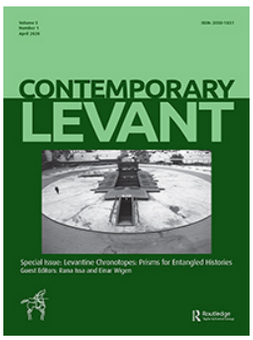

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Involuntary history: writing Levantines into the nation

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ABSTRACT
This article looks at drug trafficking, trade, and pilgrimage between Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine during the mandate period, arguing that a Levantine geography continued both as lived experience and conceived space even after the introduction of borders post-WWI. Drawing on the work of Patrick Hutton, it argues that Levantine geography can only be understood by reformulating the relationship between history and memory and bringing in the lived experience of Levantines into the writing of history.

KEYWORDS
Syria; Lebanon; Palestine; memory; Levant; trade; pilgrimage; mandate period

During a conversation with a man from Suwayda in the spring of 2013, I mentioned Adham Khanjar, one of the rebel/bandit figures who populated Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine under French and British mandate rule in the interwar period. In 1921, after a failed attempt on the life of the commander of the French Army of the Levant, Khanjar, who was from south Lebanon, sought refuge in Syria at the home of Sultan al-Atrash, scion of a Druze family that nominally ruled Suwayda in the Hawran region south of Damascus. No sooner had I broughth up the story than the man from Suwayda uncharacteristically interrupted me, excusing himself by saying, 'I know – I'm from there'. He proceeded to tell me how French forces raided the Suwayda home while al-Atrash was on a hunting trip, arresting Khanjar and executing him later that same year. The arrest of a man under his protection was a breach of customary law that put al-Atrash's prestige and honour at stake. Al-Atrash took offence and, the man from Suwayda continued, this was the spark that launched the Great Syrian Revolt that shook Syria and parts of Lebanon in 1925–27, ending with brutal repression and the bombardment of Damascus and Hama by French aeroplanes.

Although the immediate link between the arrest of Khanjar and the 1925 Revolt resonates with local histories of south Lebanon, where Khanjar hailed from, the story is not considered a catalyst for revolt in the canons of academic history. According to scholars of the mandate period, the main reasons behind the revolt range from the intrusive policies of the French in the quasi-feudal Hawran combined with the dire post-war economic situation, to urban elite politics and their navigation of the new territory of mandate rule (Miller 1977, Khoury 1987).[1] Although the two narrative logics do not contradict one another, there is a tension between them: while honour and insult remain anecdotal in the socioeconomic and political explanation of the events that led to the Great Revolt, these emotions constitute the motor force of history as told by the man from Suwayda and in similar local histories. The 'I know – I'm from there' statement trumped academic expertise and produced locality as the site of historical truth. Proximity to a flow of history repeated and handed down through generations in the geographical area in question delineated an area of knowledge that no outside expertise could hope to appropriate or replicate.

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The drama involving Khanjar, al-Atrash, and the French mandate takes the history of an era where mandate 'divide and rule' policies prevailed and highlights not only connections between Syria and Lebanon, but more specifically between the Hawran and south Lebanon. It takes regions outside the centre of rule and makes the dynamics between them pivotal to the movement of historical time. That Khanjar was a Shiite from Jabal `Amil and al-Atrash a Druze from the Hawran region ties the history of these two regions in a way that goes beyond the emergence of states and the drawing of borders after World War I. Even more importantly, it offers up a narrative of the mandate period that cuts across the sectarian politics that constituted an inherent part of how mandatory powers conceived of and organised governance.

At a time when international boundaries were introducing new political realities in the states of the Levant, older geographies continued to make their presence known, even when reformulated in the presence of borders and states. Yet, these histories remain subservient to state history. At the same time, collective memory continues to hand down stories and images of a Levantine geography straddling present-day borders. The presence of borders notwithstanding, experience of the mandate period, paradoxically, served to reinforce this geography. An awareness of a Levantine space continued both as lived experience and conceived space through movements of people and goods in trade, smuggling, drug trafficking, and pilgrimage, among other things. For citizens who suddenly found themselves at the edges of states, these activities continued to stress the immediate region as a central locality of identification. Writing Levantines into the history of the state includes tracing how, in the interwar period, movement and mobility continued to inscribe a time and place that went beyond that of the state framework. Borrowing from Marcel Proust's concept of involuntary memory, I use the term 'involuntary history' in this context to refer to a history that regularly resurfaces despite the disruptions that borders have caused in the region during the twentieth century – a history that remains evoked today by acts of collective memory.

