


UNIFIL's "Blue Line" Demarcation: Spatial Ordering, Political Subjectivity, and Settler Colonialism in South Lebanese Borderlands

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This article offers an ethnographic account of ongoing border conflicts in south Lebanon between members of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and residents in a south Lebanese border village. It emphasizes the specific experiences of this border population with foreign intervention and land expropriations. It places UNIFIL's current intervention in a long history of Western imperialism in the region. It underlines how UNIFIL weakens the Lebanese state by taking over the sovereign functions a state typically performs. It examines current border contestations in a context of Israeli settler colonialism and its long-term role in shaping the livelihoods in south Lebanese border villages. It argues for the importance of understanding border conflicts and the work of international interventions in their specific local and historical contexts.

Este artículo ofrece un relato etnográfico de los conflictos fronterizos que están todavía en curso en el sur del Líbano entre los miembros de la Fuerza Provisional de las Naciones Unidas en el Líbano (FPNUL) y los residentes de una aldea fronteriza del sur del Líbano. El artículo enfatiza las experiencias específicas que vivió esta población fronteriza en relación con la intervención extranjera y las expropiaciones de tierras. El artículo, también, sitúa esta actual intervención de la FPNUL dentro de una larga historia de imperialismo occidental en la región. Además, remarca cómo la FPNUL debilita al Estado libanés mediante la asunción de funciones soberanas que normalmente desempeñaría un Estado. Este artículo estudia las disputas fronterizas actuales dentro de un contexto de colonialismo de asentamiento israelí, así como su papel a largo plazo con respecto a la configuración de los medios de vida en las aldeas fronterizas del sur del Líbano. También defiende la importancia de comprender los conflictos fronterizos y el trabajo de las intervenciones internacionales dentro de sus contextos locales e históricos específicos.

Cet article propose un récit ethnographique des conflits actuels aux frontières du sud du Liban, entre les membres de la Force intérimaire des Nations unies au Liban (FINUL) et les habitants d'un village de la frontière sud du Liban. Il souligne les expériences spécifiques de cette population frontalière vis-à-vis de l'intervention étrangère et de l'expropriation des terres. Il place l'intervention actuelle de la FINUL au sein d'une longue histoire d'impérialisme occidental dans la région. Il montre que la FINUL affaiblit l'État libanais en s'appropriant les fonctions souveraines dont s'acquitte normalement un État. Il analyse les contestations frontalières actuelles dans le contexte du colonialisme israélien et son rôle à long terme quand il s'agit de façonner les moyens de subsistance des villages frontaliers au sud du Liban. Il défend l'importance de comprendre les conflits frontaliers et le travail d'interventions internationales dans leur contexte local et historique spécifique.

Introduction

In May 2000, Israel withdrew from south Lebanon, ending its 22-year occupation. The United Nations was then tasked to confirm the withdrawal, but their repeated unsuccessful attempts highlighted an issue that is still subject to considerable contention today: the determination of borders in the Lebanon–Syria–Israel triborder region. Because Lebanon and Israel do not have diplomatic relations, Lebanon does not officially recognize the State of Israel, and Israel has not declared borders with Lebanon, even the idea of a border between the two states is a highly contested political issue. Instead, the United Nations Interim Force In Lebanon

(UNIFIL) claims to be marking not a border but a "Blue Line," a provisional borderline between Lebanon and Israel. While large parts of the Blue Line have since been marked, there are ongoing contestations about the shape of the frontier in several locations of this geopolitically sensitive region. This article analyzes border disputes that took place over several years in Blida, a small village located in southeastern Lebanese border region, between the UNIFIL, villagers, and the pro-Hizballah municipality.

This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork and oral history research I conducted between 2009 and 2019 concerning the implementation of UNIFIL's foreign-designed peacekeeping mission within rural frontier communities in south Lebanon. I spent several years living in south Lebanon, where I observed everyday encounters between UNIFIL, residents, and authorities of south Lebanon, encompassing official and unofficial, public and private meetings, and rituals and festivities. Additionally, I collected a total of eighty interviews with current and former UNIFIL officials and officers, local and foreign employees of international and civil society organizations, former Lebanese army officials, Lebanese intellectuals, and rural villagers.

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Border Contestations Between Lebanon and Israel

UNIFIL's ongoing efforts to visibly demarcate the border-line between Lebanon and Israel are contested by both sides states. Lebanese-Israeli border demarcation is further complicated by the issue of the Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights, whose border with Lebanon was never fully delineated prior to Israel's illegal seizure of the territory in 1967. This is particularly an issue in the disputed areas of the Sheb'a farms and the village of Ghajar. UNIFIL's demarcation has also been challenged by a number of individual south Lebanese villagers, as the proposed lines cut through agricultural land used and claimed by border communities. The conflicts in Blida were a consequence of UNIFIL's attempts to demarcate the Blue Line, and therefore enforce its mandate. UNIFIL's initiative was met with considerable resistance by many villagers, who regarded it as illegitimate and unreasonable.

This article looks at actions through which the border comes to materialize, which in turn reflects on the social and political situation (Reeves 2014). This article presents different scales, that is the different perspectives that exist in the field: on the one hand UNIFIL's, which partially uses French and British colonial records to locate the Blue Line and enforce the boundary between Lebanon and Israel. At the same time, it shows the conflict from the perspective of the south Lebanese residents, whose livelihoods were and continue to be directly affected by the enforcement of these colonial boundaries. It outlines their own relationship and claims to land, that are not reflected in UNIFIL's boundary demarcation. By analyzing the reactions of the municipality of Blida and villagers, this article demonstrates how UNIFIL's mission is rejected, largely due to the terms of UNIFIL's mandate. It further underlines how UNIFIL's practices, such as its Blue Line demarcations, serve to weaken the Lebanese state by taking over its sovereign functions.

Contests over UNIFIL's Blue Line demarcation are not unique to Blida. Nearly simultaneously, a similar issue took place in the village of Sheb'a. Israel began to construct and fence off an area along the border that is claimed by the Lebanese government and citizens of Sheb'a, the area known as the Sheb'a Farms, which are adjacent to the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights (Al Arabiya English 2016; National News Agency 2016).¹ Despite the ownership of the farms by Lebanese villagers, UNIFIL had declared the contested area as being in Israeli-occupied Syrian territory, and therefore outside of Lebanon. At the time of writing this article during the first half of 2023, there continued to be major border confrontations and escalations between Lebanese residents and Israel, especially in the area of the Sheb'a farms, which are partially occupied by Israel.²

UNIFIL and Anti-Zionist Resistance

The United Nations Security Council created UNIFIL in 1978, during the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990). Israel invaded south Lebanon in April 1978 with the objective to defeat the Palestinian–Lebanese resistance movement based

¹The Sheb'a Farms have been occupied by Israel since 1981. Hizballah invokes their continued occupation, among other sites, as one of the main factors that legitimizes its use of weapons, by staking the claim that Lebanon's territory continues to be occupied.

