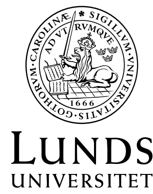

SAMHÄLLS-
VETENSKAPLIGA
FAKULTETEN

Centre for Middle Eastern Studies

UNDERSTANDING BORDERING IN THE CONTEXT OF WAR

AN EXPLORATION OF THE EXPERIENCES OF SYRIANS FREQUENTLY TRAVELING TO LEBANON

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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Author: Sarah Janse
Advisor: Dalia Abdelhady
Examiner: Torsten Janson
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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I explore the bordering experiences of Syrians who frequently cross the border into Lebanon during the Syrian conflict. I draw on five in-depth interviews conducted in March 2018 to show how they live, understand and manipulate the border. Through a theoretically informed analysis, using the concepts of the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann), habitus (Bourdieu) and collective identity (Melucci), I find that the participants engage in a rather unique type of cross-border movement. Despite their ability to engage in frequent traveling, they cannot be seen as migrants because they keep returning home, nor as tourists because their motivations to travel go far beyond leisure or business activities. At the same time, I find that they value their home in Syria and that those who do want to migrate face difficulties. As a result, they end up in a type of yet undefined and underexplored circular traveling which allows them to enjoy the benefits of Lebanon and home.

Key words: Syria – Lebanon – Syrian conflict - Bordering – Migration – Traveling - Habitus

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Map: Arida and Masna'a Borders *5*
List of Abbreviations *6*
1. **Introduction** *7-9*
   - *1.1 Context and Statement of the Research Problem* *7*
   - *1.2 Disposition* *8*
   - *1.3 Political-Historical Background* *8*
2. **Literature Review** *11-19*
   - *2.1 Cross-border Migration, Tourism and Mobility* *11*
   - *2.2 From Borders to Bordering* *13*
   - *2.3 Syria's Border Dimension* *15*
   - *2.4 Lebanon's Border Dimensions* *16*
   - *2.5 Conclusion* *18*
3. **Theoretical Framework** *20-25*
   - *3.1 Berger and Luckmann's Social Construction of Reality* *20*
   - *3.2 Bourdieu's Habitus, Field, Capital and Doxa* *21*
   - *3.3 Melucci's Collective Identity* *23*
   - *3.4 Conclusion* *24*
4. **Methodological Framework** *25-33*
   - *4.1 Research Approach* *25*
   - *4.2 Case Selection* *25*
   - *4.3 Data Collection* *27*
   - *4.4 Method of Analysis* *28*
   - *4.5 Reflection and Ethical Considerations* *28*
   - *4.6 Limitations* *31*
5. **Empirical Findings** *33-48*
   - *5.1 Introduction of Participants* *33*
   - *5.2 On the Road from Syria to Lebanon* *36*
   - *5.3 Experience of Border Crossing* *39*
   - *5.4 Life on the Other Side of the Border* *41*
   - *5.5 Returning Home to Syria* *45*
   - *5.6 Traveling in the Future* *47*
6. **Analysis** *49-59*
   - *6.1 Habitus and the Ability to Cross* *49*
   - *6.2 The Rules of Border Crossing* *51*
   - *6.3 The Act of Border Crossing* *53*
   - *6.4 The Meaning of Border-Crossing between Syria and Lebanon* *55*
     - *6.4.1 The Border as a Separator and Connector* *55*
     - *6.4.2 Defining Cross-border Movement* *56*
     - *6.4.3 Collective Identity of Frequent Opportunity Travelers* *59*

Conclusion *61-63*
References *63-66*

MAP: ARIDA AND MASNA'A BORDERS

(Google Maps 2018)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AUB MC	*American University of Beirut Medical Center*
ESCWA	*United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia*
FSA	*Free Syrian Army*
INGO	*International non-governmental organization*
ISIS	*Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant*
MENA	*Middle East and North Africa*
PYD	*Kurdish Democratic Union Party*
UNDOF	*United Nations Disengagement Observer Force*
UN	*United Nations*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CONTEXT AND STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

The way in which people experience the Syrian-Lebanese border now is, expectedly, very different from before the Syrian crisis[1] started and limitations on crossing were imposed. Syria used to have so-called 'thin' borders due to its close historical, economic, cultural and political ties with Lebanon specifically. However, the intractable conflict and unprecedented number of refugees have led to the 'thickening' of the Syrian-Lebanese border to protect both states' sovereignty. For some, border politics have become a question of life or death, as was reflected in the news of January 2018. Fifteen Syrians seeking to flee the war, including two children and eight women, froze to death as they attempted to cross the border into Lebanon through mountainous terrain (Sanchez 2018). Since the outbreak of the civil war, more than 5 million Syrians have fled their home country, many of which made their way into neighboring Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon and are unable to return (Betts, Ali and Memişoğlu n.d.). At the same time, Syrians meeting certain requirements remain able to visit Lebanon on a regular basis via one of the five official open roads.

In this thesis, I explore how five Syrians who are able to cross construct a narrative of the Syrian-Lebanese border based on a literature and theoretical study as well as semi-structured interviews I conducted in Beirut in March 2018. Specifically, I investigate the bordering experience of the participants in times of conflict: how they live, understand and navigate the border. Through this exploration, I show how they take part in a rather unique type of border-crossing movements and do not fit into existing definitions of migration or tourism.

On the one hand, they explore life on the other side of the border and enjoy the benefits of traveling. They are able to do so because of their social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital. The participants travel frequently and not only for business or typical leisure activities as migrants or tourists. The participants take control over their lives, for example by using their ability to travel back and forth to pay off military service, temporarily escape the conflict and seek medical care.

On the other hand, they keep returning to Syria because they see it as their home or because they are unable to leave Syria behind completely. As a result, they end up in a yet undefined and underexposed type of spatial movement. In this thesis, I refer to them as 'frequent

[1] For the purpose of this thesis, 'Syrian crisis' or 'Syrian conflict' refers to the ongoing Syrian war that started in early 2011

opportunity travelers'. Their narratives speak to our academic understandings of how borders are lived and understood by the individuals who cross them as opposed to the nation-states that construct and deem them immutable.

Therefore, the research question is:

How can Syrians frequently traveling to Lebanon today, and the way in which they experience the Syrian-Lebanese border, be understood and qualified in light of the concept of bordering?

1.2 DISPOSITION

Within the **introductory chapter**, I review the history of Syrian-Lebanese relations to provide a background not only to the topic of this study but also to the experiences of the participants.

In **chapter two**, I review existing literature on different understandings of cross-border movements, borders and bordering as well as Syria's and Lebanon's borders to be able to draw on earlier academic insights and to outline the significance of this study.

In **chapter three**, I set out a theoretical framework that helps to understand the bordering experience of the participants in relation to existing perceptions of cross-border movements through an overview of the theoretical concepts of the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann), habitus (Bourdieu) and collective identity (Melucci).

In **chapter four**, I outline my methodology by explaining my research approach and providing a reflection on the process, ethical considerations and the limitations of this research.

In **chapter five**, I profile the participants and provide the empirical findings based on the themes of being on the road, crossing the border into Lebanon and returning home to Syria.

In **chapter six**, I present a theoretically informed analysis of my findings, which I summarize in the **Conclusion** while I answer my research question, discuss the significance of my study and suggest avenues for further research.

1.3 POLITICAL-HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The complex political-historical background needs to be considered for any analysis of Syrian-Lebanese relations. In this section, I will discuss the historically shared territory, the Lebanese civil war, the Syrian occupation of Lebanon and the current Syrian conflict.

To start with, Syria and Lebanon share a turbulent past, starting with the Ottoman empire (circa 1299-1923) as the beginning of modern history (Cleveland and Bunton 2017). After

World War I, much of the political world map was redrawn and France was given authority over modern-day Syria and Lebanon through a mandate system. During the late 1920s and early 1930s, the new Arab state system was marked by what effectively constituted colonialism and power struggles, causing the non-natural and non-historical demarcation lines, i.e. borders, to harden (Salibi 1993). The question of nationality was a contentious issue in the recently established states which shared a rich past, most notably in the historically Arab territory stretching from Lebanon to Syria, Palestine and Transjordan (Salibi 1993; Trabloulsi 2012; Harris 2013). After many political-religious power struggles,[2] Lebanon gained independence from France in 1942. In Syria, which became independent in 1946, power struggles led to different regimes lasting only for short periods of time until the Ba'thist regime took over power in 1963 (Picard 2006, 76-77).

The Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) and Syria's occupation of Lebanon are considered the most influential events on Lebanese-Syrian relations, which remain turbulent ever since. Following independence, political-religious power struggles in Lebanon had continued and eventually led to the outbreak of the civil war in 1975. Alliances between internal forces, such as the Maronites, Palestinian Liberation Organization and pan-Arab groups, shifted rapidly and foreign powers became involved. Syria intervened military and occupied Lebanon in 1976 (Wight 2013). Instead of bringing an end to the violence in Lebanon, the Syrian occupation subverted Lebanon's autonomy. Moreover, Syria was unable to stop Palestinian attacks on Israel. This led to the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon, in turn causing the emergence of resistance groups as Hezbollah (Wight 2013, 176). While the Lebanese civil war ended in 1990, the Syrian occupation and internal conflict lasted. Anti-Syrian Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was assassinated in Beirut in February 2005. Later that year, Syria withdrew due to international pressure and Lebanese protests. The civil war and assassination of Hariri left the Lebanese state deeply divided by sectarianism (Blanford 2006).

Since the Assad regime came to power in Syria more than 40 years ago, it was long able to keep the country's ethnic, sectarian and political diversity in check through the pan-Arab secular Ba'athist ideology and repression. President Bashar al-Assad succeeded his late father in 2000 and enjoyed substantive personal popularity despite complaints of many Syrians about high unemployment rates, corruption and a lack of political freedom (Hokayem 2013).

[2] Lebanon's political system has a long history of balancing power between different minority confessions, including Maronite Christians, Sunni Muslims, Christian Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Shi'a Muslims and the Druze.

At the beginning of 2011, citizens in almost every country in the region stood up to demand fundamental political change. Some leaders acted swiftly with, for example, social subsidies and others responded with brutal force. In Syria, the Ba'athist regime met protesters in Deraa with violent troops, leading to the country-wide escalation of protests (Lynch 2014, 1-2). This year marks the seventh year of the ongoing conflict, which has led millions of Syrians to flee to neighboring countries and beyond. In addition to those seeking asylum and resettlement, among which 1.5 million reside in Lebanon, roughly seven million Syrians are internally displaced (Betts, Ali and Memişoğlu n.d.). Other have not moved at all and stayed in their home country, which continues to have a strong relationship with Lebanon.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, I first look at relevant definitions of cross-border mobility. Secondly, I discuss different approaches to border studies and spatial movement. Lastly, I explore recent studies of Syria and Lebanon's current border dimensions.

2.1 CROSS-BORDER MIGRATION, TOURISM AND MOBILITY

Migration can be understood in various ways but generally refers to the crossing of a boundary for a minimum period of one year. With a narrow definition, this makes a migrant someone who temporarily or permanently lives in a country other than the country of birth (Fargues 2014, 4; UNESCO 2018). This way, migration does not include all cross-border mobility. It excludes, for example, relocation whereby people are involuntarily moved in an organized manner or territorial movement whereby the residential status does not change, such as tourism (UNESCO 2018).

Indeed, tourism is primarily seen as a temporary leisure activity outside of the person's place of residence, such as attending cultural events or visiting heritage sites. In some definitions, it includes non-leisure activities such as business travel and day-trips as well (Veal 2006). There are many sub-categories of cross-border mobility in between.

In an attempt to create distinctions between the most common types of migration at the beginning of the twenty-first century, Castles (2000, 271-272) looks at, among others, temporary labor migrants, refugees, i.e. those residing outside the country of origin who are "unable or unwilling to return because of a well-founded fear of persecution", and return migrants. This last category refers to people returning to the country of origin after being abroad and is linked to labor and economic development (Castles 2000, 272). In more recent research Chakraborty and Mandal (2016) note that return migration is relatively less researched compared to other types of migration. They use a more modern definition with a focus on the specific reasons of return, which they identify as "hazards, homesickness, completion of job contracts and mental upgradation" (Chakraborty en Mandal 2016, 90). Moreover, return migration is similar to circular migration, but it perceives the return as the end-point of mobility.

