in turns structures it. Tobacco’s swift temporal rhythms, its cultivation in irregular, small plots of flat land close to habitation and its lack of need for hefty capital investment or infrastructure works well with the demands of the warscape. Tobacco is successful and sustainable here because its time-space, tasks and storage are irregular, fragmented and elastic like that of the battlefield within which it is cultivated: the weed’s brief lifespan of ninety days jives well with the warscape’s preference for swiftness. After harvest the leaves are brought into the ready-made shelter of the family home to be strung and dried. This contrasts with the time-space of trees that live in slower-longer cycles – and largely suffers for that. Tobacco is the domestic crop, the crop of warspace and wartime. Trees define distances and limits and embody endurance but they are inflexible; they are often destroyed to make way for tobacco.

One February day as the earth is waking up from its winter repose, I accompany Khawla and her sister Zahra to a family-owned plot of land that they farm that lay fallow for two decades during the Israeli occupation due to its proximity to the border fence. We climb up a hillside to reach the strip of farmland on a steep slope on a narrow terrace of blood-red rocky soil near the crest of a ridge, which is sliced by the border. The only way to access the piece of land is by foot and so we follow a narrow footpath up the hill. As we continue, some villagers on the road down below spot us and call up: “Where are you going? The Israelis are up there!” Khawla answers, “What do we care? It’s our land!” The women feel safe venturing up the slope this close to the borderline because it is their land and they assume the Israelis know that. They say “We are often up here so they
won’t think it amiss”. “Sometimes during the time of the planting we are working up here and the Israeli planes spraying pesticide on the fruit trees on their side of the border spray us too!” Zahra exclaims. We are ascending in the direction of Israel and soon we arrive at a narrow terrace that is encircled by an old hand-hewn stone wall. The dusty border track where the Israeli APCs patrol is a little removed from the technical fence up here and instead wild greenery clamors across the barbed wire from the other side, innocent and heedless of the absolute segregation imposed by existing political enmity. Above the trees rises a spindly aerial stabbing at the sky. “This is our land” Khawla tells me pointing toward the aerial. “The Israelis planted that thing in the middle of our land and ate it up” 89. As we near the freshly ploughed plot, the sisters show me a stone trough and well carved into the bedrock. “Our grandfather carved this to gather the rainwater that sluices down the hill… from Palestine,” says Khawla. She stops for a moment with a wistful expression on her face to consider that thought and chuckles. Indeed, as the top of the hill is beyond the border fence she is correct. “Our grandfather – and father but not during the “events” and occupation because this land was off-limits to us– would use the water collected here to water the early tobacco shoots and to rehydrate the beast doing the plowing”. This piece of land on the very edge of Lebanon has been recently ploughed in preparation for its tobacco crop. It has evolved with the times that have changed around it and the needs of the people who farm it. The plot used to be planted with fruit trees, which were chopped down to make way for tobacco whose fast temporal clip and rhizomic spatial dimensions are much better attuned to the demands of a warspace. Trees need care, and time and space – they embody continuous presence, but diminishing

89 In Hollow Land Eyal Weizman describes the land-grabbing significance of aerials in claiming space for settlements in the West Bank.
returns – their fruits are not easily converted to cash. Rooted in place they are targeted by the Israelis as abettors of guerrilla activity. These days, villagers prefer the easy money of tobacco. Tobacco hedges its bets and guarantees an income. It is the sprout of wartime survival and success.

I settle down with Khawla and Zahra on the side of the hill overlooking their village, a jumble of pastel single-story homes huddling together cheek by jowl. The marj is still a watery mirror, a temporary pond, a shrinking water-clock that reflects on its silvery surface the pastel colors of the houses of the village on the hill blurred like an impressionist painting. As the earth warms, the water-face contracts, the ground is ploughed and it is planted – almost entirely with tobacco these days. I think to myself as I gaze at the scene and nibble on the wild dandelion pastries that the girls brought with them, that this marj could be a reflection (if you don’t mind the pun) of the growing dependence of the inhabitants of Lebanon’s southern frontier upon the monoculture of tobacco. As the waters evaporate, the reflected houses disappear, the red earth is plowed and tobacco is planted.

Tobacco is the golden child of the South Lebanon warscape that inexorably accompanies human habitation, spreading out brightly across any horizontal surface. If we agree with Deleuze and Guattarri (Deleuze and Guattari 1988) about the physical and metaphorical qualities of trees, then tobacco is the rhizome. More than anything apart from war itself, tobacco unites the southern borderland in its labor-intensive fourteen-month cycle from seed to weed to commodity.

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90 In the spring wild herbs are avidly gathered in a practice known as tasli’.
Needing from nature only the nourishing dew of dawn, tobacco demands much more from its human cultivators: in the opening days of spring the powdery seeds are coaxed into seedlings then transplanted by hand into ploughed fields where the rubbery green plants live for the ninety days of high summer during which they offer their tar-filled leaves for successive pluckings. The leaves are then threaded and hung to dry – anywhere in and around the village home – until they turn deep gold after which they are packed in bales ready for sale to the State-owned monopoly, the *Regie Libanaise des Tabacs et Tombacs* that comes ‘round distributing *Liras* after Christmas. Tobacco, the crop of summer, which is also the season of war, unites the landscape during the time of its efflorescence in its bright green ubiquity; its rhythmic labor unites the poor. Its brief life and flexible storage is temporally and spatially attuned to the spatio-temporal parameters of the warscape. Premised on poverty and acclimatized to war, the “bitter weed” is the sprout of continued survival in a place of war.
Allies in the fight for life in a space of war, tobacco farming has long been vilified as enslaving and enchaining. I have shown that that may be so in many respects, but it is not a coincidence that this weed is the only legal global market friend of the poor in parts of the world forced to farm genetically modified crops in place of more lucrative crops like cannabis and opium. I have called it a wartime crop for its almost tailored adaptation to the various not very generous aspects of life in these parts. The space-time of tobacco unfolds in tasks and rhythms across the warscape and adapts itself accordingly. Many recognize that tobacco is the most viable – and hence “only” – source of livelihood here for the way it combines “non-wage” family labor with the fleeting life of a hardy weed that requires no irrigation and that thrives in the uneven topography of the southern highlands, that requires no infrastructure outside of the family home and is linked to a government subsidy protected by political forces that guarantees an income.

The South today is inexorably moving toward a more rational capitalist order where land is property and locals are de facto “wage laborers” for an exploitative tobacco-growing enterprise. But in the meantime as long as there are folk around like Bou Sahel and his family – and it is they who make up the majority of the permanent inhabitants of the villages –whose lives temporally and spatially exceed the categorical and political strictures of capitalist modernity – we are still not entirely there yet. Those who remain on the land for reasons not entirely rational, reasonable, or “just so” as Bou Sahel put it, have found ways of maintaining and sustaining themselves here by combining capitalist cash-crop agriculture with a local barter and subsistence economy based upon the land… and thus a way of life continues in peripheral quarters, the neglected, conflict-ridden margins of the state.
V. The Resisting Earth:  
On the Nature and Culture of War in South Lebanon

The first part of this chapter explores a place of cultural memory and the second part explores a place of cultural ruin.

i. Culture as Nature: the Mleeta “Resistance Landmark”

The landscape as story

The ordinary finds flesh in the ebb and flow of life along the southern border of Lebanon across seasons of conflict and calm. But this natural/ized living texture has freshly been brought into sharp relief: it has been subtly dis-embedded and re-arrayed as a cultural artifact to be experienced, contemplated, and carefully absorbed. Long has the earth of the South (*ard al janub*) and the rural nature of warfare (*resistance*) been mobilized in discourses of (southern, Shi’i) suffering, but only recently has this taken tangible spatial and material form. The rhythmically violent texture of inhabiting and cultivating the rural battlefield that is the South Lebanon borderland has newly found pedagogic and exhibitionary expression in a cleverly landscaped cultural “landmark”. The “Mleeta Resistance Tourist Landmark” is a recently inaugurated\(^{91}\) and hugely popular\(^{92}\) venture

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\(^{91}\) Mleeta is not the first time that Hizbullah puts its “recent” (Deeb 2008) history on display; they have been doing it for years. I will never forget the exhibit staged in Hamra in West Beirut in 1986 celebrating (and claiming authorship of) the Israeli withdrawal from the southern half of Lebanon. My father was a hot-blooded (Southern) nationalist at the time passionately proud of the defeat of Israel at the hands of the Lebanese Resistance and Israel’s recent withdrawal from Saida, our hometown, and took us to see the show. I was ten years old, my siblings much younger; my mother, a Saudi, was skeptical of such “Islamic” things. I remember gazing with fascinated horror at the images of Israeli atrocities, events that has barely just happened and which were constitutive of the atmosphere I was growing up in yet still not clearly enunciated in my perception as my mother sought to – only partly successfully – shield us from the worst this war was generating. The exhibit took place in the dank and dusty showroom of the Lebanese Ministry of Tourism in Hamra and was probably the first foray of this surly and dour – and
that opened its doors to the public in May 2010. Located in the hills above Saida where
the resistance physically dug itself into the earth to fight the Israeli occupation for twenty
years, Mleeta is described on its brochure and website as a “natural museum”:

Being the first of its kind, this place engravés into memory a continual stage in the
history of Lebanon. This is a natural museum, surrounded by captivating nature
and mountains. Its aim is to preserve the places where the Mujahideen [resistance
fighters] lived giving people the chance to be better acquainted with the unique
experience of the Islamic resistance against the Israeli enemy since its occupation
of Beirut in 1982. Carved into a soaring hillside that swoops into a deep and wide valley, the landmark
makes use of natural topography and terrain to weave the history and practice of
Hizbullah guerrillas into the landscape. The landmark’s various features mold the
physical features of this earth to one particular transcript: the Resistance’s victorious and
ongoing struggle against a relentless, destructive, existential enemy. Bringing people into
generally feared – Islamic movement into the Lebanese public sphere. Hizbullah back then were a
hardline Islamist faction among many warring Lebanese factions and had yet to reinvent
themselves as Lebanese heroes. But here was one of their first attempts. Bearded men lurked at
the sidelines of the exhibit as my father herded us in to view the show whose centerpiece was the
actual bloodstained clothes of Ragheb Harb, an early leader of the resistance before it became
known as Hizbullah, who was assassinated by an Israeli commando on the doorstep of his home
in Jibsheat, South Lebanon on Feb. 16, 1984, a mere two years before. One of Harb’s first acts of
defiance was refusing to shake the extended hand of an occupying Israeli officer, saying “You are
occupiers, I do not shake hands with you and I do not sit with you, get out of my country”. At the
time, Southerners and the Shi’a in particular were perceived by the Israelis as meek local peons
and willing allies in their war with the Palestinians. Harb’s stance powerfully indicated otherwise.
As we left the exhibit my father grasped the hand of the stern-faced organizer of the show and
spoke heated words of emotional compassion and political allegiance, as we looked on, slightly
stunned. I couldn’t get the bloodied clothes and the dusty shoes out of my mind. The blood and
the dust. Out of place materials that conveyed at once the mystical and the mortal aspects of
Hizbullah’s project.

92 More than 800,000 visitors passed through Mleeta in its first year of operation. It has attracted
much media attention.

93 www.mleeta.com
a cleverly designed “place of nature,” the landmark re-presents southern landscape as the “natural” source of a particular kind of culture, community, politics (and ultimate and inevitable moral victory). In this way it persuades docile subjects, knits a moral community and produces a (natural/ized) place (of war). In and through an affective and tactile encounter with a carefully scripted landscape, cultural and political subjects \textit{ra’aya}\textsuperscript{94} are cultivated, educated, nurtured. Mleeta meshes Hizbullah’s socio-political project with the spirituality and materiality of the earth upon which its guerrillas (and constituents) fight and dwell. The spiritual-material connection is sourced from repositories of communal affect and religious and folk traditions, orientations and forms and interwoven with the (by now) familiar experience of inhabiting a rural battlefield. Such a landscape project is premised upon and flourishes within “organic”, kin-based networks of dependence, love and care that span the rural South that is the military stronghold of the organization (and the source of affective iconography that dominates the Hizbullahi repertoire) and the urban (the Southern Suburbs of Beirut \textit{al dahiyeh} that is the current day political stronghold of the organization). These webs shape, nourish and naturalize the landscape within which Hizbullah operates as a fighting force, a social organization and political party.

The landmark weaves together the materials of warring and (rural) dwelling and is the place where a certain moral community encounters its mystical, material (and military) sources. Here, subjects of a “war society” encounter the objects that contain, generate and propagate their history and constitute their specific “Culture of Resistance”. Toward this end Hizbullah’s “natural museum” (re)shapes the earth of south Lebanon.

\textsuperscript{94} Translated as constituents, \textit{ra’aya} literally means flock, those one leads to pasture.
(ard al janub) into a specific Resistance landscape narrative: in re-presenting, re-shaping a familiar, common, mundane, inhabited topography and terrain to tell a particular tale, the landmark effectively transforms it from a place of everyday dwelling into a tangible cultural object – all the time drawing on the powerful traditions and long-cultivated patterns and deep-seated affects and orientations emergent of long generations and genealogies of rural inhabitation. In a recent article Deeb and Harb (2011) argue that this landmark is a part of Hizbullah’s efforts to shape an Islamic milieu in Lebanon. My objective is to explore how this clearly enunciated cultural-hegemonic project couches war in “natural” terms that utilize the landscape as medium: in particular how the “natural” landscape is mobilized and effectively fused with a certain narrative or culture of war (hence explicitly naturalizing it). Thus nature becomes the material and medium of a particular culture at the same time that this culture is naturalized. In the latter half of the chapter I will visit a place of “cultural ruin” that contains untamed and hence “wilder” pasts and presences; I contrast its presence in the life of a community, where shreds of stories from an other time still fitfully circulate despite the increasing silence (or half-life) of cultural memory to the didactic and domesticated and fixed memory-narrative present(ed) in Mleeta.

The landmark is physically crafted from the organic elements of life in the southern countryside and reconfigured to embody and embrace the moral, spiritual and political narrative of “resistance culture”. Resistance fighters are posited as the physical, moral and mystical interface between a warrior culture and its victorious practice and a

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95 zur “to visit” in Arabic is a term used also for a form of pilgrimage to shrines.

96 I relate this to Walter Benjamin’s concept of Natural History Naturgeschichte.
natural world that fluidly aligns with and facilitates their eternal and sacred yet mortal
and earthly cause. Mleeta re-states the material texture of life that was heretofore
inhabited in the everyday performance of living (and dying) in a rural warzone as
Hizbullah’s natural cultural context and moral-political heritage. It educates and orients
its visitors on how to understand and to emotionally respond to the “natural” landscape of
the South and to war as the (naturalized) context of ordinary living.

Everything about Mleeta – and by extension village life in South Lebanon – performs a
connection and communion with habitat. In Mleeta the connection is carefully scripted
and interwoven with the hegemonic narrative of a political party and path; and in Mleeta
this “naturalized” narrative is there to be encountered, contemplated and absorbed. Off
the manicured museum path and into the jumble of village life and surrounding
countryside one encounters wilder, multiple, layered and less scripted memories and
experiences: a natural (hi)story of warfare. The power and significance of Mleeta is its
ability to tap sources of memory and affect stored outside of the self encountered in
places and objects, to weave those into the landscape and to claim this landscape as
testament to and enabler of a particular history and political-theological trajectory. The
landmark’s goal is to shape the very earth of South Lebanon to Hizbullah’s political and
existential project.

A “Natural History” museum: subjects and objects in a landscape of war

We visit the landmark on a bright day only a few days after its inauguration on May 25,
2010, on the tenth anniversary of the liberation of the borderland. Driving through the
twisty roads and tiny villages of Iqlim al Tuffah\textsuperscript{97} the hilly, largely Shi’i hinter- and upland of Saida, we arrive at a large brown sign spanning the road pointing the way towards the “Resistance Tourist Landmark”. Crowning the hilltop the landmark lies sparkling new in the bright spring sunlight: geometric, minimalist, sharp-edged, low-slung buildings of unadorned cement and glass. We park in the immense parking lot, pay the 2000 liras\textsuperscript{98} entry fee, collect our brochures (one can select Arabic, English or Farsi) and enter the iron gates.

Most of the visitors to the landmark are families, who are here to combine an outing \textit{nazha} in nature \textit{al tabi’a} – a common and popular form of familial bonding among villagers as well as the urbanized majority one or two generations removed from the countryside and village – with a sound moral-political education. Other visitors are school groups, Hizb-sponsored women’s groups, tour groups from Iran, the odd journalist or anthropologist, as well a handful of curious, non-affiliated visitors. The atmosphere is one of leisure, with various groups making use of the landscaped setting to stretch their legs and absorb some “culture” \textit{thaqafa}. Here and there male figures are seen lecturing to knots of attentive listeners. Wandering around on my own on a subsequent visit I was casually adopted by a guide who immediately took me to show me the ancient oak that would not be uprooted as the bulldozers first broke earth to build the landmark. The tree continues its long life in an unobtrusive spot. This oak, my guide told me, embodies the steadfast \textit{resistance of nature}. It embodies the spiritual and physical connection of the resistance \textit{to} nature: of the earth and sky to the divine and earthly success of the

\textsuperscript{97} Literally “Region of Apples”

\textsuperscript{98} A little under a dollar and a half.
resistance. This connection is echoed in the slogan of the landmark “Where the Earth Speaks to the Heavens”.

Walking up the manicured, neatly cobbled promenade, we stop to contemplate the landmark’s plan. It is clear and the order of consumption is indicated by numbers. The layout is a large cross with a central field called, like many village squares, “The Square” al saha, where a large circular pool reflects the sky, a form quoting the rain-collecting pools at the center of many southern villages. Curling off from the main quadrant down the precipitous decline of the hill is a long and twisty footpath that eventually by way of deep into the earth brings you back to the center of the landmark. We follow the prescribed order of business.

Our first stop is in the plush, air-conditioned screening-room of the multi-purpose hall where we watch a short film presenting Mleeta’s central narrative. We are welcomed to Mleeta by Hassan Nasrallah who addresses us, his audience, directly. Then, floating on the rousing crescendo of operatic music, the long and bloody history of the Israeli-Lebanese wars is unfolded in dates, sounds-bites and gut-wrenching images soaked in pathos. The 1982 invasion: tanks rolling through tobacco fields as villagers stand by helpless and watch; endless Israeli attacks upon southern earth; explosion upon explosion upon explosion; dead and bloodied children; the beginnings of resistance with the November 1982 suicide bombing in Sur. Early Hizbullah leaders who met violent and untimely deaths at the hands of Israel are shown speaking rousing words of angry

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defiance. Soon the jagged music ascends in urgency as the tables begin to turn. Fighting in village streets and explosions in orchards. Hassan Nasrallah takes the helm of the Resistance, a younger black-haired man of thirty-four. As the Resistance come into their own and make the occupation a losing game for the Israelis and their minions, Nasrallah declares in his now signature style of address “a Resistance, honorable and magnificent and up to the challenge, no one can defeat it and it will be victorious by the grace of God!” Israeli soldiers are seen scrambling, an image is flashed of the assassinated SLA commander Aql Hashem. Finally Israel withdraws from the borderland and locks up the border gate behind them. The prisoners languishing in the detention camp of Khiam are freed with desperate, squirming bare hands against rusted metal grates and people stream back in euphoria to their liberated villages: old women throwing rice and young men kissing their grandfathers. Then comes the 2006 war as a testament to the “True Promise” and Israeli soldiers are shown running, scattered, injured, dying and in coffins. Thanks to the “Divine Victory” scored by Hizbullah in this conflict, Israel releases the remaining Lebanese prisoners in its jails and they are personally welcomed and embraced by Nasrallah amidst a sea of yellow flags in the immense bombed-out square where the dense heart of dahiyeh used to be. Standing defiantly exposed under the night sky beside the freed prisoners, Nasrallah famously pledges that “the time of defeats is over and the time of victories has begun”. A new chapter begins. Nasrallah appears on the screen shaking a warning finger: “if you bomb Rafiq Hariri International Airport in Beirut we will bomb Ben-Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, if you bomb our ports we will

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100 And also provocatively. Most of dahiyeh was flattened in 2006 with the explicit aim of assassinating Nasrallah who never ceased to address his people throughout the violence. He has gone underground since and only appears in person briefly on significant occasions, more commonly making addresses via video-link.
bomb your ports, if you bomb our factories we will bomb your factories” in his famous “eye for an eye” speech from 2008. The feeling is one of ascending might. Good over Evil. The war is not over (it is “to be continued”) but the clip must end and it does with a taste of what is to come: the late Abbas al Musawi, assassinated in 1992 by Israel from the air as he traveled by car in South Lebanon with his wife and infant son, raises his finger and turns to the camera. His pale skin is in stark contrast with the blackness of his beard and his thick-framed glasses serve to enhance the intensity of his already electric gaze. All background music stops as he calmly and matter-of-factly states: _israeel saqatat_ “Israel has fallen”. The staccato and sober pronunciation of these final words reverberates powerfully throughout the room. This eerie pronouncement from beyond the grave is in the past tense. The unsettling conviction with which it is spoken, the calm assuredness of the long-dead man’s demeanor, his direct address and the past-ness of the statement, imparts an uncanny sense of an _alternate present_. The room is hushed as we contemplate this possibility, this _reality_. Suddenly, jarring us out of our reverie, the soundtrack resumes and Hizbullah’s militant and pumping anthem _ruwwad al ard_ “pioneers of the earth” jerks us back to where we are in the here and now, as we are visually swept out of this particular history with universal claims and into the spaces of the landmark down into “The Abyss” and along the winding path… _This_ place here is the site of (this) history’s “continual” presence and unfolding.

Our feet follow suit. Emerging charged with appropriate emotion into the bright light of day we pour along with the rest of the visiting families toward “The Exhibit” _al maarad_ where sundry objects captured from Israeli soldiers over years of violent encounters are on display. Everything from arms to fatigues and helmets to field supplies
and rations, canned food and drink, radios, hand grenades, medic kits and the various odds and ends that a squadron carries with it on a mission into enemy territory are exhibited in glass cases, strewn around carelessly, haphazardly. The collected junk of war looks oddly familiar, homely even, as these objects address basic human needs for sustenance, apparel and shelter from the elements.

Warring gets inserted into this “ordinary” category through its scattered, discarded objects, as Navaro Yashin has shown101 (Navaro-Yashin 2009). The feeling – and the message – they evoke (in me) is: “these boys (the supposedly formidable enemy) are mortal, vulnerable, bungling. Look how we can take their toys from them just like candy from a baby.” A couple with two girls and two boys all dressed up for the outing as identical pairs in pink and blue respectively, direct their children to pose for a photograph in front of a case with captured Israeli guns and rocket launchers. The children obediently hug each other and smile at the camera. This is the ordinary political-cultural context of their upbringing. The walls of the exhibition hall are covered with slick murals and dioramas painstakingly detailing the command-structure of the “undefeatable” IDF, maps of military installations juxtaposed with salient excerpts from Nasrallah’s “eye for an eye” speech. These convey a single and unequivocal message: we know our enemy. From their canned beef to the finest details of their intelligence structure and hidden weapon caches. Of course: knowledge is power102.

101 According to Navaro-Yashin (2009) Ganimet or “loot” is the term used by Turkish Cypriots in reference to the abandoned and appropriated property and objects of Greek Cypriots after the partition of Cyprus in 1974.

102 Long has Hizbullah internalized this axiom and made it explicit.
Beyond the peaceful “village” square _al saha_ and upon emerging from the exhibition hall we enter “The Abyss” _al hawiya_ where destroyed Israeli tanks and Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) are sunk haphazardly into a massive, circular cement pit with scattered letters spelling out in Hebrew TZAHAL, the acronym for the Israeli Defense Forces. “The Abyss” is designed to be viewed from above: it is a message to the Israeli jets and unmanned drones that continue to patrol and unilaterally dominate the skies of Lebanon. Scattered Hebrew letters spell out “The Lebanese Quagmire” around the sunken vehicles to complete the picture for those who read Hebrew and care to have a look (and shudder in memory or in anticipation). The Merkava 4 is Israel’s “invincible” tank and the ones on display here with the muzzles of their guns cartoonishly tied up in knots were lost in the 2006 battles in _wadi sluqi_ and _wadi hjeir_ (Harel and Isacharoff 2008) when an entire Israeli tank column was destroyed by nimble resistance guerrillas hidden in the undergrowth as the tanks blundered along the foot of a narrow valley towards the Litani
River with the inexplicable (because tactically irrelevant) goal of crossing it. These tanks are Hizbullah’s biggest booty (and Israeli’s biggest loss) of the 2006 war and represent one of the resistance’s great military victories and here they are on jeering, nose-thumbing display. The museum path winds us around and around the pit; we, along with the rest of the landmark’s visitors, stop and take pictures and point and remember and relive the well-known episode.

“The Abyss” leads us round and round the sunken tanks and eventually onto “The Path,” al masar. A sign positioned among the undergrowth reads:

This is a rugged and bushy area where thousands of mujahedin had positions during the years of occupation. From there, they launched hundreds of jihadi operations against facing enemy outposts as well as inside the occupied security zone.

“Standing up to” is a Weapon

From 1948 until Lebanon’s invasion in 1982, the Israeli enemy imposed on Lebanon and the region one choice: surrender, defeat and submission. On 11-11-1982, a martyrdom seeker named Ahmad Qassir blew himself up at the Israeli ruler stronghold in Tyr to announce the birth of a different choice, the Islamic Resistance, another new course with its slogan, “Never to Submit,” and its method “O ye who believe! If ye will aid (the cause of) God, He will aid you and plant your feet firmly.