A Levantine chronotope between history and memory

The tension between the popular story about Khanjar and al-Atrash and the interpretative socioeconomic analysis in academic histories of the same period can be understood on one level as a tension between history and memory. Patrick Hutton (1993) argues that contrary to nineteenth-century historians, the trend of modern historians has been to move away from relying on the authority of received tradition. With the diminishing authority of the past, the past itself becomes open to dissection and analysis, with the result that historians today often focus on a study of the past itself, how it is used and represented, rather than experienced. As Hutton illustrates, such an understanding of history not only assumes a dichotomous relationship between history and memory, but also a suspicion of what memory has to contribute to historiography, as seen in the works of Maurice Halbwachs and later scholars who draw on them.

In reconciling the two aspects of writing the past, Hutton sees memory as consisting of two moments: repetition and recollection. Repetition involves the unreflective ways with which we bring forward past images that shape our present understanding. As Hutton puts it, 'They are the stuff of the collective memories that we associate with tradition' (1993, p. xxi). Recollection, on the other hand, involves conscious efforts to evoke the past and our selective use of it for our present purposes. What Hutton proposes is a move away from the dichotomous relationship between history and memory to viewing history as 'an art of memory', as a mediator between repetition and recollection. In other words, history becomes not just about describing the past through its representations and recollections, but also through a lived experience that sediments in collective memory.

While repetition and recollection are movements in time, the space to which I tie them in this article is that of the Levant, a geography that spreads across the borders of Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Jordan. As Joachim Parslow convincingly argues in this issue, the chronotope as a unit of analysis is useful whenever the intersection of narrative and space determines the signification.

The narratives deployed in this article revolve around the people who lived and moved across state borders and, in their movement, continued to conceive of a space that stretched across the borders that resulted from the post-World War I settlement between France and Britain. Those narratives animate the cross-border space I refer to as the Levant and continue to bring it forward in time through the acts of repetition and recollection involved in the telling and writing of history as an art of memory. These acts set the geography of the Levant in motion not only by opening up the ways in which cross-border movement decentred the Mandate state at the moment of its inception, but also through temporally transposing these movements of the past onto the troubled border that today separates Lebanon and Israel. Although today the animation of a Levantine chronotope remains erratic, fragmented, and divorced from any coherent political expression, I show how it served to destabilise the chronotope of the mandate state that took form in the interwar period and that tied the geography of the state to a notion of progressive time.

The geographies mapped out in collective memory around the movements of rebels and saints might not always stand the test of scholarly history. The claim that the insult to al-Atrash triggered the revolt of 1925 will be dismissed by the historian in favour of more nuanced historical analysis. At best, the story occupies a similar place to supernatural events in professional history-telling: a curiosity that does little more than give us some insight into how 'the native' thinks (Chakrabarty 1998). But paying closer attention to the geographies that this story evokes and the mobility across them brings into relief a space that was lived across Mandate borders and turns these borders into the centre of a different kind of geography. The different sources used in this article underline the continuity between the two instances of repetition and recollection: oral history based on interviews with individuals, collective history based on stories handed down across generations, the writings of local as well as professional historians, in addition to the local press and the French Mandate archives. These are sources that range from the oral to the textual and that exhibit different degrees of codification. There is a tension between them, as is the case between any sources. But at the same time, when thought of in continuity with each other, they can be allowed to work together. In this instance, I have used them to bring out an involuntary history – one that is repressed but brought out where the hold of the state weakens.

Sacred geographies of the Levant

One of the most important processes undergone during the late Ottoman period is the Ottoman Empire's attempt to remodel itself as a state. The reforms known as the Tanzimat were introduced by Istanbul piecemeal from the late 1830s onwards as a tool for this remodelling. With their main concern of centralising state power in Istanbul, the administrative and bureaucratic reforms of the late Ottoman period did two things. First, they promoted provincial urban centres as sub-centres of rule, leading to the rise of specific cities, sometimes at the expense of the economic and political influence of other cities and towns in their orbit. Second, reforms introduced administrative organisation that shuffled the division of provinces accordingly. This often underlined the ascendancy of urban centres in their promotion to provincial capitals. Thus, the provinces of the Levant became more tightly interwoven not only to the centre but also to each other. The relationship between the outlying sub-provinces became stronger in order to make up for the dominance of economic centres such as Beirut and Haifa. The regions of Hawran in the province of Syria, and Marja'yun, Wadi al-Taym, and the Galilee in the province of Beirut all became more tightly interwoven in the late Ottoman period through commercial relations and the network of souks based in the major towns (Bazzi 2002b, pp. 69–72).