As is the case for other types of migration, circular migration can be understood in different ways. In the broadest sense, it refers to the repeated process of leaving and returning to the country of origin (Newland 2009). However, it is rarely understood in this manner. When the term first appeared in the 1960s and 70s, it was often used to refer to migration for seasonal

work, survival as in the case of drought or as part of the life-cycle, such as for study purposes (Elkan 1967; Hugo 1977; Newland 2009). With time, the historically flexible concept started to be linked to policy and labor needs, focusing on legal and managed migration between two countries (Vertovec 2007; Fargues 2008; Newland 2009).

Looking at circular migration as an employment strategy, Venturini (2008, 1) notes that a restricted definition of circular migration includes repeated short stays and repeated returns. An extended definition, on the other hand, looks at the return of labor migrants after a relatively long stay. However, what is 'short' and what is 'long' is undefined. Comparatively, Newland (2009, 9) proposes four dimensions that should be included in any modern definition of circular migration: (1) geography: the migration process needs to involve at least two places, i.e. the place of origin and of destination. (2) duration: from a short-term stay with a minimum of several months for seasonal workers, for example, up to life-cycle moves, such as studying elsewhere or returning to retire. (3) repetition: other than return migration, circular migration includes more than one cycle of back-and-forth movement. (4) development: the migration process needs to benefit both the place of origin and the place of destination, on which policies are based. Moreover, the process can bring about human development when the migrants themselves benefit from the circularity. At the same time, she acknowledges that there is no formal definition of circular migration but that it would be useful for operational purposes, such as policy implementations (Newland 2009, 9).

Similar to Newland (2009), the United Nations (UN) Task Force on Measuring Circular Migration considers five dimensions of circular migration, including repetition of move, duration of stay, developmental impact and geography (UNECE 2016). However, they also look at directionality for geography, meaning that the return has to be to the country of origin defined by birth, citizenship or previous residence. For the duration of stay, the UN takes any move of any duration for the simplest definition but a minimum of three months for statistical purposes and calls anything less a short-term stay. Finally, they add the dimension of purpose of move, whereby they note that it may be difficult to define for statistical purposes but needs to be included in the conceptual definition because it is important to understand motivations for policymaking purposes (UNECE 2016, 10-13).

The fact that definitions of migration vary so widely, and develop over time, reflects the complexity of the phenomenon. While both narrow and broad definitions of return migrants and circular migration look at repeated cross-border mobility, both terms look at return after a prolonged stay in a country other than that of origin and are often linked to labor migration.

These definitions leave gaps to define certain types of mobility, which are in turn insufficiently researched. People who frequently cross national borders for leisure but also for other activities such as education, business and medical help but are non-residents of the destination country, for example, do not meet the criteria of being a migrant nor those of being a tourist.

2.2 FROM BORDERS TO BORDERING

Whether Syrians repeatedly traveling to Lebanon are migrants, tourists, or neither one, they have the frequent crossing of the border in common. This draws attention to the meaning of borders and the Syrian-Lebanese one specifically.

From the 1960s onwards, borders studies shifted from a focus on functional characteristics to borders as social constructs (Newman 2006). Globalization, the hardening of borders after 9/11, changing territorial identities, migration, and binary distinctions of 'us versus them' became dominant themes in border studies (Newman 2003; Kolossov 2005; Newman 2006). Borders are no longer merely seen as geographical inter-state divisions or physical constructs, but also as imagined boundaries that impact daily life practices.

One of the most influential authors on the impact of borders on lives in the Middle East is Newman, who finds that the formation and existence of borders impacts identities and affiliation with groups (2006, 175). According to Newman, the creation of a boundary through a bottom-up process, i.e. through the daily practices of ordinary people, reflects differences on the ground. On the other hand, a top-down process, which focuses on institutional actors such as governments, cuts through functional categories as borders are then imposed. What follows is a demarcation that does not necessarily separate two distinct identities (Newman 2006).

To what extent and in what ways the physical border affects lives depends on border management by the respective authorities on each side. Border management includes the regulations and practices around the physical line and thus the procedures that make crossing more or less restrictive for specific individuals or groups. This can result in a situation where some people are unable to cross, for whom it may even be a method of survival, whereas the crossing of the border is merely an option for others. This way, the meaning an individual or group attributes to a border is complex and dependent on different notions of the border, beyond the simple ability to cross (Newman 2003, 15-17; Newman 2006, 169).

The use and understanding of borders as well as the relation between belonging and spatial movement have been researched in a great body of relocation and border town literature.

Moreover, these studies provide examples of how different methodological and theoretical approaches can be applied to specific cases. Such studies have frequently been done in relation to bordering Latin American countries, Mexico and the United States, Scotland and England, the Balkans, the European Union, Cyprus, and Scandinavia as well as in relation to the borders between Israel and Palestine (see McCrone and Bechofer 2015; Hopkins, Reicher and Harrison 2006; Waldinger 2008; Cisneros 2014; Newman 2006; Prokkola 2009; Linde-Laursen 2016).

To start with, relocation studies explore questions of social exchanges and attachments related to the crossing of borders. For example, Waldinger (2008) looks at transnationalism as erasing the distinction between 'here' and 'there' for Latin American immigrants in the US. Political conditions, such as government-imposed restrictions of movement or someone's legal status, can facilitate or hinder home-ties (Waldinger 2008, 9). Similarly, Cisneros (2014, 3) notes that while the political debate and public discourse reflect a will for increased border security in the case of Latin American immigration to the US, "borders are more than territorial boundaries but rather constitute a rhetorical process of demarcating and defining identity and social space." This finding reflects the mechanism between social space, movement, bordering and the shaping of identities.

Secondly, studies on border towns provide insights into geographical and cultural proximity in relation to border crossings and identities. For example, McCrone and Bechofer (2015) have studied social interaction to explain the meaning of national identity between two nations with considerable political and cultural resemblance. In their study of the border between Scotland and Northern Ireland, McCrone and Bechofer (2015, 91-96) argue that those who cross the border on a daily basis and see no difference between the two sides of the border, take the border for granted. At the same time, the border's institutional practices, e.g. by determining rights to societies' resources, remain real as the border constitutes the national boundary. Besides, the border still influences the way in which people describe themselves and others, and thereby how people makes sense of their position at the local, national and regional level.

For instance, crossing a border can allow someone to be exposed to different political, cultural or social surroundings but, at the same time, the inability to cross a border can also withhold these opportunities from someone. This depends, for example, on politics and policies on both sides of the border as well as a person's own capabilities and surroundings. Linde-

Laursen (2016) finds that identity formation is affected by paradoxical liberating and confining aspects of the border processes.

In this context, *bordering* refers to how people live, understand and manipulate the border (Linde-Laursen 2016, 2). This way, the border functions as a separator as well as a connector as it can both barricade and facilitate the transnational crossing of people, goods, capital and information. Moreover, the border is a cultural practice, as crossing allows people to enter different social spaces. Through its separating and connecting function, a border impacts national culture and identity which, in turn, allows for the exploration of the meaning of the border for individuals and groups (Linde-Laursen 2016, 1). Thus, focusing on lived experiences makes it possible to understand how the way in which people live, experience and manipulate the border, i.e. bordering, is adapted and performed by individuals as a cultural practice in their everyday lives (Linde-Laursen 2016).

In sum, an emphasis on the border itself, such as in relocation and border town studies, allows to understand the relation between belonging and spatial movement and thereby the experience of bordering beyond migration and tourism. Drawing on the body of border studies literature, I explore how the Syrian-Lebanese border is used and understood in times of conflict, provided that an historical overview of Syria and Lebanon's border as well as recent literature shows how the border between these two countries has always been and continues to be thin (see Obeid 2010; Van Veen 2015; Mourad 2017; Tholens 2017; Diogini 2017). This is important because it helps to understand how the border has developed in recent years and thereby provides a context of the fields the participants are moving in between.

2.3 SYRIA'S BORDER DIMENSIONS

To explore the concept of bordering in relation to the Syrian-Lebanese border, the border first needs to be understood from both sides. The most recent and comprehensive study on Syria's borders, and the effects of the conflict, has been done by Vignal (2017). I therefore consider her study as vital to my research. Firstly, Vignal (2017) explains that Syria's internal and external borders have been altered since achieving independence. Since the outbreak of the conflict in 2011, non-state actors and foreign powers involved have been challenging physical, political and social boundaries, amongst others, by filling power vacuums, moving populations and crossing into neighboring countries. At the same time, she notes that Syrians today identify with the country and its borders as externally imposed after World War I (Vignal 2017). This is important because in previous studies Salibi (1993), Trabloulsi (2012) and Harris (2013) note

that the question of nationality remained difficult due to the shared history of Syria and Lebanon’s surrounding countries.

Moreover, Vignal (2017) argues that Syria’s national borders - apart from its border with Israel[3] - were never questioned during the conflict. However, the nature and management of the borders have evolved over the last years because they were not continuously controlled by the Syrian government (Vignal 2017). Political and territorial fragmentation, paired with different armed actors, have altered internal borders and caused sections of the external border to be controlled by different parties. Vignal (2017) concludes that although the Syrian border remains relevant on local, national and international level, the three levels no longer align necessarily. This observation highlights the effects of the conflict on Syria’s borders.

The 29-year-long Syrian occupation of Lebanon had caused the border to soften, increasing the legal flow of money and people, as well as illegal trafficking. Even after the 2005 withdrawal of Syria from Lebanon, the border remained thin, partly because the Lebanese government lacked the means and will to establish strict control over the border. According to Vignal (2017), the border is vital to all of the parties in the Syrian conflict because of the access to Lebanon’s economic center and supply routes. Today, there are five official border-crossing points on the Syrian-Lebanese border, with respective authorities in control of their own side. This is rather unique as Syria’s borders with the Kurdistan Regional Government, Iraq, Jordan, and Turkey are or have been controlled by non-state actors as well, such as the Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD), the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) and the Free Syrian Army (FSA) (Vignal 2017).

2.4 LEBANON’S BORDER DIMENSIONS

Looking at Lebanon’s border dimensions, one relevant pre-Syrian conflict study has been done by Obeid (2010), who focused on the Syrian-Lebanese border. In her analysis of the period between the assassination of the Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and the start of the Syrian conflict, she points out that there is a discrepancy between state borders and social boundaries in the Middle East, and Lebanon specifically. This compares to Vignal’s (2017) observation of multidimensional borders in Syria, which looks at the meaning of Syrian borders on a local, national and international level, both internally and externally.

[3] The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) has troops stationed on the Syrian Golan Heights, unilaterally annexed by Israel in 1981, to manage the confrontation line (Vignal 2017)

Moreover, despite the official border-crossing points, Obeid (2010, 335) finds that people in this time often used parts of the border subject to informal controls through the highlands to avoid checkpoints. Thus, the official border crossing points are state-controlled (Vignal 2017), while earlier research indicates that the crossing of borders often also happens through unofficial and uncontrolled, but monitored, routes (Obeid 2010). This finding remains relevant today as uncontrolled pathways are still being used, tragically reflected by the death of 15 Syrians crossing through unofficial routes in January 2018 (Sanchez 2018).

Alternatively, offering a different perspective than Obeid (2010) on control over borders, Van Veen's (2015) study explores the purpose of border securitization. He shows how the Lebanese-Syrian border serves the interests of political and financial elites as distinct groups. Furthermore, Mourad (2017), Tholens (2017), and Dionigi (2017) have analyzed most recent Syrian-Lebanese border processes and dynamics. To start with, Mourad (2017) looks at the Lebanese policy response to the influx of refugees and government processes, such as closing the borders for refugees and humanitarian purposes since 2015. Through an exploration of border processes, with an emphasis on refugee policies, she provides a background to the changes in regulations and the political history of the border. According to Mourad (2017, 254), the policy response toward refugees should not be marked as a change from an open to closed border but rather as a form of 'standoffishness' because it purposefully excludes populations through political inactivity. This idea, in turn, relates to Van Veen's (2015) thesis that border policies serve the elite.

Comparatively, Tholens (2017, 867-868) describes how challenges at the border can impact governance and sovereignty. She examines external actors engaged with border control, e.g. security assistance provided through European and North American embassies in Beirut and EU-financed projects on integrated border management. Introducing the concept of 'hybrid-sovereignty', in which formal and non-formal government structures interact within a social space, she explains that the borders in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region have traditionally been both thick and thin. Lebanon proved to be resilient despite spillover effects from the Syrian conflict, the related influx of refugees and the resurgence of sectarian conflicts (Tholens 2017, 867). Formal trade, integration, regional conflicts and a centralized state 'thicken' the border as they stimulate strict military control over external borders (Tholens 2017, 865). The thin side of the border relates to the random division of social groups as a result of the colonial demarcation and cross-border exchanges that have proven to be resilient and durable (Tholens 2017, 365).