A rough-hewn footpath under a protective canopy of dancing trees making dappled shadows on the ground takes us steeply down the scrub-covered hillside where we almost expect to see families barbecuing on a Sunday outing but where instead we encounter scenes of war-making in a nature setting: from camouflaged rocket launchers and makeshift field hospitals to protective natural shrines like the “Sayyid Abbas Barricade”

103 This infamous tank-column debacle was previously showcased as a sound and light show in the 2007 “Spider’s Nest” beit al ‘ankabut exhibition, a well attended installation on the 2006 war staged in the victorious rubble of dahiyeh, an experimental and temporary forerunner of this much more elaborate and sophisticated permanent exhibit.
where Abbas al-Musawi the martyred secretary-general of the party prayed when he visited “the boys” *al shabab* on the front. His prayer spot, a leafy alcove, has been transformed into a natural shrine like those of the prophets that dot the countryside, testament to his continued spiritual guidance and presence among the fighters despite his violent and early death: his voice wafts through hidden speakers and envelopes the visitor who is invited to pray upon the reed mat covering the dirt floor beneath his picture beside a casually propped Kalashnikov: an enchanted portal, a place of sacred affect.

![Figure 28. The “Sayyid Abbas Barricade” in Mleeta. Photo by author.](image)

Familiar nature sounds – birdsong, crickets and the rustling trees – smells of warmed earth and vegetation, dust, thyme and resin – engage our senses as we crunch along the dappled nature trail sheltered from the open blue sky by the protective maquis. Occasional placards inform us as we stroll deeper into the woods about the arts of guerrilla warfare.

**Missile Power *al qiwa al sarukhiyya***

This military unit is commissioned with short, medium and long-range surface to surface missiles whose aim is to deter the enemy from targeting Lebanese civilians and infrastructure.
Martyrdom Seekers \textit{al istishadiyun}

This unit takes direct orders from the supreme leadership of the resistance. It numbers hundreds of trained and equipped volunteers ready to sacrifice their lives.

The end of the pathway delivers us into the \textit{piece de resistance} of the landmark, “The Cave” \textit{al mghara} and “The Tunnel” \textit{al nafaq}. The sign outside reads:

This is a rocky bunker that the resistance militants constructed when they used Mleeta as their stronghold. Initially this cave was merely a 1 m² gap that the resistance militants used as a refuge against the Israeli enemy bombardment and to protect themselves from the harsh weather elements. It was later transformed into a 200m long tunnel over the course of 3 years, an excess of 1000 men dug and prepared in rotation, excavating over 350 m² of rocks and soil. The weight of almost 1000 tons which were disposed under trees to cover an area of more than 4000 m² in a camouflaged manner that made it difficult for the enemy air observation to discover. After completion Mleeta cave was transformed into a military integral base dubbed by resistance fighters as ‘The Point’ which formed several parts and rooms. Moreover it was linked to water supply for drinking and other purposes and was equipped with electricity, safety devices and ventilation allowing more than 7000 resistance militants to use it as a barracks and main base to resist the enemy in that area.

“The Tunnel” takes us through the stony and dark heart of the mountain and to the ideological and pedagogic core of Hizbullah’s landscape project: naturalizing the holy struggle, fusing its otherworldly goals with the materials of this earth, the long arc of the eternal struggle with the shorter but ever-replenished cycle of life. Deep underground we breathe into our lungs the damp, close air and once our eyes have adjusted to the gloom, we view there between the cold, sweating walls the technologically cutting-edge operations room where massive detailed area map is laid out on a table top and illuminated with a basic oil lamp while an IBM laptop flickers nearby. Jagged, staticky, urgent radio communications are piped through the sound system and echo tinnily in the gloom: “Haidar, Haidar, Haidar. I read you Ali, Ali, Ali”. The constant night and cramped darkness of the underworld is experienced in stark contrast with the bright
airiness of outside. Here one is cocooned in an earthly grave and must soberly face the stark realities of war alone in the depths of the mountain, the inevitable finality of death. Along the tunnel walls piles of Kalashnikovs *kleshen* the beloved and familiar Russian-made AK-47 machinegun, loyal companion of guerrilla fighters around the world are on display in glass panels built into the walls of the snug passageway. We enter the barracks: bare stone walls, thin mattresses, a prayer mat, a small battery radio, tinned goods on a shelf, a braid of onions (a staple in any southern larder) and writing on the wall: “My weapons and my soul are twins”.

![Figure 29. Display of bunker larder in Mleeta ‘Tunnel’. Poster reads: “My weapons and my soul are twins”. Photo by author.](image)

“It is upon us to create a war society,” another poster reminds us, a famous call to arms by Ragheb Harb an early (assassinated, naturally) leader of the party. In the heart of the mountain we are made to feel the spiritual and physical communion of earth and man, nature and (holy) war. The medium is the message. Being *there* where *they* were between the same walls of stone is thrilling. A communion is taking place; if not exactly a shared ideology then a deep, almost primal, affect is roused from its bodily slumber deep in this (resisting) earth.
Emerging from the ever-night darkness of dank tunnel into the dazzling daylight half way up the hill, we fall blinking and disoriented out onto “The Outlook” al matall. It is breathtaking, like flying in place like a bird of prey suspended in mid-air above a cascading valley dotted with miniature, toy-like villages. Hizbullah fighters have no control of the air; the earth is their element. But with the help of the topography of their home-turf they can acquire strategic advantages like this position here. The wind is sharp and whips us, and the Lebanese and Hizbullah flags flap and snap insistently over our heads. The tunnel has regurgitated us half way back up the hill. After our exhilarating encounter with heights, we turn and continue our ascent on the surface of the earth through a thickly wooded hillside among the embedded heavy guns of the resistance along “The Line of Fire” khatt al nar, and thus proceed through a progressive, enacted, embedded and embodied history of Hizbullah’s kind of warfare.

The Line of Fire khatt al nar

The resistance developed its military structure since 1982 hence inventing a unique military concept blending between the classical and the nonclassical guerrilla tactics. It also obtained a system of different weapons constituting the modern with the ancient military techniques and specializations, which it professionally utilized on both tactical and on manoeuvering fields.

We continue casually perusing the arsenal deployed to fight the enemy with some dug into the ground, some concealed by trees as we struggle upwards. Figures of guerrillas are inserted in the undergrowth and among the trees. These are “The Special Forces” al qiwa al khassa “a highly trained fully equipped special force”. Dressed in camouflaged
fatigues the dummies are barely discernable among the bushes and when glimpsed suddenly can startle\textsuperscript{104}.

Figure 30. Katyushas among the bushes. Mleeta, South Lebanon. Photo by author.

Figure 31. Dummies of fighters among the trees. Mleeta, South Lebanon. Photo by author.

We take in with interest the various types of mines that can be encountered in the southern wilderness like amateur botanists perusing an exhibit of the various native species of wild mushroom. Waiting our turn among excited families, we pose with and

\textsuperscript{104} This reminded me of a trip, when I was a journalist in 1999 the year before the liberation that was organized by Hizbullah to show the media their boys shabab “in action” in the field of battle. It was somewhere in these areas but when it was still an active frontline. It was a thrilling trip as we left our cars at a designated meeting point and were driven to the front in vans with blacked out windows so that we couldn’t see where we were going. We tumbled out into a wild area of terraces and olive trees and deafening crickets. Our hosts presented to us their arts of warfare in power-point underneath camouflage netting under the trees, and showed us their field operations setting and allowed us to pose for a souvenir photographs underneath a “real” Katyusha rocket launcher in the back of a pickup truck (with real mujahid!). As the day ran into afternoon we heard the buzzing of Israeli jets in the sky above our heads. This indicated to our hosts that it was time for us to go. We were quickly packed back into the vans and driven to our cars.
playfully manipulate some of the missile launchers and anti-aircraft guns like the *Doshka*, a staple in any guerrilla war, where lightness of foot and mobility are key.

*Placing war: military objects and affective spaces*

The (war) objects on display throughout the landmark are carefully woven into the maquis landscape that mobilizes a powerful communal affect from being the “natural habitat” of the agricultural communities from whence Hizbullah emerged and continues to draw its man-power; it is also the landscape that generates Hizbullah’s kind of warfare and the geography that enables their military advantage.

There is an explicit awareness among the creators of this landmark of the power of place and its ability to “store” memory and stories: they have mobilized the affective nature of *ard al janub* “southern earth” and spliced it with military materiel to a powerful effect. The nature-setting of the landmark is a mountainous *maquis* landscape identical to that of any southern village, but is subtly rearranged into a hegemonic cultural narrative serving a certain socio-political project. By bringing subjects into a particular landscape the narrative is re-presented, re-lived, re-invented and simultaneously brought “home”.

The exhibitionary complex (Mitchell 1991), the pedagogical intent and the homogenizing bent of the landmark is something the Hizb has adapted from Western forms – in particular the memorial practices of its sworn enemies. “Know thy enemy” is one of the dominant themes running throughout the landmark. Emulating *them* in some of their winning strategies is effectively put into practice here.

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105 The landmark bears more than a passing resemblance in terms of aesthetic and objective to the Jewish Museum and the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. The minimalist, unadorned concrete and metal structures of Mleeta emulate battlefield architecture but also quote the materials and forms of those two Jewish museums and memorials.
This was underlined by one of the museum’s architects, when I met him one day in his office in dahiyeh. He put the idea behind the project and its location thus:

We saw how our enemy ‘aduna uses the museum medium to express its cause such as the Holocaust. We discovered that we needed to combat the enemy with his own medium: the media and education, which are their primary weapons. We could have chosen a location for our museum in Beirut and it would have been easily accessible to everyone but it did not have the memory that is stored in the place. Therefore we decided to locate it in a place that witnessed live resistance activity and the village of Mleeta, which is now Israeli-free, was at its time on the front line on Sujud hill. Before 2000 this valley was the connection and interface between Israel and the Resistance. We chose this location for its natural beauty but there is also a cave that is located in it and is an important position that remained active. Resistance fighters used its underground tunnels up until the 2006 war (emphasis added).

Mleeta turns on the “gathering” power of place (Casey 1996). It is where the community of the Resistance goes to encounter and contemplate itself, to find and constitute itself in space and time. In Wisdom sits in Places (Basso 1996; Feld and Basso 1996) Dudley Patterson, Keith Basso’s Apache interlocutor explains to him “Wisdom sits in places. It’s like water that never dries up. You need water to stay alive, don’t you? Well you also need to drink from places. You must remember everything about them. You must learn their names. You must remember what happened at them long ago. You must think about it and keep on thinking about it” (70). Edging closer to the sources of Apache wisdom through a linguistic excursion through their language Basso gathers that place to the Apache is akin to a receptacle. “The verb si- (it sits) incorporates a classificatory system … which applies exclusively to rigid containers and their contents. The prototype of this category is a watertight vessel, and thus the adage creates an image of places as durable receptacles and of the knowledge required for wisdom as a lasting supply of water resting securely within them. This same image supports the assertions that preparing one’s mind for wisdom is akin to a form of drinking, and that wisdom, like water, is basic to
survival” (76). A similar metaphor could be suggested for Mleeta. Mleeta is named after the village in which it was built. According to the architect, the word Mleeta is Aramaic and comes close in meaning to the Arabic \textit{imtala’} derived from the Arabic root m-l-‘ that indicates the act of filling, becoming full, fullness or repletion. The architect said that the name stems from the plethora of water sources in the area. “We thought of giving it another name but decided to preserve its historic name in line with the landmark’s spirit of preservation,” he said. The word for fullness embodies the fullness and fecundity of this earth – as \textit{the} source of this community.

Often as I have mentioned, in villages, I would be taken to places to be told stories; it was as if those places held (and generated) the stories. Illustratively I was once prompting Abu Jalil, a regular interlocutor of mine, an old man who grew up in the rural South but who left his village as a young man to a life of poverty in Beirut, to tell me a story about the place he grew up in. We were in Doha, far away from the place he was speaking of. He was usually eloquent and forthcoming but this time his language was stilted, his sentences came out cropped, stunted, wilted, dry. He said “I would be able to tell you this better when we are both there in place \textit{bil makan}”. It was as if the place could not be narrated, presenced in words unless one were physically there; unless it were underfoot. It is as if the material landscape were the source and storage of the stories that it collects and that when tapped, gush forth from it. In Arabic the word for narrative is \textit{riwaya}, and to narrate is \textit{yirwa} from \textit{rawa} – this is the same root – the same word – for to irrigate. To narrate is to irrigate, to draw from the earth the water nurtured within it and sprinkle it upon its surface and thus to fertilize, enliven and blossom stories that it brings forth to life.
Mimesis and the divine

Mleeta was an active front where the Resistance fought for more than twenty years where the “native” fighters enrolled the native maquis in their fight against the occupier, the “stranger”. The architect with whom I spoke described the alliance of the fighters and the maquis as lteif al bahiya “the kindness of the flora”. This is why the architect told me that during the design process he had insisted upon an aesthetic and form for Mleeta that reflected the “natural habitat” of the Resistance fighter and made explicit reflected the deep mutual moral connection between the fighter and the earth upon which he fights.

We considered and thought through many options before we decided on a plan of construction… We wanted to make something that stems from resistance muqawama and that resonates with it. We could have made something postmodern like Centre Pompidou but that does not resemble us and is not native to the land. So we said that we would build it according to the resistance fighter… Our first concern was to cooperate with nature because we consider that there is an organic connection between the resistance fighter and the oak tree. This is the tree that protected the muqawim in addition to its natural qualities of purifying the air. We consider it a strategic connection so we attempted to preserve the area as a natural reserve. We are extremely mindful of preserving the site’s natural surroundings and working with them. Let me tell you a story that happened during the occupation. Israel was extremely bothered by the hirsh the uncultivated wilderness that has the oak sindian trees and so it burned it all via helicopters that poured napalm over the trees and ignited them, but the wind blew the fire away from the trees to an area that has no trees, and the trees were spared. This is another example of the graces of God.

My interlocutors constantly link observations about the (good/sacred) beauty of nature and its (good) utility to the resistance project as a proof of the Resistance’s ultimate goodness and divine sanction for their moral-political project. The architects of the landmark designed it to mimic this communion with the good earth and to blend with its materials, textures and forms, like a Resistance fighter in the maquis. The “good magic” of mimicry and communion with the earth is at once a spiritual and strategic move on
behalf of the fighter. The protective arm nature extends to the shield the fighters taking
refuge in her womb and utilizing her natural formations for strategic and tactical gain in
warfare is repeatedly acknowledged by my interlocutors as a recognition (by God/Nature)
of the inherent goodness of the resistance’s cause. Nature mobilizes its forces and beings
on behalf of the resistance and is repaid in a return gesture of protectiveness. This is an
organic alliance and a form of spirituality and supplication that stems in part from once
popular but now waning traditions across the rural communities of the South (and
elsewhere) where good spirits are known to reside in trees and in other natural
formations.

Nature’s passion

Winded, hot and dusty, we are finally back at the top of the hill. This is “The Freedom
Field” maydan al tahrir. Here we stroll through an exhibition of Hizbullah’s heavy arms,
anti-tank missiles and other more technologically advanced weaponry compared to the
basic artillery and guns we encountered in the woodland. Here the Kornet-E, Malyutka
and Fagot are installed: anti-tank guided missiles whose innovative use was key in
getting the upper hand in the pitched battles of the 2006 war – like that of wadi saluqi
where the IDF tank column was demolished. These weapon systems are on display in a
cheery rambling rose garden where children run amok among the missiles and flowers. A
young boy, too young to have lived through any war (yet) rides on his father’s shoulders
and asks him about the weapons and his father takes time to explain them to him: “Listen
habibi…” In the “Freedom Field” maydan al tahrir there is a wall that serves as a mihrab
or prayer corner that is inscribed with excerpts of Hassan Nasrallah’s speeches during the
2006 war. To stand here and pray here is to spiritually connect with the collective taking
shape (Deeb 2008), to participate in its principals and to support its victorious trajectory. Praying is a way of exiting the shell of the self; it’s an act of spiritual communion with a place that is simultaneously constituting you as a moral and political subject.

The last stop of our walk through the war-laced countryside and “natural museum” is the “The Hill” al talleh, a common geographic landmark found in any village (often both a militarily strategic location and the enshrined dwelling of a local prophet), the rounded mighty buttress that presides on the highest ground of the landmark. It at once evokes the crusader castles that dot the southern landscape across its highest points as well as the many military fortifications that the Israelis built on top of them (as well as those crouching along the border at regular intervals). The gigantic height when approached from below makes one feel small, earth-ridden, vulnerable, mortal, a little akin to what one feels like when under bombardment. Upon this highpoint is the “Martyrs’ Garden” rawdat al shuhada, we ascend a wide and steep and very long stairway. As we climb the stairs we get tired, weighed down by the pull of the earth’s gravity and unsheltered from the already mean rays of the early summer sun high in a bare blue sky. As we stop to catch our breath our sense of overwhelming physical exhaustion allows us to connect bodily with the effort juhd, pain and sacrifice of the mujahideen. The pinnacle exposes the hilly southern landscape that had been occupied by Israel until 2000 – and beyond. Standing here we appreciate the militarily value of this strategic position and bodily participate in its posture of empowerment. The scene that the eye takes in, in full surround, is all about (military) power and its culmination in absolute victory but also about the culmination of the spirit’s journey in martyrdom and its eternal reward in heaven, janna the Garden of Eden.
Hizbullah is utilizing the medium of landscape to claim, narrate, domesticate and naturalize war. Naturalize first in the normative, cultural hegemonic sense of pedagogically disseminating war’s ongoing existential and social reality to shape a moral-political community, and second by placing, uniting, fusing, enshrining war in the ordinary textures, places, smells, the dwelt material formations of life on the Lebanese frontline, as front and as (natural) habitat. Hence war becomes simultaneously a dominant trope of a certain cultural narrative as it is utilized to craft a “war society”. One of Hizbullah’s goals is to reintegrate into its moral-political fold its overwhelmingly urbanized and youthful constituents who possess at best nostalgic attachment to their villages and largely latent, disembodied, vague understandings of long-practiced rural traditions and embodied affects (and critically too, a waning memory of violence). Mleeta places subjects and objects in a landscape of war, it locates them within a teleology and spatio-temporality of existential, ordinary warfare. Through kneading the earth to tell a particular story, Hizbullah is both claiming the southern landscape as a source of ongoing cultural and moral identity, cohesive community and recognizing the landscape itself as the site and source of its political and military strength – and ultimate “Divine Victory”.

ii. Nature as Cultural Ruin: Sacred and Spectral Geographies

Figure 32. S., South Lebanon at sunset. Looking southwest in direction of Israel. Photo by author.
Smoke will stir
no more, no more
the trees, now
evening closes
on the colors of the village.
An end is come
to the workings of shadow.
The response of the landscape
expects no answer.
(Sebald 2012)

There are divisions that one should never try to pass over, go beyond, try to overcome dialectically: rather they should be ignored, left to their own devices, like a once formidable castle now a ruin in the midst of a deserted moor.
(Latour 2004)

I think that we live in a world which is still populated by myth and magic, in which people believe all manner of contradictory things without batting an eyelid. From telepathy to precognition, from reincarnation to hauntings, from angels to aliens, people appeal to all sorts of explanations that are often regarded as ‘irrational’ as they think the borders of the possible
(Thrift 1991).

What remains of the position are the artificial buildings, the infantry trenches and artillery shelters, which, however, now stand there without any meaningful relationship to their surroundings. They thereby lose their directional power for the landscape and are reduced to insignificant or meaningless formations “in the country”. If after a short time one comes back to places one has known as positions, the entirely new landscape can make recognition substantially more difficult. There is no longer a zone consisting of natural and artificial things of combat; its place has been taken by pieces of land with a predominant emphasis on agricultural features. The character of danger has been abolished. Finally the boundary no longer exists; that connection linking the strip of land to the adjacent “round” surroundings expanding to infinity on all sides
(Lewin 2009 (1917))

“On every hilltop there lives a prophet”

The sacred affect upon which Mleeta is premised and draws – and reconfigures as a “landscape of resistance” – is sourced from traditions and practices that continues to persist across the Mediterranean (Alberga and Couroucli 2012). Across the South linger beliefs and practices that collect in sacred nature spots or landmarks where good souls or spirits (arwah salha) continue to dwell. Such landmarks often take the shape of “inhabited” maskun landscape features, like trees and hilltops, and are sites of
contemplation and supplication where locals visit to ask for divine intervention on earthly matters. Scattered across the rural south, these sacred nature-spots, many of which are local shrines, worshiped at by the diverse religious communities inhabiting the borderland (Shi’i, Sunni, Christian and Druze), who are otherwise divided into often-hostile sectarian-political communities. These “good trees” and other spiritual-natural landmarks point to a deep moral topography across the Lebanese South. Places of vernacular worship, they embody an increasingly silent yet still resonant tradition of communal belief and practice that often override legal-sectarian boundaries across the riven political landscape on this side of the border and even beyond. It is such repositories of traditional rural practices where people worship good spirits in “nature” that I believe informs Hizbullah’s recent (re)turn to nature in its moral-cultural discourses and narratives and landmarks.

_The Hills of Adonis: A Quest in Lebanon (Thubron 1990)_ is a travelogue penned by Colin Thubron about his journey on foot through Lebanon in 1968. A lyrical account both familiar and strange. Thubron tells of the many enchanted natural shrines dotting the landscape:

In the book of Kings it is recorded that the Israelites ‘set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree: And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the heathen…’ Solomon turned away from God and built a high place to Astarte, and Josiah ‘brake in pieces the images and cut down the groves, and filled their places with the bones of men’. But the holiness of these sanctuaries was of the hills themselves, and so natural was their veneration to Semitic peoples that no king or prophet could destroy them, and often the Jews took and resanctified them.

106 A better known example for the confrontations it has sparked in the post-liberation era is ‘Abbad hill that straddles the borderline near the Lebanese village of ‘Adaisheh and is a point of pilgrimage for both Muslims and Jews who respectively believe that a holy man – a Sufi saint/a Jewish sage – is interred there.
'Joshua came with an army and captured high places all over this district,’ said a monk… pointing into the mountains, and gave Jewish names to the peaks around: Nebi Hanania, Nebi Azar, Nebi Ayoub. On the hill behind us were the tombs of a Hebrew prophet names Nebi Misha and his wife, but nobody knew who they were or what they had done. Beside them, in a circle of stones, grew a sacred oak tree, so old that its trunk had died, and new branches sprang from its base. The small, domed tombs were venerated by local Moslems, who had covered one with silks in Islamic green and lit iron lamps where candle wax bled to the floor.

These sanctuaries must have fallen and been rebuilt era beyond era. The lamps which were lit in the shrines of Astarte are re-dedicated, but only to another name. On the tomb walls of the prophetess – if such she was – sacred trees have been lightly moulded. Here Moslems ask things of the saint which they would be shy to ask of God, and women petition the unknown lady for fertility.

Shrines like these grow from half the crags and knolls of Lebanon, rude-walled and white-domed under trees descendent from the pagan groves. Every village has its saint’s tomb, or welli. Sometimes they belong to mad or holy men who actually lived, but more often villagers know nothing of their origin. ‘A great prophet is buried there’, they say, or ‘a famous lady who died long ago’, or sometimes, embarrassed by the absence of any grave, they declare that a holy man or woman passed that way and so the place is blessed.

If the site is ancient, the name of its saint is usually that of a misty patriarch perpetuated through all the Semitic religions, and perhaps born in Phoenician myth. So the names in the highest places are altered or are lost, but the sanctity never fades. Significantly, many of the shrines are those of women, and often a woman is associated with the welli of a man. ‘She was his sister’, they say, or ‘she was his daughter’. Rarely is she a wife, for the moral sense of Moslems and Christians turned the divine Phoenician lovers into consanguinity.

The shrines are sought out by every sect. Christians, Metawilleh [sic] and Druses, who shun each other’s mosques or churches, murmur prayers together before the unknown spirits on the hilltops, and tie strips of sick relatives’ clothing to the bars of the windows or on the holy tree as talisman for health, and sometimes give a small gift or offer henna as libation (69-70).

As elevations that expose surrounding country, many of these enchanted hilltops transformed into strategic geography during the wars and occupations of the borderland. These hilltops are by now so entangled with the warscape that one cannot prize them apart; their sacred nature and material remnants of war blend together into a peculiar formation: a charged affective geography composed of natural and cultural ruins, what Yael Navaro-Yashin refers to as ruination, “the material remains or artefacts of
destruction and violation, but also to the subjectivities and residual affects that linger, like a hangover, in the aftermath of war or violence” (5). As wars erupt and subside remains of war and of culture tangle with regenerating greenery and the lives of animals and fuse into a resonant topography as in my ruined and enchanted hilltop at the very end of Lebanon’s earth.

S. is a hamlet on the top of a hill on the southern border of Lebanon inhabited by goats, a bereaved graveyard and a possessed tree. Periodically visited by villagers, guerrillas, international peacekeepers, stray dogs and wild pigs, it is composed of an abandoned Bedouin campsite, a smashed mosque with a stopped clock on its wall pointing to a quarter to eleven, a grapevine, a fig tree, an olive grove, a defunct stone olive press, a huddle of overgrown, eroded stone and cement dwellings and enclosures, and in summer, brief, bright fields of tobacco. Here in S. a constellation of objects inhere in the present and indicate something about the past. Existing on the margins of human habitation on the edge of the nation-space in layers of agricultural battlefields old and new, S. is a living ruin, a knot of animate and inanimate devastation and regeneration that continues to breathe through entwined cycles of seasons and wars. Through turning harvests and shifting politics new configurations of being(s) claim its spaces and recycle its materials and forms. Habitation attends to some of the rubble and vegetation – enlivening it – and leaves some to decay or run wild. Rhythms of dwelling and seasons of war have seamlessly constituted this only partially abandoned place.