Religious identity and collective pilgrimages also played an important role in coalescing a regional identity in the late Ottoman period. A network of pilgrimage spread across the ensuing mandate states of Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Transjordan, linking together the sacred sites of the various religious groups inhabiting the area: Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Although in some of their aspects these spiritual practices can date back millennia, in many ways they were also affected by

modern transformations, most notably Western missionary interest in the Levant as the cradle of holy scripture (Tibawi 1961, Makdisi 2008). Late nineteenth-century travelogues and surveys, such as the Palestine Exploration Fund's *Survey of Western Palestine*, enforced this mental geography. In the latter survey, conducted in the 1870s, what is referred to as 'Western Palestine' stretched north–south from the Litani River to the Sinai Desert, including in its survey of biblical history and religious sites a considerable part of the region that later came to be south Lebanon.

Before they constituted a base for Zionist claims to the Land of Israel, the cartography of such surveys and travels interlocked with a sacred conception of the landscape and a biblical history shared by Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike. The many shrines dedicated to holy figures and dotting the region constituted focal points in this sacred landscape. While the shrines of the prophets Abraham in al-Khalil and Samuel in Jerusalem stand out in their prominence and their centrality in the geography of the Holy Land, lesser-known shrines dedicated to biblical figures further north in Palestine and south Lebanon enjoyed regional significance, attracting members of several religious communities on collective pilgrimages and individual visits. These included shrines for the prophets Jethro in Hittin, Elijah in Buwayda near Marja'yun, Sujud in the hills above Nabatiyya, and Saydun just outside the city of Sidon (*Davar* 17 June 1932, p. 2, Al-Amin 1961, pp. 178–180, Majdhub 1983, Petersen 1996, Firro 1999, pp. 92–97).[2]

Although such shrines were often under the authority of one religious denomination, many of them were venerated regionally and visited by more than one religion, both during the late Ottoman and the mandate periods (Abou-Hodeib 2015). Figures from the New Testament who also appear in the Quran are considered venerable by the Druze as well as Shia and Sunni Muslims. Influenced by inherited stories and partly also by the work of missionaries and Western surveys, local lore found an extension of Christ's travels and miracles in locations such as Sidon and Tyre. According to the New Testament, Christ embarked on a trip that took him by land north from the Galilee up to Sidon, then east to the Golan Heights and the Hawran region south of Damascus, and finally back to the Galilee.[3] These narratives took on a codified form in the late Ottoman period through the works of Jesuits such as Henri Lammens and Alfred Durand, who were regularly published in Arabic in Louis Cheikho's periodical *al-Mashriq* (The Levant). Such conceptions of geography resonated with a sacred landscape that stitched together in a clockwise motion the four Levantine states of Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Transjordan across their borders (Grehan 2014). It also posited another temporality, which was not coterminous with the linear time of progress implied by the nation-state. It layered upon it biblical time, brought in by the history of those religious figures in the land, as well as seasonal time, as those visits were referred to as *mawasim*, literally seasons, because of the longstanding association of many religious rituals with seasonal events such as the harvest. In such ways, the temporality and geography of folk religion constituted a Levantine chronotope that had both economic and social dimensions and that was at odds with the borders introduced after World War I.

The chronotope of the mandate state

Until the outbreak of World War I, the different identifications of the late Ottoman period constituted overlapping geographies and there was no contradiction, for example, in an Ottoman subject identifying as a citizen of the Empire, part of a Syrian community, and belonging to an Arab or Eastern culture (Kayali 1997, Worringer 2014). These overlapping identifications did not correspond to any specific political geography, but they constituted part of political, social, and regional time–space configurations both modern and more ancient. With the dismantlement of the Ottoman Empire, the borders introduced post-World War I constituted a rupture with that time–space both temporally and spatially. Not only did the mandate era carve up the Levant geographically into states, it also introduced a notion of progressive time that was intrinsically linked to the breakdown of Ottoman identity and the gradual emergence of independent nation-states in its stead.