This fluidity and multidimensionality, which exists despite the conflict and expected thickening of the border, has been further explored by Dionigi (2017). Dionigi (2017) proposes a reconceptualization of borders through an analysis of the concept of a thin border focusing on displaced Syrians in Lebanon. Borders, although key components of modern forms of statehood, are challenged by interstate movement. This way, borders illustrate the complexity of their nature "as multilayered entities regulating the flow of people from Syria to Lebanon in a way that transcends the idea of national territoriality" (Dionigi 2017, 232). They are also challenged by the dynamics that have been reshaping the MENA since the Arab uprisings although "old regimes and global powers" are trying to uphold them (Dionigi 2017, 233; see also Van Veen 2015; Mourad 2017).

Taking a different approach than Tholens (2017), Dionigi (2017, 235) explains the thin cultural and economic boundaries as well as the physical border. Firstly, she holds that culturally, the boundary between Syria and Lebanon relates to the shared Ottoman past, colonial experience, religious ties and, for example, stance in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Secondly, the thin economic ties relate to trade, Lebanon's protective financial institutions and informal trade. Thirdly, the physical boundary includes the current official border crossings as well as informal crossing and smuggling (Diogini 2017, 237-238). Despite renewed border policies in 2015 and its regulative and filtering function, the Syrian-Lebanese border remains thin in many aspects (Diogini 2017, 248). Thus, different studies of the Syrian-Lebanese border approach it through multiple layers: internal and external, social, cultural, economic and physical.

2.5 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the case of the Syrian-Lebanese border is different from aforementioned relocation of border town studies, for example because the border is not contested in the sense of Israeli-Palestinian borders or open to cross for citizens of both sides as is the case in Scandinavia. At the same time, such studies are relevant because they also look at borders beyond their territorial boundaries. These studies add to our understanding of the crossing of the Syrian-Lebanese border as they involve geographical and cultural proximity as well as the opportunity to explore different social surroundings, or being withheld from that possibility because of border management.

Syria and Lebanon share a turbulent past. The ongoing Syrian conflict and subsequent influx of refugees in Lebanon have put great pressure on the shared border. Literature shows that spatial movement or the restrictions thereof causes the border to harden or soften. However,

as elsewhere in the Middle East, there is a discrepancy between the state borders and social boundaries. Borders materialize differently for different groups in society and can define social space, which is impacted by border management. The border, with its connecting and paradoxical separating function, is thus understood and lived in different ways. It is therefore important to look at the impact of the Syrian-Lebanese border on the daily lives of those who engage in crossing it.

Moreover, a review of existing literature shows that frequent travelers for both leisure and non-leisure purposes are not yet accurately described in definitions of migration and that this specific group has not been researched on the Syrian-Lebanese border. Recent studies did show that crossing the Syrian-Lebanese border today means surviving for some, whereas it can be just an option for others. This raises questions such as why it is that some Syrians are individually understood as different and can cross and how the border materializes for them. I therefore explore the following question in this thesis:

How can Syrians frequently traveling to Lebanon today, and the way in which they experience the Syrian-Lebanese border, be understood and qualified in light of the concept of bordering?

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the indications of the literature review, I provide a theoretical framework that encompasses concepts which assist in analyzing how borders materialize differently for everyone, how some Syrians are able to cross and how they understand the border. Ultimately, this will help to answer how the experience of Syrians frequently traveling to Lebanon can be understood in light of the concept of bordering and current perceptions of cross-border movements.

For this purpose, I start with the social construction of reality as discussed by Berger and Luckmann in the following section. I further provide a framework drawing on theoretical concepts of ‘field’, ‘capital’, ‘habitus’ and ‘doxa’ of Bourdieu and ‘collective identity’ of Melucci. By connecting these theoretical insights, I create a comprehensive toolkit that allows me to analyze the position of Syrians and their capabilities in relation to spatial movement.

3.1 BERGER AND LUCKMANN’S SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF REALITY

To start with, insights from Berger and Luckmann help to understand the subjective reality of the participants in relation to the objectively given Syrian-Lebanese border. Although we live in an intersubjective world shared with others, Berger and Luckmann (1966) suggest that what is understood is different for each individual as there is no constant interaction and communication with others. This means that individuals perceive their own routines and everyday lives as a self-evident reality taken for granted (Berger en Luckmann 1966, 37). A deliberate effort is required to challenge these assumptions and routines. Without such interruptions, routines are accepted as they are. This understanding of reality helps to analyze how the participants view the border and their ability to cross in times of conflict; What are their motivations to cross? How do they perceive border regulations? How do they view their abilities vis-à-vis those of Syrians who cannot cross legally?

Furthermore, when describing society as a subjective reality, Berger and Luckmann (1966, 194) explain how social processes form, maintain, modify and reshape social relations. The limitations of reality are set in a dialectic between nature and the socially constructed world, in which humans produce reality while this reality produces humans (Berger and Luckmann 1966, 201-204). This notion of reality forms the basis of the theoretical concepts that will follow. Moreover, it helps to analyze how individuals and groups shape social reality.

3.2 BOURDIEU'S HABITUS, FIELD, CAPITAL AND DOXA

Bourdieu's ideas help to understand social spaces, movement and relationships. Specifically, he argues that the environment we live in consists of structures, i.e. characteristic material conditions of class, which produce 'habitus'. Habitus are "systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*" which are determined by past conditions (Bourdieu 1972, 72). This way, habitus forms the source of people's actions as habits, characters and skills are engrained in minds (Bourdieu 1972, 73). As concluded in the literature review, people navigate different borders and, with that, social fields. Therefore, habitus becomes important as it is what people have with them when they enter different fields or spaces such as institutions or social groups. The type and amount of social, cultural and economic capital constitute the habitus of a person. This way, the concept of habitus helps to analyze the participants' sense of orientation in relation to crossing borders.

A person's social capital in each field consists of their social network. This network is based on which relations are made between interaction with other people and social formations. Relations of dominance, i.e. institutionalized mechanisms, seem permanent within these interactions (Bourdieu 1972, 184). This relates to what Berger and Luckmann (1966) explain as a social reality taken for granted. However, Bourdieu (1972, 89) deconstructs this social formation of society by saying that it is based on the cultural capital of people, which sets up hierarchies and divisions between things, persons and practices. The hierarchies form a classifying system that reinforces and inculcates cultural provisions. This spatial organization directs perceptions, thought and action. It is thus because of cultural capital that people know how to behave in different settings or in the context of a specific field (Bourdieu 1972, 89-90).

Because of the establishment of culture through systematic inculcation of resources, relations of power and dominance do not only exist between individuals but also between institutions. This means there are socially guaranteed qualifications and defined positions through which social mechanisms create value and define positions among things and people (Bourdieu 1972, 186-188). Therefore, the concept of cultural capital, i.e. competence, helps to analyze the ability of people to cross the border.

Further, individuals are directed by calculations based on their economic capital expressed in, for example, material wealth, money, land and livestock (Bourdieu 1972, 179-180). Economic capital is considered by Bourdieu as the ultimate basis to exert power, but only in the symbolic form, i.e. as a valued and recognized form of capital. Economic power is not

based in just wealth, but rather in what this wealth means in the field of economic relations: it is the value people ascribe to wealth, based on interests and interpersonal relations, that allows one to utilize it in the field (Bourdieu 1972, 184-185).

This way, accumulated economic capital becomes socially recognizable capital. It requires individuals to endlessly convert economic capital into symbolic capital. This is because the mechanisms that produce and reproduce the appropriate habitus can only function with symbolic and economic capital combined (Bourdieu 1972, 195-196). The conversion creates economically based relations of dependency, disguised as moral relations. Symbolic capital is automatically formed when individuals enter into a social field, existing of not only economic but also social and cultural capital. Economic capital itself may be relatively stable, but symbolic capital can fluctuate, for example, through marriage or the loss of a prestigious family member and is more difficult to measure (Bourdieu 1972, 67,182). The understanding of economic and symbolic capital helps to understand how wealth and symbolic capital, collectively recognized as credit, position and guide people in and between social fields.

Therefore, people bring their habitus into the field they enter, which has its own rules. This is what Bourdieu (1972, 164) refers to as 'doxa', based on which a social group perceives the person as having a specific position in the field. One's habitus can be transformative, responsive to a field while simultaneously structured by class position, whereby it regulates, facilitates or hinders access within any given field. According to the rules of each field, the social group on aggregated level will evaluate the individual and position him or her in the field. The more determined a social formation is, the more normalized it becomes as it reproduces itself and extends the field of doxa (Bourdieu 1972, 165-166).

Individuals and their social positions are located in different settings or environments, something Bourdieu refers to as 'fields'. Through the concept of field, e.g. a social, political, economic or intellectual field, we are able to understand the ways in which spatial movement is related to one's environment as well as relationships to others, groups and institutions. Thus, to understand the fields related to crossing the border, there needs to be an understanding of its rules, institutions and legislation. This includes structures of opportunities, resources, forms of social control and possibility of movement. The act of border crossing as a field determines the capital necessary to enter this field and move in between others. This way, Bourdieu's concepts help to analyze the societal position of those crossing the Syrian-Lebanese border, their capital and the rules of crossing.

3.3 MELUCCI'S COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

Lastly, Melucci discusses how movements in a globalized world focus on claiming authority over aspects of daily life such as time, space and interpersonal relations as a form of resistance against political actions (Melucci 1995, 41). This resistance does not just happen through social relationships, to which Bourdieu's analytical concept of habitus can be applied, but it happens within a system of opportunities and constraints. This system is part of a social space, a specific field in Bourdieu's terminology. Together, these ideas help to analyze how acts of individuals collectively shape relationships within a system of opportunities (Melucci 1995, 44). Moreover, Melucci argues that the social construction of a collective occurs when collective action takes place. The collective identity does not need to be institutionalized but requires emotional investment and a network between actors influencing each other while negotiating and making decisions (Melucci 1995, 45).

Building on this, Melucci (1995, 45) believes that identity implies a notion of unity and a distinction from others, which makes it recognizable. Importantly, he notes how collective action is not merely a reaction to social and environmental constraints, something Bourdieu would likely call the doxa in a field, but actually produces symbolic orientations and meaning. Seeing collective identity as an analytical tool, it can be applied to analyze social fields, collective action and processes of mobilization. The collective's relationship with the outside, in particular to the political system and system of social control, defines the field of opportunities and constraints. Using Bourdieu's insights, this relationship would be defined by a person's habitus. The field is where the collective actor takes shape and perpetuates (Melucci 1995, 52).

It needs to be noted that whereas Melucci uses his theorization of collective identity through collective action as an analytical tool to explain social movements, I apply aspects of Melucci's theory in a unconventional way. Melucci focuses on both internal processes within a group as well as its external relations. Alternatively, I take the aspects of Melucci's theorization of collective action focused on a notion of unity and the act operating within a field of constraints to claim authority over aspects of daily life while I look at the participants' shared consciousness of their positions in the field as well as how they are recognized and categorized by others. Thus, I use parts of Melucci's understanding of the construction of a collective identity to analyze individual comparable cross-border spatial movements rather than a social movement. Aspects of collective identity theory help to make sense of the participants'

narratives by looking at individual characteristics collectively and how their sense of belonging is narrated in response to restricted mobility.

3.4 CONCLUSION

To explain the distinctions of who can and want to engage in cross-border movement, I draw on the social construction of reality and Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field and doxa. This means that I look at the rules of border crossing between Syria and Lebanon as well as the specific aspects that make the participants different from other Syrians, who cannot cross regularly and legally.

Using these ideas in combination with aspects of Melucci's collective identity theory, I show that Syrians going back and forth to Lebanon today share a consciousness of their position in the field and look at how they are recognized and categorized by others. They do not entirely meet the definition of migrants, nor that of tourists, but collectively claim authority over their daily lives by using their habitus to engage in frequent cross-border movement between Syria and Lebanon.

4. METHODOLOGY

In this section, I describe the methodology used for this thesis through an explanation of my research approach, case selection, data collection and method of analysis as well as a reflection on my data collection and a discussion on the limitations of my research.