²A video that circulated on social media in June 2023, showed a Lebanese farmer being partially buried alive by an Israeli bulldozer. The two UNIFIL men near the farmer are seen to be attempting to talk to the bulldozer operator in vain at first. Once they finally get to stop the bulldozer, the man was half buried under the ground (Shoeb 2023).

there. Furthermore Israel hoped to impede US attempts to foster a wider Arab–Israeli settlement (Reilly 1982; Makdisi 2014; George 2024).³ Following United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 425 and 426 (both of 1978) UNIFIL was placed in south Lebanon as an "interim" force in order to ensure Israeli withdrawal and "restore international peace and security" in the area (UNSC 1978). However, Israeli occupation continued, and UNIFIL's initial temporary mandate became a permanent fixture in Lebanon. UNIFIL's situation was initially reviewed and its mandate renewed every 6 months by the Security Council, in agreement with the Government of Lebanon. Israel finally ended its occupation of south Lebanon in 2000 and its Lebanese proxy militia disintegrated. Increased attacks by local resistance forces that were in then end led by Hizballah made it difficult for Israel to stay in Lebanon. UNIFIL remained in Lebanon since, even after the Israeli occupation ended.

Israel invaded south Lebanon again in 2006 with the aim to substantially weaken or destroy Hizballah, which did not succeed, despite widespread, killing, damage, and displacement (Achcar and Warschawski 2007; Hovsepian 2008). Following the 2006 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, UNIFIL went through a substantive shift, not unlike peacekeeping missions elsewhere.⁴ UNIFIL was expanded from 2,000 soldiers, to a maximum of 15,000 troops under UNSCR 1701. This time largely staffed by European countries Italy, France, and Spain, which were now leading the mission. Additionally, UNIFIL was more heavily armed than previous force. In stark contrast to UNIFIL's initial deployment in 1978, which existed mainly to ensure the withdrawal of Israel's foreign occupying force, UNIFIL's post-2006 force was aimed at delimiting the power of Hizballah, an armed Lebanese Islamic political movement that the UN resolution largely blames for the conflict (Norton 2006). At the same time, Hizballah is a democratically elected, organized, and powerful political party that has thirteen members of parliament, has held numerous ministries in present and past governments, and leads numerous municipalities. It is made up of (predominantly southern) Lebanese themselves. Quite contrary to UNIFIL's mission, the record of parliamentary elections shows a large majority of the south Lebanese population endorses Hizballah. Hizballah's legitimacy is clearly derived from its reputation as a resistance force that liberated south Lebanon from Israeli occupation, defends and deters from continued Israeli incursions, as well as its repute for efficient and reliable local governance.⁵

³Prior to the invasion, in 1976 Israel had set up and supported a proxy militia, the South Lebanese Army (SLA), in order to fight the local Palestinian and Lebanese resistances.

⁴Traditional UN Peacekeeping "observer missions" shifted to include not just observer duties, but peace negotiation and dispute resolution, community development (such as the restoration of infrastructure), and providing humanitarian assistance and aid in postconflict zones (Loftsdóttir and Björnsdóttir 2010, 27). Beginning with the enlarged military deployments of the 1990s, UN Peacekeeping has also more strongly relied on increased militarization and the use of force and was often NATO-led. More "robust" peacekeeping forces were introduced in situations in which an UN-envisioned "peace" might be opposed with military power, which granted peacekeepers a concomitant authorization of the use of force (Goulding in Makdisi et al 2009, 10). The post-Cold war approach to peacekeeping merges military activities with civilian practices of economic, civic, and cultural engagement in an attempt to implement an idealized political order in the former colonial world. Furthermore, following the attacks of 9/11, "Global terrorism," an ill-defined term, became a blanket justification for large-scale military interventions in the Arab world steered by the United States and its allies in the direct aftermath of 9/11 and applied to organizations "as disparate as Hizballah and al-Qaeda" (Makdisi 2011, 7).

⁵In the most recent parliamentary elections in 2022, in UNIFIL's area of operation (electoral districts South 2 and South 3), Hizballah and its allies won more than 85 percent of the vote (Bou Khzam 2022).

While Lebanon is formally a sovereign state, many of its sovereign functions are circumscribed—or even usurped—by UNIFIL, amongst other forces. UN Security Council Resolution 1701, calls for “the extension of the control of the government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory,” the main criterion of which is defined as there being “no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than the Lebanese state” (UNSC 2006). UNIFIL’s mandate is to establish south Lebanon as a zone free of arms other than its own and the Government of Lebanon’s and to strengthen the Lebanese state by replacing Hezbollah’s military dominance of the area with UNIFIL’s forces and the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). Officially, UNIFIL’s mandate, including its enhanced mandate under UNSCR 1701, has been renewed annually at the request of the Government of Lebanon.⁶ Practically, however, Lebanon was very divided about the expansion of UNIFIL’s force.⁷ The interpretation of how active UNIFIL should implement its mandate, in particular with regard to the disarmament of Hezbollah, arguably led to limited, but decisive, violent internal conflict in 2008 (Makdisi 2011). The internal Lebanese confrontation ended with the signing of the Doha accords that were largely in Hezbollah’s favor, which entailed a more passive interpretation toward Hezbollah’s disarmament of UNIFIL’s mandate (Makdisi 2011).

UNIFIL’s mandate, as well as much of the available academic literature depict contestations around the Blue Line as problems internal to the borders of the Lebanese nation-state, state-failure, underdevelopment, and security (Newby 2018). Much of the literature portrays the presence and authority of Hezbollah in south Lebanon as the primary challenge for the boundary demarcation (Hof 2000; Kaufman 2006; Meier 2018, 2015). This article instead emphasizes the social history of politics in the region, whose enduring problem since 1948 has been Israeli settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is a form of colonialism that comprises the colonization of land and people by foreign settlers, who aim to eliminate the native inhabitants of the land and replace them with settlers and their sovereignty (Veracini 2010; Wolfe 1999, 2006). Israel’s aggressive, colonial policies long predate Hezbollah’s formation and popularity—and indeed motivated its foundation. The article places people’s experience of land expropriations, military invasions, occupation, and displacements in conversation with the current border contestations. It shows how south Lebanese understand current European-directed interventions in a historical context of European imperialism in the region (Fagioli and Malito 2024). At the same time it underlines how UNIFIL’s policies and practices are in line with these preceding imperial interventions as they do not problematize Israel’s settler colonial nature.