The trees rising up to the left of the dirt path as we approach announce the beginning of habitation. From afar they look as one but now we can see that are a circular cluster huddled around a hollow. Forming leafy shelter in exposed country, they draw us
toward them after our steep climb up the dirt path. These trees mark the place of a former Bedouin encampment. Before borders and wars, beasts would seasonally live among the trees with the Bedu, pastoral nomads native to Galilee. The Bedu hauled water up from the freshwater spring in the valley and shared some of it with their animals and the good spirit who lives in the ancient gnarled oak standing apart from the tree-cluster. Nomadism declined in South Lebanon after the establishment of the militarized border and front between Lebanon and Israel fractured, fixed and mined traditional pasturelands, divided families, and made wandering the borderland a troublesome affair. But the Bedu found that their knowledge of terrain and their familiarity with its nature was an asset to the Palestinian guerrillas who came to the borderland in the 1960s. The Bedu’s knowledge of the landscape was expressed in their practiced movement as they piloted guerrillas across the border into enemy territory. Soon the camp under the trees was overtaken by guerrillas and their shepherds… and the protective spirit kept watch. The tree watched as Palestine became Israel. It watched as war transformed the hilltop settlement under the trees into a strategic military geography. The tree has presided over many burials over the long years of its existence and we are able to make out the identities of some of those buried among its roots: two are Bedu youths, this is clear from their names and the names of their villages scrawled on their tombstones “the Orchard”, “Mother of Mulberry”. Their dates of death are 1949 and 1968 respectively.

The tree is still alive and so is its good spirit although not many pour libations down its trunk these days. This oak is a monumental hollowed-out creature embodying

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Pastoral nomads, Bedouins, refer to themselves and are referred to as Bedu (plural of Badawi/yya) or ‘Arab.
the ungentle passage of long time, with a massive wrinkled body, bushy foliage, swooping limbs and branches like dainty skeletal fingers.

Figure 33. “Inhabited” oak. S., South Lebanon. Photo by author.

Villagers say that it glitters and glows on some nights when it communes with another “good” tree on a hilltop across a shallow plain, smack on the borderline\textsuperscript{108}. Trees – even when they do not house spirits – are wonders in the warscape of South Lebanon. Targeted in asymmetrical warfare for their guerrilla-sheltering qualities, trees are solitary rem(a)inders in the thorny wilderness of the south Lebanon warscape, and possess a kind of magic embodied in the sheer material fact of their physical continuity. In a warscape time is fast and movement is shifting. Cycles that follow a slower pace fall by the wayside as cumbersome and obsolete. Hence the tree, embodying rooted vertical continuity is a testament to a different time and temporality when it survives in a landscape of natural destruction, erasure and abandonment. Consider the olive, the blessed crop of the profane landscape of the Lebanese South. Producing more heat than other trees, the olive is the perfect foil for the advanced heat-seeking technology of the

\textsuperscript{108} Called al Sheikh Zein (the good holy man) or Um al Zeinat (mother of goodness) the other enchanted hilltop is inhabited \textit{maskun} by either a good male spirit or female depending on different narrators.
Enemy seeking warm-blooded fighters under its warm-wooded branches. The olive’s natural complicity in guerrilla tactics attracts the wrath of ruin in war. Hence olives have largely disappeared from seasoned battlefields, surviving in more peaceful terrain like undisputed villages, nonstrategic geography, sacred/enchanted spots like our oak, or church land.

Both like and unlike the charmed life of a tree is the permanence of stone. Stone perseveres, preserving the imprint of its builders, but dwellings need dwellers to remain hale. The ramshackle stone houses of S. speak the silent poetry of human abandonment. Their last residents keep the dead Bedouins company under the magical oak. Date of death according to gravestones: July 1983. Only the fruitful fig tree outside their front door knows how the old couple died, but the villagers say it involved a grenade that exploded as they sat down to a never-touched dinner. These were the days of the occupation, when the enemy had swelled over border that sliced the landscape, and dug in for a spell of twenty-two years. So after the death of its last inhabitants the hamlet’s homes became occasional barracks to different armed groups, depending on the ways the winds of war were blowing. And the stone houses absorbed waves of destruction, gently melting into the hillside as the forces of nature and war took over. The mosque remained in occasional use until it was destroyed in the last war to blow over the area in 2006, after which it joined the other stone houses in melting: each smashed wall frames life-size rural scenes.

The stopped clock on the wall points uncannily to a moment of ruin now past. Its frozen hands separate the wheat from the chaff: this is no place for metronomic time, the trees – the grapevine, fig, olives and oak, proliferate and steadily keep the seasons.
In 2000 the occupation ended and a new order came to reign over the borderland and hamlet. Inhabitants of the nearby village who did not dare to wander the woodland during the time of military rule returned to wild pastures – with a brief hiatus during the vicious summer of 2006 – walking paths, traversing meadows, picnicking under trees, tending olives, keeping goats in the tumbledown stone dwellings and planting tobacco in any accessible flat space with some soil-cover.

Figure 34. Smashed mosque walls framing scenes of surrounding landscape. Photo by author.

Figure 35. S. looking south toward shrine visible as clump atop hilltop in distance. Late summer denuded tobacco fields among a sparse grove of olives in foreground. Photo by author.
Contemplating cultural ruin(s): the enchanted plateau and the wilderness of the past

Was this what Benjamin had in mind when he wrote that in “order for the past to be touched by the present there must be no continuity between them.” Such touching – or should I say kissing – was in his opinion the singular outcome of images that, like falling stars, would jump-start the process of redemption, wrenching history onto a new track. But these images were above all effervescent. They no sooner emerged than they disappeared. The exact opposite, one would think, of monuments” (Taussig 2006)

In Mleeta a political narrative is disentangled from the landscape and refashioned utilizing an earthly medium into a tangible, digestable, pedagogic format conveying a hegemonic discourse that serves political ends and shapes a moral community and political constituency. Yet something entirely other is afoot here in S. Here in S. my “guides” lose their footing. They (and I) no longer know what it is I am after; less do they know what it is they know or don’t know109. In S. an enchanted plateau at the very edge of the Lebanese nation-space, many pasts lie shallowly buried, nervously silent yet studiously unperturbed. Those who – like me – insist on disturbing their repose encounter wisps and phantoms, swirls of affect, partial answers and half-truths. For what the landscape embodies and conceals is always excessive of what can be revealed, grasped, analyzed, comprehended (Bataille 1985; Santner 2006; Taussig 2006). The silence can be partly ascribed to the ignorance or the carelessness of its human dwellers – a stance which lends itself to the perceived “abject” nature of cultural ruin (Navaro-Yashin 2009), its “natural history” (Benjamin and Osborne 1993; Santner 2006). But there is also a willful silence on behalf of this landscape’s dwellers/knowers, in particular with regards

109 Taussig gives us a sense of how to find our senses in a place such as this in “Walter Benjamin’s Grave”. “It is then to this sense of space and place as a mix of beauty and death and namelessness that I want to draw in the notion of allegory as used by Benjamin for that art of understanding in which under the spell of death and terror the human world was frozen and naturalized in what we call a still life or landscape” Taussig, M. (2006). Walter Benjamin’s grave. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
more recent lived pasts of wars and occupation. That what is buried in S. also has to do with the present: a present that is careful to maintain a certain survivor’s silence (Agamben 1999) about a troubled/unsettled past that continues to resonate as uncanny presence and yet is constantly brushed off as “normal”, “natural”. How can one understand the heavy, haunted nature of the “natural” here? Echoing Yael Navaro-Yashin’s argument that the abject yet affective nature of such post-war geographies is not external to the present moral-political order but rather lies at its very heart, I suggest that buried – albeit shallowly – in S. is the ambiguous experience of domination, of wars and occupations, an excessive recent past that remains at the heart of the nervy condition of “calm” that defines the present of this prosaically yet uncanny, “nervous” (Taussig 1992; Taussig 2010) (what Navaro-Yashin describes as “irritated”) (Navaro-Yashin) borderland landscape. Here in S. the inhabitants of the nearby village of R. (who now partly own the abandoned hamlet) encounter the murkiness, ambiguity and violence of life under various kinds of crushing power – be it Ottoman, French, Lebanese or Israeli – that is now shallowly interred, restlessly embodied in material remains. The recent past of occupation crowds close – sometimes too close for comfort – and so it is surreptitiously held apart. S. embodies a space of tension, spectrality and material affect\textsuperscript{110}, what I investigate as landscape. I came to understand S. as a other place (Stewart 1996) to the village of R., as a place where murky pasts of war, occupation and collaboration continue to dwell, a place where the past is stored and half forgotten, a place that allows the village of R. to reclaim a post-occupation normalcy – a normalcy that is anything but. Thus along

\textsuperscript{110} Taussig quotes Benjamin in “Walter Benjamin’s Grave”: “If the theory is correct that feeling is not located in the head, that we sentiently experience a window, a cloud, a tree not in our brain but rather in the place where we see it, then we are, in looking at our beloved, too, outside ourselves”.
Lebanon’s southern marches, a gray zone and place of limens I often encountered a complicit human silence alongside that of shrub and stone. How does one interrogate such an affective, spectral geography?

The landscapes of Anselm Kiefer, Sophie Ristelhueber and W.G. Sebald orient my approach to the affective landscapes of the Lebanese South. Kiefer’s practice of materializing history in the tangible medium of his art performs landscape as a rhythm of annihilation and regeneration. His resurrected landscapes are “dirty fields of death sewn with floral brilliance” that “enact a parable of the entwined fate of nature and humanity” (Schama 2007). Ristelhueber’s (Ristelhueber 1984; Ristelhueber 2001; Ristelhueber 2005; Ristelhueber, Mayer et al. 2008; Ristelhueber 2009) photographs of unnamed, human-less landscapes from across the world’s warzones capture the marks of the unending rhythms of destruction and construction that human beings like forces of nature etch upon earth and habitat. Her (Bosnian) series La Campagne, indicating in one word countryside and military campaign, includes in the photographic frame ruined shards of human dwelling enshrined and eclipsed by nature’s sweet and generous, yet cruelly impersonal renewal. Likewise, my contemplation of this landscape is inspired by W.G. Sebald, who so calmly evokes the uneasy, unquiet resonance of the afterlife of war (a sense I deeply, intuitively comprehend having inhabited this rhythm too). His saturnine travelogues (Sebald 1997; Sebald 1998; Sebald 2000; Sebald 2003) through the silenced ruins of resurrected European cities still resonating with the ghostly remains of the catastrophe of the Second World War inspire my aesthetic sensibility and direct my gaze toward the enigmatic “materiality of human artifacts and habitation” that “pulsate with the rhythms of natural history” (Santner 2006). Sebald draws my attention to the “flayed
surfaces” (ibid.) of the material world, a movement and meditation that fleshes out Benjamin’s concept of Naturgeschichte or natural history, “the ceaseless repetition of [...] cycles of emergence and decay of human orders of meaning, cycles that are [...] always connected to violence” (Santner 2006). Sebald’s writings “enact the battle of the intellect and senses with the hermetic or repellant face of history’s surface layers. The impression is one of traveling across the land in which the catastrophic events of the twentieth century have left a pattern of shallow graves under the … tidy upper stratum of civilization,” (Sebald 2012)111. Suitably, the kind of knowledge that one encounters in such places is necessarily fragmentary112.

This chapter now turns its back on the insistent, ordered, didactic narrative of Mleeta and enters a labyrinth, a place of ruins and fragments, myths and magic, of wilderness, an enchanted plateau, a matraha, place I returned to time and again throughout the period of my fieldwork, drawn as I was to its haunted presence(s) and heavy silence(s). I was first brought here by Sahel but I subsequently returned with different companions, often with his sister Khawla, to gather half-remembered and half-forgotten stories inhabiting its resonant matter. Shreds of stories hung around the place.

111 Thus writes Ian Galbraith the translator of a posthumous collection of W.G. Sebald’s poems entitled Across the Land and the Water.

112 Reminding us of Benjamin’s philosophy of knowledge Navaro-Yashin writes, “This approach to knowledge is not one that asserts a transcendental philosophy of truth, but rather one that portrays knowledge as fragmentary, like the shards, debris, or rubble left behind after a cataclysm or catastrophe. From reading Benjamin, I derive the idea that ruination lies at the heart of modern regimes of knowledge, including our own mechanisms of academic knowledge production. Here I would like to invite the reader to consider ‘ruination’ not only as constitutive and descriptive of a political … system or its foundations, but also as a motif through which to reflect upon the making of knowledge, including our own practices of knowledge production as anthropologists” (2012:7).
Something persistent in the materiality of its ruin(s), affected me and kept me coming back. Disturbing the stories into action like the dust our feet awaken beneath the trees as we walk, I probed at the jumble of graves beneath the inhabited oak and the abandoned dwelling of the dead couple with the bountiful fig tree. As I contemplated the affective, melancholy nature of its ruins, this place half-afforded me a glimpse of the shadows of lost time. By bringing dwellers from the nearby village of R. to dwell on the matter of the hamlet of S. I was able to follow a few threads into the nervous labyrinth.

*Ariadne’s thread: into the labyrinth*

S. was once a *mazra’a* a plantation, a fertile piece of earth where flora outnumbered the people who tended them. Ensconced in the midst of thick and wild shrubs it attracted outlaws and those who sought invisibility, during the times of the Ottomans and beyond. The lushness of its vegetation and the sparse habitation also attracted the wanderers of this land with their livestock who fed off the thick wild pastures: the pastoralist Bedu’/Arab and the Nawar gypsies in the time before the fixing of borders and the incarcerating of citizens within them. Those itinerant folk, the pastoralists who had no one *place*, had many places wherever they roamed and those took shape around friendly spirits who would center their temporary settlements and protect their passage. The oak at the heart of S. is at the heart of this narrative and the source of the place’s name. S. comes from *saleh*, which refers to the *ruh saleh* “good spirit” who still inhabits *yiskon* (from root s-k-n meaning to inhabit or dwell) that tree. Every winter the pastoralists struck camp near the tree where the circle of trees around the hollow still huddle and hauled water up from the freshwater spring in the valley to share some of it with the spirit in the tree.
Abu Jalil grew up in S. because his father was the *wakil* steward of the land for its Christian owners. His father oversaw the peasants who worked the land of the Christians. After the death of his father when he was fifteen, Abu Jalil left to a life of poverty in Beirut in the 1960s. He told me the story, as he knew it, of the hamlet.

My father told me that the land belonged to a guy called Salman, who could have been from R. This guy Salman used to rule the whole plantation *kan hakim hal mazra’a kullitha*. The *arab, bedu*, used to come and stay there in winter for their goats because it is a wide land [a plateau], you saw how it is. Salman used to oppress them a little bit. They used to fill water from the *tannur* [the spring in the valley] and carry it up all the way on their backs and on their donkeys so that they could drink. That big tree there the Arabs made offerings there *biqyu yinzurula nzur al arab* they would put water on its roots *bi ka’ba*. They would get water from the valley and pour it on its roots. But it wasn’t only the Arabs who believed the tree was inhabited. All the people living around it did. They would say that this tree is Good and that in it is a prophet *haydi al sajra mneeha wa fiha nabi*.

One day one of them was killed and they carried him and put him in front of the house of this guy Salman and the women and the children they came and started screaming “Salman killed him! Salman killed him!” Salman heard “Salman killed him” and the *‘arab* were frightening before and so that very night he took his wife and ran away. He went down to Sur or who knows where. He found someone from the family of H. and one from the family B.-W. and he sold them the *mazra’a*. He sold them the *mazra’a* but those [new owners] they weren’t able to go up there and so they sold the land to the N. family from Ain Ibl and to Y. S. from Sur. They bought the land and then the land was taken care of *mishi hala*.

According to Bou Sahel, another elder of R., S. was a small hamlet of cultivators until the incident with the slain Bedouin. After that, the rest of the inhabitants of the hamlet took off *tafasho* out of fear of *tar* revenge.

It was in 1885 and there were troubles with the tribes and whatnot and a Bedouin got killed and they found him and put him there at the beginning of S. The inhabitants of the village got up in the morning and found him [the corpse] and then the Arabs attacked all the villagers got up and left. Some went to Ya’tar, some went to Majdal and two families came to us. The rest ran off *tafasho*. When the village emptied the Turks [Ottomans] were still here. The Turks wanted to raise taxes on the village. If this village had five hundred people there was a certain amount owed and if the village didn’t pay up the Turks would take it over. So this village its inhabitants are no longer in it and nobody paid so the family of N. bought it after the Turks took it over. My father told me this was before the
time of the French. The N. family paid for it and registered it in their name *tawwabuha* that is how it was back then. For example Naqura thirty or forty years ago people didn’t own anything but their houses, the land was for the Y. and the H. families, Mansuri was for the Kh. Family, Qleili was for the B.-K family. There are some villages that are owned and others that are not. So the N. family bought S. and put it in their name *tawwabuha ‘ala ismhun*. In 1940 or 1945 the families of R. bought a share – you see the ruin? They bought the land around it from Y.N. but the Baseel [hill] remained for Y.S. from Ain Ibl. And that is the way things are until today more or less.

By the time those three guys bought the place it didn’t have any inhabitants. There was only one guy living up there on his own and his name was Ali. He never sold his land. There were people from R. and from Beit Leef who would go up there and plant the land but they wouldn’t live there. Until today people own the land up there but it remains uninhabited.

When the Palestinians left [Palestine] there were people who were wanted by the law and the *darak* would be after them and so they would hide out there in the wilderness and in the valleys and so they could never be found *yitkhabu bil ahrash wal wudyan wa ma byistahdo aleyhum*. Outlaws *maghadeeb* who were wanted by the Lebanese state would hide out there because its all maquis *ahrash* and trees and it was a place to hide out because no one could reach there. When the Palestinians came and some lived in S. and would work there. They would plant tobacco and wheat in the land up there. The Palestinians who lived here were mostly from Tarbikha [one of the seven villages] right next to us. In 1957 the Lebanese state disallowed Palestinians from staying in this area here. Whoever wants to come here needs permission – they were no longer allowed to come to these parts.

The same quality that made the place attractive to outlaws made it attractive to guerillas, who by the 1960s began to use it as a base for surveillance and operations into northern Palestine/Israel.

Says Bou Sahel:

Then the *fida’iyeen* started to come to the area. Around 1970 the state made agreements with the Palestinians and the Eastern Sector was allowed to have armed Palestinian fighters *msallaheen falastiniyyeh*, the Central Sector where we are was allowed to have offices and the Western Sector was not allowed to have any guerrilla presence. Thus the guerrillas wouldn’t show, they went underground and they would come to areas like S. during the night.
It is not a coincidence then that Abu Jalil left the hamlet around this time never to return.

Soon the hilltop became a target for the Israelis and their allies and in time they (or more likely their allies) occupied the place.

Then Israel found people here that it could cooperate with and they made militias and in 1978 they invaded and so the fida’iyeen went far and would not come and show in S. and other places. And there were marakiz positions for the Israelis yahud in S. and in Baseel between S. and Ya’tar and Kafra it also put positions.

This hilltop and those nearby became military positions for the occupiers and their allies.

All but one family remained living in this hamlet emptied of inhabitants: Ali and his son and daughter-in-law were the hamlet’s last human inhabitants. Their crumbled home, the olive press, the fig tree, the inhabited oak and the graves beneath it enclose and half-disclose shreds of their story.

**The hidden force**

There is a hidden force – some call it affect – that stands apart and yet within what we can grasp and communicate. Affect is what this place embodies and exudes, and is what drew me here time and again; housed in the beings and matters of this world, affect is that only half-acknowledged force that collects and conceals and only half-transmits (Thrift 2000; Dewsbury 2005; Thrift 2008). For example the “inhabited” tree: stories collected around its gnarled branches emerged and swirled and the remains of people collected around its roots disclosed to me a persistent presence, the pulsating half-life of cultural ruin (Navaro-Yashin 2009). Like the tree in the Brueghel painting “The Harvesters” that Ingold writes about in “The Temporality of the Landscape”, this tree centers this place as a living being, upright, rooted and old. But at the same time, and due to its inhabitation by spirits, the tree, rooted, vertical and strong, also unsettles the veneer of reality that we
seem to be a part of. Its physical presence is encountered in the here and now, its cultural resonance as a house of spirits and good magic, is a fading echo from a time past that barely makes it into the present we inhabit. We can hardly grasp it from our place in the here and now but we sense it as affect (Santner 2006). Here in S. unlike the carefully scripted narrative of the memorial or landmark that we are made to consume as docile political subjects, these other places conceal resonant matter that tells us more – and hence less – than we can know. As Taussig writes “For a while a monument … may center and fix this landscape, but that spell is broken by the even greater spell of the landscape” (28).

Underneath the inhabited maskun tree are five graves. One, with two headstones, is lonely and huddles closest to the spirit-tree. Two lie side by side and two more lie off to the side. What do those graves contain? The oldest grave is barely legible, fading letters scrawled in wet cement more than half a century before and mottled with moss. I can make out the name of a man and his village of origin, which is one of the Bedouin villages not far from here. Date of death: February 15, 1949. This was a time when the state of Israel was not yet a year old. This place at this time was inhabited by Palestinians who had left their villages in Galilee and were biding their time here waiting to return (they await still). I was unable to gather more, but can conjecture that as a pastoralist with knowledge of the many paths into Palestine this man could have been of use to the Palestinians guerrillas here, guiding them on hidden footpaths back to their homes under the cover of darkness. The second lonely grave attests to this: another Bedouin lies interred here and he hails from another Bedouin settlement very close by. His name and date of death are written in the cement and are more legible than the older grave. Date of
death: 1968. This was a hot time on this troubled border; a year before the 1969 Cairo Agreement that in effect formalized the guerrilla warring that was being waged by Palestinian militants here. Was this young man guiding guerrillas to their targets in northern Israel? Quite possible. What is known is that his village of birth, scrawled on the gravestone, was bloodily wiped from the map in the 1978 Israeli invasion because its inhabitants were known to be complicit with the Palestinian guerrillas. Then there is the grave with the two headstones that stands alone closest to the tree. It is slightly grander than those of the two dead Bedouins, with a carved marble slab sunk into its cement body; it belongs to the old man Ali, who never left S. He lived and died here. Date of birth: 1892. Date of death: January 6, 1983. This man, who lived a long and eventful ninety-one years, was among the last three inhabitants of this hamlet. When he died in January 1983 the Israeli occupation of Lebanon post its terrible second invasion in June 1982 violently ruled this hilltop (the southern borderland had already been occupied since 1978). During this time the Israeli occupation of the borderland was being restructured and revamped. When this old man died, in a cold winter month well known to sweep away the elderly and the frail, he left behind his son and his son’s wife, who now became the last two inhabitants of S. As I walk over to study their twin gravestones I notice the following: they died on the same day July 29, 1983, in the same year as the old man.

The gravestones disclose the names of the graves’ inhabitants: Hussein and his wife Khadija I asked many times about them and the circumstances of their death but never got a straight answer. It is possible that no one really knew. But neither were they willing or wanting to conjecture. What is known and what was often recounted is that they were killed by a grenade that exploded between them as they sat down to dinner.
The villagers say that that is how they were found: dead together with their untouched food. When I ask whether they were killed people look away and sometimes mumble. I gathered from these mumblings that the man had killed his own sister in his youth in an honor crime and that he took up residence in the hamlet after that. I was told that he was a loner and had a hobby of collecting bombs that he would find here and there as he went about his life in the countryside and that he was probably fiddling with one of his explosive finds when it went off. The sense I got was that asking about the cause of this man’s death unsettled a complicit silence, and made people uncomfortable, if not necessarily about this man’s violent end, but rather about the murkiness of the era that witnessed it, the occupation. In the wake of the death of its last residents the hamlet was finally emptied of its permanent dwellers. It could finally be commandeered for entirely military purposes without civilian disturbances. Those with no business abroad stayed in the immediate environs of their homes and only cultivated their close by fields. The elevations and the wilderness were for other types of tasks, activities. The SLA established a militarily strategic outpost here: it was an ideal vantage point on the valley to the south where the resistance was active. And the occupation dragged on.

Fig. 36 Fruitful fig tree and ruin of home of dead couple in S.
How is this landscape similar and different from that of Mleeta? Enclosing similar layers of living and warring the landscape I have just unfolded appears nervous, restless, unlike the cohesive moral narrative of the singular scripted landscape of Mleeta but involving the same material. Here it has run amok under the thin cover of silence. These days S. is frequented again by the inhabitants of R. who come up here to plant tobacco on its terraces, tend to its ancient olives and keep goats in the old stone houses, picnic. It is a truly magical place where the setting sun weaves its rays through the trees and the rising mist from the valley refracts it into a sparkling pink haze.