4.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

The emphasis of my sociological paradigm, social constructionism, lies in uncovering socially constructed realities. Because these can differ, as discussed in the literature review and theory section, I approach the understandings of the Syrian-Lebanese border, its meaning and practices through a qualitative exploratory study. This allows me to capture detailed realities and nuances. Specifically, I use a narrative interview method to explore five individual cases.

The answers and stories of the participants constitute the narratives. These narratives are discourses that connect events in a meaningful way, whereby offering insights about the social world and the participants' experiences of it. They have a chronological dimension because they do not necessarily represent the current state of affairs but rather connect series of events and experiences (Elliott 2005, 3). It is important to capture such nuances as people make sense of their ideas through narratives and borders materialize in different ways for each individual subject to different circumstances and practices (Prokkola 2009, 21). Narrative approaches to data analyses can be of storytelling, i.e. a narrative analysis as in this thesis, or of conversational exchanges, i.e. a discourse or conversation analysis. Moreover, narratives can form the basis of a larger thematic analysis. All narrative approaches aim to understand the context of verbal interaction (Padgett 2017, 156-157). I find this method fitting because it puts emphasis on everyday life and the crossing of the Syrian-Lebanese border is an important event on which a narrative is constructed.

As the interviews for my case-study of border crossing between Syria and Lebanon all took place in March 2018, the research is cross-sectional, i.e. done at a specific point in time, rather than over a longer period.

4.2 CASE SELECTION

I arrived in Lebanon in August 2017 for an internship with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and to conduct research for my thesis. By the time I started my data collection in March 2018, I had built a useful network. I reached out to colleagues and friends to see if they could connect me with Syrians residing in Syria but

crossing the border into Lebanon regularly. One participant approached me because he had heard of my study in a WhatsApp group. I found the others through contacts and snowball sampling.

However, I received many rejections, either indirectly through my contacts, directly during one-on-one conversations or because my requests remained unanswered. I feel that the rejections were based on the sensitivity of the issue and time constraints. To illustrate, I tried to interview someone who crosses the border back and forth with the help of Hezbollah to avoid registration at the border. This was needed for him to reside in Lebanon on paper, whereby avoiding military service in Syria. Although this would be an interesting narrative, the person let our mutual contact know several times that an interview would be too sensitive. With this person, and other cases, I felt that I did not have sufficient time to gain the trust of the potential participants as a complete stranger.

Some others felt uncomfortable being interviewed or did not entirely meet the criteria for my study, but engaged in informal conversations with me. This is how I for example learned from a Syrian man working in Lebanon that many people legally visit Lebanon to bring back products that are forbidden from being imported into Syria during the war. He told me that his father always brings incredible amounts of popular chips back to Syria to share with the family at the cost of bribing the border guards. Through stories like this one, I was able to gain a better understanding of the border before conducting interviews with the participants.

For this thesis, I interviewed three male and two female Syrians between the ages of 25 and 33 who cross the border legally and regularly, i.e. at least once every couple of months. Four of the participants cross the border on the road to Beirut from Damascus and one from Tartus. One participant turned out to have a slightly different case as he holds a Jordanian passport because his father's side of the family hails from Jordan. However, he was born in and spent most of his life in Syria, has a Syrian mother, speaks with a Syrian accent and feels Syrian. This, as will be explained in the findings and analysis sections, proved to be an interesting case in the understanding of border practices.[4]

Whereas interview studies with a nomothetic aim to explore general theories require a large sample, a study as mine with an idiographic aim seeks a sufficient relatively small sample size to be able to conduct an intensive analysis of each case and show individual voices

[4] For the purpose of this thesis, this participant will also be referred to as a Syrian because he was born in Syria, feels Syrian and, importantly, identifies himself as a Syrian.

(Robinson 2014, 29). For a single study, a total number of five participants falls within the sample size range that is sufficient to provide "scope for developing cross-case generalities […] and permitting individuals within the sample to be given a defined identity" (Robinson 2014, 29). Moreover, I feel confident that the five interviewees tell a big part of the story as they represent a diversity of experiences.

4.3 DATA COLLECTION

To capture the social reality of Syrians able to cross, I created an interview guide based on themes from my literature review. Key concepts included past and current border dimensions, border policies and practices, social space and motivation of crossing. Through the semi-structured interviews, I listened to their experiences and encouraged them to open up about their views and life experiences (see Mack et al. 2005, 28).

The interviews of approximately one hour each were a rewarding experience for me because the participants entrusted me with their personal life stories and beliefs. I did not only feel this way because of elaborate answers, but also because some shared stories with me that meant a lot to them. For example, one participant shared a deeply emotional story of when she personally had to inform her Palestinian colleagues in Syria that they could not go on a trip to Lebanon with her because of their nationality. She recalled it as one of the most difficult moments in her life. Another participant told me how she crosses the border to seek medical care for her father and how her experience of border-crossing has changed since her mother passed away. These are very sensitive and personal stories that showed the participants' trust in me and their willingness to open up.

Focusing on the narratives of individuals gave me the opportunity to gain detailed insights into how the participants are able to cross and how they understand and experience the Syrian-Lebanese border and its practices. To this aim, I tried to actively engage in conversations and ask respondents about the connections and relationship they were able to see between particular events, phenomena and beliefs (see Mack et al. 2005, 29). Moreover, the individual interviews allowed me to address somewhat sensitive topics which my interviewees may have been reluctant to discuss in a group setting or in surveys. Through the semi-structured open-ended interviews, all participants were asked some identical and some personalized questions. This allowed participants to make answers as detailed as they pleased and allowed me to ask follow-up questions (see Turner 2010, 756).

None of my interviews were conducted in person for several reasons. Firstly, it proved to be too difficult to arrange a meeting in Beirut while I was there. Secondly, for obvious reasons, including the conflict and visa regulations, I was unable to go to Syria. Thirdly, some of the participants indicated that they felt more comfortable with an interview over the phone. While I conducted some interviews over Skype through video calls, some indicated they preferred to talk without the camera on. Another participant asked to be called over WhatsApp because it was considered to be a more secure connection. I was able to take notes without disrupting the flow of the conversation because the participants could not see me taking notes and I only needed to write down what was not being said because I recorded all interviews. One phone interview was conducted with a Syrian English-literature student present to act as a translator in case my interviewee did not understand my questions or was unable to articulate the answers in English.

Before the interviews took place, I introduced myself and my study, gained oral informed consent and asked for permission to record the interview, to which all participants agreed. I explained that they would remain anonymous and would not disclose any potentially revealing information, although my thesis would be publicly accessible.

4.4 METHOD OF ANALYSIS

To answer my research question, I combined the findings of my literature review and theoretical section to make sense of my collected data. After transcribing the interviews, I divided the compiled data in the form of qualitative interview texts into groups of information, as described by Turner (2010). Through theme identification, I analyzed the interviews by firstly looking at themes and subthemes. I looked for themes that my literature review and theoretical section pointed at as relevant while at the same time looking at which themes or subthemes occurred frequently in the participants narratives. For example, when looking at the theoretically informed theme 'habitus', I tried to find indicators in the text of subthemes as 'cultural capital', 'economic capital' and 'symbolic capital' and with that, for example, notions of networks and privilege. Secondly, I went over all the themes and subthemes repeatedly to make sure I captured the right information within a manageable number of themes. Thirdly, I ordered the themes and subthemes based on what information seemed most relevant in relation to my research question, as described by Ryan and Bernard (2003, 85).

4.5 REFLECTION AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In most cases, my introduction led to an informal conversation before the actual interview began. I believe that this showed the participants were comfortable discussing the topics, and in three cases they explicitly indicated to be excited to share their stories. Some thanked me in the end for drawing attention to the border through my research, although that could also simply be politeness. Some were more nervous, which became clear as they were providing answers at a fast pace at the beginning, even elaborating on personal stories I did not ask for. This could be related to the relationship between me and the participants, which could have affected their physical or psychological well-being.

At the same time, I asserted power over them during the interview by being the one asking the questions and having the power of disclosing sensitive information. However, I believe that through for example my openness, interest and reinsurance of the anonymity, the power relation did not influence the answers to a great extent. Moreover, the participants started getting more comfortable over the course of the interview, which was demonstrated by the extensive answers eventually provided at a normal pace. I believe this was also related to the fact that I started with personal background questions, which were rather easy to answer as these did not require participants to form an opinion or discuss clearly sensitive issues.

There is a number of things to consider when it comes to the sensitive issues discussed in my thesis. To start with, my own position as a researcher likely influenced the answers of the participants. To explain, I met most of my interviewees over the telephone without having much more information than the fact that they were Syrians who crossed the border into Lebanon regularly. At the same time, they only knew that their ability to cross the border was the reason I wanted to talk to them.

Moreover, the influence relates to having different backgrounds as I am not Syrian, or even from the region, and do not speak their native language fluently. Secondly, being born and raised in Amsterdam, a daughter of two Dutch parents, I have been able to enjoy many privileges related to travel, including limited border control and visa regulations. Unlike most people in those stories, I have also never experienced war or the limitations on traveling caused by war. Thus, I clearly have a different position in the context of borders and conflict, which affected my starting point, interview questions, their answers and, eventually, the analysis. The background difference became clear when the participants, for example, explained certain practices that were self-evident to them in great depth while they were genuinely surprised when I knew of certain regulations or cultural habits. Of course, I had been researching the topic since I arrived in Lebanon. I had already talked to Syrians able and unable to travel, and

discussed the issue with my network in great length in order to gain a better understanding of the situation before conducting the interviews.

Moreover, the second sensitivity consideration is that it is more difficult to judge to what extent someone is telling the truth as an outsider. Sometimes, one of my interviewees would indicate that they preferred not to discuss a certain topic further or would tell me that I could figure out myself what something means. This was mostly related to illegal border practices or bribes. I believe that, through comparisons of the narratives, I have been able to tell which stories were valid and factual. Furthermore, I also felt a great deal of trust, because some of the participants shared emotional stories with me such as having their friends stranded on the border, parents passing away and the necessity to travel for medical help.

A third strongly related issue is that although the participants provided me with useful information, they may not have represented the entirety of border practices as they all crossed legally. I was unable to gain the trust of people who cross illegally, which indicates that there are many stories that are yet to be told. Altogether, these considerations imply that I needed to be aware of my biases and privileges as a research responsibility when conducting the interviews and writing up the analysis.

Other ethical considerations include leaving out information that is sensitive but not key to answering my research question. When the participants would reveal such information, I did not stop them in order not to disrupt the flow of the conversation. Furthermore, because some narratives touch upon illegal practices, I have limited exposure of sensitive and private information as much as possible in this thesis. I am convinced the participants were more aware of the risks involved than I was, because they are more familiar with the Syrian and Lebanese authorities.

Looking at power relations, it also needs to be considered that I am female. This could in the first place have prevented potential participants from taking part in this study. Additionally, although I could not detect any influences because of this, it is imaginable that the male participants felt less comfortable sharing information and the female participants felt more comfortable than if I had been male due to, for example, a perceived level of understanding or cultural gender roles.

Moreover, the imbalance of power is also related to conflicting interests. For me, the interviews were essential to produce knowledge for the purpose of my thesis, while for the participants there was seemingly little they could get out of it. Some participants indicated to

be grateful for my attention to the topic and their participation but one only seemed to participate because he was asked to do so by a friend. However, in all cases, I stressed that participation was on a voluntary basis and they could withdraw at any time. They also have my contact information in case they have further questions.

Lastly, looking at political considerations, Clark (2006) stresses that researchers applying the technique of interviewing in the Middle East need to consider politics. This is because the politically sensitive issues, such as border practices, can create unanticipated ethical discomfort. These ethical considerations include the questions around my position as a female researcher from Europe and only spending a limited amount of time in the host country and no time in the country of origin for the purpose of this research. As a privileged white academic interested in the lived experiences on the Syrian-Lebanese border, I sought continual reflexivity on my role as a researcher in relation to the participants and Lebanon as the country I was living in. At the same time, in the interviewing process as well as in the draw-up of my thesis, I considered the political implication of the participants' narratives and aimed to limit potential harm. Thus, I aggregated the narratives, drew connections and patterns, and told a story through my findings and analysis sections in which I fully considered any distortions created by my position.

4.6 LIMITATIONS

While the qualitative interviews allowed me to gather in-depth information on the bordering experience of the participants, the limitations of this research are multifold.