⁶After 2000 UNIFIL’s mandate was renewed annually.

⁷The residents of south Lebanon, that were directly affected by UNIFIL’s enhanced presence, voiced open concern about UNIFIL’s enhanced post-2006 force. Lebanon had just gotten out of a major conflict with Israel, which affected people in the south immensely. Many lost houses and/or family members. Undetonated cluster bombs that Israel dropped on Lebanon especially in the last days of the war left a serious threat looming in people’s garden and farmland (“Flooding South Lebanon” 2008; Khayat 2022). Residents of south Lebanon were agitated by the heavily armed mission and expansion of UNIFIL’s mandate (Interview with former longterm UNIFIL spokesperson, Beirut, March 2015). In the 34 days of war with Israel, Hezbollah was able to show an unprecedented strength and defiance and largely perceived to have won the war against Israel (“Hezbollah Leader Claims Victory” 2006). Disarming what in the south was perceived the only force that had just stood by and defended people’s interests in the south amidst Israel’s large-scale invasion was unthinkable for many, if not most, people there. Especially in the initial months of UNIFIL’s enhanced mandate, there were many confrontations between UNIFIL and residents and Hezbollah partisans (Makdisi et al. 2009).

South Lebanon: Brief Historical Context

Blida and the Mandate Era

Blida is a Shi’i village with about 9,000–11,000 registered inhabitants, of which about 1,000–2,000 live there year-round.⁸ About half of its registered residents primarily live in Beirut and the remainder resides abroad, mostly in Germany, but also the United States and West Africa, to which people migrated mainly during the 1980s. Blida was first occupied by Israel in 1948, and its inhabitants were displaced temporarily. Even though their houses were destroyed, the people from Blida and some other border villages were lucky, as they were able to return to their village only a year after this initial period of occupation. Blida was subject to Israeli raids, assaults, and infiltration from the 1960s onwards, and was within the Israeli occupied zone of south Lebanon from 1978–2000.

Due to its location that became the border between Palestine and Lebanon in the Mandate era, Blida’s, similar to other Lebanese border villages, recent history is one of repeated occupations, invasions and wars. The villagers’ confrontations with the border first occurred when Britain began to demarcate what became the Lebanese–Palestinian border in 1920. In March 1921, a joint British–French border demarcation committee drew the border in reference to the 1916 Sykes–Picot agreement. This committee placed Blida within British mandate Palestine (Toye 1989c). It remained in Lebanon presumably because large parts of Blida’s fields were on the Lebanese side of the border (see Blanford 2011, 7).⁹

The Mandate system significantly reconfigured the economic space of the region, disconnecting south Lebanon from its role linking Damascus and the Syrian hinterland to the coastal cities and ports of northern Palestine and beyond. This connection was crucial for the economic sustenance of south Lebanon. The 1948 *nakba* and the establishment of Israel finally severed the region’s social and economic relationships with Palestine. The economic activity of today’s Lebanese villages was redirected northwards after this separation, especially due to the destroyed labor and marketing opportunities in Palestine (Beydoun 1992, 35).

Political and military history of this period often omits the social experience of peasants and villagers that made up the vast majority of the area. Oral history interviews I conducted with border villagers show how present this border separation still is in the memories of the inhabitants. Large parts of Blida and neighboring villages’ agricultural land, on which people depended for farming, became part of Mandate Palestine and were later seized by Israel in 1948.

⁸The exact number of inhabitants is difficult to determine, as Lebanon has not conducted any official census of its population since 1932. Furthermore, it is difficult to determine its all-year long residents as many rotate between Beirut and Blida depending on the time of the year. In the summer the number of residents is much higher than the winter for example.

⁹As many of the villages on the fringes of both the French and British Mandates, Blida often changed hands between the two, or were subject to simultaneous and overlapping British and French rule into the 1940s. Over the years, it was often unclear whether they were part of the British or French Mandate. In a correspondence to the Chief of the French delineation mission Paulet, the French general Gouraud attributed Blida, written as Belideh, to the British Mandate of Palestine (see also Blanford 2011, 7). At the same time other very close Shi’a villages such as ‘Aitarun were attributed to the French Mandate of Syria and Lebanon (Toye 1989a, 277). However, the same document also indicates that Gouraud preferred if the Shi’a villages were not separated (Ibid.). In an earlier map from 1920 that was used for the Sykes–Picot agreement, Blida, referred to as Belide, was attributed to the British Mandate. However, a corrected map of 1924 shows Blida (again referred to as Belide) within the French Mandate (Toye 1989b, Map 10 and Map 15).

Residents of this area often felt helpless in their complaints to Mandate and Lebanese authorities, when trying to prevent the occupation of the land they owned (Interview with Firas Mustafa, south Lebanon, September 2019; Interview with Hussein Ahmad, south Lebanon, August 2019).¹⁰ Blida and other nearby villages were already occupied for the first time by Israel in 1948 and the inhabitants expelled for nearly a year. Villagers from Blida were lucky in this respect, as they were able to return to their village several months after this expulsion, following the armistice agreement signed between Israel and Lebanon (Hughes 2007, 219). Several villages within walking distance from Blida that fell within Israel's borders were not so fortunate and the population of the neighboring Palestinian villages did not return after this war, in which they were forced out. However, large parts of Blida's and neighboring villages farmland were conquered by Israel and not returned (Hutayt 2004). According to a former Brigadier General of the LAF, Blida and neighboring border villages claim to have lost to up to 80 percent of their farmland, about 10 km south into what is today Israel (Interview with former Brigadier General of the LAF, Beirut, June 2015; Hutayt 2004).