The landscape is thus a labyrinth always excessive of the stories that attempt to pin it into place (Pandolfo 1997; Rose 2002; Taussig 2010). What its materials, beings and features tell us is that they cannot be herded into a neat script. Quite the contrary when prodded a little, these yield wild shreds of stories half forgotten and half remembered but mostly untamed; their power remains unharnessed to a higher purpose. Instead they nudge us acknowledge the forces that continue to destroy and to create new orders of meaning upon this earth, that continue to sediment and remain for us to contemplate as affective ruins. The landscape we have just encountered pulled me towards it again and again throughout the years of (re)searching and told me a few things about what it is to dwell in a place where the natural rhythms of sunrise and sunset and the turnings of the seasons and the necessary toil that churns earth into dollars blend with the cycles of naturalized violence that are visited by humans upon each other and upon this same very earth (Ristelhueber 2001; Sebald 2002). Our steps encounter stories buried in the earth and disturb them into fitful circulation, briefly once again before they fall into silence forever. I was first brought here to gain a “view” of the surrounding landscape.
My first impression was of its surface texture, its breathtaking topographic features. 

Lingering awhile, I stumbled upon the resonant ruins and their irresistible affect drew me in, deeper and deeper. I came back here time and again with different companions and guides to coax a few more stories from unspeaking yet strongly resonant materials of this place. These stories somehow emerged in place – as if the place composed them, compelled them, stored them and gave pieces of them (back) to us. A profane illumination, “an emphatic statement on the weighting of the world by its nameless dead” (Taussig 2006).
VI. Inhabiting the Gray Zone: Life at the Borders of the Possible

Figure 37. Israeli settlement of Metulla as seen through the border fence at Kfar Kila, South Lebanon. Photo by Rola Khayyat.

A boundary is not that at which something stops, but as the Greeks recognized, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing.

(Heidegger 1977)

This chapter is about limens, borders and gray zones, neighbors and enemies. In what follows I collect together ethnographic fragments of a fragmented landscape. The scenes collected below are spaces of epistemic murkiness, multiply-haunted scenes, strange encounters. And like a barzakh between sunlight and shadow, life in this borderland unfolds in a gray zone where it is impossible to go to one side “for existence has no edges”. But modern power formations do, and they are sharp and slicing. They feel a bit like razor-wire. How does one seamless reality encounter the edges of another co-habiting reality? How do they bleed into one another? In violences and pain, uncanny
affect and encounter, pockets of untamed spirits, in something as ordinary and as haunting as the lives of butterflies, birds and bees, as radiowaves\textsuperscript{113}.

I. On Edge

\textit{Munira in borderland}...

This study probes a liminal place, a gray zone, a borderline, a front, a point of contact and of division, a space rife with murky ambiguity, mystery and magic. I stand at this thrilling and uncanny boundary and stare through the invisible air that sometimes feels like an enormous looking glass and sometimes like a bell jar. It is eternal and unmoving this land beneath my feet, from the perspective of my tiny human form and finite lifespan; and immense and whole, the implements of earthly power rending it appear so futile and fragile under the giant arc of the ever sky. It is also painfully, wearily beautiful this place both raw and ravaged, constantly renewed and oh so very old. It affects me profoundly and speaks to me in ways I think I understand; more and more, the more I dwell here and journey here and watch and listen and taste and smell and feel here.

Ideally the inquiry should compose its object through an investigation that embraces both sides of the ephemeral divide. But due to several factors, all of which inhere in the painful physical realities of political enmity and national bordering, the mortal, tangible body of the researcher and its inalienable stamp of Lebanese citizenship, this study is condemned to explore one side of the two-sided figure that unites at the line between shadow and sunlight, the Lebanon/Israel frontier. Israel thusly in this account is at a physical remove; it remains wrapped in its protective cocoon, a defensive and

\textsuperscript{113} Driving along the border I often tune in to Israeli radio. The sound of Hebrew FM radio chit-chat chimes uncannily with the militarized, multiple and mutilated landscape of the borderland.
paranoid ghetto from which I am physically, morally, politically excluded. It is touchable only with my eyes and yet it is everywhere. But there is an epistemological trick that addresses and redresses the sensual and embodied yet frustratingly one-sided state of affairs: Israel may be stuck there behind the border (for now), but it is in fact everywhere. Here in South Lebanon Israel is the enemy, al-’adu, evil incarnate sharr mutlaq to be ceaselessly fought in an endless struggle that defines the basis of being and gives shape to time. But Israel is also the next-door neighbor, just over there (and often enough over here) beyond this crest, along my vegetable patch, behind those trees; a neighbor that is daily encountered and prosaically related (to). Israel then is something both existentially and mundanely constitutive of this place: it inhabits every utterance, movement, feeling, being, object, thought, and place.

... and through the looking glass

Local knowledge, then, comes down to an intimate understanding of what is generally true in the locally obvious; it concerns what is true about place in general manifested in this place. Standing in this place thanks to the absolute here of my body, I understand what is true of other places over there precisely because of what I comprehend to be the case for this place under and around me. This does not mean that I understand what is true of all places, but my grasp of one place does allow me to grasp what holds, for the most part, in other places of the same region. My ongoing understanding of surrounding and like places is characterized by essential structures manifested in my own local place and illuminating other places as well. That anything like this induction of place is possible exhibits place’s special power to embrace and support even as it bounds and locates.

(Casey 1996).

Place is in a sense what happens. It is an event: both an epiphany – a vision unveiled – and a shattering of the mirror of the world.

(Wylie 2007).

We stand on a desolate promontory overlooking another world as the light wanes. Blue grey chases red gold across the landscape as the sun withdrew behind us. Nearby stood a phalanx of young pines, a row of skinny legs with knobby knees under prickly green tufts, promising us bravely with the naïve eagerness of youth that when they grow up

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114 It also comes to me through the airwaves when I drive my car along the borderline
they will do their bordering job more convincingly. They whispered to us between giggles: “*Jihad al Binaa*115 planted us here! To thumb our noses at the border! At the enemy! At war! When we grow up we’ll show them! We’re not scared!” To our right on a low hilltop squats an Israeli outpost. To our left on a higher hill lurks a camouflaged Lebanese Army position116. We stand in the middle of two warring worlds and the cold wind bites into us. Puddles of mud lie across the red earth track: should we go any further? I shiver – am I feeling vulnerable, mortal and small… or just cold?

We look at the two outposts and then at the neat industrial-agricultural landscape through the impervious looking glass before our eyes. A geometric patchwork of fields, right up to the border, a dividing line composed of visible and invisible forces of enmity, socio-economic difference, networks of connectedness, identification: rows of cypress trees, paved roads on which cars (from another universe!) drive, dense, irrigated fruit orchards, a geometric hilltop settlement117, refrigerated hangars for agricultural produce, Europe. Our side of the border/this side of the glass: a prickly abandoned agricultural plain, faint traces of cultivation – years and years ago, mere seconds in geographic time – tattered dirt roads, Arab ignominy. Desolation. Silence.

R., my companion, wants to go further down track, toward the extreme edge of the nation-space – the Blue Line, which he claims is a stick in the ground topped by an overturned tin can (or so I picture it in my mind’s eye), but I hesitate, my throat tightens.

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115 Building and contracting company owned by Hizbullah.

116 Since the 2006 war the Lebanese Army has deployed along the border. I have often wondered though if their outposts are sometimes “disguised” resistance outposts.

117 Avivim
It looked too deserted. This place looked like it has been left to fend for itself in any which way since the French and the British decided what was what back then in the wake of the Great War. Why is no one around? Why are some points of this border megamilitarized and others so rudimentary, basic? I feel like we are the last people on Earth. Why are we the only people here? And more to the point: are we the only people here? I bet we are in the sights of both military outposts. I bet the Israelis are aiming their guns at us. I think of my son. And I refuse to budge. Instead I take some pictures (is that worse?). Finally we get in the car to get away from this terrifying, desolate place and a BMW jeep rounds the top of the hill, casually driving in the direction of the border along the dirt track. It is populated by a few women and a baby out on an afternoon drive, it appears. We slow down to inquire about the nation’s physical limits but the driver pretends not to see us. When we finally get her attention she stops. We ask her: how far can we go? She says, “to the birkeh” (there is a small pond down the slope toward the Israeli outpost about fifty meters away) “okkeh.” “Do you go there?” we ask her. “Sometimes, but right now it is all muddy.” Hmm so where is she going? This is a dead-end track that ends in Israel. She drives off and a few meters down the road stops and turns. Suddenly over the ridge a Mercedes comes hurtling toward us at a mad speed. What on earth! The guy who is driving and another guy sitting next to him glare at us like mad. We keep driving and so do they – we check them out in our rearview mirror – they get a few meters past us and make a high-speed hairpin turn, the car half skidding off the road. They must have been dispatched to get us away from where we were standing (we think), but we had already moved and their speed ended up representing misplaced urgency. Maybe the Israelis sent a message via UNIFIL saying: find out who those two are or else! Were they
coming for us? Were they speeding because we were in danger? Were we transgressing some invisible borders? Ignorantly flaunting the rules of war? Who knows.

After that we drive through Yarun, the village at whose edge we were standing. It is one of the few religiously mixed villages in these parts. Today its Shi’a inhabitants are mostly in Panama and mostly very rich and mostly building massive and tasteless mansions on former agricultural land surrounding and overwhelming the tiny remains of the largely Christian old village, a few tangled streets and flat-roofed stone village homes huddled on the hilltop around a church and a walled monastery. All the life we see is concentrated in a few scrawny cats, who stare at us with hungry eyes. We continue to Marun al Ras, a high bluff swooping down into a flat and wide yet fallow agricultural plain, continuous, indulgently undulant and yet unforgivingly gashed in the middle by the border, a unifying flat topographic surface divided between enemy worlds: Lebanon and Israel. The Lebanese side is an eroded, faded, dry, cracked and brown mirror of the verdant and agriculturally productive Israeli side. The borderline running along the middle in a southwesterly direction is the looking glass.

Figure 38. Lebanese-Israeli borderline as viewed from Maroun al Ras. Abandoned dry fields on the Lebanese side up until the Israeli border. Photo by author.
As the sun sinks and the gloom rises a few lights begin to glimmer across the un-crossable divide, as impermeable (to us) as a (one way) mirror. Cars and trucks smoothly trace the paved streets, purring contentedly. We bump along on the moonscape asphalt in our little blue car. R. says that he feels like he is standing on Earth and gazing at Mars. The landscape is silent poetry.

_Nahariya? Akka?! Mars!_

On the way back to the familiar coast where we habitually dwell (we know where the sun sets there: into the sea), we lose the border for a spell and inadvertently take a diverging route down through Haneen and Dibl. Haneen, a sunken Shi’a hamlet sitting on the one road connecting the two Christian villages of Ain Ibl and Dibl. Here in the basin out of sight of the glowing western horizon, an inky night prematurely gathers. Haneen (which means longing) was razed to non-existence in the 1970s during the formation and consolidation of the local pro-Israeli forces in the borderland. Dibl was the home of Colonel Aql Hashem the second in command of the SLA who was blown up there in front of his home by a booby trap in his jeep set by Hizbullah in the waning days of the occupation. Dibl was known back then as a lair of SLA thugs. Its name (which in Arabic relates to wilted, rotten things) still carries notes of fear.

From the New York Times, Jan. 31, 2000:

_Guerrillas fighting to oust Israeli troops from southern Lebanon killed the second-most-senior officer of the Israeli-backed militia there today with a bomb that exploded near his house._

_The Iranian-backed Hezbollah, or Party of God, took responsibility for killing the officer, Col. Akl Hashem, 47, who commanded the western brigade of the pro-Israeli militia, known as the South Lebanon Army._
Colonel Hashem, who was also the chief of the group's intelligence service in his area of command, was considered the likely successor for the 71-year-old militia commander, Gen. Antoine Lahd.

Reports from southern Lebanon said that Colonel Hashem, who had survived several previous attempts on his life, was killed instantly when a cluster of explosive charges went off in the yard of his farmhouse near the village of Dibl in southern Lebanon.

We drove up and down snug and curling village streets, as the blue hour turns black. Some shadowy figures of boys note our intrusion. Fruit trees in gardens and low stone walls accompany our directionless path. Our orientation dissipates. Is this Hashem’s home here? I think I remember it from the grainy recordings of the moments of his death that were broadcast triumphantly, repeatedly on al-Manar, Hizbullah’s TV station. I hold these thoughts in my heart as my companion and I speak of other things. I am sure that this is his front yard where Hashem met his death near his big white jeep. Will we ever get out of here? We exit the village and drive along a level road that runs parallel to an elevated shelf on our left. As the shadows coalesce around us, we come across a car parked on the other side of the road facing us, its lights are switched off but its trunk is open. Beyond the car in the olive grove in the protected, defensive trench between the road and the elevated ridge we note the movement of some men working with long cylindrical objects; we swivel our heads in their direction but keep driving. What are they doing? Preparing already for the next round? Finally we reconnect with the border road by coming up a steep incline from the murky slump where Dibl and Haneen dwell. We are back on (the) edge.

Breathe out: orientation. Heading toward the still-distant sea, we pass through Rmeish, Aita ash Shaab, Ramia and then Marwaheen (In Aita at a fork in the road we ask the way, a laughing youth shouts: “this is the way to Sur, this way leads to
Nahariya\textsuperscript{118}). As we drive toward Marwaheen, we crawl up a ridge that soars above the Israeli north. We see the first lights twinkling along the Israeli coastline, a continuation of ours, a world away, and then suddenly the image swells, spreads, glitters and shimmers, overwhelming us. “Is that ‘Akka\textsuperscript{119}?” we wonder aloud to each other. We want it to be ‘Akka. Look at how the coast curves! It must be a gulf, no it’s not Nahariya, it has to be Akka, (the sister city of my hometown Saida, entangled with it throughout history and this is the first time I see it!). We stop, our hearts beating, the lights sparkling like stars in our eyes, our mouths open. To our left, grid streets, electricity, urban sprawl. To our right, dark hills and valleys, scrubland, a few half-hearted naked light bulbs, poverty, plucked-chicken tobacco fields, a hopeless scattering of reverse-selected villagers. What a place! A very significant nowhere strung across the universe, across worlds! A depopulated, devolving fertile desert truncated by the border then ravaged with wars and poisoned with ordnance. All the youth are somewhere else, apart from those who are busy as bees in underground lairs preparing for the next round. Only old people and unmarried women keep the farming and the villages alive. And those with no other options left in life. And yet the dark houses insist on continuing to embody some kind of presence.

\textbf{II. The Intimacy of Enmity}

As we have seen, Israel and the inhabitants of South Lebanon go way back. They simultaneously became neighbors and enemies at the moment of inception, when Israel,

\textsuperscript{118} Closest coastal Israeli town to the Lebanese border.

\textsuperscript{119} Acre
the Promised Land, burst forth upon the land of Palestine: despite their professed hatred, these neighbors/enemies complement one another and to a certain extent they need each other. Often during my time in the South, I heard Israel (hinneh them) referred to in familiar, familial terms: “we know them mna rifon,” “we live with them ma’ayshinon”. This indicates an exclusive, tight relationship, a deep knowledge of this special other. And their relationship, like many long-term affairs, is rife with ambiguity and contradiction: can’t live with them, can’t live without them. One man described his life with Israel as a marriage, a violent one, but a marriage, a kinship and love-bond nonetheless. “What can we do?” he said. “We southerners are like a woman who has married a violent man! We are stuck in this violent affair, there is no escape – and so we make the best of it and get on with things”. Although morally/politically speaking, enmity is the prescribed, preferred (possibly only non-taboo) mode of relating to this other, there are other orientations toward the enemy/neighbor that are more ambiguous. And not as muted or subtle or silenced as one would expect.

**Jihad’s story: the neighbor, the enemy**

Jihad has lived all his forty something years in a town that saw among the worst of the fighting and destruction in the 2006 war (and has since crazily rebounded). He often, in my presence and in the presence of others (provocatively?) expressed his affection and regard for Israel. During the Israeli occupation he worked as a plumber or janitor (“technician”) in a Hospital in northern Israel and earned a good living. It is not that Jihad does not earn a good living now. Ever the opportunist, he cashed in on the post-2006 (re)building boom. Investing a part of the cash compensation he received for his destroyed home to establish a building-supplies business: he transformed a piece of land
that his family no longer farms into a quarry and has since then profited and proliferated. He is well off by village standards: he cultivates a belly, tells jokes, drinks non-alcoholic beer, drives a jeep and has many children (his wife produced two successive children during the time I was in the field in addition to the five they already have). His relatives grumble that he has gotten rich through exploiting the need of others but there appears to be a hint of envy in their pronouncements. Others I know who know him do not like him and prefer not to be in his presence because of his “compromised” past. I found this antipathy strange because there were others with an equally or more “compromised” past who were not shunned thus by the same people, and anyway in the former occupied zone dogmatically pursuing such sensitivities is just not very practical. It eventually dawned on me that most of his critics look down on him mainly because he belongs to a small, poor, unimportant family with no social status or auspicious pedigree, which never had any presence or standing in the village.

Most villages are composed of two or three large families that due to a combination of descent, numbers, connections, acquired wealth and mobility, dominate village power structures\textsuperscript{120}. These powerful families often occupy public positions like head of the municipality or mukhtar. Yet today, unlike during the time of the zuama, those in power do not see themselves as a separate social class as most of those inhabiting the villages are of peasant stock, fellaheen, or their immediate descendants. In the village scene, the smaller, weaker families are worse off and socially denigrated and often

\begin{footnote}
\textsuperscript{120} Emrys Peters article “Aspects of Rank and Status among Muslims in a Lebanese Village” in Julian Pitt-Rivers ed. Mediterranean Countrymen based upon fieldwork in a village in South Lebanon in 1952-3 is a gem of British Structural-Functionalist anthropology. He subsequently revised his argument in an article following fieldwork a few years later to accommodate socio-economic mobility and flows within and without the village, which in the first work was characteristic to this school of thought self-enclosed.
\end{footnote}
marginalized. It is well known – and pretty understandable – that such subaltern families were the most eager to throw their lot in with the occupiers. During the occupation, enabled through their association with the brute force of occupying power, they turned the tables and climbed to the top of the village molehill and their ascent was often ugly.

One day I was driving in a nearby village and my companions pointed out a house built in the shape of an airplane. “That is the house of a big collaborator,” they told me. “He was feared and hated in our village”. “Where is he now?” I asked. “In Israel, never to return” they said. “He did too many people too much wrong. There is no place for him here ever again”. During the time the collaborator had inhabited the house he had painted it in blue and white – the colors of the Israeli flag. Today it is repainted and his relatives inhabit it. There was a clothesline outside and children’s toys strewn about. Not everyone who collaborated did so at such a level and with such dramatic repercussions. Most people just made do with the occupiers and somehow muddled along. And that is the muddled moral nature of the present in every single village in the former occupation zone. It is hard – impossible mainly – to be politically principled and pure in marginal a space of constantly shifting power.

Jihad did not join the SLA; his older brother did. But his brother then sponsored him to work in Israel. This sponsorship cost a hundred and fifty dollars a month, which Jihad paid from his salary, which came to about five hundred dollars. Many people, who out of opportunity or out of need or coercion took these jobs, were bussed into Israel daily to work as “technicians”, builders, agricultural laborers and other menial jobs. The pay, although low, was relatively generous for occupied Lebanon. Many think that Jihad’s lowly background is the reason for his lack of “moral integrity” yet it is just as
likely that it is also the source of his ambitious streak: he does not have the luxury of other safety nets to fall back on and thus he makes the best of what he has. Principles in such a space are hard to maintain. Jihad’s business is booming these days and can he barely keep up with demand: he works his eldest son from sun up to way past sundown in orders and deliveries of building materials as he sits back and works his cell-phone.

The first time I visited him in his home Jihad was renting an apartment in the center of the town while he builds his new home on the southeastern outskirts of town overlooking the thorny hills of Israeli Galilee. We sit in his living room, my sister and I, among his many children and wife. At the center of the room taking pride of place sits a huge TV that is crowned with a picture of a smiling Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the Secretary General of Hizbullah. We got talking and soon, after a few pointed questions from me he lowers his guard. “Life was better back then” he says, laughing mischievously. Jihad he appreciates Israeli orderliness, the cleanliness of their cities, their free schooling and affordable healthcare, their “respect for people” and their “democracy and freedom.” He says, “people in Israel are judged on “merit” unlike here where it is all about wasta connections and which politician has your back”. His wife and kids pipe up with fond memories of daytrips to Israel during the time Jihad worked there: “It’s just like Europe!” they said (although they have never been to Europe). All throughout this discussion and disclosure Hassan Nasrallah crinkled his eyes and smiled his sweet smile at us from atop the TV. Jihad loves and respects the Sayyed although he blames Hizbullah for provoking the last ruinous war (that made him rich). Jihad is full of contradictions.
Truth be told, at first I did not comprehend Jihad’s contradictory declarations and contrary orientations especially since he is not by any means disenfranchised by the current Hizbullah-run scene in the former zone. As he spoke glowingly of Israeli democracy and freedom I pointed out that “democracy and freedom” were not things Jewish Israeli citizens shared with non-Jewish Israeli citizens let alone with captive, menial day laborers bussed in from occupation zones! He did not disagree but brushed my objections away with unflattering descriptions of the Lebanese state as distant, neglectful, cronyst and corrupt and of the Hizbullah crowd in control of the southern villages as equally so. He said “those in this village who were the dirtiest Israeli collaborators are now the most righteous pillars of the new order”. He appeared disgusted by their lack of moral integrity. It struck me that Jihad’s apparent appreciation of Israel was a kind of refined affectation for hadara “civilization” that constantly reflects on the way things are not in South Lebanon today. He continued “let me explain the situation here to you in simple terms: before, we were living under an Israeli occupation and now we are living under Iranian occupation and really not much has changed, except that Israel is now off limits to us and Hizbullah provokes wars whenever they please that kill us all and turn our homes to rubble”. Then he switched subjects and launched into a cloak-and-dagger story about the late Hajj Imad (Mughnieh) coming over to his place to break his fast unannounced and undercover one inky moonless night in Ramadan.

This shifting, this flipping, this amorphous, ambiguous, political sensibility evokes the compromised nature of the drive to survive in the face of bare power
described by Primo Levi (Levi 1996) in *Survival in Auschwitz* when he speaks of the “gray zone” of complicity that defines life in the Lager:

> the hybrid class of the prisoner functionary constitutes its armature and at the same time its most disquieting feature. It is a gray zone, poorly defined, where the two camps of masters and servants both diverge and converge. This gray zone possesses an incredibly complicated internal structure and contains within itself enough to confuse our need to judge.

When I spoke to Goksel, the UNIFIL spokesman who daily, minutely observed affairs in the zone during the occupation, he repeatedly deflected the political/moral urge to pronounce clear categories of order/understanding upon the dwellers of such spaces of epistemic murkiness. Goksel described the actions of the subjects of the occupation who threw their lot in with the occupiers in no uncertain terms: “I simply call it survival”. I ascribe Jihad’s perspectives and affections and political views that simply don’t add up to the contradictions of dwelling with an enemy who is also a neighbor. Those apparently opposed forms of relating are deeply related, simultaneously and constantly constituting and undermining one another: familiarity generates affection and identification among other things (like knowledge or contempt) and thus the enemy/neighbor (other) is always already a part of the self. Only those who inhabit enmity at a remove can fully participate in the dream of pure ideology, pure love or pure hate. Now Jihad’s oddly combined perspectives and strangely jarring affections make better sense.

A noteworthy aspect of Jihad’s story is that it has been lived entirely in place in his village. Unlike many in South Lebanon, he has neither historical connections to political families to ease his way into this or that municipal, military or governmental job,

nor a kinship network in the metropole pulling him there, nor relatives abroad sending back remittances or visa letters. Parentless and poor, he and his brother made do with the changing power situation and opportunities that presented themselves in their village at the end of the possible earth, at the limens of morality, aligning themselves with the Israelis, who emerged over that hill yonder, during the time they were there and then shifting casually/seamlessly back into the Hizb dominated village scene after serving some symbolic time in jail for “collaboration” after the occupation ended in 2000 (only his brother did, civilian “collaborators” were not imprisoned). And who knows what comes next; in any case it is the present moment that matters. Now Jihad expresses rhetorical disaffection for the present regime and nostalgia for the absent Israelis, but it could also be a way of rationalizing past acts, or simply critiquing a current political order that does not support him or respect him as much as he wishes it to, although he does pretty well on his own. In any case, he is one amongst many like him, who dabble in the murk of life that comes his way and who manages to find a way through it. Ironically (?) the most striking aspect of his story is his “steadfastness” (sumud the slogan of the Hizb and the suffering southerner who remains in place through wars and wars): he never left his village and he is still there making a living through the rise and fall of different, antithetical, existentially opposed systems of power. And come what may.

Later Jihad took me around his village and the surrounding landscape. We visited his sister whose husband is an educated man and worked as an engineer in Libya for a spell, but then lost his job and now they are all back in the village. They live in a dank windowless two-room structure with their son and daughter on a dusty main street where the gloomy indoor spaces are compartmentalized by hanging cloths. The women work
the tobacco, which they have planted at the back of their home. They were threading the morning’s picking when we arrived and their hands were coated with tar; upon our arrival they deftly re-tied their headscarves, shifting the knot from the nape of their necks to their throats and ran to the grubby kitchen sink to scrub off the black goo from their fingers to make us coffee. Tobacco is their only income in times of dearth as it is for most southerners fallen on hard times (“tobacco keeps us alive” is the eternal refrain *al-dukhan ma’ayyashna* or *‘aysheen min wara al dukhan*). The daughter who is pretty and smart and ambitious helps her mother, her older brother, a youth who dresses up in flamboyant village fashion (stonewashed skin-tight jeans and pointed plastic faux croc-skin shoes) and gels his hair into an exaggerated pompadour, loafs around mainly. And his father wrings his hands and bemoans his son’s costly fashion-sense and his own educated and unemployed fate.