To start with, I missed large parts of the non-verbal communication in the video calls and all in the case of the voice only calls. This means that I could focus solely on language. Moreover, although I did not sense it, the fact that the interviews were held over the phone may have prevented the participants from sharing information they would have otherwise shared with me in person. The positive aspect of conducting phone interviews is that the participants were able to choose a location that was most comfortable for them. Additionally, as I conducted the interviews from home, I made sure to have a white wall as my background with the intention not to cause any distractions during video calls.

Second, as the interviews were conducted in English, which is neither my nor their native language, there may be shortcomings due to language barriers. Despite the fact that all the participants were attending or had attended university, their levels of English differed. However, I felt that they were all comfortable speaking in English, except in one case where I

used a translator. In this case, it is to be expected that some words or meanings were lost in translation.

Third, I relied completely on the accuracy of the participants in recalling their live stories, behavior and thought.

Fourth, numerous stories remain untold. These include, but are not limited to, the stories of those who cross illegally or of distinct groups like Palestinians living in Syria as well as stories on other border practices I am unaware of, on other border-crossing points.

Fifth, I left out perspectives of other actors involved in border practices, such as policy makers, border security officers or taxi drivers. This limits the scope of my research but, at the same time, calls for more research on the topic to be done.

Lastly, my lack of experience and knowledge of the topic can threaten its legitimacy. However, despite the arguably negative consequences of being a 'parachute researcher' it might have allowed me to see important aspects someone involved in the field for years might overlook, resulting in new perspectives. Moreover, by using a narrative approach I focus on the voices of people who do have extensive knowledge on the matter.

5. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

In this section, I introduce each of the five participants. Thereafter, I provide the findings broadly based on the following themes: being on the road, crossing the border into Lebanon and returning home to Syria.

5.1 INTRODUCTION OF PARTICIPANTS

Hala, a humble, calm and soft spoken 33-year-old Syrian woman, arrived in Damascus in 1996 after spending the earliest years of her life in Qatar. She currently works for an international non-governmental organization (INGO). Hala has a busy life but was eager to participate and share her bordering experiences. We even did the interview on the same day I contacted her for the first time.

For most of the participants, the experience of traveling from Syria to Lebanon has changed during and because of the conflict. Hala now has to show her mother's old Lebanese passport and a family card at the border, proving that her Syrian father is married to her Lebanese mother to be allowed to cross the border. This surprised her at first since crossing used to be easy for her. She travels to Beirut once or twice a month, mostly for business but sometimes for personal purposes. While she has family living in Lebanon, Hala does not visit them often because they live in Beirut's neighborhood *Dahieh* with a lot of checkpoints due to security risks.

The grounds on which the participants are allowed to cross the border differ per person and per situation – sometimes even depending on the border officers making the decision. When Hala wants to pass the border by showing her mother's Lebanese passport and the aforementioned family card, she is sometimes questioned. The border officers may ask for proof that the she is the daughter of the woman in the passport. Normally, they grant her a six-month residency based on the fact that her mother is Lebanese. This permit does not give her the same rights as her mother as she is allowed to enter but, for example, not allowed to work. Another way for Hala to enter Lebanon is by showing a Lebanese hotel booking, after which she will be allowed to stay for the duration of her booking, or flight tickets from Rafik Hariri Airport, after which she will receive a 48-hour permit.

However, if she travels for business purposes, Hala uses her INGO ID to cross, as long as the border security recognizes the organization. They normally ask how long the meeting or

workshop will take and, depending on the officer, she will be allowed to stay for the duration of the workshop or up to one month.

Elias, a 25-years-old humorous and passionate man, was very keen to participate. As we started our video call, he wanted to know all about my time in Lebanon and motivation for this research. He spoke enthusiastically about his experiences and even contacted me after our interview to send me additional information on the Syrian-Lebanese border.

Elias was born in Tartus but his mother's family originates from Damascus. He travelled between the two places growing up. At age 18, he moved to Lebanon to pursue higher education. As a recent graduate, Elias is looking for a job while residing with his parents in Tartus. He still travels to Beirut every week or every other week, mostly for university paperwork, visits to friends and soon, he hopes, also for job interviews. Elias has some family living in Lebanon but does not visit them regularly. Initially, he decided to go to Lebanon to be able to pay the exemption fee for the Syrian military service for which one needs to spend four years abroad. He was able to pay it off in 2016 and is therefore not obliged to stay in Syria.

Just like Hala, Elias also used to visit Lebanon all the time when he was growing up to see family. He started university in Lebanon a couple of months before the conflict started and could easily cross the border until that time. When the war erupted, he suddenly faced restrictions and had to apply for a student residence permit, which is valid for one academic year. According to him, it became harder and harder to get due to the time-consuming process of investigations and because of certain conditions which, for example, required him to remain in Lebanon for three months straight. In the end, he resided in Lebanon for seven years to complete his bachelor's degree, his master's degree and an internship. Although formally Elias is already graduated, the student visa which he received for 2018 is granted for one year, which still allows him to travel from Tartus to Lebanon on his student visa until December 2018.

Malek is a 25-years-old energetic man, who spoke in a focused and confident manner. After growing up in Damascus and abroad, he is back in his hometown working a full-time job at an international organization while studying at the same time. He lived in Europe for two and a half years and a Gulf state for another two years. His time abroad made him eligible to pay off his military service. Malek explained that he had to pay $8,000[5] for this "immigration compensation". Malek comes to Beirut every other week to see his girlfriend and his Syrian, Lebanese and "foreign" friends. Additionally, he sometimes crosses to attend training sessions

[5] In this thesis, all references to dollars ($) refer to the United States Dollar

and workshops or to travel via Rafik Hariri Airport because commercial air travel to and from Damascus is currently limited.

Because of the conflict, the duration of stays has also changed for some. Malek used to come to Lebanon every two or three months for a week of vacation because the only requirements for him to enter Lebanon consisted of providing a Syrian national ID card and paying the exit fees of around $5. Malek uses his work ID as well, but because he works for an international organization that is highly valued, he is always able to receive a one-month permit. Due to the nature of his position, he has to apply for a travel permit from the Syrian government one or two days prior to travel. If it is urgent, a permit can be requested for the same day at the Syrian border, he subsequently receives an exit permit for the duration he requested.

Nour is a 25-year-old ambitious Syrian banker who was keen to participate despite the fact that she was ill at the time of the interview. I had the impression that she loved talking about her experiences in Lebanon as she had never been to any other country but truly enjoys the benefits of traveling.

She immediately said that she finds it "unfortunate" to be from Syria. Most of the time she travels to Beirut to visit her father's family, who moved to Lebanon about 50 years ago. Moreover, she accompanies her father when he goes to the American University of Beirut Medical Center (AUB MC) for treatment every two months. Nour also likes to go shopping in Beirut, attend weddings and see some of her Syrian high-school friends who moved to Lebanon. Nour and her family decided to leave Syria temporarily and stay in Lebanon for one month in 2013 when former American president Obama planned to strike Syria. This was not a problem as the border crossing at the time was still "very easy and simple."

Now, Nour can travel to Lebanon with her Syrian bank association card. There are association cards for different types of professions, such as engineers, doctors or traders, all of which have their own regulations. However, whereas this allows Nour easy access to the border, her sister who still attends university cannot go with her and her father can only travel if he can show the AUB MC proof of appointment. He subsequently receives a 48-hour permit to enter Lebanon, receive treatment, and return.

Omar is a 24-year-old man, born and raised in Damascus. I spoke to Omar over the phone with a translator next to him. He was the last person I interviewed and I realized from the start that this participant was going to be slightly different. After he passionately explained his strong sense of being Syrian, he did not show the same engagement in talking about his

border experiences. I believe the difference between Omar and the other participants can be explained by the fact that he has never had to worry as much about the border because of his Jordanian passport. Despite his city of birth and having a Syrian mother, Omar is a Syrian resident with a Jordanian passport because his father originates from Jordan. However, Omar has never lived there and returned to Damascus after studying in Beirut from 2012 until 2017.

He is currently still enrolled and is waiting to pass his final courses while residing in Syria. At the moment, he visits Beirut at least every three months to see his friends from university. Every now and then, he also picks up family from Rafik Hariri Airport. The conflict has changed the traveling for all participants with the exception of Omar, for whom nothing has changed because of his Jordanian passport.

Moreover, with the current border practices, both Omar and Elias do not face any difficulties. Even when he was studying in Lebanon for his bachelor's degree until 2017, Omar would travel to Damascus regularly on the weekends. At first, he used a tourist visa to stay in Lebanon, which was valid for a period of up to three months. Eventually, he received a student permit, which has expired now. Today, upon showing his Jordanian passport at the border, he again receives a three-month tourist visa.

5.2 ON THE ROAD FROM SYRIA TO LEBANON

The participants knew about the increased border restrictions implemented in 2015, which made it illegal for Syrians to cross for humanitarian purposes. Both Hala and Malek sympathize with Lebanon for imposing restrictions. Hala understands that because the influx of refugees is putting pressure on services, Lebanon has to restrict the movement of people. However, she says in an upset tone that the border policies sound "absurd" because people are fleeing their homes because of conflict: "it's sometimes lifesaving to cross the borders and go to another country. And most of the time Lebanon is the only accessible country most people can go to."

Elias thinks the Lebanese border policies became very strict after 2015. He explains that the implemented restrictions are not only limiting movements of Syrians to but also inside Lebanon. Although he understands the concerns of the Lebanese, he says that the way in which the regulations are implemented is "terrible", "inhumane", "naïve" and "a form of classism".

He summarizes the policies as: “if you have money, you are a good guy, if you don’t, *khalas* [خلاص][6].”

The participants indicate that it is possible to travel from Syria to Lebanon by private car, shared or private taxi, or bus. The type of transportation and the purpose of the visit affect the requirements, cost and time of travel. The busses operating between Damascus and Beirut are owned by private companies and are the cheapest option. However, this type of transportation takes the longest, as officers need to check and stamp the passports of the roughly 40 passengers on board and have to go through the luggage of each passenger. This process on the border crossing point alone takes two to three hours. Comparatively, Elias drives his own car, which means he needs to bring his car papers, university admission papers, residence permit and his ID. He spends roughly 20 minutes on the border before he can cross. It costs 65$ for his car and 5$ for what he calls a “travel ticket”. On the Lebanese side, he pays 4$ to enter and 4$ at the customs office for his car.[7]

Hala, Malek and Nour normally take taxis to Beirut, which, Hala explains, takes around four hours. Before the crisis it only took two hours but the checkpoints have delayed the border crossing process. A spot in a shared taxi costs around $50, but when she goes to Rafik Hariri Airport to travel and the flight is late at night, she needs to pay $100 to $150 for a private taxi. Nour and her father always pay $100 for a private taxi, because, as she tells me happily, they have known the driver “since forever.” Malek explains that the drivers have special documents to prove that they are taxi drivers, allowing them to receive 24-hour permits. He uses the services of a taxi company with over 100 cars that are used for transportation to Lebanon. The company’s drivers are familiar with all the checkpoints put in place after the start of the conflict, and know the border officers, which saves a lot of time as the security guards check them less and they can sometimes use the military queue. This company asks $100 for a private taxi and $30 per person for one that fits up to four people.

Both Hala and Malek explain why it is preferable to have a Syrian taxi driver, rather than a Lebanese one. This is because the Syrian drivers know how to “deal” with the checkpoints, meaning the officers do not go through all the luggage. Malek explains without wanting to go into much of the details:

[6] Khalas is an Arabic word to indicate you have had enough or are done
[7] All transactions are made in local currencies

> They already took their share of the money, you know what I mean? […] There is somehow an unofficial or untold protocol for the checkpoints for the Syrian border [and] for the Lebanese border […]. So each checkpoint for example has their share. Either money, either cigarettes, you know, there is like a specific price for each thing. And they don't go through your luggage. I mean, I don't know if people smuggle things, it is more a way of not really waiting that long.

When asked who pays for these transactions, Malek estimates that, out of the $30 each passenger pays, the taxi driver ends up with about $10 to $15 with the rest of the money spent on bribes.