The post-war settlement revised the rough map of the 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement, which concerned the fate of the Levantine territories of the Ottoman Empire. According to the terms enshrined in article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations and to the resolutions passed in 1920 during the San Remo conference in Italy, France and Britain were granted administration of mandates over the former Ottoman territories in the Levant. Whereas France was granted mandate administration over Syria and Lebanon, Britain had responsibility for the mandates of Palestine and Transjordan and of Iraq. Direct British rule over Iraq was relatively short-lived, but those over the four Levantine countries persisted into the 1940s.

The mandate system assumed that the ultimate and final form of political maturity is the independent state. It was a form of rule applied to colonies and territories 'inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world'. Article 22 of the Covenant of the League of Nations mapped out different kinds of mandates corresponding to the stage of development of the people inhabiting those countries and their economic and geographic circumstances. Different kinds of 'tutelage' were 'entrusted to advanced nations', and this tutelage was to be exercised by the mandatories on behalf of the League. Although the category to which the Levantine states belonged, the Class A mandate, was deemed not yet ready for independence, the states were considered to 'have reached a stage of development where their existence as independent nations can be provisionally recognised, subject to the rendering of administrative advice and assistance by a mandatory until such time as they are able to stand alone' (Covenant of the League of Nations 1924). Consequently, both British and French rule was very hands-on. Mandate authorities were involved in building up the institutions of the state, restructuring an Ottoman legal framework now regarded as outdated, and managing the population along the sectarian identities that constituted the lens through which both mandate authorities regarded the region (Weiss 2010, Robson 2011, White 2011).

The conception of time introduced by this new legal vocabulary superseded other notions that had prevailed in the late Ottoman period. The sense of progressive time, in which a state in its infancy is prepared for the turbulent life of a mature nation-state under the tutelage of a more advanced and experienced nation, formed the driving logic of the mandate system, at least on paper. The eradication of any political fulfilment of the identities that had formed part of an ongoing debate on nationalism before the war was accompanied by a drawing of borders that largely corresponded to the interests of mandatory powers. Despite attempts to counter this imposition through revolts, uprisings, and general strikes, the political elite often adopted the new framework of the nation-state as a necessary avenue for political participation and confrontation (Khoury 1987, pp. 327–374). In order to be heard, the citizens of the newly created states also found themselves obliged to approach the authorities along the new lines of national, ethnic, and sectarian legal categories recognised by the mandate authorities.[4]

As Levantine states gained their independence, and despite the spread of a pan-Arab ideology in the 1950s and 1960s, the framework of the state remained dominant. The writing of the history of the Levant has been complicit in this dominance. Until recently, historians of the Middle East often took the relatively new, single polities of the Levant as their analytical framework.[5] But this is not specific to the writing of the history of the Levant. Literature on the spatial turn, globalisation, and transnationalism produced over the past two decades provides ample critique of the nation-state framework that has remained dominant in the writing of European history as well. Such writings posit political frameworks on the urban, regional, and global level (Sassen 2003, Amin 2004, Brenner 2004). The 'involuntary history' I posit is what emerges when the hold of the nation-state is weakened. The connections in the interwar period between the border areas of mandate states had their more mundane, everyday dimensions. For even as state formation processes transformed the Levant, cross-border movements extended another kind of geography and continued to articulate identities that straddled those borders.

Trade, commerce, and pilgrimage

Despite the political separation imposed by the introduction of borders, various practices continued to challenge the dominance of the time–space of the mandate state. On the Levantine level as a whole, socioeconomic relations between the mandate states became denser in the interwar period. One reason for this is the economic policies adopted by neighbouring countries. Between 1918 and 1939, the Levant's neighbours – most importantly Egypt, Iraq, and Turkey – all reduced their trade ties with the region. They started following protectionist policies and erected high customs walls, especially when the Great Depression hit (Schayegh 2017, pp. 226–230). Parallel to this, agreements between the different Levantine states meant that the region became more economically integrated. This was intensified through the movement of people between the different countries, whether in labour migrations or following webs of personal relationships.