Figure 39. Rose Valley/*khallet wardeh* the exact location of the kidnapping that sparked the 2006 war. Photo by author.

Jihad then takes me into the woodland and we got off the beaten track and onto rocky dirt roads surrounded on all sides by scrubland and the occasional tobacco field. He wants to show me something. We head deeper into the *wa ’ar* the uncultivated wilderness, there is barely a footpath under our feet as the overgrowth crowds in on us as we bump along in
his jeep. “This is the village hima a natural reserve. You see that whole hill? The Hizb are underneath it but you can’t see them and you can’t know that”. Down we dip and turn and finally stop. Jihad’s jeep is nestled in some leafy bushes that embrace us protectively, swallowing us from sight. This is probably the exact position of the fighters who lay in wait with their anti-tank rocket launchers for the Humvees to come around the sharp bend that July morning in 2006. “This is khallet wardeh [Rose Valley] where the kidnapping operation took place: right there in the turn of the road, see how steeply it curves? Do you see where that Israeli flag is? The boys cut through the border fence there and camped on the other side for days before the ambush”. It was thrilling to be so close to the site from which such a monstrous war was sparked. And here is Jihad, despite all his publicly proclaimed disaffection for the current political-moral order along the southern marches, participating in some of its glory.

i. Explosive topics

Figure 40. UN-distributed poster warning farmers from handling cluster bombs encountered in their orchards. Outside Rmeish municipality, South Lebanon. It reads: “To help UNIFIL clean your lands of unexploded ordnance, do not pick the wrong fruit. Cluster bombs kill”. Photo by author.
During the 2006 war and especially right as it came to an “undecided” close with both sides claiming victory\textsuperscript{122}, Israel sprinkled South Lebanon – villages, towns, roads, valleys, fields, orchards, gardens, homes – with 4.6 million cluster-bombs\textsuperscript{123}, seeding the earth of the South with deadly explosives. A large percentage of the submunitions came from expired stocks inherited by Israel from the US Vietnam war, a large number of which failed to explode upon impact, remaining in the earth as “a deadly legacy of unexploded duds that continue to kill and injure civilians on a daily basis and impede efforts to rebuild lives and livelihoods in the wake of conflict” (HumanRightsWatch 2008). According to Tekimiti Gilbert a mines-clearance expert who headed the UNMACC (UN Mine Action and Coordination Center) and whom I spoke to at the UNIFIL headquarters in Naqura in 2009:

If you listen to the Israelis they will tell you they were targeting Hizbullah sites and Hizbullah positions. That is what they tell us is the reasoning behind where they strike. However if you look at the ground there are a lot of areas that you can tell there were no Hizbullah positions there.

To be fair there were a lot of rockets, katyushas being fired from orchards although I don’t think that explains everything. Obviously there was a balance; yes the Israelis were targeting Hizbullah sites however the cluster bombs came in the last three days. So up until then there was a lot of fighting, a lot of bombs, a

\textsuperscript{122} The jury is still out on which side “won” this war but more and more and in the wake of the scathing report of the Winograd Commission Israel comes out as the greater bungler. Hizbullah is being studied in military circles as an innovative and effective fighting force and since 2006 they have regrouped, re-armed and re-entrenched themselves in their South Lebanon battlefield. In 2008 Ehud Barak, the Israeli defense minister who replaced the disgraced Amir Peretz, stated that the conflict did not achieve its aim of disarming Hizbullah, who are even more entrenched in South Lebanon and “stronger than ever”.

\textsuperscript{123} Cluster bombs were first developed during World War II. Cluster bombs are dropped in a large canister from a plane spraying a large area with submunition or “bomblets” with the designed intention of impeding an advancing army. The cluster munitions used by Israel in Lebanon are largely leftover stock from the munitions used by the US in Vietnam. Because they are old a disproportionate number of the bomblets are duds that do not explode upon impact and thus remain where they land transforming into \textit{de facto} mines.
lot of naval gunfire, a lot of ground fire, ground fighting especially in Maroun al Ras and Bint Jbeil. But up until then, there was very limited use of cluster bombs. But in the last few days there was a curfew imposed by the Israelis saying that anyone out on the streets is a target so stay in your homes, don’t move – and so people weren’t moving anywhere. And the cluster bombs came in the last few days. Given the contamination we experienced after that I find it very unlikely that these cluster bombs were targeting only Hizbullah. My personal opinion is that there were three days left, the Security Council agreed on August 4th, 8 pm local time fighting stops. So both sides were taking the opportunity to inflict as much damage and destruction as they could before the ceasefire.

I think the Israelis held off using cluster bombs until the end because they weren’t sure whether they were going to have their own forces moving into these areas. However once the ceasefire had been agreed to they knew that things are going to stop. So they knew that okay, three days to go. Let’s just saturate the country with cluster bombs. They pointed their guns in the direction of Lebanon and then – fire!

In the words of an Israeli soldier who headed a rocket unit posted in Lebanon during the war: “What we did was monstrous, we covered entire towns in cluster-bombs”124. Israel’s “excessive” cluster-bombing of South Lebanon did “not appear to have had any significant impact toward the military aims stated by Israel during the war. The massive and widespread use of cluster munitions across South Lebanon doesn’t seem to accord with any recognizable military strategy”125 (Nash 2006).

124 Haaretz, Sept. 12, 2006
125 Many have argued that Israel was targeting life – and by extension the war-formation it generates and sustains. Yet here we tread a treacherously fine line: Israel insists it sees only military formations – whereas the life within which these “formations” are inextricably tangled become at best secondary, irrelevant, invisible and at worst justifiably targeted, eradicable, destroyable. “Unpacking rhetorical slippages that try to isolate Hizbullah from its civilian constituencies through phrasings like ‘hides behind civilians’ or ‘Hizbullah stronghold’ may seem beside the point in the face of the devastation wrought in Lebanon. But it is precisely such slippages that work to justify civilian deaths and infrastructural destruction. This is one area where anthropological work matters” argues Lara Deeb. “Playing devil’s advocate, my point that Hizbullah and civilians are not easily separable may seem to legitimate Israeli strikes against civilians because ‘the water is as hostile as the fish swimming in it.’ The obvious problem with this logic is that draining the pond is tantamount to ethnic cleansing. To remove Hizbullah from Lebanon would require “removal” of a civilian population, precisely what Israel seems to have been undertaking in this attack” (ibid). Deeb, L. (2006). ”"Hizbullah Strongholds" and Civilian LIfe." Anthropology News October.
The head of the Danish de-mining outfit (DCA) I spoke to who described Israel’s use of cluster munitions as “excessive” said: “There is no strategic pattern to cluster contamination. It is pure contamination, pure obstruction of land. When you block the land you block the farmer’s livelihood.” A former military man, the de-miner insisted that this cluster bombing of landscape was excessive of military purpose. “It is pure terror what they have done, the resistance was not in such huge areas. It is pure terror to block access to the land that is so important. A farmer’s plantation or orchard is not a battle tank! Everything is contaminated.”¹²⁶ No an orchard is it is not a battle tank, but the ability of the southern farmer to continue to exist in this battlescape is a critical dimension of the tensile nature of life across seasons of conflict in South Lebanon. The way I see it, this “flooding” or “seeding” of southern land with bombs accords with another strategy (explicit or not) hinted at above and that has more to do with disrupting the hybrid nexus of living across the southern borderland¹²⁷. Indeed, in the immediate

¹²⁶ After the July War, an international movement against such weapons gained steam and a global treaty banning cluster munitions came into force in 2010 requiring signatories to stop the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of the weapons. More than a hundred parties have signed on, but Israel, China, the US and Russia did not: they manufacture, sell and stockpile most of the world’s cluster munitions.

¹²⁷ In a New York Times opinion piece “Southern Lebanon’s Deadly Crop” (Oct. 12, 2006) Brennon Jones writes: “Deny farmers their land and they’ll risk life and limb. It’s the same in southern Lebanon today as it was in South Vietnam in the early 1970s. In Vietnam, where I was a journalist and social worker in the early 1970s I saw farmers forced off their land by American and South Vietnamese bombing and corralled into refugee camps, were desperate to return to their land and to farming, the only livelihood they had ever known. They broke out of the barbed-wire encampments and rushed for home, only to be maimed and killed by the cluster bomblets that littered their land. History is now repeating itself in the cruelest ways in southern Lebanon. It’s the farmers once again who are bearing the greatest physical and economic toll from unexploded cluster bomb submunitions. An estimated one million such bomblets now contaminate the farmland and residential areas of southern Lebanon – a deadly calling card left by Israeli forces as they departed Lebanon at the end of this year’s 34-day war”. 
aftermath of the war more than forty people were killed and around three hundred injured by land mines and unexploded cluster bombs. But worse than that was the pervading sense of the landscape – traditionally a source of life – as a place of death and danger (Khayyat 2012). In the war’s immediate aftermath a humanitarian campaign was launched to clear away the cluster bombs and about 200,000 were removed, but since then the clearing effort has petered out due to lack of funding (humanitarian relief has a short attention span). More than a million cluster bombs, not counting landmines128, remain in the earth of South Lebanon. According to the mines expert, relatively speaking and despite its “postage stamp” size, Lebanon is the country worst affected by cluster bombs worldwide in terms of contamination density. What concerns me here is how cluster bombs and mines as physical remnants of war entangle with the lives and livelihoods of the borderland’s inhabitants, that is, extend into periods where wartime violence is not acute. Gilbert stressed that mines and cluster bombs become a problem when people use the land.

128 Says Gilbert: “We know there are around a thousand minefields along the Blue Line, which equates to around 357,000 mines along the Blue Line, based on records. And we know because we can clearly see the minefields down there, there is a fence there and there is a minefield fence and a technical fence, so in between the two, there are mines. And to be honest we don’t need the records because we know where the minefields are, we know that they are there. So the situation we have now is that there are still cluster bombs in the South and there’s a lot less than when we first started back in 2006, and it’s been almost three years now of clearance and there’s been a lot clearance conducted, a lot of money has gone into this. Around 190,000 cluster bombs that we know about that have been located and destroyed, which is a joint effort from the Lebanese Army, the UNIFIL teams and the civilian organizations that we have working here. The job isn’t finished, there’s still work to be done. But like everything else, Lebanon is now falling off the world’s attention. Until the next conflict, whenever it happens. And that’s the reality. The international community loses interest. In 2007, at the height of mine clearance activity, we had 61 cluster teams, in 2008 they dropped to 44, and in 2009 at the start of this year, we started with 40 and we’ve now dropped down to around 27 teams now, so it’s a third of the team we had back in 2007”.
Up until May 2000 the mines weren’t a really big problem. Because people weren’t using the land, relatively speaking there was less agriculture going on… however, after the withdrawal, as you can imagine, there was a lot of happiness and people … came flooding back to the South and they were confronted by these minefields. And there were a lot of accidents that occurred just after the withdrawal because people were unaware of the mines and people were desperate to cultivate the land and get their livelihoods restarted again. [Because of the reigning war condition] the Lebanese government excluded a number of areas [from mine clearance]: the Blue Line and minefields north of the Litani river. The people who are suffering are the villages on the Blue Line [the borderland villages] because during the occupation they were denied their land. The Israelis left nine years ago now and still nine years later, they are still in the same situation as when the Israelis were occupying the South. The villagers can’t use their land and land is valuable in the South and not only for agriculture but also for grazing. So every meter of land for them is of use and value. If we could clear that land of minefields and release the land back to the people it would be so much better for them.

So how does the warscape intersect with the landscape, the lifeways and pathways of the non-fighting inhabitants of the southern borderland? We will now look at a few intersections of the lifeways and pathways of “non-combatant” dwellers of the borderland with the made-to-kill warscape.

*Walking the warscape*

We plunge into the deep valley enclosing freshwater springs and “health fortifying” forests and follow the thalweg that sinks down in a green zigzag between two level plateaus facing each other on either side of sheer cliffs north and south. The valley transforms into a defensive trench during times of conflict as it gashes across the north-south trajectory of offensive and defensive warfare: shallow and wide along the coast in the west it narrows as it cuts east and then widens again as it approaches a village nestled in a crook at the head of the rift, but the plains on either side increase in elevation as they march away from the coast.
During the occupation this valley was the northern border of the occupation zone. Thus for twenty-two years it was rife with guerrilla activity – surveillance, reconnaissance and infiltration – and UNIFIL activity – observation and obstruction – and Israeli bombardment; due to its geography and location, this leafy valley was off-limits to villagers and a place of wilderness and war. Since the occupation ended in 2000 villagers have reclaimed parts of it, especially where the freshwater spring bubbles out of the earth, even venturing farther into the woodland. But after 2006 the valley once again became a place of danger and death as the Israeli Air Force generously peppered it with cluster munitions to discourage villagers/guerrillas from frequenting it. Still, inhabitants of the surrounding villagers will not be thwarted. Families picnic, swim and wash in the stream, and some – out of necessity – venture even further, taking the valley’s explosive nature into stride, as we will see.

Following a dusty dirt track leading past a chalky quarry on our left we soon come upon villagers cooling off by the rock-pools to our right, families with small children sit and play in and around the green water. We continue along the dirt path, cleaving to a passage on a ledge against the sheer northern face of the valley wall, plunging deeper into the undergrowth crowding upon us in a friendly, pushy way from either side. Soon we realize that we have stumbled across a network of foxholes, bunkers and dugouts – active or defunct? Not clear, but most likely the latter. The ones we recognize seem to be in a state of disrepair – hence we recognize them! Plastic pipes stick out in odd places from under the earth. Under canopies of bouncy greenery, wooden planks reinforce a foxhole entrance and discarded pieces of olive-colored ammunition boxes are strewn here and there. Soon the path ends in a pile of rocks across the way, and
the undergrowth surges beyond us, indicating the way forward – but not for us. A rash of poisonous pink oleander brightens the forested foot of the valley following where the water runs and where we can only go with our eyes. We look upward toward the lip of the gorge and the sky and note along the way several black cave mouths silenced with twigs and branches like fingers lifted to mouths: shhhhhh. We obey and silently turn and return.

Figure 41. Foxhole in the wa’r. Azzieh, South Lebanon. Photo by author.

This valley is the everyday haunt of goatherds and their flocks of nimble goats. Beginning at the entrance of the valley at dawn the goats and their human companions israh wander slowly up the valley along the water source, spreading out to browse and graze along the flanks of the valley as it deepens. Goats and goatherd “heft” (Gray 1999) to the hills with a “centaurian synergy of human and beast” (Ingold 2008) and together encounter the war-objects nestled in the geography. The valley is an ideal grazing ground; due to heightened military presence and sensitivity it is uncultivated, wild and overgrown (Woodward 2004). And since it is not private property, the locust-like grazing of the goats can proceed without tresspass.
Domesticating bombs

Our winding path into the labyrinth of landscape takes us by way of “hybrid geographies” (Whatmore 2002) into human-animal networks that intersect with geographies and temporalities of warfare. Here I explore the plague of unexploded ordnance in woodland and pastureland, namely the minefields defining the borderline and the millions of cluster-bombs showered over pastures and woodland. Mirroring the transition into the monoculture of tobacco in an insecure place inhabited by people seeking the kinds of cash-transformable security that works, more are linking their livelihood to goats in terms of livestock for their low cost upkeep, hardiness, and ability to thrive in and navigate a bomb-infested warscape. But even goat herding has it difficulties as a practice that requires access to swathes of pastureland and often intersects violently with the war order.

At the beginning of the valley path in the clearing by the rock pools we meet a Bedouin goatherd with his goats. Sun-wizened, spare and wiry, and bent at the hip in a perpetual upward gait, he somewhat resembles the goats he spends his days and life with and stops for a while to tell us about his practice. A bit of twine pokes out of his grubby shirt between the buttons and he holds a black nylon bundle in the crook of his arm: lunch. Every morning at around nine he makes his way up the valley from a village toward the west with his twenty goats and ten cows. The cows he leaves near the water in the lower levels of the valley to cool off as the day warms and he continues on his way along the steep flanks of the borderland hills with his sprightly and nimble goats. Inhabiting these hillsides for all of his life he has an intuitive sense and practiced knowledge of its characteristics, features, flora and fauna. This is why he does not fear
the potentially dangerous landscape he treks through as long as the sun is in the sky with his goat-companions: the wild pigs stay in the foot of the valley and only emerge at night. The hyenas remain high up in the craggy peaks and if one is impudent enough to approach the goatherd holds a rock high over his head and shows no fear until the hyena backs off.

We ‘Arab, we Bedu are history and geography because we have been living for generations in this land. And the son of the wilderness barr doesn’t fear, he stays brave. He walks in the night and he walks in the day and he doesn’t fear. I walk in the night and my step is sure. I submit to nobody except God who created me. The brave man is not shaken, not by wind and not by a mountain. I am bajiss free! I don’t fear the wilderness or anything in it – except perhaps those.
He points and sure enough at his feet near a poisonous pink oleander *difla* is a small perfectly spherical cluster bomb. The bomb has been surrounded by rocks and marked with blue spray-paint by de-mining crews. Abu Bilal the goatherd says that he is constantly on the lookout for bomblets while wandering with his goats. “They are all over the *wa’r* [uncultivated earth]. When I find a bomb I surround it with rocks and cover it with a bigger rock so that the goats don’t trip on it” he crouches down close to the small spherical bomb to demonstrate – I instinctively take a step back. Straightening up, he continues, “I try to remember the location of the bombs I have encountered to avoid stepping on them as I walk”. Abu Bilal’s method is surely not infallible but it does not hinder him from venturing forth. For one who intimately and deeply inhabits this geography and who makes a living – and a landscape – by traveling through it, the bombs – and other war-related objects, structures, beings, networks – must be managed.

Because the uncultivated *wa’r* is low priority in terms of demining there is little chance that it will ever be cleared and the cluster bombs remain hidden there year after year as volatile explosive secrets in the undergrowth and soil and in the meantime Abu Bilal has little choice but to continue to make a living; his and his goats’ relationship to this valley overrides the push that the danger of the bombs present and so despite the danger, Abu Bilal’s feet continue to tread their daily pathways as he walks with his goats to make his living and to live here. Thus he incorporates the presence of the bombs into his intimate practiced knowledge of landscape. By navigating bombs he domesticates them by making them a part of his practiced everyday world. Bombs are thus naturalized as features of Abu Bilal’s “centaurian” life-world. “With such a close, centaurian synergy of human and beast, it is difficult to assign agency unequivocally to one side or the other
… [Pastoralists become in effect] human-animal hybrids whose combined feet and hooves move in unison and whose perception is attuned to features of the world of common concern to such compound beings” (Ingold 2008, 12). Bombs have been drawn into the realm of the ordinary hazards he navigates, like poisonous plants, hyenas and wild pigs. They are equally constitutive of his daily geography, his everyday reality.

![Figure 43. Goats and goatherd trace a meshwork of paths along the Lebanese-Israeli border. Technical fence, minefields and border road in background. Photo by Rola Khayyat.](image)

Before war became seasonal to South Lebanon, farmers kept different kinds of livestock: camels, cows, donkeys and goats. Cameleering declined with the fixing of borders and the rise of motorized transport, but since the advent of war in the area, goats have remained as the last viable livestock. Hardy, light, many, relatively inexpensive, replaceable, moveable are some of the qualities that have allowed goats to flourish in this landscape of war129. Goatherds are frequently “kidnapped” by the Israeli Army on border patrol and taken in for questioning, their flocks are confiscated – their presence in the borderland is a troubled one. They are regularly accused of covering up for guerrillas.

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129 Thus goats have often been utilized to confuse the enemy by disguising guerrilla movement.
They are also often shot at if they wander too close to the border fence. One goatherd put it to me thus: “Because of the places we frequent, we are distrusted by everyone”. It’s a hard life, but a life nonetheless.

One of the reasons goats thrive in the minefields of the South Lebanon warscape is that they are too light to spring mines. At his office Gilbert showed me a mine and explained to me how it works. Most interestingly how it works against humans (and cows) but not against goats.

Gilbert: I will show you an example of a mine here. This is a number 4 anti-personnel mine, Israeli-made. That’s all it is: a plastic casing. This used to be a live mine but the explosives have been taken out – 200 grams of explosives connected with a fuse. As you can see here it has a lid, a collar. The collar sits on the firing pin and it is laid under the ground like this, around two to three inches below the surface and the pressure of a person standing on that pushes the lid down which pushes the collar away which lets the firing pin go forward and it explodes – and it all happens within a flash. A millisecond.

Me: It’s so small huh?

Gilbert: Yeah but it is powerful. 200 grams of explosives is enough to take your leg off. But goats, because goats are relatively light compared to a person, these things can often take five to seven kilograms of weight but that depends on the depth of the mine, how deep it has been laid. So generally goats are not heavy enough to set off one of these mines and the farmers know this. And they also know that the good grazing land is inside the minefield fencing. The grass there is a lot better and so they let they goats go inside and then, taking the risk that, you know, these goats aren’t heavy enough. However every now and then cows get inside and cows set things off. So we had a number of accidents with cows losing their legs and then they’re sitting in the minefield and the farmer goes into the minefield to get the cow and gets killed.

The practice of herding is a key landscape practice tying people to place (Gray 1999; Olwig 2008) and one that is becoming more difficult as relationships to land, in particular regarding access, transform as political landscapes are imposed (Gooch 2008; Widlock 2008). In the case of South Lebanon the limits on movement does not relate so much to the enclosing and delimiting of private property but instead to the lethal presence of
unexploded mines and cluster bombs, in particular in the pasturelands along the Lebanese-Israeli border. But Abu Bilal – and many others like him – adapted his pastoral practice to encompass those deadly remnants in the land. Abu Bilal continues his practice and underfoot a landscape and life-world is unfolded. His path has has not yet been interrupted by bombs (or other war-related difficulties); for Abu Bilal these are navigable. He is fearless bajiss, confident in his knowledge and his “step is sure”. His knowledgeable encounters with bombs in the landscape domesticates them, tames them, brings them into his practiced life-world. Goat herding along the Lebanese-Israeli border is a precarious practice; many are not as fortunate as Abu Bilal has been thus far.

*Of mines and men*

It is Sunday in this small border village, the day when the scattered sons (and daughters) of the *balad*\(^{130}\) come gather at their family homes with their wives and children. This is not something taken for granted because there was a time not so long ago during the Israeli occupation when the village sons, especially as they neared the cusp of manhood, were smuggled out of the zone by their families – and had to stay far away if they did not want to get forced into serving the SLA. And even these days, being able to drive home to the village from somewhere else in Lebanon, most likely one of the big coastal cities, Sur, Saida and Beirut, is also not taken for granted, as many have left to earn a living overseas, in Africa, Latin America, North America, Australia, and do not return to visit their parents on the weekend for a long time – if ever, materializing mainly in remittances – if at all.

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\(^{130}\) *Balad* is used locally to refer to one’s village. But it also means country.
Abu Nimr sits in the courtyard of his home in the midst of many people, his
grown children, their spouses and children. He looks lost, forlorn and quite alone despite
the hubbub all around him. The low buildings around the central space are an eclectic
mix of old and new, used and abandoned, ruined and maintained, a little metaphorical
now that I think of it of the beings inhabiting them. The older, non-inhabited structures
were used as enclosures for a flock of hundreds of goats but today there is no trace of
their former inhabitants apart from the empty troughs lining the sides of one wall, carved
into the *teen* mud plaster. These structures are now filled with endless golden loops of
tobacco hanging from the wooden rafters. I sat and spoke for a long time with the *tarrash*
the old goatherd, who had finally sold his entire flock – the last one just two months ago
– and given up his life-long practice after the death of his son Ali only a few years ago, in
2005. Ali was Abu Nimr’s fifth child and the only one among his ten siblings who left
school and instead learned from his father (and their goats) how to walk the warscape.
“Ali had it in him” the old man says rubbing his reddening eyes, which made the blue of
the irises stand out even more brightly, “Ali was interested in the work. The moment he
learned how to walk he was walking with me with the *ma’za* goats. Ali learned to
communicate with the beasts and he had the stamina to be out in the *wa’r* under the sun
all day”. Ali continued to accompany his father and their flock of more than five hundred
goats through the borderland pastures in the landscape around their village; they would
often run into trouble. More than once they were shot at. The old man took a bullet in his
arm and was detained and taken in for questioning by the Palestinians guerrillas and then
the Israelis on several occasions. Goats are nimble, intelligent yet “anarchistic and
whimsical” (Gooch 2008) beings who browse the landscape for edibles, climbing up
rocks, cliffs and even trees to grab a nibble. They communicate well with their human companion who senses their mood and works with it communicating with the herd through a combination of sound and movement as he alternately follows and leads them through the landscape. Abu Nimr found that his goats’ nervous temperament and lightfootedness worked well in the militarizing landscape. Together they – human and animals – adapted to the military realities of their habitat. “Goats sense danger before humans do, they would always tell me when something was not right – whether it was a snake in the bushes or Israeli infiltrators or guerrillas”. Abu Nimr continued his goatherding practice even during the difficult years of the Palestinian guerrilla war along the border, up until the 1978 Israeli invasion. After the 1982 Israeli invasion had barreled over the hill and through their village and by the time the occupation had entrenched itself 1985, things became relatively easier for Abu Nimr and his goats as the lines of battle settled farther away from their village and pastures, north of the borderline that ran all along the southern edge of the village. “During the occupation there were clear limits as to where we could go and when we could be at pasture,” Abu Nimr says. During this time one of his sons served as soldier in the SLA. This necessary sacrifice allowed the family some breathing room to continue to live decently within the occupation order. As the rest of his sons neared adulthood they left to Beirut to avoid conscription and there one became a policeman, another a schoolteacher and another a journalist. Abu Nimr, Ali and the goats continued to walk the borderland.