Malek explains he always takes one taxi from his house to his destination in Beirut and enthusiastically shares his insights on the road from Syria to Lebanon:

> You have two options: either you book a car for yourself and then you have to pay 100$ or you go as a passenger with a car that fits four people and then you pay 30$. They pick you up from your home and then you go through, I think, four to six Syrian checkpoints until the border. On the border you have to buy the exit fee coupon, which you have to pay 6$ for. You just go. I mean, on the Syrian border there is really nothing much of restriction so they just check your security record, like if you have any criminal records or like if you have any felony or any court order or if you have to go to the military service. If not, they just let you go, so you stamp either your passport or your national ID. If you're going with your national ID, then they stamp the coupon, not the ID, of course. But if you go with your passport, they stamp the passport. And then on the Lebanese border, they just ask you about the purpose of the trip and if you have proof or any other supporting documents that will allow you to enter Lebanon. So there are different ways to enter Lebanon. When you are going on a tourist trip, the requirements are to show $2,000. It was $1,000 but now, I think last month, they made it $2,000, and a hotel booking. And then they also have a special office where they check if it is real, not fake, and then they give you a permit according to your booking time. The second type is if you have an embassy appointment. Then you also have to show a confirmation of the embassy and they will check it with the embassy. If they give it, you have 24 hours, not more, before the embassy appointment. If you go earlier, they will not let you in. If you have a flight ticket, they also check if it is real and then you can go also for 24 hours, not more. If you are going for medical services, you have to

> show the hospital appointment. Also, they check and then they give you a permit as per your medical requirements, not more or less. I think also, if you own a property in Lebanon, then you can, there is a different procedure that I am not aware of to be honest. [...] Also, if you are a Syrian and you are part of any of the associations, for example the association of engineers, [...] you can take a permit based on these.

The work ID can also be used to travel for non-business purposes. Malek always states personal reasons as the purpose of his visits even though he travels with his work ID. Each purpose of travel is thus linked to different, at times changing, regulations.

To illustrate the changes in crossing because of the conflict, Hala notes, critically of the unclear regulations, that she has to think carefully before going. Once, she traveled with about fifteen colleagues to attend a workshop:

> At the border at that time, at the Lebanese border, they just decided that they don't know the organization and they don't want us to go there and they want a hotel booking and $1,000 from each one and we were around 15 persons, that's $15,000 [...]. We went there several times and they didn't ask us for that and that time they just decided. The problem is that there is no clear system. Okay, sometimes they know the NGO, sometimes they don't, sometimes the old passport of my mother is enough, sometimes they need the passport and the family card, sometimes it depends on his mood, the guy, the officer, sometimes okay you need a hotel booking, okay sometimes a hotel booking with $1,000. So really, it changes and you need to be prepared for any questions. Like, sometimes they ask you about this and sometimes they don't. Yes, it changed and it makes us think wisely before taking this decision.

Expressing feelings of annoyance, Hala says that restrictions on the Lebanese side are part of the reason why the process takes longer now than before the crisis. She explains that, even though there are many officers present on the Lebanese side of the Masna'a border, only a few desks are open, resulting in long queues.

5.3 EXPERIENCE OF BORDER CROSSING

In general, the participants are treated well at the border and do not face any difficulties, although they are questioned from time to time. Hala says the questioning on the Lebanese side about, for example, hotel reservations or the need to show $2,000 in cash makes her nervous.

What troubles her the most though, is how they treat other Syrians. As she starts talking faster, she explains in a worried tone:

> With some people it is obvious that they come from the rural areas, like how they dress and how they look like. So usually those people are treated really very badly on the Lebanese side. Even the way that they talk to them, so […] sometimes it makes you really nervous to just see how they talk to some old ladies and some old men […]. [A]ctually, sometimes it makes you very angry because you know that he is talking to this lady in that very bad way because of how she looks […], because he assumes she is coming from a rural area and she will not be going back to Syria anymore. 'Cause usually those people who are crossing they come from […] some conflict areas and it's obvious sometimes […]. I feel so angry when I see how they are treated there.

On the other hand, Hala feels happy when she crosses the border and receives a one or six-month permit after answering all the questions. She says that it used to be normal to travel frequently with a Syrian ID, "whenever you wanted." Today, it feels different, Hala explains as her voice sounds relieved and excited: "'okay, wow, he gave me one month!' you feel like you want to celebrate. 'I have one month even that if I know that my plan is only for one week but, wow, he likes me, he gave me one month'."

Elias uses the Arida border crossing in the north of Lebanon.[8] He says that he does not experience any difficulties because he has a student resident permit and knows the people working there after crossing the border regularly for seven years. However, like the other participants, he does see that others are treated differently. When asked why he is treated well, he says with confidence that the officers base their judgment on his car, residence permit and because they know him. "[S]ince you have money and you come from a wealthy background, they are fine with it. If you're not, you are in deep shit." Elias adds with a sense of guilt in his voice:

> Sometimes, they are not ethical at all, the people working there. Especially the Lebanese, […] I can see the way they treat people, especially if they are refugees or if they are workers in Lebanon. They treat them as shit, like, they put them in

[8] See p.5

> one line and they push them […] really sometimes like animals. They shout at them and they yell at them using terrible terms sometimes.

His friends are also treated differently sometimes. One time, Elias tried to go to Lebanon with a friend who attends a Syrian university. The border officers made it difficult for her to cross and after being questioned, she had to show the $4,000 cash she had with her. Feeling embarrassed and disrespected, Elias believes this experience confirms the idea that only if you have money, you can cross into Lebanon.

The participants put their own experiences in perspective, exemplified by Malek who explained that once he had to wait three hours at the border because the Lebanese border security did not record his exit in the system during the previous visit, but, he says, aware of his position and in a serious and sad tone: "When you see […] other Syrian people stuck on the border, I mean, compared to them, my process is so easy… so easy."

5.4 LIFE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BORDER

The crossing of the border has different meanings for the participants. For example, it is seen as the only way to see friends by Malek and Elias. Elias explains that "the border is only the physical condition to split or divide me from them but nothing else." Furthermore, Hala finds it difficult that, because the Damascus international airport has limited air traffic due to the conflict, she has to cross the Lebanese border twice in order to travel by plane; once at Masna'a and once at Rafik Hariri Airport. On the other hand, she appreciates that her ability to travel allows her "to escape, if needed." Again, she puts her own experiences in perspective when she says that for other Syrians the border is an obstacle because they lack the financial capabilities and cannot meet the strict regulations. Moreover, she notes, many other Syrians reside in Lebanon illegally, which means they do not have the right to work and face restrictions of movement such as curfews. It befuddles her: "it sounds crazy sometimes […]. Lebanon is not the best place where people are dreaming to go to, but sometimes it is the only place that is accessible."

On the one hand, the participants feel like the Lebanese and Syrian societies are somehow the same. For example, Elias says he feels like it is the same country even though he feels more comfortable and free in Lebanon, which he describes as "more liberal and more democratic." He says:

> You know, it's the same people in two different countries. Especially on the borders area; the same clothing, the same way, the same accent, the same villages, because, you know, […] the first Lebanese village and the last Syrian village are only like less than two kilometers apart. So yeah, it's the same. I don't feel like there is a difference.

He adds that people, mainly the farmers, live in the same poor conditions on both sides of the border. Both Malek and Omar say that they do not feel like they are in a different country either, until they reach Stura. According to them, the villages before that point are in similar or worse conditions than the ones on the Syrian side of the border.

On the other hand, the participants notice differences. Although some view Lebanese and Syrian people as the same, Hala notes that the idea of being Arab is created by others. She says being Arab "means nothing in real life" and jokes that others have the idea that people living in Arab countries just ride camels. Being Syrian, Malek clarifies, "identifies my culture, my way of talking, a lot of my thoughts, a lot of my relationships with people." He only feels Arab whenever he is in Europe, because, he says, "for them all Arab people are the same. Yes, I feel like I am a representative of Arabs and I feel like I have to be, you know, but from my inside I feel like I belong to Syria." Different from the other participants, Elias does not believe in a Syrian or Lebanese distinct identity, but rather feels that they overlap. He does not feel a national belonging but longs for "the old, safe and peaceful Damascus. […] It is about memories, you know? It is the people around you, the places you have good memories at." He believes that the people who remained in Syria during the conflict feel more attached to the country.

Another difference than the perception of others or sense of belonging is something that most participants have both directly and indirectly commented on: Syria may have problems, but Lebanon too, for example with infrastructure, electricity and clean water. Hala thinks that, although some parts of Beirut, such as the downtown area, look "clean and nice", it is not representative for the whole city or country and she says that life in Damascus is very similar to life in Beirut. However, she believes that while the Lebanese culture is more open-minded, they have more problems with corruption and sectarianism. Malek adds that the cultural differences are indeed more noticeable in the city:

> Here you can see the cultural differences; at least the freedom, the way people are dressed, uhm, fancy cars. It's more cosmopolitan, more international. We haven't

> seen a foreigner in Syria for a long time other than the people who work with international organizations. You can see these small details which give you the idea that you are in a different culture.

According to him, people in Beirut are also different because they are more understanding towards other cultures. Moreover, Nour and Hala believe that the understanding and use of English and French next to Arabic in the Lebanese society differentiates this society from other Arab societies.

For Malek, crossing the border into Lebanese society brings him a sense of relief and, at the same time, insecurity. He explains:

> Somehow you are out of this cage which is the war, and the bombing, and the shelling, and all the sounds. The war stress, you know? All this atmosphere of war and anxiety and anger and death... But at the same time, when you go to Beirut, Lebanon is not that much different from Syria. And […] to be honest, the first town after the border, when you cross to the Lebanese border, is Nasj del Anjar, which is a conservative Islamic society. A couple of times I saw some ISIS[9] flags on the streets there while crossing into Lebanon. So you don't feel like you are out of this atmosphere that much. But when you reach Beirut, okay, it is different. You feel somehow like you can roam around more. You don't feel anxious or stressed about the mortars that will fall down at any moment. But at the same time, you know that there is a historic background of the relationship between the Syrian and Lebanese people, so you don't feel that much safe because at any moment you might be in a situation where you can be humiliated […] Sometimes you can sense discrimination, and for me, it is easier to be, let's say humiliated in Syria than to be humiliated in Lebanon. I mean, at least it is your country, Damascus is your town, you know how to deal with a specific situation, you know how to respond, how to defend yourself […] you know people, you know how things are done, but when you are in Lebanon, you don't know anything. Actually, in Lebanon, you know it is not a country of laws and policy, so you might be killed, kidnapped, whatever, anywhere, with no one to defend you.

[9] Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

Malek thus feels safer in Lebanon because of the conflict at home, while he stresses that Lebanon is not entirely safe and he does not feel completely comfortable there either.

Most of the participants do not feel like they are treated badly in Lebanon, noting, however, that other Syrians do not receive the same treatment as people with other nationalities. Elias explains that he feels that Lebanese people are sometimes surprised he is Syrian because, he says, he does not match their view of Syrians. He feels like he experiences "positive discrimination" because he enjoys a specific social status and notes that comments he receives "seem nice but are racist":

> They say it in a nice way […] 'we like you, you are not like other Syrians,' but it indicates something. It hides something, you know? […] It indicates that these guys, they don't like Syrians but because I act like them, they consider me as Lebanese. Like, I behave in a Lebanese way because I speak English, because I go to college, because I got my master's degree. I wear like good brands. I go to ABC.[10] I go to music halls. That's the way they are, 'you are like us'. And it's about the financial situation in the end, if you have good money.

On the other hand, Omar calls Lebanese people thieves and does not feel comfortable with them. He often experiences discrimination and explains: "If you are driving a Syrian car, it is so obvious that other people are trying to drive roughly towards you and stare at you in an angry way and sometimes they shout. Once it happened that two guys on a bike hit my car and started asking for money." He believes this only happens because of his Syrian license plate. Hala also thinks the majority of Lebanese people are not friendly towards Syrians. She explains how sometimes she feels the need to tell someone her mother is Lebanese just to be accepted. Hala thinks Lebanese people can tell by her accent that she is Syrian. She explains what upsets her: "So they ask you: 'are you Syrian?' 'Are you going back to Syria?' 'Do you live here?' Come on, if you see someone from a different country, you don't ask them; 'are you going back to your own country or are you going to stay?'"

Hala cannot switch to a Lebanese accent herself because of her strong Damascene accent, she explains while laughing. However, she knows of Syrians living in Lebanon who speak with a Syrian accent to her but who, for example when they go to stores, fake a Lebanese accent so that people do not identify them as Syrians to feel more comfortable. Malek recognizes this phenomenon, saying that he lacks the confidence in Lebanon that he feels in Syria. He tries to

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[10] A luxury mall

do anything to keep himself out of trouble in Lebanon and, as part of this, speaks quietly to hide his Syrian accent. However, Malek does not fake a Lebanese accent, because, he explains emotionally: “It is so humiliating to hide your identity. Being quiet is easier than faking. It feels like you should be ashamed of your identity but I am not. There is nothing to be ashamed of. Regardless of any political stance […], I am very proud to come from this part of the world.”