The effect this had on the relationship between borderlands can be traced back to the late Ottoman period when south Lebanon and north Palestine constituted the southern part of the province of Beirut. Created in 1888 on the strength of Beirut's rising position as the main port city on the eastern Mediterranean seaboard, the province centralised commercial activity in Beirut while strengthening the relationships between the outlying districts of the province to the north and south. The hinterland remained fairly removed from the process of economic centralisation in Beirut and largely dependent on agricultural and artisanal products. As such, its fortunes were more tightly linked to neighbouring towns and villages as well as to the mobility and commercial activity brought by a regional network of souks (Bazzi 2002b, pp. 64–78).

After the division of the area into states in the aftermath of World War I, commercial and social relations continued to flourish across the border even as the political situation changed. Towns in south Lebanon not only served as stops for caravans coming from Syria on their way to northern Palestine but were also markets for goods in their own right. Rather than diminish in importance, the markets of the border areas increased such that on any given day in the late 1930s, at least one market in the region drew interest from across the border (Services Spéciaux du Liban Sud 1931, p. 17, *Al-`Irfan* April 1937, p. 175). Bint Jubayl's Thursday market, one of the largest markets along the border between Lebanon and Palestine, served as an outlet for the towns and villages of south Lebanon and was also a destination for merchants from Nablus, Gaza, Hawran, Acre, Jaffa, and Jerusalem, to name but a few places. Taking the significance of souks beyond just the commercial, these markets were places of trade and commerce as well as hubs for social interactions between various nationalities and religious groups (Al-Amin 1961, p. 142).

Citing oral history, collective memory, court registers, and family documents, local historians stress the importance of these webs of trade in regional integration. The historian Mustafa Bazzi, for example, emphasises elements that are otherwise invisible from the point of view of today, such as the geography traced by the muleteer (2002a, pp. 385–389). Particularly at a time when the road network was still in the process of being laid, the transport of goods on animals along tracks connected central markets in south Lebanon and north Palestine to Hawran on the one hand and the rest of Palestine on the other. The skill of the muleteer, his sense of topography, and the commercial activity generated around his movement were crucial to binding together economies across borders. It was not until the 1930s, with the growing importance of vehicular transport, that a road network began to develop in earnest in the countryside, and even then it took time to connect the towns and the villages of the borderlands together. In the mid-1930s, the only road connecting the southern hinterland to the coast, at Sidon, could not sustain the region's need in vehicular traffic, and apart from the road connecting Beirut to Palestine, much was to be desired in south Lebanon's road network (Bulletin d'information hebdomadaire no. 12, 1935, no. 29, 1937). The muleteer thus continued to play an important role in generating the economy of the peripheries and connecting them together well into the mandate years (Services Spéciaux du Liban Sud 1931, p. 16).

Markets are significant also for their connection with another kind of cross-border movement that was long rooted in the recurrent practices of the inhabitants of the region: collective pilgrimage. Although the religious landscape shared by Jews, Christians, and Muslims was cut across by state borders, collective pilgrimages continued, albeit now with an inter-national dimension involving permits and border crossings.[6] Historically, pilgrimage is linked with commercial activity, and the case of the Levant was no different. Pilgrimage routes to significant shrines and religious locations meshed with markets, often generating economic activity directly linked to seasonal visits to the sites. Druze pilgrims from Syria and Lebanon stopped by the market in the village of al-Khalsa in Palestine on their way to the shrine of the prophet Jethro (Shu'ayb in Arabic) further south.[7] Coming mostly from Mount Lebanon and estimated at 200–300 pilgrims in May of 1937, Druze pilgrimage to the shrine of Jethro, like other collective pilgrimages, gave rise to considerable economic activities on its way (Bulletin d'information hebdomadaire no. 18, 1937). Similarly, on their return from Nabi Sujud, Jewish pilgrims from Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria passed through Sidon and generated a market there (*Abu Dulama* 10 May 1927, p. 3). Such activity underlined the network of mobility that continued across the newly born states of the Levant and brought together the social, commercial, and religious facets of daily life. They bound Levantine geography to rhythms of time related to harvest and religious rituals and continued to emphasise a history that references biblical and mythological events, a history that remained unrelated to the progressive time posited by the model of the mandate state. This temporality of seasonal and mythical time, in turn, contoured a landscape punctuated by points of contact between Christians, Muslims, and Jews at a time when those identities were being tightly woven into competing nationalisms.