After the end of the occupation Ali and his father continued to walk with their goats, selling lambs, their manure, their milk. It was also a decent living, bringing in,
according to Abu Nimr, around 25 million liras a year\textsuperscript{131}. Yet the warscape shifted once again. New realities came to define the geography – the border between Lebanon and Israel was once again a front slicing along the southern edge of their village. On the day he died, Ali was walking along the main strip of road (that runs parallel to and barely 20 meters removed from the Lebanese-Israeli borderline); this would have been impossible during the time of occupation when any movement on the main road, which was priority access for the Israeli military and their allies, was strictly circumscribed and often violently controlled. In the wake of the Israeli withdrawal, new freedoms and new restrictions emerged. There was a period of uncertainty, trial and error as people gingerly came to get a feel for this new ground, new reality that was over-writing, shuffling, blending, replacing, etc. the older occupation order. This space of rupture, both political and physical, is where Ali died. Having inhabited the occupation order since he was six, he was familiar with its dimensions, dangers and limits; it was his home. It was in the more unfamiliar (if relatively less encumbered) period that followed that he lost his footing and stumbled upon a mine the occupiers had left behind.

As his father greyed, Ali began to take over more and more of the strenuous work. One bright cold day in November 2005 Ali was heading back home alone with the flock after a long day at pasture. The goats swarmed along the main road leading toward the village that runs adjacent to a well-known minefield. Heading east with the setting sun at his back Ali came up behind as the goats fanned out to the left of the road where the land rose into a gentle slope. To the right, where the minefield snaked along accompanying the goatherd and his flock the land fell steeply into a shallow plain beyond which the

\textsuperscript{131} The equivalent of 16,000 US Dollars
technical fence defining the northern limits of Israel bluntly truncated the landscape.

Suddenly a goat lost its footing and stumbled down the short ledge to the shallow grassland that hid mines. Although there were no markings that it was a minefield\textsuperscript{132}, Ali knew too well what this stretch of earth concealed and moved quickly to guide the goat to safety before its companions followed suit for then there would be trouble. Ali’s instinct for danger was correct but he acted in haste. Stepping off the asphalt to urge the goat back to the road he stepped on the mine that the goat probably trod on and did not trigger. In his instinctive rush to guide his goat to safety, Ali met his death. He was thirty-three years old. He left behind a wife, two young children and an unborn child. His widow sits in a drift of tobacco as Abu Nimr tells the story. She is dressed in black from head to toe. Her two daughters, who are now five and three, help with the work of \textit{shakk}, threading the leaves, and the boy who is around seven hangs around listening to his grandfather talk. Since Ali’s early death, Abu Nimr tried to take up goat-herding again, but could not manage. After falling and breaking his arm his wife and children urged him to give up goat-herding and soon he had no choice but to give in. His body was no longer able. Little by little he sold his flock of seven hundred, and now after lifetimes and generations, this family’s goat-herding practice has come to an end. “I am left alone without my son, without my goats.” Although Abu Nimr continued to exist here on earth but there is something hollow, lifeless in his demeanor, movements and presence. In fact the old man does look lost. He wanders over to thread some tobacco with the women and children, but he does it half-heartedly and soon drops the thread and begins to cry. His

\textsuperscript{132} In the village there is one tractor that belongs to the other family who owns a large flock of goats. Someone had removed a “Danger Mines” sign and attached it to the front grille of the tractor. The “danger” signage and accompanying wire is often the first thing to disappear when put up by de-mining crews. The wire has other uses and the signs are often nabbed by people for fun (or tourism).
grandchildren clamber around him, accustomed (but hard to believe oblivious) to his painful affect. He lights another cigarette.

In “Open Spaces and Dwelling Places: Being at Home on Hill Farms in the Scottish Borders” (1999) Gray shows us how the practice of shepherding in the hills along the Scottish borders is a form of “place-making.” “Shepherding transforms the hills into an enveloping world where farming people of Teviothead carry out a way of life, a place where they properly belong and feel at home. In local parlance, the principal type of place in the hills is called a hirsel, a term referring simultaneously one shepherd’s sheep and the area of the hills they graze … [S]heep mediate the creation of and attachment to places. These shepherds structured their walks around the hirsel in relation to the topography and the movements of the flocks in a way that allows them to see all the sheep; they created places within their hirsels in relation to the movements of the sheep” (447) In Teviothead the practice of shepherding is formative of the distinctive life-world in the hills of the Borders, both in terms of movement and in terms of meaning. Gray uses Heidgger’s “notion of dwelling (1971) as a framework for analyzing the place-making practices of this constitutive walking and biking around the hill and describing the nature of the attachment that is produced by them” (449).

In the hirsel, sheep and space are unified by the way sheep use and live on the land. The hirsel illustrates the central dimensions of Heidegger’s concept of dwelling. … Dwelling refers to the creation of meaningful places that together form a surrounding world (Um-welt). It entails people’s relationship to the world, motivated by concern and consequent involvement. “Dwelling” thus privileges the practical and the spatial in the constitution of knowledge and of meaning (ibid).

In his study of the Van Gujjars, a pastoral community still practicing transhumance in the Himalayas despite the difficult imposition of political barriers, Gooch (2008) writes:
The walk goes through a terrain intimately known and consisting of movements and places apprehended through an embodied knowledge possessed by people as well as animals. This is – to quote Merleau Ponty – ‘the simultaneous patterning of body and world in emotion’ …

But this bodily movement – feet following hooves – is now everywhere hindered by barriers in the landscape, physical and discursive, showing that the region through which they walk is not just a life-world for local communities. It is also a highly politicized landscape, where the power over movement and the apprehension of space in the landscape is, to a great extent, dictated by policies originating in other places (67).

This accurately evokes the situation along the Lebanese-Israeli border where I have explored what continues to unfold in the shadow of such hindrances. In the case of Abu Nimr it has spelt the end of a “centaurian” life-world. When such a practice comes to an end in one way or another, the landscape and life-world, the “matrix of paths” (Ingold 2000) unfolding this peculiar geography and the “hybrid” (Whatmore 2002; Latour 2004; Haraway 2008; Law and Mol 2008) subjectivities and geographies it generates also dissipate, disappear.

Figure 44. Abu Nimr wipes away his tears as he remembers his son Ali surrounded by his grandchildren and the morning tobacco harvest. The woman in black threading tobacco behind him is the widow of his dead son. The little girl in the foreground threading tobacco is his dead son’s youngest daughter. Photo by author.
None of Abu Nimr’s descendants will ever walk with goats along the southern borders of Lebanon again. His living sons are employed and live in the cities, and apart from the eldest, who owns the village gas station, have established lives away from the village. Generally speaking, once someone leaves the village and the rural way of life, there is mostly no turning back. Formal education, employment and urban dwelling are considered a step up in social standing and hence very few take the step “back”. These days Abu Nimr spends most of his time sitting in the village square with other old men, smoking hand-chopped tobacco from their own fields. The income lost by the end of his flock is now gained by leaning more heavily on the tobacco that the women (wives of sons, granddaughters) of his household work; he sometimes helps the women and children in threading, nothing a man in the bloom of manly youth would ever consider doing. So although years have passed since a mine ended his brief life, this old man cannot stop mourning the death of his son: for his death is at once the end of a short human life, a long tradition and practice, a significant livelihood – a life-world and landscape.

Bereft of his son and his flock, his subjectivity and life-world, Abu Nimr has nothing more to say to me today. Choked with sobs, he shuffles off to sit among his household’s women and children and glumly thread tobacco. His living sons – some of who are here today take up the thread of the conversation when their father stops. They have set up a memorial and shrine to their lost brother in the dar of their home. They take me up there to have a look. As I gaze into the photographed face of Ali, a spare young man with the fair complexion, bony face and light eyes of his father, I think about how as different rural livelihoods become harder to maintain, tobacco, the bright green cash crop,
almost always takes its place. As people let go of long traditions of practice in the face of insurmountable war-related obstacles, tobacco is often all that remains.

iv. Nomadology (and the War Machine)

Living on the border is a strange affair – let alone when that border is also a frontline. Things get even more complicated when that border, which is now closed, was open not so long ago a semi-porous border internal to an occupation that accommodated a kind of traffic subordinate to the power of the occupier. What are the effects on life of such a phenomenon as a militarized and mined crossable/uncrossable war-border? Bundled up with the divisive and violent nature of bordering – let alone that of enemy borders – is the upsetting experience of a landscape that is geographically seamless and whole, making this border affair even stranger: natural continuities undermine and belie the lethal barriers and impositions of political enmity. Traveling the border and living along it gives the body a sensation similar to that of coastal living: edge-ness (Wylie 2007), a change of substance along a defined limit, the un-goable, the unknown that nevertheless lies before the eyes, at the tip of the nose, within reach. A looking-glass. An uncanny and yet dead real set of affairs.

Making this all the more dense a place and phenomenon to grasp are the lived (and narrated) experiences of this landscape’s cutting and rending, crossing and traversing, and daily practices that defy or at least prosaically accommodate the border’s violent and often deadly presence and potential. Today as the landscape is recovered/reclaimed as a site of living and livelihood, new sources of everyday violence and danger emerge, namely in the shape of mines along the borderline, interwoven with
the continuing effects of structural violence of poverty and economic and political marginalization.

*Bedu, beasts, borders and bombs*

The Bedu in this borderland inhabit an ambiguous place vis-à-vis this fixed and violent borderline and also other neighboring communities. As they are a handful of Sunnis in a politically Shi‘i landscape. And at a moment where Shi‘i and Sunni politics are at loggerheads they do not fare well in a Shi‘i dominated political landscape. They are ignored by Shi‘i politicians because their numbers are quite negligible in terms of votes; and there are no Sunni representatives in the area who would bother to cultivate them as potential clients and dependents, voters. The Bedu communities of the borderland look elsewhere for political leadership: the slain Hariri looms large as he was instrumental in getting many of the Bedu Lebanese citizenship in 1994 (Hariri gained a large voting bloc in the cities of Saida and Beirut as a result). In those half-forgotten Bedu villages one encounters posters of Yasser Arafat and Saddam Hussein – who have – mainly due to a serious lack of politically astute and charismatic Sunni leaders – becomes Sunni icons.

*Limits, life, limbs and love*

J. is a small hamlet that still exists on the Israeli side of the border on a small hill but it is today it is empty of dwellers. It is adjacent to (or rather continuous with) the Lebanese village of D. that is contiguous with B. to the east along the border. The inhabitants of both hamlets are Bedu and they are of one tribe, one family. The abandoned stone homes of J. are clearly visible from across the border but J. is no longer a functioning village. It is a village of ghosts: it stands empty and silent among its proliferating cypress trees. Its
former inhabitants are now all in the Israeli “interior”, forced out of their village soon after the end of the occupation of Lebanon when the Israeli state cut off water and electricity and forced the villagers to leave; the Israelis were uncomfortable with Arab kinship extending across enemy lines.

Unlike the Shi’a and Christian inhabitants of the borderland the Bedu have strong ties of kinship to Bedouin Israeli citizens. The inhabitants of D. and B. still attend the funerals of their kinfolk in J. as the cemetery is flush with the borderline. When the villagers of D. hear the mosque in J. announcing a burial they head up the hill to participate in the funeral and pay their respects by lining up along the barbed wire fence. Even now after the village has been emptied, its former inhabitants come back from whatever Israeli Bedouin development town they now inhabit in Israel to be buried there – in their place.

Figure 45. J. Abandoned Bedu village on Israeli side of border as viewed from Im Khaled’s garden on Lebanese side of border. Photo by author.
Im Alaa is a daughter of J. but now lives in D., Lebanon with her husband and son in a tidy, well-kept house a stone’s throw from the border. We are sitting in her beautiful and lovingly tended garden among a few young fruit trees and birds of paradise. The aerial that has been planted in the middle of J. among the low stone houses and trees towers (or glowers) nearby just up the hill from where we sit. Her immediate family members are all Israeli citizens and she would be one too today, but it so happened that she is married to a man from D. which falls a few meters on the Lebanese side of the border when it was drawn through Bedu – and everyone’s – lives. Although D. and J. are practically the same village, inhabited by one extended family, one tribe, they are now on either side of an uncrossable divide and included in the subjected citizenry and incarcerated territory of enemy nations. Im Alaa’s body may be thought of as a metaphor for this ripping and rending of the continuous spaces of her life and loves. It is because of her ties of kinship drawing her across this lethal political front that Im Alaa lost a limb of her own body to a mine ten years ago. As we sit in her tidy, colorful and fragrant little garden she remembers.

That day I was at home and my family is inside juwwa [in Israel] there are some girls from Yareen [a nearby village] and around here, if they didn’t work in Israel they would be expelled from the zone [by the SLA]: either you go and work in Israel or else get out! I don’t have any girls who work… So there were some women who went to work in Israel, they were forced to. They came to me and they said your father is sick in the hospital. Those girls who work in there they would come and tell me about my father, that his days were numbered. So one day, as God is my witness, here I was in the house working and my neighbor came to me and said there is a funeral in J., which is where my father is from and so what did I think? I thought my father had died! So I said I would go and call on an [SLA] officer and ask him about my father – if my father had died I would need to get a permit from him to stay a week in there. So in order to go and get a permit and go and see my father I set out walking toward the village and on my way along the borderline I saw a boy walking inside of Israel. He was walking down toward the interior. So I said I would call him to ask him about my father. I
took one step toward him [toward the border fence] and I stepped on something that came under my foot and it made a sound. And I did not think of mines at all. I didn’t think of anything! It felt like a tin can or something like that. The moment I removed my leg, and just as I was about to call out to the boy, the bomb exploded and I fell on the ground.

Her husband says: the Israelis al yahud came and took her to the hospital. Here there were no roads.

Me: when was this?

Im Alaa: Before the Liberation in a little.

Husband: In February.

Im Alaa: Yes it was winter. The rain is what saved me. If it wasn’t for the rain I wouldn’t have gotten up again. It was cold and it started to rain and my blood started to pour but the rain made [the blood] cool on my leg.

Me: so what happened?

Im Alaa: There is a goatherd a little to the west from here. Our house is here and you know where the house of Im Khaled is? That is where I was near the olives. My daughters were at their aunt’s house down the road. I started to pull myself in that direction and I kept thinking what would happen if I died here and none of my family knew where I was! God is my witness, I started to drag myself and I was shouting: “Come to me O people, ya arab! Pick me up!” They heard me and started shouting and people came running with their children. People came running from here and my family came running from Israel. My sister came to me and started calling me by someone else’s name! I told her “I am your sister!” They came and they took me. They took me to a hospital inside [in Israel] and I slept there and for four days I didn’t know who I was.

Im Alaa’s leg was amputated right below the knee and in time she recovered. Soon after that her father did die. Then in May of that same year the Israeli occupation collapsed.

She remained on this side of the border and her two of her daughters who are married to Israeli citizens “inside” stayed on that side of the border. The remain just down the hill from her home but another world away across an uncrossable divide. She hasn’t seen them since.
Im Alaa remembers how she lost her limb as we sit in her garden. Photograph by R. Shibli.

Im Alaa’s limb is gone; it exists as a ghost. Her village containing the remains of her kin stands silent and ghostly nearby. And her daughters, who live in the “interior,” on the other side of a line upon the earth that is at once ephemeral and lethal, are absent objects of a motherly love that transcends the deadly violence of the borderline. Um Alaa’s life and her loves have and do transcend this border, but her physical body has been viciously truncated by it: a painful and constant reminder of the deadly violence of man-made political limits and ends, however arbitrary. Her life was saved by the coldness of the earth in shbat February, the same earth that sustains her today and that concealed the man-made weapon that almost killed her.

*The house at the end of the land*
Im Khaled lives alone with her son Khaled. They live on the “last shibr” of Lebanese earth on a bend in the border road in D. the largest of the cluster of Bedu settlements on the edge of the former central sector of the occupation zone. Khaled was but a few months old when his father was shot dead by an Israeli sniper. This was in 1976, at the peak of Palestinian guerrilla activity in the borderland, where Sunni villages were especially caught up in the guerrilla action. Some of the local Bedu – following the well-worn paths of generations – would guides guerrillas along hidden paths to infiltrate the militarized marches of Israel/Palestine – and many had relatives living on the other side of the warfront in villages a stone’s throw and another world away. Khaled’s father though was doing nothing so dramatic. He was out under the cover of night on another mission: to steal government electricity. He was climbing up an electricity pole just outside his home to hook a wire over the state electricity line and extend it to his home – a common practice. “An Israeli thinking he was a fida’i on a night mission shot him dead,” Im Khaled says. Soon after that the 1978 Israeli invasion smashed and emptied their village and neighboring Bedu villages as suspected nests of Palestinian fida’i activity. She and many of her relatives were displaced and bided their time in Saida until they were able to return in the mid 1980s. Then she fixed up the house she lives in today with her son. She never remarried. Im Khaled and her son are members of a tribe most of whom today reside in D. and many of her relatives live nearby (she is related to Im Alaa who lost her leg to a mine) and her older brother is today the head of D. municipality. They have relatives across the uncrossable border. Im Khaled has the round face, dancing eyes and snub nose of many of the Bedouin/Arab inhabitants of Lebanon’s borderland.

133 A shibr is the length between the extended tip of the small finger and the thumb of the hand. A traditional form of measurement and often used to evoke something small.
She is dressed in a flowery bright red housedress and wraps her hair in a scarf that is knotted at the nape of her neck; she dons a straw hat in the outdoors. Her eyes crinkle behind wire glasses as she enthusiastically shows us around her house and garden.

Im Khaled is part of a women’s cooperative network that was funded briefly by European funders and then left to wither. Like many development projects here the cooperative survived as long as it was directly overseen by the funders and could not sustain itself for long after. Im Khaled complained about the lack of local cooperation among the women but also a lack of market networks for the products that the women of the cooperative prepared in their home: jars of pickles, tomato pulp, jams, honey and other staples of a southern larder. She continues to make these preserves though and markets them through personal networks. She generates most of her cash through her tobacco and olives and honey and preserves. Her son helps her. Apart from that there is not much else for him to do around here apart from simply be.

At the back of Im Khaled’s home is a lovingly tended back garden planted with kitchen vegetables and fruit trees, a grape vine; a row of beehives, a pile of firewood; tomatoes drying on a piece of cloth in the sun. Rainbow blooms of fragrant roses. Beyond her garden is her tobacco field, and past that her olive grove. Flush with the olive grove is a swathe of purple grasses: the minefield. And past the minefield slinks the fenced-off border road where Israeli Humvees constantly patrol trailing behind them clouds of dust. Im Khaled skirts the minefields to get to her olives. She walks the same path each time. To her this is nothing out of the ordinary. “I know where the mines are,” she says. “I simply steer clear of them.” I stand there at her garden’s edge and gaze out at the razor-edge of Lebanon and what lies beyond: I can discern some hangars. After the militarized
borderline the agricultural taskscape resumes albeit in a more industrial and less domestic sense. But still the contrast of quaint domesticity and international warfare is striking to the outside observer/the intruder. The proximity of deadly explosives and the rhythms of the Israeli patrols as they skirt the northern front of their territory are simply aspects of the spatial and temporal dimensions of Im Khaled’s daily places and rhythms. They inform her life world and generate the dimensions and limits of her livelihood.

Figure 47. View of border road and adjacent minefield from Im Khaled’s garden. Photo by author.
VII. Reprise

A Landscape of War: On the Nature of Conflict in South Lebanon

The poet, along with the ordinary person, knows better: to say “there we have been” is not the same thing as to say precisely where we have been in geographical space…

(Casey 1996)

Although I could suggest that the landscape is being read, it would be more accurate to argue that it is being heard. It is a landscape that speaks to people, beckoning them to care. In this sense it engenders dreams of presence (expressions of care) that allow those living within the landscape to imagine, cultivate, and move towards their world (and their place within it) as present and, in the process to experience it more intensively.

(Rose 2004)

In the complexity of the labyrinth one finds threads to pick up and follow: remnants of thought, learning, history, memory, things left behind by others that can guide and give direction. In and of themselves these threads are only potential lines. Often they are themselves labyrinths already on their way toward some direction or desire. To trace therefore is to trace these threads.”

(Rose 2002)

And woven into the very texture of these surfaces are the lines of growth and movements of inhabitants. What they form, as we have already seen, is not a network of point-to-point connections but a tangled mesh of interwoven and complexly knotted strands. Every strand is a way of life, and every knot a place. Indeed the mesh is something like a net in its original sense of an openwork fabric of interlaced or knotted cords.

(Ingold 2009)

We would have to memorize and remember the land, walk it, eat from its soils and from the animals that ate its plants. We would have to know its winds, inhale its airs, observe the sequence of its flowers in the spring and the range of its birds.

(Lopez 1992)

The Path: tangles of life and war

In what follows I delve into the entangled textures of warring and of living encountered as landscape, with a tour of R. that we have come to know from several aspects and fragments thus far. It is a small Shi’a village of around four thousand registered and three hundred permanent residents, 800 meters above sea level and on the western edge of the qada’ of Bint Jbeil. This village was my homeland in the South throughout my fieldwork thanks to some serendipitous encounters combined with tendrils from my past tying me
to this place and bringing me into it. The pastel-colored houses, flat-roofed, cement and stone structures mostly, cluster on a low hill that gently inclines into a level flat and wide marj to its west that is entirely cultivated by the villagers. The marj was formerly a village commons (musha') but since 2006, when the cadastre finally came to town, it has been transformed into private property (mulk).

Approaching from the west (the sea) the marj announces the village whose houses for the most part overlook it and face the setting sun. Throughout the seasons the marj behaves like a seasonal water clock. It is what in ecological terms is called a “temporary pond” (Zacharias and Zamparas 2010). In the winter the marj fills up with water, a wide, smooth mirror of the village and the changing sky. As the earth warms and spring approaches the silver water-face contracts in invisible increments and every plot that is successively exposed from the outer edge inwards is ploughed twice and then planted (almost entirely with tobacco by now); the marj’s red earth and protected geography makes it extremely fertile. Summer has arrived when the marj is a patchwork of cultivation, a textured sea of electric green tobacco shoots and no longer a placid gray liquid pool. The low hill, covered in village homes, sits alongside a higher elevation to its south, where Israel begins; between them runs the Lebanese border road, a pocked, smashed and crackled affair (it has since been repaved with Iranian funding). The road that hugs the borderline and front elevates steadily as it moves away from the sea, slumping briefly before entering the village along the minefields; it stays level along the flat marj and then rises steeply again to meet a Lebanese Army checkpoint at the crossroads. To the east of the village lies another marj but upon slightly inclined and undulating ground. On a high bluff just beyond the borderline on white rocky outcrop
(named “White” for its calcium-colored rock) sits a bristling Israeli military position buffered by an insular UNIFIL camp. To the northwest of the village is the ruined hamlet of S. upon an enchanted plateau, where (in winter) goats and (year round) a tree housing a good spirit dwell. In a sharp valley to the southeast of the village almost directly underneath the Israeli outpost is the sharp, rocky and dense and wild “Rose Valley” khallet wardeh where the kidnapping that sparked the 2006 war took place.

The journey through landscape that follows is based upon an impromptu tour that Sahel took me (and J. my companion that day) of his village one day in July 2008. I have presented it in first person narrative to give a sense of “thereness” and to convey the way landscape is related (to) and also heard.

In “The Rediscovery of North America” (1992) Barry Lopez writes:

How then, do we come to know the land, to discover what more may be there than merchantable timber, grazeable prairies, recoverable ores, dammable water, netttable fish?

It is by looking upon the land not as its possessor but as a companion. To achieve this, one must, I think cultivate intimacy, as one would with a human being. And that would mean being in a place …

We would have to memorize and remember the land, walk it, eat from its soils and from the animals that ate its plants. We would have to know its winds, inhale its airs, observe the sequence of its flowers in the spring and the range of its birds.

…To be intimate with the land like this is to enclose it in the same moral universe we occupy, to include it in the meaning of the word community…

When we enter the landscape to learn something, we are obligated, I think, to pay attention rather than constantly to pose questions. To approach the land as we would a person by opening an intelligent conversation. And to stay in one place, to make of that one, long observation a fully dilated experience. We will always be rewarded if we give the land credit for more than we imagine, and if we imagine it as being more complex even than language.

In these ways we begin, I think, to find a home, to sense how to fit a place (13-14).
It is in this spirit of “rediscovery” that we explore, re-encounter R. in what follows. The tour is narrated in the first person, by Sahel (deriving from the root s-h-l it can means “easy” as an adjective and a “plain” or “expanse” as a noun and the two meanings relate insofar as walking is “easy” on level ground), who is *ibn al balad* – a son of this village.