Israeli Invasion and Occupation

Israeli soldiers first took up positions within Lebanon as early as 1970 (George 2019). After the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war (1975–1990), Israel armed and trained the predominantly Christian militias of the right-wing Lebanese Front. Israel launched its first major invasion in 1978, inaugurating its continuous occupation up to the Litani River. Israel invaded again in 1982, occupying about half of the country reaching up to Beirut, laying siege to the capital in the summer of 1982. Israel is estimated to have killed more than 19,000 people “during the ten weeks of fighting from early June through mid-August, 1982” alone (Khalidi 2020, 226).¹¹ It continued to hold these advanced positions until 1985, when it retreated back to the 1978 lines in the face of widespread resistance. The population of south Lebanon, which is what is largely now also UNIFIL's area of operations, lived under a hostile foreign military occupation for at least 22 years. Hizballah emerged in the mid-1980s to resist this occupation, while advancing a Shi'i Islamic revolutionary ideology inspired by Iran (Daher 2019; Saouli 2019).

UNIFIL's Blue Line Demarcation

UNIFIL's “Blue Line” is a temporary working concept for a prospective, official border between Israel and Lebanon recognized by both parties. At several places, including Blida, the Blue Line has never been fully delineated or enforced. UNIFIL began to draw it upon Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon in late May 2000. At this time, the UN sent a special envoy to Lebanon in order to confirm Israel's withdrawal. In June 2000, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan confirmed the Israeli withdrawal “in full compliance with Security Council resolution 425”, upon the investigation of the commission and Lebanon's approval of the temporary line, with a few exceptions (UN 2000). Despite Annan's clear indication this was a temporary solution, Israel uses Annan's statement to justify its continuous occupation of the Sheb'a

Farms and half of the village of Ghajar, arguing that the full withdrawal of Israeli troops was accomplished in 2000 and certified by the UN.

The Blue Line serves to define the de facto borderline between Israel and Lebanon that had not been marked yet. For the Blue Line demarcation, the UN relied first on the colonial boundary descriptions of Newcombe and Paulet; until the Lebanese were able to provide a French language version of the 1950 Israel–Lebanon Mixed Armistice Commission (ILMAC) report that produced a series of maps and coordinates following the 1948 war (Blanford 2011, 3).¹² The original version of this report coordinates, vanished when Israeli troops occupied the building of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization building in Jerusalem in 1967. Additionally, the UN relied on a 1974 map, which marked the area of operations of UNDOF, the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force in the Golan. The Blue Line today is based on mostly on the accessible data from the French version of the ILMAC commission coordinates and the British–French border agreement of 1920–1923 (Blanford 2011, 2–3). UNIFIL conceives of the Blue Line as a temporary solution that could demarcate the border between Israel and Lebanon in the absence of a peace agreement between the two states (Head of Civil Affairs, Meeting, Beirut, June 2015).

The absence of an official border with Lebanon is not an isolated problem for Israel. While Egypt and Jordan have both recognized the State of Israel, signed peace agreements with it, and declared their mutual borders, Israel's considerable frontiers with Lebanon, Syria, and the Occupied Palestinian Territories have yet to be fixed. Israel illegally occupies the West Bank, Gaza, the Golan Heights, and small areas of Lebanon, including the Sheb'a Farms and Ghajar. In practice, marking even a temporary border between Lebanon and Israel has proven to be a very sensitive process, as there are many discrepancies on the exact coordinates.

In addition to demarcating and defining the Blue Line, since 2006 UNIFIL has done substantial work to demine the border area. Israel dropped an estimated 4 million cluster munitions on south Lebanese territory in the 33-day 2006 war (“Flooding South Lebanon” 2008). Most of them were fired in the last 3 days of the war, which Human Rights Watch found to be “indiscriminate and disproportionate, in violation of [International Humanitarian Law], and in some locations possibly a war crime” (“Flooding South Lebanon” 2008). UNIFIL's demining efforts have been and still are largely welcomed by villagers and municipalities, considering that these hidden bombs caused many injuries and deaths in the years after the war, and that much of this territory is essential for their agricultural production.

In the past UNIFIL also attempted to create awareness and physically enforce the Blue Line. Over some years UNIFIL provided lessons to children throughout south Lebanon about its significance. According to UNIFIL, the key message that they want to convey to the children is that the Blue Line is not the official border between Lebanon and Israel; that the Israeli's so-called “technical fence” is not the border; but that if they see a “Blue Barrel,” a marker that is put up after the Blue Line coordinate has been approved by UNIFIL, Lebanon and Israel, they are not allowed to

¹²The coordinates of the last survey of the border from 1949 to 1950 that was undertaken by the Israel–Lebanon Mixed Armistice Commission (ILMAC) vanished when Israeli troops occupied the UNTSO building in Jerusalem in 1967 (Blanford 2011, 2–3). The majority of the coordinates today are based on a French version of these coordinates that the Lebanese provided from which more concrete coordinates of the border were revived (Ibid.).

¹⁰I have changed the names of my interlocutors.

¹¹Khalidi refers to official statistics of the general Lebanese Security Services. “More than nineteen thousand Palestinians and Lebanese, mostly civilians, were killed, and more than thirty thousand wounded.”

cross it (UNIFIL 2012). “Mr. Blue Barrel,” a comic version of an actual Blue Line marker, is brought along to better visualize the demarcation for the children. However, UNIFIL’s access to local schools is not welcomed throughout south Lebanon. In Blida and its nearby town of Bint Jbeil, authorities have stood against UNIFIL entering schools and giving lessons to school children, whether these entailed lessons about the Blue Line or the provision of French, Italian, and Spanish language classes (Field Notes Blida and Bint Jbeil September and December 2014). The contest about who is allowed to enter local schools and provide lessons is a further indicator of the power play between UNIFIL and the local authorities.

While UNIFIL continues to emphasize the nonofficial nature of the Blue Line, in practice it devotes a lot of significance to its existence and authority. UNIFIL uses the Blue Line as an official marker to record any border violations it observes. UNIFIL further attempts to control and prevent these violations, and attempts to inform the Lebanese public, as well as educate future generations about the role and location of the Blue Line. UNIFIL views the Blue Line as a potential first draft of a finalized borderline and potential peace treaty between Lebanon and Israel.