The centrality of the borderland

If the socioeconomic ties across the mandate states of Transjordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria underlined a time–space that cut across those of the mandate states, specific kinds of movements, namely illicit border crossings, turned these borderlands into a central location. South Lebanon, southern Syria, and northern Palestine constituted a hub for an economy of black and grey markets. The mandate authorities in Palestine often overlooked this activity and, particularly when it came to drug trafficking, partnership spread on both sides of the border (Bazzi 1988, pp. 408–409). In terms of space, the geography of the region, with its mountainous landscape and the absence of vehicular access to large parts of the hinterland, shaped this black economy and rendered many of the border areas difficult to access by the authorities.

Writing on narcotics trafficking in the mandate period, Cyrus Schayegh (2011) argues that spatially speaking, these kinds of economies highlight the different kinds of territorialisation involved in the state-making process in the Levant. In the case of Lebanon, while territorial organisation took one form in the port and city of Beirut and along the border-crossing into Palestine, it took a different form in the border zone where Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine met along with the north-western part of Jordan. Whereas the border zone remained relatively free from the interference of the French colonial state, the presence of French officials in Beirut and at the official border crossing into Palestine precipitated conflicts that integrated the different sections of society involved in propagating or fighting the drug trade: poor locals, French forces, and regional smugglers (Schayegh 2011, p. 277). While the centralised location of authority and self-containment are usually taken to be defining aspects of the state, the border areas of Levantine states were the centre of the kind of economies that could not thrive in urban centres and at official border crossings, where the state was more present.

This territorialisation not only has spatial implications but also relates temporally to state-formation. A transnational Levantine space did not emerge from established national frameworks. Rather, it unfolded simultaneously as the current shape of the region began to take shape in the aftermath of World War I (Schayegh 2011, p. 305). To take this point even further, transnational movement was regional movement even before it became transnational. Regions of Lebanon,

Syria, Jordan, and Palestine were transformed by their new status as borderlands in ways that drew on the tracks, paths, local knowledge, and social relations that extended temporally on both sides of World War I. More so than commerce, smuggling and narcotics trafficking depended on local knowledge of the area. Inhabitants of the border villages could navigate the region both geographically and politically, making them central players in illicit cross-border mobility (Bazzi 1988, pp. 463–464). Both illicit and licit commercial relations point not only to a wider Levantine framework but also to a regional commercial space, both coexisting with the mandate state even as they were transformed by it.

Territorialisation at the edges of the state emphasises a different kind of Levantine space, one resonating with interwar revolts that shook mandate rule, and with the story of Khanjar, al-Atrash, and the outbreak of the Great Revolt in 1925. At its height, the revolt spread to northern Syria and eastern Lebanon, bringing back demands for the reunification of the two countries. Another eruption that brought this cross-border interconnectedness into focus is the 1936–39 Arab Revolt in Palestine, an uprising against British rule that included both peasants and townspeople and that made use of Lebanon and Syria as sources of arms and sanctuary from the British crackdown in Palestine (Jankowski 1973, p. 226, Abisaab 2009, p. 490). For the south of Lebanon, there was more involvement in this revolt than in the Great Revolt just a decade earlier. The town of Bint Jubayl, site of the major Thursday market mentioned above, became a place of refuge and supply of arms, and fighters from Lebanon and Syria were smuggled across the border to join the fight against Britain. This atmosphere of resistance highlighted disgruntlement with mandate rule as a whole and contributed to the tobacco uprising of Bint Jubayl in 1936 (Abisaab 2009). This latter link is of particular interest, since while it is common to view the history of the French mandate over Syria and Lebanon as interconnected, the Palestine-Lebanon connection is not addressed nearly enough, and neither is the relationship between South Lebanon and the Hawran. All these connections point to the intertwinement of political struggles across Levantine states, but they also have a specific geographic dimension. Throughout the mandate period, these and similar uprisings and political mobilisations not only set a question mark on the democratic viability of the borders introduced by France and Britain, but also turned border areas into a central arena for activity that bound the politics of the mandate states together.

Conclusion: a time and place for the Levant

One of the implications of the choice of the state as a framework of analysis is that people who cross borders tend to fall through the cracks of history. Writing Levantines into the history of the state involves looking at citizens and inhabitants who continued to cross borders as part of their regular activity and to draw on the socioeconomic network that had asserted itself in the late Ottoman period. The networks explored in this article highlight these relations and bring new Levantine characters into history – characters that connected these geographies, such as muleteers, smugglers, rebels, and pilgrims. Through their movements, they crisscross the border and make the geography of the Levant visible. Although such figures may appear incidental to processes of interwar state-formation, they remain central to the stories that are told on the edges of the state, and their habitual movements across the border helped to define the nature of the modern state in the Levant.