Malek believes that the discrimination towards Syrians comes from the way Syrians treated the Lebanese during the Lebanese civil war and because of the current number of Syrian refugees residing in Lebanon. However, he says while apologizing:

> Since I am not a refugee and I am so sorry to say this but I don’t look like a refugee so people would treat me differently. So maybe their main anger is coming from another background. Because for them, I am here to spend money, I go out like them, I live like them so I am not a burden on them, I am more like an income for them. […] But I’ve heard many conversations between two Lebanese being like ‘oh fuck, it’s full of Syrians now man, you cannot move without seeing 100 Syrians there.’

At the same time, he does not want to generalize and also feels that some Lebanese people sympathize with Syrians. He believes this sympathy is related to the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah, when Lebanese people fled to Syria for a short time. Malek says the Syrians welcomed the Lebanese people back in those days and some Lebanese consider treating the Syrian refugees well today as a way to repay the Syrians for their treatment of the Lebanese in 2006.

5.5 RETURNING HOME TO SYRIA

During the seven years he spent in Lebanon, Elias felt at home. He explains: “it is about where you feel safe, where you want to stay […]. The place you call home is not necessarily the place you are born in.” He adds that it is the place where he “became more mature, started clubbing and experienced sex for the first time.” So, he says, it is about the experiences that have shaped the way he is. Moreover, he does not have as many friends in Syria and says that, among other reasons, this is because the Syrian society is more conservative. Elias only returned to Syria to see his parents and to enjoy his mother’s food. He feels nostalgic about Damascus with “its old houses and typical food.” Despite not having lived in Damascus for a long time, it is the city where he thinks he can build a similar life to the one he had in Beirut with liberal and open-minded people.

Nour is the only one who expresses explicit preference for life in Lebanon over life in Syria. She says, pointing at the language, traditions and cultural similarities: "I believe in the Arab world, and I think it should be one […] we are the same." She adds: "I can't see Syria if there are no people; my friends, my family, my place, my home. It means nothing to me if these are not available." She feels more comfortable in Lebanon: "I feel relieved security wise. When I hear a loud noise or a boom or something, I get scared because I am used to hearing bombs and stuff so I don't understand quickly that I am not in Syria anymore." Moreover, she believes that refugees cause problems and explains with conviction: "I totally understand they cause problems to Lebanon but I don't see myself like that because I shop a lot, I go to places, I think it is good for them, *ya'ani* [يعني][11], the money."

Comparatively, Hala, Malek and Omar feel very strongly about Syria. Even though Hala says "this is not the Syria that we know," it is where she feels at home because she spent the majority of her life there and would never live in another Arab country if she ever were to leave Syria. When Malek returns to Syria, he feels home despite the challenges:

> I get the confidence back somehow, but at the same time, I get the anxiety back, the fears back, like it is so obvious that I cross [mentally and physically]. So like anxiety habits that I do all the time, like I bite my nails, I play with my beard, I bite my lips for example. So when I travel, whenever I travel outside of Syria, seriously, I don't. I just stop doing all of this, but when I come back, although I am feeling confident like it is my country now, it is my territory, I know people, I know my abilities, I know how I should act in specific situations, but I get the stress back. Unconsciously, I just feel myself biting my nails.

He believes that because "most of the people are outside now" his sense of home "is more related with memories and places we cannot go to anymore."

The participants have many friends and relatives who cannot travel to Lebanon regularly. They explain that their friends do not have the financial capacities or privilege of working for an employer who allows them to travel, are not allowed to leave Syria because of conscription or who are, for example, Palestinian. The participants think that the costs are the main reason why their friends cannot travel. Elias and Malek explain that with an average salary

[11] Ya'ani is used in Arabic to say "it means" in a way similar to the English use of "you know" and "like"

in Syria of $100 per month, people rather spend their money on improving their living conditions at home.

When asked how the differences in situation between her and her friends make Hala feel, she admits in an upset tone: “It makes me feel awful because […] it’s exactly against equality and why can I go freely? Okay, I am more lucky that I have a job with an international NGO but there’s a lot of other people that sometimes… they really need to go.” When she thinks about this, she also reminds herself that she is privileged because if the conflict escalates, she will always be able to go to Lebanon. She respects Syrians risking their lives by crossing illegally: “I really feel like those people are fighters, and survivors. It makes me feel proud. Okay, wow, those people really deserve a better life.” She feels guilty for having the chance to go while other people, who “are suffering day and night”, need it more. One time, she wanted to cross the border with a group of volunteers she was taking to a workshop in Lebanon. She had to tell her Palestinian colleagues they could not accompany her and describes this as one of the moments she hated most in her life.

Malek does not like to share his travel experiences with friends because some of them have been trying to cross for years and still cannot go. It makes him feel bad and he thinks his friends envy him, not only because he can “escape to Lebanon” every other week but also because it shows that he is financially capable of traveling. Comparatively, Omar has never thought about how his ability to travel makes him different from other Syrians who cannot leave Syria except for when he is treated differently at the border because of his Jordanian passport and has to use a different queue. He says, sounding annoyed: “I have to wait for other people to finish.”

5.6 TRAVELING IN THE FUTURE

The future is a difficult topic for the participants as most of them want to leave Syria and Lebanon altogether. Only Omar sees his future in Syria.

Hala describes her situation: “I [am] just applying for scholarships, even though I am fine. I don’t want to study anymore but it is the only legal way that I can go through.” She wants to go to Europe or the US.

Malek sees his future in Europe as well and, when asked why not in Syria, he explains: “That’s enough. I lived there for enough time and I think the war is not ending soon and it is really devastating regardless of all the financial and social conditions that we are living in. It is

difficult to continue here." He says to be sure travel limitations are stopping him from migrating. Comparatively, Elias is focusing on his career but it does not really matter to him where: "I have no problem traveling to Somalia or if the opportunity is good to Nepal […] I wouldn't mind [working with] UNHCR in Iraq or in Raqqa, the most conservative place in Syria […] [but] the people in my team should be really, you know, open-minded […]. It is not about the place but about the people around you."

Nour says she would "totally love to leave" because the limited opportunities in Syria are holding her career back. Thinking about Lebanon as an option, she notes: "I would like to work in Bank Audi in Lebanon. I would love it just for my career because I would learn great things but I can't. It is impossible. They won't allow me, even with a Lebanese residence permit." Nour explains that it is nearly impossible for Syrians to obtain a work permit in Lebanon, even with her Lebanese family. "Plus, working in Bank Audi as a Syrian is very hard. Front desk is definitely not an option. Can you imagine going to a bank in Lebanon and the customer service officer speaks Syrian?" she says as if it would be the most unimaginable thing in the world. Nour would love to go to Dubai for her career as well, even though she has never been she says: "I would love to work in Dubai, I love Dubai, the banking sector is just…". She stops and sighs in admiration and hope. Then she continues to explain that her fiancée is currently working in Kuwait and hopes to be married within two years so that she can follow him there, which she believes is only possible if they make use of his family connections in Kuwait.

6. ANALYSIS

The theoretically informed analysis of my findings explores how the experience of Syrians frequently traveling to Lebanon can be understood and qualified in light of the concept of bordering. I first cover habitus and social, cultural and economic capital, the rules and act of border crossing. Based on this analysis, I turn to the meaning of border-crossing between Syria and Lebanon by looking at the border as a separator and connector, defining the cross-border movement and looking at the development of a collective identity of the participants as frequent opportunity travelers.

6.1 HABITUS AND THE ABILITY TO CROSS

To start with, my findings show that the ability of someone to cross the border depends on his or her habitus. First, there is someone's social capital, encompassing the interaction between people and social formations (Bourdieu 1972). This relates to both the ability as well as motivation to cross. For example, Hala, Elias and Nour have been coming to Lebanon for a long time, understand the Lebanese society and still cross partly because they have family living in Lebanon. It also relates to knowing the right taxi drivers; getting the cheapest price for a ride like Malek, having a driver you trust completely like Nour and her father or getting the driver who knows how to avoid strict control at the checkpoints. Social capital enables the participants to understand the field and move from one to another more easily.

Secondly, cultural capital also constitutes their habitus, i.e. the understanding of the so-called codes of the field, the hierarchy set up by spatial formations of society which directs actions (Bourdieu 1972). Like social capital, cultural capital relates to their understanding of how to cross, as well as how to behave on both sides of the border. In terms of understanding the most efficient way to cross, cultural capital relates to taxi drivers knowing the rules of checkpoints, knowing who and how to bribe and with what means, from cigarettes to money. Importantly, the participants know this is what they pay for, no questions asked. It is even the reason why Syrian drivers are preferred as they are familiar with such unwritten rules.

Moreover, cultural capital additionally includes the fixed value of tangible things such as Omar's Jordanian passport combined with his Syrian residence permit or the Lebanese passport of Hala's mother combined with the Syrian family card proving her parents are indeed married. It also includes Malek and Hala's work identification cards, Malek's documentation proving he has paid the military exemption fee, Nour's bank association card and Elias'

Lebanese student visa. Thus, such documents objectify credentials regardless of the individual holding them, giving power to the ones possessing them.

In terms of knowing how to behave on both sides of the border, as well as during the crossing, one of the codes that became clear is knowledge of the political history between the two countries. The participants referred to this time and time again, mentioning, for example, the shared history of the countries, the similarities between the people and the influence of sectarianism. Further, these close historical ties made it feel natural for the participants to cross regularly up until the outbreak of the Syrian conflict. First, this highlights the historically thin multi-dimensional boundaries as indicated by Diogini (2017). Second, this understanding enables the participants to know how to behave in certain situations. Malek, for example, explained to feel more comfortable in Syria than Lebanon because he understands what his behavior means at home. Others mentioned that Syrians at times hide their accent in Lebanon to avoid being treated differently.

Thirdly, there is economic capital. This, for example, relates to their financial capabilities, jobs with international NGOs, hotel bookings and material wealth. The participants use their economic power as an instrument to function in the field, which is possible as its accumulated worth becomes socially recognizable. This way, their economic capital forms the basis of power. Some examples are the relatively high salary of most participants in comparison to a Syrian's average wage of $100 per month, the fact that Elias drives his car across the border or that they can afford taxis. In the case of Nour and her father, they even pay for private taxis, spending a month's average salary on a one-way ride.

Importantly, it is symbolic capital that allows them to cross, and grants them a positive reception in Lebanon. Capital needs to be recognized by others, such as by the border officers or Lebanese society, in order to be of value. Like Hala explained, sometimes the officers acknowledge her NGO on the border, but other times they might create trouble, they might ask for her mother's passport. Even this passport proves to be insufficient at times. Besides, symbolic capital can change through, for example, marriage or a different job and thereby acquiring an association card or obtaining a foreign nationality. At the same time, recognition of symbolic capital can change, even arbitrarily. Hala explained that border security sometimes refuses to recognize the NGO she works for, or the fact that the period she is allowed to stay in Lebanon is dependent on the person going through her documents at the border. These factors are thus dependent on how an officer values her documents.

Another example of the importance of symbolic capital was given by Elias, who noted that the border officers recognize his wealth by looking at his car or the clothes he wears. Moreover, like others, he indicated that he is treated better than the average Syrian in Lebanon because he looks like he has money or a certain status and is not a refugee. Thus, the participants' social position, resources and competence constitute the habitus that defines their sense of orientation and makes it possible to cross the border by being ascribed a certain position in the field. This finding also reflects Mourad's (2017) idea that authorities purposefully exclude certain groups through border management and that such practices serve the elite, as described by Van Veen (2015).

6.2 THE RULES OF BORDER CROSSING

The Syrian-Lebanese border's rules or doxa define how one's spatial movement is related to one's environment and relationships to others as well as institutions. It has been established that Syrians are limited in movement because of the border policies and increasingly restrictive regulations. This reflects the findings of my literature review as the Masna'a and Arida border crossing points are indeed controlled by the Syrian and Lebanese governments, upholding strict policies (Mourad 2017; Diogini 2017). However, it needs to be noted that this does not mean there are no informal border crossings taking place, for example with aid of Hezbollah, as noted by Obeid (2010).