Blue Line Confrontations in South Lebanon

The Blue Line is still unfinished, disputed, and at places, such as in Blida, highly contested. As opposed to UNIFIL’s view, many border villagers in Lebanon regard the Blue Line as yet another effort in a series of Western attempts to control their land, dating back to the fall of the Ottoman Empire and competing British, French, and Zionist claims over Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. This connection to a previous occurrence in history, shows “the multiple temporalities in which people live,” and links people’s history directly to the present (Stoler in Malito and Fagioli 2024). Due to its location at the border, Blida is a militarily strategic town. It is one of the key villages of concern for UNIFIL as its relations with the south Lebanese residents leaves much to be desired. Many of the villagers I talked to were very suspicious of UNIFIL’s ambitions. In May 2014, a set of confrontations took place between members of the municipality, villagers, and UNIFIL. The Blue Line demarcation has repeatedly caused conflict between UNIFIL and the people of Blida because it cuts through their agricultural farmland, mainly olive groves and a historic well. Blida is notable because it is a site of multiple contestations, stemming from the fact that it is one of the few villages to be bordered by Israel on two sides. The confrontations took place when the municipality of Blida, attempted to clean and restore the old well, *Bir Nabi Shu’ayb* (the Well of the Prophet Shu’ayb), on the outskirts of the village during a summer that experienced a heavy drought due to sparse rainfall that winter. According to an old legend propagated by villagers, from which also the name of the village originates, Moses gave water to the flock of Shu’ayb in Blida’s well, in the village near Jerusalem. This legend further serves to show the historic and symbolic importance of the well for the villagers. When the municipality of Blida began to renovate the well in 2014, UNIFIL ordered it to stop. UNIFIL declared parts of the underground cistern outside of Lebanese territory, thus deeming the well inaccessible *in toto* to the villagers. Due to the heightened regional tensions stemming from the Syrian civil war, the municipality of Blida initially ceased its restoration project (Interview with Deputy Mayor of Blida, Beirut, August 2014). However, in December 2016, after the position of Hizballah and its allies in Syria had solidified, the mu-

nicipality restored the well regardless of UNIFIL’s protests. In photos and a video shared on the Blida municipality’s Facebook page, the restoration was celebrated as a great victory against the “Israeli enemy” who tried to capture more of Blida’s land (“*Min Amam A’iyyin al-‘Adū al-Isrā’īlī*” 2016). The pictures were shared widely throughout south Lebanon by individuals on WhatsApp, Facebook, and the official webpages of several municipalities.

Even if UNIFIL emphasizes the Blue Line to be an unofficial demarcation line it uses the Blue Line as a base to report any violations across it once it has been demarcated. Once finalized, the Blue Line will make the currently contested territory inaccessible to the people of Blida. Blida constitutes one of the sites of the Lebanese government’s thirteen reservations to the Blue Line (Meier 2013; Interview with former Brigadier General of the LAF, Beirut, June 2015). Since the borderland in Blida is important agricultural farmland where the villagers maintain their fields of tobacco and olives, as well as herd sheep and cattle, villagers have frequently been at risk to be attacked or abducted by Israel. Despite the demarcation, Israel violates Lebanese space by air, sea, and land almost daily. Israel justifies its daily violations of the Blue Line by pointing to the presence of Hizballah “terrorists” in the area.¹³

The next section provides several examples of how the contestations to UNIFIL’s Blue Line play out in practice. Combined, they show a different scale and understanding of peace in the region, one that does not resemble UNIFIL’s. As we have seen, UNIFIL proposes a technical solution to the border demarcation that is not accepted by many of the affected villagers. These ethnographic accounts show a different reading of the situation, and underline how and why the border demarcation is viewed, and rejected by the affected population. The people are keen on defending their rights to the land, a position they were not always able to maintain. In the past they were often forced to give up their land they cultivate, their rights, and even their physical presence and existence.

Israel’s Abduction of the Ismail Brothers and the Perception of UNIFIL’s Role in Blida

For example, a few months ago, Israelis kidnapped two civilians from this village. UNIFIL didn’t interfere. Where were you, we asked? So, we claim our rights concerning the crimes of the Israelis, the violations of the air space, so that they forbid the [Israeli] violations on Lebanon. (Interview with former Mayor of Blida, Blida, May 2009).

One of the most prominent incidents in Blida since the 2006 war was Israel’s abduction of the Ismail brothers. In December 2008, the brothers were ambushed and abducted from their olive groves along the Blue Line, which are another area of Blida’s reservations to the demarcation. I interviewed both brothers on two different occasions. They were both attacked by Israeli army dogs while they were working in their olive groves. They were held and questioned in Israel and released the following day (Interviews with Ismail brothers, Blida, August 2014; Now

¹³For almost daily Israeli violations of Lebanese space by air, land, and sea, see UN Security Council Reports on the Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701. For example, the “Seventeenth Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1701” (UNSC 2011, 3) reports: “The Israeli Defense Forces continued to make almost daily intrusions into Lebanese airspace, mainly by unmanned aerial vehicles, but also by fighter jets.”

Lebanon 2008). UNIFIL tried to mitigate the situation and was involved in negotiating their release. Israel claimed the brothers were on the Israeli side of the border, while the brothers insisted it was their land, which lies in Lebanese territory, a claim which was supported by Lebanese officials.

When talking to Muhammad Ismail, he told me that despite his imprisonment by the Israeli Army he regularly walks along the border and the well "just to demonstrate to them [Israelis] that it is not their land" (Muhammad Ismail, Interview, Blida, August 2014). When he told me about the municipality's attempts to clean out the well, he underlined that the village needed the water because of a recent drought. He was disappointed by UNIFIL's reaction to the incidents at the border, and he got emotional when he was talking about his experience about life in the border region.

I told the peacekeepers that they always take [the Israeli] position and don't even listen to ours. I told them straight away, 'we don't want you here, if you are eager to protect them, go to their side of the border, what are you doing here? Why is the mission just established on this side of the border? This is an occupation if you do not let us do what we want within our borders' (Muhammad Ismail, Interview, Blida, August 2014).

For him, the proper answer to his attack and capture, was not to acknowledge the Blue Line, but to resist it. He regarded UNIFIL's attempts to demarcate the Blue Line as a pro-Israeli position and a part of continuous Western attempts to occupy Blida's land. When I interviewed him in August 2014, he had gone to three protests with other villagers to the well. He continued to be actively involved in the fate of the well, actively resisting UNIFIL's attempts to declare parts of it to Israeli territory.

His brother, Ali Ismail, shared a similar position when I talked about his capture with him in a more recent interview, in July 2019:

A UNIFIL soldier pointed out the Blue Line to me, to which I replied: 'you and your green, blue, red, purple line! This is all Lebanon to me! We do not want you to serve here. And we don't like you.' [...] I told him [face to face], 'if you want to protect Israel, go serve in Israel. Israel is an occupying state.' The UNIFIL soldier replied, 'why is this my fault?' I told him: 'you see with one eye only, you do not see with both eyes. What do we have here, when I reach this land, you only come after me, why? I don't want you and I don't want you to step on my land, and neither do I want you to approach me' (Ali Ismail, Interview, Blida, July 2019).