Cross-border movement in the Levant is not merely the survival of older patterns that persist despite the emergence of borders. It is subject to transformation and management with the introduction of borders, and it becomes a matter of negotiation between the state and its subjects (Abou-Hodeib 2015). Because of its nature as negotiated movement, it defines precisely what the Levant came to mean in the presence of the state and, in turn, it defines the character of the state at its most vulnerable edges.

The persistence of the Levant is not simply a historical matter specific to the interwar period; it bears its imprint well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As a reconcilement of history

and memory, involuntary history consists of the two moments of unreflective repetition that bring past images into the present and conscious efforts to evoke the past. Although not the only location where involuntary history makes itself manifest in acts of repetition and recollection, borders highlight how such a Levantine chronotope continues to erupt even across the most rigid of borders. Repetition occurs even at the border between Israel, on the one hand, and Syria and Lebanon, on the other. Levantine geography erupts there whenever borders shift or the hold of the state transforms. For example, between 1978 and 2000, during the Israeli occupation of south Lebanon, Druze from that region started again in some measure to visit the shrine of the prophet Jethro. Even today, when such visits have been discontinued again, there is still a perception of continuity in the corner where the four Levantine states meet. As one of my Druze interviewees in the village of Kufayr put it, pointing vaguely in the direction of the south and southeast, 'This is the land of Shu'ayb'.[8] Today this land of Jethro is also marked through technological means. At a shrine commemorating the prophet in the village of Fardis in Lebanon, audio-visual recordings of visits to holy sites in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights are available for sale, and similar material is also available online.

This kind of reflexive repetition that defines one aspect of involuntary history re-enacts a cross-border Levantine chronotope, whether physically or digitally, and brings into the present the temporality of biblical time and geography. But conscious recollection also plays a part in constructing this Levantine chronotope through personal recollections, in reminiscences that are passed down from one generation to the next, and in local histories of the mandate period. These are selectively used to orally and textually re-enact individual and collective border-crossings and to evoke a cross-border geography through the transposition of the past into the present, even where such a geography is almost unfathomable from the point of view of the present.

Notes

1. Michael Provence (2005, pp. 1–5) recounts the story of the arrest of Khanjar, the subsequent attempt and failure by al-Atrash to launch an uprising against the French, and the failed attempt to free Khanjar. Although there is not a single, simple explanation for the revolt, Provence points to the role that urban-rural relationships and the axis of the grain trade played in its spread and longevity.
2. Nabi Sujud and Nabi Saydun, both known as such by Jewish pilgrims, were considered by Jews in the region to be the burial places of Aholiab Ben Akhisamakh and Zebulun son of Jacob, respectively. The two burial places were among the most revered Jewish shrines in Lebanon and were both destinations for yearly collective pilgrimages. Nabi Sujud was and remains today a Shia waqf, but it contained buildings dedicated for Jewish worship, donated by beneficiaries from across the region, including Egypt.
3. The Gospels according to Matthew (15:21) and Mark (7:24 and 31) both mention Christ visiting the vicinity of Sidon and Tyre, where he heals the daughter of a woman described as a Canaanite in Matthew and a Greek born in Syrian Phoenicia in Mark.
4. For example, the legal system set up by the British authorities in Palestine marginalised the Christian population. In order to be heard and acknowledged by a political system organised along semi-autonomous sectarian identities, Christians were forced to shift from nationalist politics that aligned them with Muslims to communal political strategies that set them apart as a minority (Robson 2011).
5. Rather than take states as the starting point of analyses, recent works by scholars such as Benjamin White (2018) and Jordi Tejel Gorgas (2018) focus on cross-border movement of refugees and the local population as a process instrumental to defining the state and its borders.
6. Interview with Almaza al-'Ajami, Yarun (Lebanon), 4 June 2013. Al-'Ajami talks about the border gate she used to cross from Lebanon into Palestine when she took part in the yearly collective pilgrimage to the Shia shrine of Prophet Joshua in the village of Nabi Yusha', destroyed by the Israeli army in 1948.
7. Interview with Ghalib Saliqa, al-Fardis (Lebanon), 19 June 2013.
8. Interview with anonymous subject, Kufayr (Lebanon), 20 May 2013.

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