He grew up here but ever since his youth was recurrently displaced repeatedly by wars with his family. As a young man he took up arms with the communists who were allied with the Palestinian guerrillas. Finally after the 1978 Israeli invasion and occupation Sahel left the occupation zone and did not return for fear of being conscripted in the SLA. He and his brother remained in Beirut with relatives. His father, mother, unmarried sisters and youngest brother returned to the village in 1984 and lived there throughout the occupation farming tobacco and tending their olives. Sahel never returned to live in the village, for like most men of his generation he lives and works in Beirut the capital (and arguably *only*) city of Lebanon. But he spends his weekends, feast days and summers, tobacco season *mawsim al dukhkhan*, there and his father and mother and three unmarried sisters live in the family home and continue to farm tobacco and olives. Sahel has begun constructing a home in the village adjacent to his father’s house. This home is a gathering and holding place, a presence in absence, the stuff of belonging and being in/of place. As his father Bou Sahel said to me when I asked about the practice of building houses in villages that are only fitfully inhabited: “The idea is [laughing] that he [who builds a house] knows that if I want to go to R. there I have a house. Listen: *yalli ilo bayt ilo balad* [he who has a house has a village/country]. What makes you a part of this place? I have a house, I have some land therefore I have a path. People believe this and they
declare this [by building here]: that I am from R. and if I am there I want to spend the rest of my time [on earth] in R."

I present this passage through R. as a thread that unfolds landscape as it is simultaneously encountered, narrated and heard, as it bubbles forth. The passage picks up its various tangled affective, enacted as well as narrated threads, its bubbling immanences and “dreams of presence” (Rose 2004), bring us (and our attention and affection and perception) into the materials and memories, textures and topographies of this place that has been touched upon here and there in what has gone before. This passage weaves variable features relationally, spatially, temporally, placially together in a tale of love and life and agricultural labor and war. This encounter came at the beginning of my field research and was one of the experiences that pushed me to grasp landscape as metaphor, material and medium of life in this place. I have placed this passage it at the end of my account as a meditation once again upon a textured, tensive, unbroken and broken surface, a train of thought, a passage of life and of love… in a context of recurrent rupture and violence.

Although I am re-presenting the encounter in its “unedited” entirety (translated from the recorded spoken Arabic and illuminated with photographs taken along the way and interrupted here and there with bracketed commentary and explanatory footnotes) I am doing so for the unique nature of the narrative. Like landscape it sits the fence between distance and proximity; it is both raw and cooked. The passage is at once an impromptu event, an inspired and emplaced account that bubbles out of the lips of one constituted in this place and subsequently alienated, someone in a lifelong conversation with a lived and loved environment but no longer of this place (Pandolfo 1997). Hence it
is simultaneously a poetic enactment and a distanced discourse on emplacement and
displacement that folds back upon itself in often surprising instances of philosophical
commentary and analysis. But as in most landscape “somethings” (Casey 1996) the two
strands (in/out, subject/object, nature/culture, seeing/inhabiting) are deeply twisted and
hopelessly entangled, one is the other and vice versa. Hence I perceive this passage to be
an instance of performance through narrative: a resonating affective enunciated
enchanted passage through/of landscape.

“Rose Valley”

Step out of my home, the first in the village along the border road, and turn left heading
into the rays of the morning sun. Continue until you reach the top of the hill along where
the border runs. Here let’s stop at the Lebanese Army checkpoint facing a billboard with
a poster jeering at Olmert, Peretz and Halutz for their pitiful performance in the July War.
This position has been here since 2000 but they reinforced it after 2006. You can take a
picture of those clowns looking helplessly at us from behind iron bars. [We stop to take a
picture and take in the geography. A Lebanese Army soldier from the checkpoint comes
and tells us not to take any pictures].

Figure 48. Billboard overlooking khallet wardeh. Photo by author.
The billboard overlooks *khallet wardeh* or “Rose Valley” where the soldiers were kidnapped on July 12, 2006 – the incident that sparked that war. [Rose valley is steep and the border road along the technical fence separating Lebanon and Israel snakes down in a “V” shape on the Israeli side.] It was at the deepest point of the valley, right by those rocks over there where they set up their trap on the Israeli side of the border fence. They cut the wire, crossed, re-tied it and lay in wait. When the Israelis came around the corner on their morning round “the boys” sprung their ambush, hitting the vehicles taking the two soldiers and running back inside the border into Lebanon.

The fame and glory of this war went to Aita ash Shaab because it is there that the biggest battles were fought, but this land, this valley *khallet wardeh*, is R.’s land so we should claim some of the fame. You see this land here that is planted with olives and tobacco? This is our village land! Our village is no good for fighting though. It is militarily unadvantageous because it is exposed. Lift your eyes from the valley and follow the line of the hill to its crest. You see those two military positions? When the Israelis retreated to the Blue Line in 2000 they established positions along the border and the UN are right next to them. That is the “White” outpost overlooking our village, an Israeli Army position and it has been there since 1969-1970 since our brothers in the Palestinian resistance came here from Jordan and the Israelis began establishing positions or observation posts on elevations along the Palestine-Lebanon border. This position on the “White” hill has been there since those days. This outpost is considered one of the most pernicious to the resistance because it overlooks an area with geographical formations that are crucial for battle. This outpost exposes an important strategic area in geographic terms. There used to be a balloon floating above it installed with surveillance
cameras that captured a geographical area encompassing the whole of the South, but they
took it down during the July War for fear that it would attract fire. Right in front of the
Israeli outpost, on Lebanese land at the top of that hill, practically a buffer between them
and us is a UN outpost that was established after the July War as an observation post for
this valley. Both of these positions are on Lebanese land, but that is what the Israelis do:
they always occupy the elevations for military advantage, eating up our land\textsuperscript{134}.

Beyond that outpost in the middle distance southward is a hill in Israel where
there are shapes at the top that look like ruins, a church or monastery. That is a
camouflaged Israeli position! You can’t tell by looking, but we know what it is because
we are living with them \textit{ma’ayshinon}. You see that hill right in front of there? That is
where the Hizbullah resistance was before July [2006]. They were at the border
provoking them morally and politically! When we came back in 2000 at the Liberation
we were standing at the Gate\textsuperscript{135} with our weapons and throwing stones at them and they
were sitting in their tanks like coyotes \textit{wawaya}! And during the occupation we didn’t
even dare wear \textit{Rangers} let alone carry a gun!

You see this white ground here? They [the Israelis] used to hold military exercises here,
which they are now forced to do on the land of Palestine – now they are forced to bother
their own people whereas before they used to bother us. We have lived with them since
1948. I am forty-nine years old and since I was born they have been around.

\textsuperscript{134} Eyal Weizman has illustrated this in Weizman, E. (2007). \textit{Hollow land : Israel's architecture of
occupation}. London ; New York, Verso.

\textsuperscript{135} One of the designated crossings between Lebanon and Palestine from the time of the French
and British and throughout the time of the occupation.
Lebanese land is over there on the top of that ridge [pointing to a forested hill overlooking *khallet wardeh*]. The wilderness is full of resistance but no one can see them, or hear them. There is a work by Ibn Rushd\textsuperscript{136} entitled *fasl al maqal ma bayn al hukmati wal shari‘a* in which he says *al nazar fi ulum al qudamaa’ wajib al sharaa*. “If I do not learn from history then I do not have a future.” The Vietnamese have taught a beautiful lesson to any people who want to be liberated: you dig a hole in the ground and you sit in it and wait. No need to go to the enemy, the enemy will come to you. You stay where you are comfortable. He will oppress and colonize you anyway, but when he comes to you that is when you shoot him. The enemy seeks his own annihilation and the Israelis are just like that. Now look here at the southern farmers who plant tobacco and olives and wheat and lentils and beans and grapes and figs. If you live in the city and you have a child who is three or four years old and he starts to go to school or to mix with society you tell him “listen *mama*, watch out that a car doesn’t hit you and don’t play with glass or you will cut yourself!” Here when we were small and began to go outside on our own, to pasture with the cows and the goats or to the tobacco fields, our parents wouldn’t tell

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\textsuperscript{136} Averroes
us to watch out for cars, here there aren’t many cars, we ride on donkeys and mules!
They would tell us instead: “Watch out you don’t step on a mine!” or “Don’t get near the border fence or the Israelis will shoot you!” They fed us this with our mother’s milk: that this is an enemy who will not spare you. So that is why I say that our understanding of the Israelis is the result of an education that we absorb from childhood and thus in an unconscious way we begin to believe that our fight with them is a duty for honor and for humanity.

Now turn around and let us head in the direction of the Western Sector the route going down to the coast, the west. This land to our left [south] is called “Back of the Camel,” “Chicken Terrace,” “Hussein’s Valley” – this area the villagers were not allowed to even look at with their eyes, from fear of the Israelis and the SLA during the occupation. In 2000 people re-entered their land like a tiny babe whose mother has left him alone for a few hours or days. Imagine how thirsty he would be! And when he sees her again he hugs her knowing that she is life. People came back to their land, which is the basis of life, and started plowing and fixing and working all at once. All of this was built up since then. This plowed land that you see there was nothing. Before it was all wilderness wa’r, forests. And until the July War people were living comfortably in their homes and on their land.

Marj

Here is the marj. This marj has a place in people’s memories because in the year 1973 Israel ambushed a group of Lebanese and Syrian officers who were here to study the border situation with Palestine – there was an idea to make a joint frontline with bunkers
and shelters. Israel killed some of the officers and imprisoned four. The people of my village saved two important Syrian generals by hiding them among the people and the goats and smuggling them out. We are ten meters away from the place where the ambush happened in 1973.

Figure 50. Marj with view of Israeli military outpost on hill in the middle of the frame. Photo by author.

So people here my dear they wake up early at five a.m. to tend to their plants and land be it tobacco or wheat or grain or olives or figs and grapes – they go out ‘ala al sarwa which means early morning as our neighbors the Bedu say. During the occupation though, it was impossible to go outside at five a.m. because of the Israelis, so the farmers would wait until sunrise and then they would go out. But that is destructive because you can’t work under the summer sun! This was the state of things until 2000 and after that things got better and people would be able to get up and go out in the night and in the day and any time they wanted and they were able to live in this comfort and luxury.

So now we are on a road that Israel made and it leads to a place that exposes the coastal landscape of Sur and militarily exposes all the way up to the region of Saida. Saida actually shows from up there on Blat where seven martyrs died in 2000, among
them my relative. So here is the area of the *marj* – the fertile plain of our village that used to be planted with vegetables and vines but is now all planted with tobacco. It is the *marj* of R., see how R. overlooks it?

R. is on a low hill and is surrounded by small plains like most of the villages in the immediate area. The only village nearby that doesn’t have a plain is B., which is in a deep valley. We are here at the entrance of *khallit al hamra* “the Red Valley”. Do you see that Israeli position now? That’s the one that we saw when we were near the billboard. There only a small portion of it showed but now it all shows, B., the most pernicious Israeli outpost.

![R. viewed through the thorns. Photo by J. Makhzoumi.](image)

Let me tell you a funny story about the UN – you see that *sahra*\(^\text{137}\) that vegetable garden over there? Its owner from the village was harvesting his vegetables and putting them in crates and the Israelis saw him and what did they do? They called up the UN and told

\(^{137}\text{Sahra} \text{ literally means desert but here it is used to refer to a flat piece of land planted with rain-fed subsistence crops. See Makhzoumi, J. (2008). Interrogating the hakura tradition: Lebanese village gardens as product and production}
them to investigate suspicious activity. So the UN descended from their outpost in four or five trucks, four or five tanks, four or five jeeps and they all followed the guy who was going home with his vegetables and they followed him all the way to the beginning of those olives. There they stopped him and searched him and found that he had with him vegetables. He said “What’s up?” and they said “We thought you had missiles!” and he said to them “Would I put missiles in plastic crates! You don’t put missiles in plastic crates!”

_Living in spite of themselves: agriculture and suffering_

Here people are living with two faces. The first face and that is the reality of the people here is that they do not care a radish about Israel or the whole world that wants to protect Israel. And the second face is that when the people here find themselves displaced or dying seven deaths then they prefer to die here standing on their own feet. This is what keeps people here! If people didn’t identify with this landscape they would not stay here for an hour! Life here is not different from slow death in any way. Life here comprises suffering at the level of agriculture. For example there is no guidance. Tobacco this year didn’t work out because the government will not send anyone to advise the farmers what chemicals to use, what fertilizers. In this way people continue to live in spite of themselves.

_Guerrilla geographies_

Here we are in the “Israeli graveyard”. This valley _khallet al hamra_ or “Red Valley” was an Israeli graveyard from 1970 until 2000 starting with the Palestinian resistance and continuing to the Lebanese resistance. Go ahead a little further let me show you the reach
of this valley. If you follow it all the way, the time that it will take you to walk the length of it the Israelis won’t even notice you… until you grab them by the hand! It is a very narrow valley, overgrown and like a tunnel and it conceals you until you are in the mouth of the beast: Israel!

Figure 52. Tobacco fields and olives in “Red Valley” *khallet al hamra*. Photo by author.

This road that we are on leads up to S. and to the most important strategic positions for the Israelis in the history of the South. Do you see how narrow the valley is? Here is where they used to ambush the Israelis.

J: look at these olives! They are a thousand years old!

Figure 53. *Kifri* ancient olives in R. Photo by author.
What! Only a thousand! I will show you now olives that are four thousand years old! So you see what helps the resistance? You see those geographical formations? These can hide up to five thousand fighters. This area is rocky and hilly by the way it is not a plain, tanks and machine guns can’t do a thing here. Before, there was no asphalt road here it was a dirt road and the farmers instead of using trucks like they do today used to ride their donkeys and mules to get here – there was no way to get here except by foot.

This is the khalleh. You see how narrow it is? This khalleh reaches M. [on an elevation right on the Israeli border] in a way that the fighter who is fighting Israel remains unseen until he is right near them – there is no way they can expose him! So the Israelis would come here and the guys would have set an ambush that would tear them apart. This is the muthallath the three-way fork, one road leads to the village, one to the marj and one to S. In these rock formations/crevices if a group of resistance fighters are hiding there, Israeli elite troops, Apache helicopters and Israeli infantry all wouldn’t be able to touch them. Why? Imagine: if in a place whose surface is 100 dunums\textsuperscript{138} three soldiers are hiding, what are the Israelis going to do? It’s like finding a pin in a haystack! How can they find them? They are just three: one of them has a rocket launcher, one has a medium machine gun and one has personal weapons.

And throughout all of this people continue to plant the land, work the tobacco and the olives and live here and not only that! During the time of the Palestinian resistance [1969 – 1978] it was the villagers who would carry the fighters and hide the wounded and take them to the emergency room or contact people to pick up the dead.

\textsuperscript{138} 1 dunum = 100 square meters
This farmer here he’s riding his tractor and going to his land and look at the UN [UNIFIL] going on ahead of him! This repetition, this routine, this is what has kept people alive from the beginning of time.

This guy for example he’s a goatherd. He’s from R. from one of the two big families. During the war he stayed here with his goats. And one of them got killed, poor thing, one of his brothers I mean. These guys they don’t leave their livelihood *rizq*. “Livelihood is equal to the soul” *al rizq yu’adil al ruh*. They got their mothers and sisters out though.

The area we have just reached is “the crossroads.” S. by the way is a farm/plantation *mazraa*, it has houses and a mosque and land but it was destroyed by Israel a long time ago because it was a stronghold of the resistance.

This area that I am about to lead us to is considered one of the most pernicious positions on Israel. The “White” outpost as I showed you, is the most pernicious position to the resistance, but this one is the most pernicious for the resistance, why? Because in rural geographic terms it is referred to as *al-‘imyani* “blinderness”. It is blinding in the sense that if you walk through it even in the daytime you cannot see ahead of you. It is a very, very narrow valley and it has dense vegetation, undergrowth and trees.

*Sacred earth*

Now there is something I want to tell you: the resistance won, but one of the main reasons for their victory in this area is *geography*! Because in the plain *sahel* the resistance wouldn’t have a chance! Even Desert Fox was defeated in the desert! Montgomery and Rommel demolished each other in the open desert! In open desert land
with nothing there, even tanks don’t have a prayer. These geographical formations and features are for wars of small groups and guerrilla resistance. This is what breaks the backs of the Israelis and of classical warfare.

That up there is S. [atop the plateau], do you see the destroyed houses? It doesn’t have a road from here. You see those two houses? You can reach them from the other side. S. is a village, it belongs to R., it is R.’s plantation *mazra’a*.

This land where we are standing used to belong to R. but the Christians bought it in 1959 or 60. It contains ancient olives, and oaks and pistachio trees. There are uncountable numbers of plants and trees here grown wild. Look at the hawthorn *zaarour* when it comes into season you should taste it! This area has been neglected because of Israel and it has grown wild. But this is Galilee and Galilee is a piece of heaven here on earth! Its nature and its winds and its climate *ya Allah*! This here is *tayyun* sage it is medicinal and it is also great for bees – there are lots of bees in the hills and among the rocks.

![Figure 54. “Blinderness”. Photo by author.](image)
This is the ‘imyani [blinderness] can you see what a deep valley it is? You are looking at it from the side so it doesn’t show that much, but it is very deep. R. is a plain and right above it there is a holy place called al maqam al sheikh zein near M. Up there in the trees on the horizon. It is the shrine matraha of a holy man. In Galilee at the top of each hill there lives a prophet.

You see this red butum here? Do you know that these are wild pistachios? Have you tasted them? They taste just like pistachios but they are small and round – you can’t tell the difference when you eat them and they taste even better when they turn blue. Their taste is even more intense than pistachio because it is wild barri and natural tabiʾi. The best way to eat it is in bread baked on the saj, my mother and sisters bake bread on the saj.\textsuperscript{139}

Look at this hole here, Israel dug it up and took the gravel from it. A truck of this stuff costs 100 dollars! It’s a treasure! You don’t need a quarry for this! All you do is dig and it’s there and comes up pebbles and powder, crushed rocks. Anyway they took it, it’s gone, and they destroyed the poor ground in the process.

Look over there that is the ‘imyani. Do you see that village in the distance? It is Sh. and see the plain? It is on the left and over there that land is the shrine maqam of Sheikh Zein up there where the trees are on the top of the horizon. This area that has an agricultural road that looks like a footpath that red one, it is called al dawrat the turning. It is called that because you go in circles around the mountain to get to where you want to go.

\textsuperscript{139} Rounded wood stove
Obstruction

(The UN approaches)

I hope the UN don’t bother us! We are allowed to take pictures here, this isn’t Palestine it’s *our* land!

Up there, there is a plateau that I want to show you! The resistance did an operation against the Israelis up there and that was the reason for the invasion of 1978\textsuperscript{140}. I want to show you the operation. In 1978 I was fighting the Israelis. I was twenty years old.

[enter UNIFIL]

UNIFIL soldier [in English]: How far?

J: We’re fine! How are you?

UNIFIL: How far are you going?

J: We are from the American University of Beirut and this is my colleague.

UNIFIL: Are you Lebanese?

J and me: Yes.

UNIFIL: How long are you here?

J: We are going back to Beirut now.

\textsuperscript{140} The 1978 invasion was according to most sources launched in the wake of a guerrilla operation headed by Dalal Mughrabi whose remains were included in the 2008 prisoners and remains exchange. The guerrillas infiltrated into the Israeli north and hijacked a bus. All the guerillas as well as many on the bus were killed as the Israelis struck back.
Sahel (in Arabic): What are his demands?

J: He wants to know who we are.

UNIFIL: This is a restricted area. This place nobody can reach. You can’t go further.

J: Where are you from?

UNIFIL: Ghana

Sahel: Ask him a question, we can’t go to S.?

J: No they don’t allow us.

UNIFIL: It is blocked.

Sahel: It is closed? Okay I get it then it is not allowed. Ask him can we go to B.?

UNIFIL: No. Here and here.

Sahel: Why is it not allowed? We want to go B. up to the markaz [military position] turn and come back down. Ask him why.

J: why is it prohibited?

UNIFIL: It is a long story. It was used some time back before the war.

Sahel: [in Arabic] Why is it a long story? Tell him that I am from R. and that I want to go up and see my land!

J: [in English] He says he is from R. village and he says that it is his land, why can’t I go?
UNIFIL: I know I know that it is your land! But it was used some time back by one of the armed elements that instigated the war and for that matter it is prohibited. That is why we are here.

Sahel: He knows that it is our land?

J: Yes I told him.

UNIFIL: Go to the UN HQ in Naqura and get permission.

[We close the windows of the car and stay where we are, Sahel continues]:

*Hilltops and valleys*

These valleys to our northwest are called Tannur and Ain el Tineh. There is a spring there and this valley reaches all the way to Sur [on the coast]. We want to go to B. so I can show you the area. See over there Blat? You see the aerial? That is the last place that the Israeli evacuated from in 2000 and a few of our boys were martyred, among them one of ours, the engineer.

Here is where the thirteen Israelis were killed here at this knoll *jibban* right here. You see the trees? That is where the ambush was. They slaughtered them here in 1978 and that is the reason for the 1978 invasion.

The place where we are standing right now is called *al mafariq* the “Crossroads.” Blat is where there used to be an Israeli HQ, a major strategic position and from there I wanted to show you Saida! If we had only arrived before them! You know why they came? They won’t let us pass but we won’t listen to them! My brother who we left at home, he came with my cousin in the car and they went up there last week! If we had
time we could just wait for them to go and if we had arrived before them they would have just followed us and not said anything. You know why they came? While we were up there at the billboard taking pictures, you know why the Lebanese Army said no pictures? Because they got a phone call from their superiors who got a phone call from the UN\textsuperscript{141} in M. You know that in M. the UN there are the 1948 observer force, not the regular UNIFIL force. They got a phone call from the Israelis saying there is a car up there taking pictures and we want to know why they are taking pictures! The Israelis wanted to know! You see why we say we don’t care a radish about the Israelis? We know their reality! The UN are the protectors of the Israelis. They tell us we need permission from N. but we don’t need any permission! I don’t need permission from anybody to be in my land!

\textit{On the nature of war: the salt of the earth}

This land here looks burnt but that is the nature of the land. It is the land of \textit{ballan}. Before, this land used to be filled with strong trees. I want to tell you this story that happened to me. After the invasion in 1978 I was with a reconnaissance party and we got to a wild area. When we reached here we got to a place where we were sure we were exposed. An Apache [helicopter] came upon us and went around and around in an area adjacent to B. and then it turned and left. We slept for forty-eight hours in our place – a day and a night – until we did what we had to do and then we left. Suddenly the Apache came upon us again and it was so close to us! Our hearts were beating in our chests and we held our breath and the Apache left. With me was a guy who is now a schoolteacher and another guy who is now in Sweden – we were with the Communists back then – and you know what he said to me? He said, “What are you thinking?” And I said, “God is

\footnote{UNTSO}
following us!” And he said “what do you mean following us?” and I said “Brother he is protecting us! God is protecting us!”

And it is true that God is protecting the resistance fighters here! Here is their land and their people. So you see when an operation would happen people would say how did they [the resistance] do it? They would say milih oo debat “they dissolved like salt!” and I say no! They did not dissolve like salt! The Israelis did not disappear they are still very much there but they are blind and the fighters appear to have dissolved into nothing because it is their land and they know every tree and stone but they are also there!

The Americans and the Israelis say that it is foreign fighters from Iran and Syria who are backing up the resistance but that is not true, it is the people and the proof of that is the price of these wars. Yesterday they brought back the remains of fighters[^142] [in a prisoners swap] and all of them are Lebanese and Palestinian and all of them are from the security belt [the occupied border zone].

Martyrs have been falling since 1948 and even before! In the 1936 revolt the people who died were from Blida! And in 1948 they were from Blida and Houla and Mais [border villages in the Eastern Sector of the Zone]! It is from those villages that Israel entered! Ninety-seven percent of the martyrs who died on Lebanese soil by the hand of the Israelis are southerners from their own land and the other three percent are

[^142]: This prisoner swap was the end – the fulfillment of the “True Promise” – whose means was the kidnapping on July 12, 2006 that sparked this war. The exchange was an orchestrated and bombastic and grisly affair that took place in Naqura the coastal meeting point of the warring nations and an island of UNIFIL, their operational headquarters. The exchange involved a handful of live human prisoners – including the longest serving live Lebanese prisoner in Israeli jails Samir Qantar and the remains of Dalal Mughrabi, the only woman among them – given back to Lebanon by Israel and many, many remains and body parts. The Lebanon to gifted Israel the remains of the two soldiers abducted that fateful July morning. Until that very moment it was still unclear whether they were dead or alive.
Arabs. The Palestinians are included in the ninety-seven percent because it is also their land! The people who have been fighting and continue to fight are from this land. Like I said it is the same as in Vietnam: the peasant who was planting his rice was also carrying his gun. When he finds it is time to use the gun he uses it and when he finds it is time to continue planting he continues planting. The peasant considers that the planting of rice and the gun are twin weapons! And in the South it is the same. When Israel said in July [2006] that the Southerners are not allowed back onto their land they thought that the fighters would not come back but they did not know is that this fighter is of this land and of this people. And the indication of this is the number of martyrs! R. has martyrs, Aita ash Shaab, Marwaheen, Sheheen., Teir Harfa., Shamaa, al Jubban, Beit Leef, Bint Jbeil, Ainata, Aitaroun, Blida, Mais… all these villages, the martyrs are from there! In yesterday’s swap and the swaps of the past and the future it is the people who are fighting – don’t think for a minute that someone else will fight for you! No one will fight for someone else on their land! It’s your land so you fight for it. “No one is King more than the King.” People will empathize with you, stand with you in terms of nationalism and religion and help in terms of money and logistics and humanitarian aid or doctors… but to send fighters? No one would do that.

We don’t need them [Iran] and we don’t need people! To show you: during the July War those that were fighting Israel during that war there were only one out of ten of them among the soldiers if not less! And the truth of the matter is that we don’t need them! For example, this whole area needs just thirty soldiers. This whole geography that we just went around in needs just thirty soldiers to tie together the valleys and the plains!