When he speaks of the multiple colors of demarcation lines, Ali Ismail is not just making light of UNIFIL's project. He is comparing the Blue Line to previous ceasefire lines between Arab states and Israel. The "green line" demarcated the 1949 Armistice Agreements between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. The "purple line" was the ceasefire line between Israel and Syria after the 6-Day War. Ali Ismail is, therefore underlining his unease by linking the Blue Line directly to previous border disputes and interventions—all of which enlarged the territory controlled by Israel considerably beyond the area allotted to it in the 1947 UN General Assembly resolution that partitioned mandate Palestine in the first place.

Protest at the Blue Line in Blida

When I inquired about the protests that were taking place at the well in Blida, villagers showed me several mobile phone videos filmed by the men attending one of the larger demonstrations, which took place in May 2014. The residents did not accept UNIFIL's designation of the well as being outside of Lebanese territory and gathered by the well to protest the international border demarcation. Videos and photos of dancing and chanting protestors circulated in the village among friends and family. Several media outlets of municipalities throughout south Lebanon covered the protest. A long video was posted on the popular news site, *BintJbeil.org*. The video covered the protest in detail, along with photos. Some of the photos taken show armed Israeli soldiers standing nearby. I am going to briefly describe the protest through the video of it and interviews I have conducted with villagers who attended it, who I also visited the well with on different occasions.

The protest showed four generations of male residents of Blida, ranging in age from one to seventy, who came together on a Sunday afternoon in early May 2014 at Bir Nabi Shu'ayb to protest UNIFIL's Blue Line demarcation. The protestors occupied the space they regarded as theirs "from the generations of [their] forefathers" (Ali Ismail, Interview, Blida, August 2014). Among the protestors were the mayor and employees of the municipality. The two oldest men present were the Muhammad and Ali Ismail. They sat together on plastic chairs and drank tea prepared on a small gas burner, while also enjoying sodas, ice cream, and *arguileh* (water pipe). The protest could rather be described as a festivity. As one group of villagers played the *buzuq* (long-necked fretted lute), *dirbakki* (hand drum), and the *nay* (flute), whose music blared over portable amplified speakers, another group danced the *dabke* (Arab folk dance) to the lively music, chanting:

The sun has set as the cold rises
We do not accept the Jewish rule
Our Resistance, hand down to us the rifles!
So we can combat together the Zionist rule! ("Bil-Fidiu wa-l-Sura" 2014)

I learned from some participants that the protest continued for several hours. At some point everyone joined in the *dabke*, including the mayor and the Ismail brothers. Their engagement in these celebratory, everyday activities was intended to send a clear message, as the mayor of Blida told *Bint Jbeil's* major news outlet: "Let the Israelis shoot us, but we are not going anywhere" ("*Bil-Fidiu wa-l-Sura*" 2014).

Photos and videos of the event reveal the protest's various spectators: to the south, four Israeli soldiers sat in camouflage, carefully observing the crowd with binoculars, occasionally raising a middle finger; to the east, the LAF, who could not halt the men from proceeding to the area, and who monitored the situation alert to a potential confrontation with the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF); and the UNIFIL soldiers that were standing immediately north of the protestors along the Blue Line, who were also incapable of stopping the men from accessing the well area.

Visit to the Well

In September 2014, Ali Ismail and a male member of Blida's municipality accompanied me on a visit to the border. Both did not pay any attention to the warnings of UNIFIL

soldiers and soldiers of the LAF that were posted along the Blue Line. When we reached the well the villagers walked around it freely without hesitation, even though they were previously warned by the LAF not to do so. A UN peacekeeper stationed at the site was holding a UN flag, marking the location of the Blue Line. Since the Lebanese government contested UNIFIL's claim of the well, there was no blue barrel nearby. Technically, the villagers and I crossed the Blue Line several times just walking around the well. The villagers did not abide by the Blue Line nor were they intimidated by UNIFIL or the LAF. According to village stories, the well provided one of the main water supplies for this and nearby villages in the past. There are many anecdotes and stories that people often recount about the well, which firmly indicates its social and historical meaning to the village. The villagers also claimed that Israel dried up the well in the past. At the same time, the villagers claim their right to this land today, that they were not willing to give up easily. The residents of Blida linked the current conflict about the Blue Line to past Israeli attempts to occupy territory and secure its access to water resources.

During this trip, I asked Ali Ismail about his abduction. Unable to respond immediately, he swallowed and took a break. Then he looked at me and said: "Do you know a chicken, when they pull out his feathers?" After a short pause he continued, "they plucked me like a chicken" (Field notes Blida September 2014). He raised his pant leg to show me the large wound in his leg from the dogs that the Israeli army released on them. "I have a second even bigger wound in my stomach," he said. "This is how they picked me." Despite this violent attack, neither of the Ismail brothers are intimidated, as they repeatedly told to me they continue to work this land and harvest its fruit.

When I asked if he had avoided going to his olive fields since his abduction in 2008, he replied "my olive groves had never been better kept in my life" (Ali Ismail, field notes Blida, September 2014). On another occasion, his brother, Muhammad Ismail, told me that he walked by the Blue Line every day and was not afraid of being captured again.

UNIFIL's Conflict Resolution and Prevention Attempts

In 2009, UNIFIL attempted to solve this border issue in several ways. It fenced in the olive fields in question so they are only accessible to their owners and only during harvest season. Second, in order to keep people away from the Blue Line, and as a reaction to the protests by the well, UNIFIL funded several of their so-called "Quick-Impact-Projects" (QIPs) related to water infrastructure in Blida. QIPs are short-term, low-cost (usually cost maximum of \$25,000 US), and rapidly implementable development projects (Kassem 2016). This attempt to improve the water services of the village, coming as it did following the dispute over the well, was clearly intended to reduce or eliminate the need for the villagers to access the well, and to demonstrate UNIFIL's benevolent intentions in the area. The most significant project was funded in Blida in the spring of 2013, 1 year prior to the demonstration I observed. A substantial donation of a 400-cubic meter water storage tank was made by UNIFIL's Spanish and Italian contingents to the municipality of Blida, costing approximately US \$90,000. With QIPs usually costing a maximum of \$25,000, this project constituted a substantial initiative (UNIFIL 2013). UNIFIL funded the water storage tank to replace the need to access the Shu'ayb well (Meeting with the Head of Civil Affairs, Beirut, June 2015; Deputy Head of Civil Affairs, Naqoura, December 2014).

The inauguration of the water storage tank in April 2013 was an important spectacle that even UNIFIL's force commander attended. The attendance of the force commander is a rare event. In all the inaugurations I attended throughout the years and observed through the media, I have never seen the force commander in attendance. The attendance of UNIFIL's highest authority indicates the importance given to the issue in Blida. In addition to the force commander, other officials present included the commanders of both UNIFIL Sector East and West, the commander of the LAF responsible for the area south of the Litani (UNIFIL's area of operations), and the *qaimaqam* of Marjayoun. A major article about the inauguration was featured on UNIFIL's website. Photos displayed the force commander standing next to the mayor of Blida while cutting the ribbon for the inauguration—hand in hand.

Positions and Reaction to the Blue Line Demarcation in Blida

While Blida's municipality has generally welcomed UNIFIL's QIPs, the municipality as well as Blida's population have refused to cooperate on several political questions. UNIFIL's Blue Line demarcation as well as the free movement of UN peacekeepers in Blida's village center are central to UNIFIL's operations but firmly rejected in Blida. Independent of its practical use, the people in Blida claim their rights to the annexed borderland, which for them constitutes yet another attempted appropriation of their land, which began with the British–French demarcation of the border in 1923. The elders of the village have a vivid memory of when the British came to draw the borderline in Blida. According to stories I collected in Blida, a group of village men went to the British in order to protest the confiscation of their land. Following the village elders, the British required an official and documented deed, which the villagers were unable to provide. As they lacked what the British colonial authorities considered to be 'proper documentation,' the British took the land from them. Other neighboring villages were apparently more successful in maintaining their land rights during this time as they were able to provide written proof of ownership to the British (Interview with Former Brigadier General of the LAF, Beirut, June 2015; Hutayt 2004).

The unwillingness to cooperate with the UNIFIL troops frustrates the peacekeepers. The position of the Civil Affairs department was that the villagers should have no reason to protest the annexation of the well, because the well was dry and UNIFIL had considerably improved the water situation in Blida through their development projects (Meeting with Head of Civil Affairs, Beirut, June 2015; Conversation with the Deputy Head of Civil Affairs, Naqoura, December 2014). "This shows you that it is not just about water for them," the deputy head of Civil Affairs told me, "because if it was they would have stopped after we funded the project there" (Conversation with the Deputy Head of Civil Affairs, Naqoura, December 2014).

UNIFIL's conflict resolution approach following the liberal peace paradigms emphasizes underdevelopment as the cause of conflict. In accordance with liberal peace theory, QIPs should lead to stability, development, and popular support for the intervening mission (Chandler et al. 2011; Chandler 2004). On the contrary, as we can see through the examples I provided from Blida, the QIPs do not necessarily lead the population to support the political goals of the mission, and they do not in themselves provide sufficient

leverage to compel either the local authorities or population into cooperation. UNIFIL does not even have enough authority in Blida to define what needs to be developed, moreover it operates under the auspices of the municipality and their vision of development and modernization.

UNIFIL focuses its conflict resolution paradigms on internal solutions within the boundaries of the Lebanese nation state, whereas the root of the problems lie elsewhere. UNIFIL's generic technical approach of providing aid does not pay attention to the specific history of the region and the people it is interacting with. The conflict along the Israeli-Lebanese border and the definition of the Israeli-Lebanese border remains unsettled. Instead, this article places the conflict around the border in its specific local and historical context. My ethnographic research contributes another perspective and multiscale analysis of the border confrontation. It provides a different perception of peace and development in the region, that is not in line with UNIFIL's.

Israeli Settler Colonialism

The reasons for the villagers' continuous conflict with UNIFIL around the border, are not due to UNIFIL's presence alone, or for reasons such as economic underdevelopment that UNIFIL brings forward, but for everything that UNIFIL represents to the people inhabiting this borderland. The presence of European militaries in the region and their attempts to police and enforce borders is nothing new to southern Lebanese. Border villagers here have experienced French, British, and Israeli military rule and are very wary of European intervention in the present. For the generations that experienced colonial rule and were directly affected by the demarcation of the French and British Mandates and the subsequent colonization of Palestine, as well as through the oral histories that were passed on to future generations, UNIFIL's efforts in Lebanon leave a bitter aftertaste. I collected oral histories of people's land being lost following the demarcation of the French and British Mandates and the economic hardships that followed after the creation of a militarized border where there previously was none. My interlocutors also reflected on their helplessness and vulnerability and the abandonment they felt from the Lebanese state. In my interviews, current and former south Lebanese border residents also explicitly contrast their previous feelings of helplessness to their more powerful and secure position today. In this context, many also put forward for their support and pride of "their resistance" or support for Hizballah today, emphasizing how villagers had to take matters into their own hands. In their interviews with me, people from south Lebanese border villages view UNIFIL's current border demarcation in a context of continuous appropriation of their land. Many people I interviewed throughout villages in south Lebanon, explain their protests of UNIFIL's border demarcation to moments in the past where they did not protest and as a result lost much of their land. UNIFIL's current interventions are seen as yet another appropriation of people's land that they encountered especially after the demarcation of the French and British Mandates. This was later reinforced through the Zionist colonization of Palestine, which also took large parts of border villagers' farmland and economic opportunities from working in Palestine and changed people's life immensely. In order to understand current border contestations in south Lebanon, it is important to view them in a context of settler colonialism. UNIFIL is not just implementing an impartial borderline as it likes to view it. Seen from a villager's position, as was recounted to me in several interviews, all around

the contested borderline are vivid examples of previous land appropriations. Entire (Palestinian) neighboring villages, that used to be in walking proximity, were destroyed, renamed, and replaced by Israeli settlers; farming land that used to be planted by villagers was replaced with Israeli military bases; and neighbors' houses were destroyed and replaced with large fruit plantations (Interview with Ahmad Ali, Blida, September 2019; Interview with Khodor Salameh, Blida, 2019; Interview with Firas Mustafa, Aitarun, September 2019).