*On mimesis and the divine: philosophies of presence*
Our soil is gold and our land is giving. I have read Ibn Khaldun’s *Muqaddima* and he speaks of how the environment forms people and so this is why I say what Ibn Khaldun says that the *nature of the people is from the nature of the land* and a popular saying here is: each people is according to their water. So people here are generous because their land is generous. Dry land makes people dry, but our people here are generous and full of life and soft and blessed because their land is like that! And that is divine will.

I always say in many different contexts that it was not by my good will that I was born here, but it is by my good will that I am fighting here. It is not by my intention that I was born here since God created me but it is entirely my intention to fight! And my will cannot be forced. My presence here has nothing to do with my intention since it is the intention of God, but I am fighting with my intention and I am giving with my intention.

*The path of suffering: the road to Palestine*

Now I want to show you the road of suffering where people from R. were blown up by mines and died from Israeli mines as they were picking tobacco and harvesting wheat and as they were toiling for their daily bread (*wa hinni yibhathu ‘ala luqmat ‘ayshun wa yaqifu fi sabeel liqmat al ‘aysh wal hayat wa sabeel ta’alighum bi ardhum wa itha jaz al ta’abir juhud ard*). That piece of land up there [on an elevated terrace adjacent to the border fence] that is planted with tobacco is for my family. See that piece of land up there? You see all the tobacco *al tabigh*? The wild land *wa’ara* behind it is all for us, and it is planted with mines! Do you see what a beautiful piece of wilderness it is? If you go up there your life will be prolonged. It has a water-well carved from the rock and it has a kind of tree called *shubruq* that is edible and sweet and its color is red. It is right on the
borderline. You see that [Israeli] aerial? That aerial is ours! It is on our land! My family goes up there to plant and pick tobacco.

Now we are heading west. I want to take you to a place so you can see something both beautiful and hateful.

See this pretty billboard here?

![Figure 55. Poster of assassinated Hizbullah operative Imad Mughnieh with minefield and Israeli border road in background. Photo by author.](image)

The [border] strip and the mines are only eight meters away from it. Get closer, this shepherd here is the brother of the shepherd we just saw… it was his brother who was tying the donkey earlier.

This is the Israeli borderline do you see how close it is? I want to show you the mines, the place where the shepherd died – he’s my cousin – and he was the most recent civilian to die from mines after the 2000 withdrawal. He stepped on a mine and died a year before July [2006]. Do you see the Israeli mines? That is where the mine came upon him. Do you see that hillock of pistachio bushes?
That is where the mine was that exploded. From this road where we are standing all the way to the Israeli road over there it is mined – and those mines extend all the way from Naqura to Jabal al Sheikh [Mount Hermon]!

![Fields, minefields, and Israeli border road. Photo by author.](image)

So you see that plain over there? As God is my witness I was plowing on the *feddan* on that white land over there. I was plowing and a girl passed by me her name is Zeena and that was in the year 1974 or ‘75. She passed by me riding on a beast *dabbeh* on her way to *hish* collect grass and she said to me “God give you health!” And I told her “hello,” I was still unmarried back then. I am plowing on the *feddan* going and coming, going and coming when all of a sudden a mine explodes in the dried earth over there. When the mine blew I looked up and her sister calls to me and says “the mine got my sister!” Her sister is now in Australia with her family. I went towards her and the Israeli soldier is standing close to the borderline and he is shouting at me in Arabic “Don’t come closer! Don’t come closer!” I didn’t listen to him, I went to her directly and I found her torn apart by the mine, in pieces and you know at the time I was a soldier. I told her sister I don’t know how your sister stepped here but step exactly the way she did and pull her out
of the minefield because I can’t enter. She knew how her sister had stepped and so she went in and pulled her out. She had dragged her three meters exactly when I went and picked her up. As I picked her up she fell from my hands because of all the blood, her left breast fell off, her neck was slashed, her left leg was cut off and yet it still took her another twenty-four hours to die – can you imagine the suffering? I carried her and she kept slipping from my hands from all the blood, her father was running after me and they quickly covered her. There were people there harvesting grass for their cows and their goats. “Take off your skirts!” I told the women. They took of their skirts [which they wore over pajamas] and we wrapped her in them and a car took her immediately to the hospital and she died the next day. [She was blown up] at that green hillock exactly and I was plowing here exactly! This ground, Israel ruined it. It used to be agricultural ground but they took the topsoil. I jumped immediately and at that green hillock and the Israelis were standing over there facing me at that lit street lamp telling me to go back and I did not listen. Another guy also died when his cow stepped on a mine and then when he tried to move her the mine exploded, killing him and hurting three people. This all happened in the 1970s. Another guy was riding his camel that he had loaded with wheat and the Israelis shot and killed him and his camel. That was in 1971. We are standing facing the Gate bawabit R.! This is the road to Palestine!

Hallowed ruin

Here is the uphill to Blat where the seven were killed [in 2000] and among them the engineer. I will show you exactly where they died. These here are the “Truce Forces” [UNTSO], international observers there since 1948.
Look at Palestine! Look at Galilee! Look at the settlements! Look how beautiful its nature and its trees are and look how ugly the Israelis are who are in it! Look at the settlers where their houses are! When we used to take the cows to pasture we would steal apples and peaches from their orchards!

Here is where the engineer Nasser and his brother Khalil were killed, here in this wilderness wa’riyat. They were carried from here. This is where they [Hizbullah fighters] were hit by the tanks and the Apache. Three [Hizb] cars got hit and seven of them died and fifteen continued. They were coming up here to secure the Israeli position and get the Israelis out of it because this outpost was the last place to be evacuated by the Israelis [at dawn on May 24, 2000]. Now we can go up there because there is nothing there now, no longer any Israelis nor anybody. People have built houses here from both M. and R. Here is where the first car was destroyed, where the first car for the muqawama burnt. The second car went here near this tree that is uprooted. The third car clashed with the Israelis up there and killed an officer and a soldier. Now we will reach the blue barrier and turn around because we cannot go any further. This markaz Blat is the main position that the
Israelis fought for until the last breath. They finally abandoned it on Wednesday morning [May 24, 2000] and they had already left all of the South by Tuesday. This is Blat, the Israelis flattened it after they left.

[To the Lebanese Army soldier who approaches]: We are looking at Palestine from here! I am from R. and they are doing research. We are just going to park on the side. [To us] See how sweet the Lebanese Army is?

Here in Blat there is a castle that is 5000 years old. Stay here don’t go further, we are protected by the army! [Standing there one feels very exposed to the Israeli border road and the regularly passing Humvees].

You see that UNIFIL position that is between R. and Marwaheen? That is the position that did not allow the people of Marwaheen to take shelter during the July War and then twenty-eight people died. They came to take refuge there and the UN told them to get lost and so they got in their cars and drove toward Sur and on the way they were hit by missiles from a gunboat on the Bayyad hill near Sur and twenty-eight people died.

Here in Blat there used to be a castle that is thousands of years old\(^{143}\). It was right under the Israeli position and surrounded by a wall. The Israelis didn’t dare destroy it and the UN didn’t allow them to destroy it but they put their outpost on top of it on the hill.

\textit{Locating love}

God how I love Palestine! I am not Palestinian but I feel that it is a part of me. This is not an ideological feeling but rather a tangible emotion \textit{ihsass waqi‘i}.

\(^{143}\) There are many undocumented Roman and Crusader ruins across the South that are being progressively pulverized across the wars.
The bitter life

I explained to you how the people who got blown up by the mines were toiling, the girl who got blown up had come to get grass for her cows and the other guy with the camel was harvesting his wheat. From 1948 onward they have been suffering from war and the government has not compensated us anything for this agricultural land that is of no more use to us! This land here [where the mines are] is flatland/plain sahel and tobacco cannot be planted in land that has geographic undulations tadareez geoghrafiyya, tobacco needs flatland. When we used to plant tobacco a long time ago the government would give us for the kilo three or four Liras, then it started to give us 4000 or 5000 liras the equivalent of three or four dollars. The price of a kilo of tobacco is not enough to pay for a kilo of meat! With that knowledge one kilo of tobacco embitters your life! How bitter is tobacco!

Tobacco is the one crop that requires fourteen months of work. Two months of its work goes into the new calendar year! And you have wagered your life on the price that they will take your tobacco…

I have been politically aware since the day I was born and I have read all the greats from my love Socrates my first teacher to the great Imam Ali my first teacher even before Socrates and passing through all the people. I consider the person who does not read to be dead and not worthy of burial. So look at the neglect as I was saying, the guy who is waiting to get paid for his tobacco if he wants to put his money on an operation for his wife or himself or to send his son to a university – this miserable guy cannot send his son to a decent university. But then the civil war came and helped an important stratum of this poor society – it opened to them the socialist countries and the route to
specialization – engineering and medicine – via the militias who would provide scholarships! Anyway so the guy really can’t decide where he is to spend the money he gets for his tobacco since he has so much to spend on. Anywhere he spends them, it is the bitter price of his toil. So you see that people are eating their daily bread with the bitterness of tobacco…

*Dead geography*

This is our [family] land here all the way to Palestine it is ours. This plot ‘iqar on the side of the road it is for us, it comes to thirty-five dunums and it is worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. But it is dead because no one can get to it, we can’t use it. But still it means the world to us. When I walk through it, it takes me back to when I used to come to it when I was ten years old. I would catch birds and eat the sha’shub al butum the soft sweet and sour ones and the wild pears and in the “green season” mawsim al khadar I would gather ‘irs ‘anni and dandelions hindbeh. When I come here I am again a young child or a naughty adolescent and I stop being 49 with children and all that…

*Marj again: planting money (wargriculture)*

Go left so I can take you into the depths of the marj. And I wish you would stay until the evening so I can take you to the vegetable garden and feed you sour tomatoes and wild cucumber.

You see the marj? It embodies our village. There is not one single person in R. who does not have a piece of the marj. If he does not have a thousand meters then he has 250 meters. Get a bit closer, here this square here is ours it comes to nine hundred meters and it is right here on the corner on the roundabout. The marj is for all of R.’s people. A
person from R. will say, take anything from me but leave me the marj. Why? Because in the marj he plants rain-fed kitchen vegetables sahra, he plants grapes, he plants everything: sunflowers, tomatoes, wild cucumbers, chickpeas, all of it! But now he has started to plant only tobacco. Why? Because he needs the money. He cannot afford not to plant tobacco. Water lasts throughout the season al mayy 'ala fatratha we don’t irrigate here and that is why this agriculture is called ba’l144. You see these tomatoes? They are neglected. Say I have a sahra and I want to take my tomatoes to the vegetable market. I would have to take down three crates a day and they will throw them out why? Because every three tomatoes are worth a thousand Liras! And this is with the knowledge that each one is worth all the tomatoes in the world! These tomatoes are organic – they have no chemicals! You make jam from them or you eat them raw with salt or greens.

In terms of winter crops there is also green beans and zucchini and you can also plant cabbage if you want. The marj is protected and cold, do you see those vines dawali? This marj used to be all dawali, with each bunch of grapes like sweet things – you could never be able to eat just one bunch. Even when the rains start there would still be grapes on the vines because the marj is like a refrigerator! At night it gets cold. Now isn’t it summer? In the evenings you can’t just wear a T-shirt. And in winter it snows here! For the marj many people died. This marj and all the murooj of the South! But there aren’t many murooj like this one. You know that Rmeish and Aita [among the two most prolific tobacco-farming towns of the South] they both come to buy tomatoes and grapes from us? Because they have been planting only tobacco in their plains from a long time ago and no longer plant subsistence crops.

144 From Baal the Sun God: crops that need no irrigation.
Goats and generation

This road here leads us to Blat. Do you see that old man who is walking slowly because of his age? He is the father of the guys who have the goats. He was just with his goat, he puts her here near the wild land waar and he has fenced her in with a makeshift gate so she doesn’t wander. She sleeps there, do you see it over there? This man is ninety years old and he walks on a stick and yet he goes to follow up on his goats. And you see this boy carrying the kid? He’s his grandson. I want to point this out to you: between the old man and this small boy there are the youths and the men shabab who take the goats to pasture. You see this boy is the connection between the goatherds and the old man, this grandfather. You see the kid he is carrying? He won’t leave her. He is bringing her back from pasture.

The absent state: geographies of care and of neglect

Here is the entrance to the village and these trees here are around two thousand years old. The municipality has made up the pavement here nicely but in spite of that look at how the land reflects the suffering of the people and the poverty of the people – the people are neglected by the state! Absolutely neglected! See, if the state nurtured them just a little they could be an example of civilized society…

I want to tell you something: R. is the only village among fifty villages whose inhabitants do not have blood feuds and killings amongst each other. In other villages you have such things. In R. on the other hand, the differences are mainly political: either you are with the Hizb or you are with the Harakeh [Amal] or you are a Communist period. This [not having blood feuds] is a transgression of tribal customs and practices.
Look at those people working in the fields! It is a good thing for you to love the land that you live on because if you don’t love it then you will stop being a part of it.

Look at the State how much it has neglected us! The road that we just passed on was really worked on to become like this. Now I want to take to take you on a street that is literally the pits! It is very, very narrow and neglected and that is because the state has abandoned us as if we are not for it and not of it! This is emblematic of the whole region!

Look at the pomegranate trees! Our village is a forest when viewed from the outside! And all these trees were planted not so long ago and you know why? Because when Israel was here they were worrying us to the extent that we couldn’t even breathe and they would burn down forests with napalm.

Geographies of violence

The village square is up there and on the way back I will take you up there and then we will reach the area where our house is. These are the inhabitants of this neighborhood. See how people plant tobacco even under their windows? The other marj I want to show it to you, we will take that road because it is nicely asphalted and we will reach there and come back immediately but I want to show you an area we can call the basin hudn of the Palestinian martyrs. The other place I showed you was the site of the Lebanese resistance martyrs and here is the site of the Palestinian martyrs. So I can tell you where the Israelis killed the Palestinian people.

You see R.’s land? It extends until the walls of Q. the next village there on that hill over there? Until the end of the white land – the land is for R. Q. is a Christian village. See here, Bint Jbeil are Shi’a, Ain Ibl are Christian, Aita ash Shaab are Shi’a,
Rmeish are Christian, Haneen are Shi’a, Qawzah are Christian and Naqura are Shi’a. Do you see what a demographic mix? And they used to co-habit, their weddings were one and their funerals were one. The civil war came and they slaughtered each other to the extent that now they each could be from a different planet. And today when Israel comes and bombs Aita and flattens it, it doesn’t bomb Qawzah or Marwaheen or Ain Ibl and even in skirmishes with the resistance… R. is Shi’a but it was spared because it is militarily unadvantageous. Wherever we roam the Israelis have us exposed.

*The orchard: the Garden of Eden*

They didn’t feed you cactus *sabr* at home – did you eat cactus *subbeir* at our house this morning? This morning we came me and my brother to a small orchard over there that my father planted after he returned from being displaced during the 1978 invasion. Do you see that olive over there? The orchard is around 8000 square meters – it has figs and cactus and almonds and quince but most of all olives and I have also planted there pines *snubar* – I picked some cactus fruit this morning like fifty or sixty pieces. When you pick a cactus fruit we pick sage *tayyun* or laurel *ghar* and rub them until the prickles are removed. R. is filled with laurel trees. It has the most laurel trees of the South, Aita has also in its land that is adjacent to R. – *khallet wardeh*! You can make soap from laurel leaves and also oil that is good for rheumatism. You know if Israel would give people a break this place would be a paradise *janni*.

Do you see the hawthorn tree *za’rura* in the middle of that piece of land but its owners have not removed it. That is because it embodies tradition/history for them. To us
the za’rura is like the zeitoun olive, it embodies the same thing. If someone has it in their land they will take care of it and cultivate it even if it takes up space\textsuperscript{145}.

These are blackberries! Come and eat some! Eat blackberries and see how delicious they are! At home I eat a whole plate in the mornings!

This is our orchard. And I have planted here pines snubar and cypresses saru. I planted the cypresses to protect the olives from the wind – to prevent the wind from making the blossoms fall… but I also planted them for their beauty. And mostly I planted almonds. Right now there are some dried almonds and you can taste them by breaking them open. Now it’s not their season, but you should see them when they are in bloom! The trees look as white as snow! You see my house? When I am here I can see my land from my house. My house is the one there that is still not completed next to my parent’s house.

\textsuperscript{145} Rizq refers to livelihood and is considered a divine blessing. One of the names of God is \textit{al razzaq} – the livelihood giver. Trees are considered blessed and are referred to as rizq as opposed to tobacco – which is an inedible cash crop.
This here is laurel; all our uncultivated land wa’r is filled with laurel. We sometimes clear it out of our land to plant grain and tobacco and when it has those small black berries in it mashallah. We make oil out of these berries. First it is a blossom and then it becomes a small berry that becomes smaller. But this stuff is great. One gallon of this stuff is worth twice as much as olive oil! It costs two hundred dollars! And it is just here in the wild – there are songs about it! If you really want to love the laurel come here when it is all yellow flowers in bunches. Some trees are male and some are female – this one for example is male because it doesn’t carry berries. In our land there are lots of trees, sindian oak of all types and laurel – but the laurel has dominated everything. People who have laurels in their land no one comes near them – they harvest their own trees kul wahad bi hawwish bi rizqo.

S.: the forbidden hilltop

Now I am going to take you to S. to the place that the UN guy didn’t allow us to go we will go. I want to take you to a place that when you see it you will say I want to build here and live here!

Do you know what R. means? It means “hills between hills”. If you notice all the hills that are around it are higher than it and that is what keeps it protected, as if it is walled in.

Where the UN didn’t let us pass – do you see the road that is along the edge of the mountain? That is the road that we wanted to reach there the horizon and park there so we can get to B. You see the maqam shrine I told you about for Marwaheen there at the trees you can see it clearly now. Now S. is beginning to show, a few of the houses, but
there are no people. It has been abandoned since the 1970s when the Palestinian resistance began against Israel, it began to get shelled. R. used to be two villages, R. and S., but then S. became a part of R.

These valleys here are the base of the resistance – how is Israel going to see anything in those valleys? In this valley there is a spring. If you can see there are lots of orchards because it is a deep depression.

Figure 59. Valley. Photo by author.

Look at this pear tree when it matures if you taste it, it is pure honey. These are wild pears. This is the spring that gets filled up with water in the winter. It is a very old spring. Do you see the nature of the land how beautiful? Do you see how many kinds of trees?

Do you see that ploughed piece of land over there? Do you know who it is for? This land is for Abu Jalil. Poor guy it is the only piece of land he has in all of R. It looks unused because it is neglected.

J: What a solitary land! Miskeen just like him!
This land here is for my grandfather – the father of my mother – they have about seven hundred dunums here.

Until the knoll jurf over there begins the land of Yaatar. The flank safh all of it – the valley is all for R. And here is S. Now we will reach those trees and stop there and walk around fifteen meters until we reach there. You will see…

The road here is good but just until here. The Council of the South\textsuperscript{146} once donated a stretch of asphalt to the village and they reached here and stopped [at the edge of S. the enchanted plateau].

\textit{The end of the road}

This land is for the people for thousands of years and it is all butum wild pistachio but they are not blue yet – when they become blue you should see how delicious they are. I want to feed you some of the blue ones. This is blue, but only when it is dry does it become exquisite. Wild pistachio is so delicious! Everything here is so delicious! This oak sometimes grows a nut that very rarely grows – if you eat it, it is as if you are eating a delicious fruit. When it grows properly people harvest it and bake it into bread. The shepherds also have a well here for their goats – they get water here with a tractor. Those are the shepherds we saw earlier.

They are the last remaining shepherds in R. – there were others but they sold their land, sorry I mean they sold their goats. But those remain why? They have not stepped one foot outside of this village for generations. They do not go to the city and they are living from this work – they took their goats out of the village proper because they aren’t

\textsuperscript{146} Majlis al junub also locally known as majlis al juyub or the “council of pockets”.
allowed to keep goats there anymore and so they brought them to this abandoned village here. They have land of thousands of dunums here on the other side where they can take their goats to pasture. Now they are the caretakers of that land that belongs to the Christians.

Figure 60. S. Ruins, goat enclosures and shrine on top of hill in distance. Photo by author.

We continue on foot into S. – the enchanted plateau – and we entered a place of living ruin(s)… Sahel picks fat purple figs from the proliferating fig tree outside of the house of the dead couple, splits them open to expose their fleshy red interior and hands one to me. I bite into it and it is as sweet as life. He leads us further and pushes in a rotted door and we peer into the gloomy interior of their long-abandoned and successively re-inhabited abode. The blackened hearth speaks of former presences. The empty room with overturned furniture speaks of abandonment. The tree reaches over the passage and caresses the rotting door. The goats maaaa in the distance. This was my first encounter with this place, which continued to haunt me as I returned time and again to discover its hidden stories.
This particular thread of the labyrinth ends here on my enchanted plateau and another thread begins that I have taken up elsewhere.
Coda

We have just together traversed a landscape of war: the borderland of South Lebanon that unfolds as a rural-military hybrid formed in/of entangled cycles of agricultural seasons and seasons of war. In interlaced movements through nervous landscape labyrinths we have probed ways of understanding the continuities of life in a place of many ruptures. Delving into a landscape of war as embodied and naturalized, we have explored the South Lebanon borderland through interlaced strands of narrative, other/worldly encounters, body- and place-ballets\textsuperscript{147} (Seamon 1980), and sensuous shreds chased along trails that open up, wind, intersect and sometimes abruptly end to compose an earthly yet surreal bricolage of life as (un)usual in war country. Unfolding landscape as movement, material, medium, and metaphor (practice, performance, poetics), through lives lived and paths traveled this work has illuminated how the arts of rural dwelling entwine and combine with those of war to compose this particular place. The inquiry assembled along a tangled path (a limen, a borderline, a \textit{barzakh}), framed as landscape as dwelling composed of the “materiality of human artifacts and habitation” that continue to pulsate with the rhythms of Benjamin’s understanding of natural history of \textit{Naturgeschichte}, “the ceaseless repetition of… cycles of emergence and decay of human orders of meaning, cycles that are always connected to violence” (Santner 2006).

\textsuperscript{147} Seamon (1980) writes, “\textit{body-ballet} – \textit{a set of integrated behaviors which sustain a particular task or aim}, for instance washing dishes, plowing, housebuilding, potting, or hunting. Body-ballets are frequently an integral part of a manual skill or artistic sensibility; their sum may constitute a particular person’s livelihood” (157). “The \textit{place-ballet} is a \textit{fusion of many time-space routines and body-ballets in terms of place}” (159) and “Place-ballet… is an environmental synergy in which human and material parts unintentionally foster a larger whole with its own special rhythms and character” (163).
We were led into landscape by its dwellers (and others), who helped us make and find our way through this place of living and warring as we stumbled along the confusing detail of its many paths. Accordingly, we passed through difficult terrain where the visibility was low and paused occasionally for recuperating breaths in clearings of illumination. So like the ground upon which we walk and (also from which we) live and (sometimes for which we) die, this account is simultaneously whole yet also necessarily fragmented. But like clever goats we managed to heft to the ground where living and warring unfold/enfold and entangle through seasonal rhythms and under our feet appears a mundane and meager yet magical earth.

This work contests understandings of war as exceptional and primarily destructive. Instead it illustrates how war can be thought of as not only an ordinary, inhabited condition but also as creative of life worlds. In “Liminality, Seasonality and Landscape” Olwig (2005) writes “Seasonal landscape phenomena occur in space and time, but they are also a measure of space and time”. He continues “The word season derives from a Latin word meaning to sow, and ‘to every thing’, in the words of Ecclesiastes, ‘there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted’” (259). In South Lebanon where war has recurred in rhythms like seasons, war has also come to be inhabited a little like the seasons, as a horizon of potentiality, a parameter of possibility, a limit, a simultaneous resource and risk. In South Lebanon there is a time for war and a time for living and they are contained within each other, inextricably entwined.

War here along this rural periphery is as generative and structuring a phenomenon as it is destructive – a phenomenon whose forces and materials and beings have
constituted ways of living and of making a living, ways of embodying time, moving through space, making place and other existential modalities shaping the gestalt and detail of in-habitation along this sliver of meager earth. Suitably, dwellers of this earth have found ways of domesticating war and manage to continue to (re)create their life-worlds across and through seasons of destruction. The low-tech family-based agricultural-military complex that is South Lebanon today can probably be defended as an optimally (never in an ideal sense, and always in a contingent one) war-adapted formation able to somewhat withstand the seasonally violent “war” condition that storms across this rural landscape. The configuration innovatively uses locally available materials and beings and assembles them into a tensile hybrid: household labor, dryland crops, hardy livestock. Building close to field and hearth the hybrid assemblage expands outwards through ever-widening meshworks and networks. Thus what emerges then when one contemplates a lifeworld premised on an arid geography and perennial conflict is a landscape whose various elements, actively bend with the winds of acute violence and then quickly snap back to resume what was temporarily interrupted. The combination and collisions of life and war here across the long-term has resulted in a tensive, resilient, nervous formation that cannot be easily parsed, judged or annihilated.

In “Body, Self and Landscape” (Casey 2001) Casey writes “Landscape is the capacious scene wherein the coadunation of places in a given region arises; it is the matrix of places without us, hence the antipode of habitus as the matrix of schemes within us. It is the arena in which cosmos and hearth, otherwise such disparate terms, connect and animate each other. As such, it shows hearth and cosmos to be not merely dichotomous but ultimately continuous with each other” (419). I have approached
landscape in this dissertation as the lived nexus that places us in space and time, holding polarizing forces together in a creative and tense embrace.
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