Salamanca, Qato, Rabie, and Samour (2013) argue that it is imperative to include the analytical framework of comparative settler colonialism in the field of Palestine Studies, in order to move away from frameworks that underline the alleged exceptionalism of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Such exceptionalism tends to justify Israeli colonial practices. Contextualizing Israel with comparable settler colonial formations elsewhere (such as South Africa, the United States, and Australia) directly opposes hegemonic Zionist self-representations that seek flattering comparisons of Israel to European democracies (Ibid., 4). The ongoing struggle of Palestinians for self-determination and return, as well as Israel's continuous expansion, makes understanding this history all the more urgent. Israeli historian Ilan Pappé (2013) underlines that what distinguishes Zionist settler colonialism from is that Israel continues to expand and is an ongoing rather than finalized process. Wolfe (2012) emphasizes how the World Zionist Organization established the Jewish National Fund in 1901 for the purpose of attaining exclusively Jewish Zionist ownership of land in Palestine.

One thing the literature on settler colonialism in Palestine does not typically do is examine Zionist colonialism outside of the British mandate's borders. But it is crucial to view south Lebanon's past and present in the context of Israeli settler colonialism. This allows to continue to connect the case of the Palestinians to the experience of the southern Lebanese, from the separation into British and French Mandates, followed by the experience of the Nakba, and beyond. While there is not much written about life in these border villages at the time, it is clear that the establishment of Israel in 1948 disrupted social, economic as well as trade relationships that existed with Palestine. The economic activity of today's Lebanese villages turned north after this separation, especially due to the destroyed labor and marketing opportunities in Palestine (Beydoun 1992, 35).

Whose "Rules Rule?"¹⁴

The Blue Line demarcation process reveals the complexity of the situation and the different forces that are competing for influence in this border zone: UNIFIL, Israel, Hizballah, the residents of south Lebanon, and the government of Lebanon. Through my ethnographic analysis of this border conflict the "multiple, coexisting, and juxtaposing realities" of contemporary forms of interventions become apparent (Fagioli and Malito 2024). Instead of strengthening the authority of the Lebanese government, as its mandate implores, UNIFIL's Blue Line, similar to its other practices, creates yet another authority in south Lebanon that people are required to abide by and be accountable to—without providing mechanisms of accountability in return. But unlike Hizballah, which enjoys the support of a large portion of the south Lebanese population and is made up from within

¹⁴See Reeves (2014). *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

the population itself, UNIFIL's project for authority in south Lebanon is largely rejected. Opposite to what it claims, it weakens the Lebanese state by taking over the sovereign functions a state typically performs.

Following Reeves' approach of "how the border comes to materialize," this article shows the border "as lively, and as constantly (re)producing itself through social and political production of space" (Reeves 2014, 54). Reeves criticizes the work of development organizations in rural central Asian border regions. Anthropological literature on development, such as James Ferguson's influential study (1994) have previously emphasized how development institutions have enforced a bureaucratic discourse over developing countries that legitimizes their intervention. Reeves argues that in addition to the bureaucratic entrenchment of development work on subject populations that Ferguson's work proposes, there is also a spatial one. My work shows that UNIFIL's claims over spatiality, while partially successful, such as when it managed to build a gate around the olive groves, can only be enforced in ways the residents of south Lebanon and municipality approve of. This in turn emphasizes the people's and Hizballah's authority over the border, and directly contradicts with UNIFIL's own presentation as major force responsible for the absence of hostilities in south Lebanon. UNIFIL's authority is further jeopardized through Israel's constant border violations. UNIFIL's conflict resolution tools appear inept in the political reality of the border area.

The legality of the Blue Line is ambiguous. While UNIFIL repeatedly emphasizes that the Blue Line is unofficial and not final, at the same time it uses it as only legal basis of a border to report violations (Meeting with Head of Civil Affairs, Beirut, June 2015). Ideally, the Blue Line lays the groundwork for a border agreement to be concluded in a future peace treaty (Interviews with Senior Political Affairs Officer April 2009, Naqoura, and September 2010, Beirut, and UNIFIL's Head of Public Relations, Beirut, March 2015). Israel also already attempted to create new border coordinates for the Blue Line that would replace original coordinates that refer to the 1920 border demarcations and 1949 armistice lines. However, the Lebanese government opposed changing these the border coordinates and the case was dropped (Meeting with Senior Political Affairs Officer, Tyre, June 2015; Interview with Retired LAF General, Beirut, May 2015).

Conclusion

Through the Blue Line, UNIFIL attempts to create a buffer zone that would reflect its influence and impact on the region. At the same time this demarcation and UNIFIL's authority over it is sharply rejected by the population. UNIFIL hoped to purchase the villagers' consent to concede Blida's historic well by increasing funding for development projects. Instead, the villagers accepted the projects while continuing to refuse the losses imposed by the proposed Blue Line demarcation. UNIFIL's present intervention is perceived as alien usurpation of land and political rights that began with British–French border demarcations in the mandate era, and continued with the *nakba* imposed by the 1948 establishment of the State of Israel, its 1967 conquest of Syrian, Egyptian, and Palestinian land, its multiple attempts to dominate Lebanon's national politics, and its ongoing colonization of Palestine. The villagers perceive that UNIFIL's mandate serves Israeli interests against their own. They do not entrust UNIFIL with the authority to demarcate the village's—and by extension Lebanon's—borders. It

is primarily this local consensus, which extends far beyond membership in any political party, that prevents UNIFIL from carrying out its mandate.

To understand interventions beyond interventionist frameworks, they need to be analyzed as (inter)actions within specific contexts, histories, and the experiences of the populations in countries of intervention. This article combines ethnography and oral history to grasp these multiple and historically interrelated perspectives. I focus on the everyday interactions of peacekeeping to understand how globally designed peacekeeping missions play out on the ground and how they interact with competing perspectives and different political forces present in the field. Carefully analyzing how Western-led peacekeeping policies are implemented in an environment in which other political and social forces are present, is a central aspect to understanding the nature of interventions (Li 2019).

UNIFIL's presence and peace in southern Lebanon cannot be viewed outside the context of settler colonialism and the ongoing colonization of Palestine. This article underlines the reasons behind border contestations from below, without romanticizing the positions of native communities. UNIFIL's mandate conceives of peace in Lebanon within its national borders and presents Hizballah as a force unwilling to commit to peace in the region. This article instead aims to foreground how villagers perceive and experience international peacekeeping and Israeli military interventions. It highlights the conflictual spatio-temporal events and settler-colonial violence that the demarcation of the borders in this region entailed.

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