On the Masna'a and Arida border, the habitus of the participants is assessed together with that of other Syrians and they are, accordingly, attributed a legitimate position in the field. Part of the reasons why the participants can cross is based on their motivation, which, in turn, leads to different rules. Motivations including pursuing academic careers, visiting friends and family, hoping to find a job, and more, reflect the findings of my literature review that there is a clear discrepancy between the state borders and social boundaries (Obeid 2010; Cisneros 2014) and that these boundaries are not just a physical construct but they impact daily life practices (Newman 2003; Kolossov 2005; Newman 2006).

At the same time, each motivation to cross requires different components of habitus. The rules related to different motivations include, but are not limited to, applying for a student residence permit which takes months to obtain during which one cannot leave Lebanon. The validity of the given permit, again, depends on your habitus. For example, even though he is graduated, Elias' student permit is valid until December and Hala can sometimes stay for six

months, if she is given permission to cross based on her mother's passport. Yet, this passport only allows her to travel, but not to work or vote in elections.

Hala further explained that the time period given to someone is arbitrary, depending on how the border officers on that day value one's papers, in turn reflecting the importance of symbolic capital. It also depends on, for example, one's employer. Although he needs government permission, Malek can normally stay for periods up to one month because he works for a renowned organization. Even though Malek travels with his work ID, he still states on the border that he travels for personal reasons, which indicates that his crossing is allowed because of what his work represents, not on what he plans on doing. In fact, his motivation to cross can be similar to the wish of someone not allowed to cross. This underlines the extent to which the border, its practices and rules are socially constructed and understood differently for each individual as a subjective reality (see Berger and Luckmann 1966). The easiest way of crossing seems to be with a foreign passport like Omar, which provides a three-month tourist visa and allows for crossing the border by using the shorter queue designated for foreigners.

Generally, without special papers like a work ID, association card or foreign passport, it is necessary to provide proof of the visit's purpose combined with $2,000 in cash. Additionally, one should not be called up for military service and have a clear criminal record. The time those crossing the border are allowed to be in Lebanon for depends on the purpose. The varying motivations to cross and the related policies firstly indicate that to what extent the physical border affects daily lives indeed depends on border management (Newman 2006), as both policies and border officers decide who is allowed to cross, in what way and for how long. In addition, the motivations go beyond those of migration and tourism, including hospital visits and embassy appointments.

Moreover, these findings highlight that the renewed policies of 2015, in combination with, for example, the 2018 increase of the amount of cash that needs to be shown at the border from $1,000 to $2,000 serve a regulative and filtering function (as described by Mourad 2017; Diogini 2017). Following my literature review as well as my findings, the Syrian-Lebanese border practices indicate that the governments on both sides pushed back when the number of people crossing increased (as described by Van Veen 2015; Diogini 2017). This way, the official border regulations as well as the arbitrary decisions made by border officers can be seen as a purposeful act to exclude populations (as discussed by Mourad 2017). This has resulted in a situation where border management stops those people from crossing legally who might need it to survive, as reflected by the events of January 2018 (Sanchez 2018). At the same time,

people like the participants see it as a normal option to cross, as described by Newman 2006, which points at the relative convenience of traveling as a reason to cross.

The crossing of the border by the participants and others alike affects so-called hybrid sovereignty. Whereas Tholens (2017) describes hybrid sovereignty as formal and informal government structurers interacting within a social space and thereby affecting the hard or softness of the border, I find that individuals can do so as well. On the one hand, conflicts and military control, as described by Tholens (2017), combined with the subsequent increase of regulations may harden the border. On the other hand, the continued crossing of individuals like the participants as well as refugees, albeit often illegally, softens the border as it indicates that there is a random division of social groups and the flow of people transcends the idea of national territoriality (as described by Diogini 2017).

6.3 THE ACT OF BORDER CROSSING

The crossing of the Syrian-Lebanese border is experienced as rather normal by the participants despite the increased regulations. It could be argued that this reality is taken for granted, as Berger and Luckmann describe it. Only by comparing themselves to their family, friends, colleagues or to other Syrians generally, they understood that for them, as people possessing a certain habitus, it is relatively easy to cross. Nevertheless, they indicated that it has become more of a hassle in recent times – except for Omar for whom nothing has changed because of his Jordanian passport. Looking at the concept of bordering as how the participants live and understand the Syrian-Lebanese border, their experience has changed over time. This is, for example, reflected by Hala's experiences who indicated that for her, unlike most Syrians, the ability to cross the border can be a lifeline if needed (as discussed by Newman 2006). Nour even crossed with her family in 2011 to stay in Lebanon for one month because of the US bomb threat. Now, Nour's family cannot travel as easily anymore. Such experiences do make them grateful for their ability to cross.

The crossing itself was not experienced as difficult by the participants, but they experienced sadness and anger when they considered how other Syrians are treated by border officers or inside Syria. Moreover, because the border officers' decisions on crossing- ranging from deciding who is allowed to enter to the period people allowed to stay- seems arbitrary, Hala was grateful for the periods she was allowed to enter Lebanon, even though she understands she is entitled to access. Thus, looking at the Syrian-Lebanese border beyond territorial boundaries (Cisneros 2014), the findings indicate that the crossing of the border

enables the participants to explore different social surroundings while constructing a narrative on the border which involves aspects of social exchanges, border security, legal status as well as geographical and cultural proximity, comparable to the what relocation and border town studies have found.

Another example of how border crossing can make one feel is given by Elias, who indicated that he can cross because the border officers recognize him and know that he is wealthy and has a residence permit. He acknowledged that he is lucky with this - in Bourdieu's terms - habitus because it is often the opposite for many other Syrians who are, according to him, treated like animals because the way they look or because of the way the officers expect them to be like. They put other Syrians, who are not recognized as having a certain status or position, in embarrassing situations by pushing them around or asking for proof of their financial capabilities by forcing them to bring and show exorbitant amounts of cash. In other words, the participants and other people alike with a certain amount and type of capital are recognized and categorized by border agents as people that are not only allowed to cross but also are to be treated different from people with capital that is given less credit. The relationship of the participants as a collective with the political system and system of social control, i.e. border management, define their field of opportunities, as described by Melucci (1995), given that crossing into Lebanon is still possible but has become more difficult.

In short, crossing is seen as something that should be normal, but has become increasingly difficult and a privilege. Therefore, the Syrian-Lebanese border today does not only create a separation between Lebanese and Syrian people, but it creates a division between Syrians as well. At this moment, border management has caused the Syrian-Lebanese border to materialize differently between those Syrians able to cross legally and those who cannot. Thus, while the border is constructed through a top-down process and border management affects the daily lives of Syrians differently (as discussed by Newman 2006), the demarcation line separates groups.

In addition, it shows that the Syrian-Lebanese border materializes in different ways for individual Syrians as well, a process described by Prokolla (2009), and that the meaning individuals attribute to the border depends goes beyond the ability to cross as it impacts life practices and identities, as discussed by Newman (2006). For instance, people like Malek and Elias have been able to pay off their military service only because they possess the right type and amount of capital to be able to cross and reside outside of Syria for more than four years. In contrast, the same border regulations that have enabled them to do so, have stopped other

Syrians from being able to meet the requirements and this has affected their lives to the extent that they have to join the military. However, crossing the border has made it possible for the participants to see other people, pursue academic degrees and be exposed to other cultures, whereas those restricted by the border regulations are hindered from engaging in such practices. This shows that the participants are understood as different from other Syrians.

Thus, recognizing the motivations behind the act of border crossing and what it leads to, i.e. creating a distinction between those who can and those who cannot cross, does not only increase the understanding of bordering in the Syrian-Lebanese context but also how this relates to aspects of collective action and identity as described by Melucci (1995). In addition, crossing the border can be seen as a cultural practice in light of Linde-Laursen's (2016) concept of bordering, given that the participants use their abilities to enter into different social spaces.

6.4 THE MEANING OF BORDER-CROSSING BETWEEN SYRIA AND LEBANON

6.4.1 THE BORDER AS A SEPERATOR AND CONNECTOR

Looking at the participants' narratives and their bordering experiences, i.e. how they live, understand and manipulate the border, it becomes clear that the Syrian-Lebanese border creates notions of difference based on habitus. The border does not only separate Lebanese people from Syrians, but also creates a distinction between those Syrians who can cross and those who cannot as well as between those who can cross legally and those who cannot. On the one hand, this identification is imposed by others (as described by Vignal 2017), namely by the authorities responsible for border management, the officers who arbitrarily enforce the policies and, for example, by the Lebanese people who treat the participants differently than other Syrians, including refugees. It needs to be noted that how Lebanese people treat Syrians is addressed here through the eyes of the participants.

Related to this is the notion of difference created through self-identification, which Kolossov (2005) and Newman (2006) describe as a recurring theme in border studies. Some of the participants explicitly stated to be and feel different from other Syrians, for example, because of their motivations to come to Lebanon. This way, it becomes clear that the way the participants differentiate themselves from others is related to their understanding of self and other. The other becomes not just Lebanese people on the other side of the border. Sometimes it is even the opposite, as Hala, Elias and Malek indicated to behave similarly to Lebanese people, which in their opinion is based on their behavior in terms of shopping, night life and characteristics such as being open-minded. The other becomes a person without symbolic

capital the participants deem important for border crossing: money, expensive clothing, cars, jobs, foreign education or capabilities such as being able to speak multiple languages. Therefore, it becomes apparent that because the participants do have this symbolic capital, they see themselves as different and it allows them to escape the label of refugees based on the assumption that a refugee is someone who does not have such capital. This notion of difference is reinforced by other actors involved in border crossing, such as the border guards who, according to Hala and Elias, treat people who are dressed in a certain way badly because they assume they are not going to return or are refugees. Thus, the Syrian-Lebanese border influences the way in which the participants describe themselves and make sense of their position in the field (as described by McCrone and Bechofer 2015; Vignal 2017).

However, it is not just because of border management or the actors involved perceiving people differently and behave accordingly that the border materializes differently for everyone. It is also the practical manner because while the border is near to impossible to cross for some Syrians, others cross frequently. For the participants this means that despite the conflict the Syrian-Lebanese border remains thin and does not necessarily limit their social, cultural or economic boundaries (as described by Vignal 2017). Rather, the border is used as a connector and opens up opportunities. This again shows how experiences around the objectively given border lead to differing subjective realities of individuals (see Berger and Luckmann 1966).

6.4.2 DEFINING CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENT

The way in which the participants experience bordering cannot fully be captured by current definitions of cross-border spatial movement, such as of those living in border towns, as return migrants, as circular migrants, or as tourists (see Veal 2006; Venturini 2008; UNECE 2016; UNESCO 2018). To illustrate, while a trip to Beirut from Tartus or Damascus is convenient in terms of travel time and transportation possibilities and the participants point at cultural resemblance, the cities are not border towns in terms of geographical proximity. The people moving in between them, and specifically those not able to cross, also do not take the border for granted as its implications are profound. Secondly, the participants are not return migrants, because the return to Syria is not the end point of their mobility. Thirdly, the participants are not circular migrants either. Following Newman (2009) and UNECE (2016), the participants do meet some dimensions of circular migration, such as repeatedly moving between two places, of which one is the place of origin. The place of origin is defined by birth, as is the case for Nour, Elias and Malek, by citizenship, as is the case for Hala, and by previous residence, as is the case for Omar. However, while the five of them arguably do contribute to development of

the place of origin and of destination, which is one of the required dimensions of circular migration, they currently do not stay in Lebanon for a minimum period of three months and, as required in most definitions, they do not only cross for labor opportunities. Lastly, they are not tourists either, for example because their motivations to travel go beyond leisure only.

Therefore, I argue that the participants form a yet undefined flow of spatial movement. To substantiate this argument, I look at their motivations to travel. It is namely not only because of their ability or habitus that they cross. More importantly, it is because of factors in Syria that make them want to leave and factors in Lebanon that attract the participants.

To start with, the most apparent reason to leave Syria as the country of origin is to escape war and civil unrest. Malek for example talked about how he breaks out of "the cage of war" when he travels to Lebanon and Nour similarly described to feel relieved after crossing as she is scared of the sound of bombings at home. In 2013, she even resided in Lebanon for one month with her family to escape the threat of attacks from America on Syria. This sense of relief and the escape add to the symbolic value of the border and the participants' ability to cross. Next to that, reasons to leave Syria include the needs and wants of the participants related to meeting new people, visiting friends and seeing family, which they are not able to if they stay in Syria.

Secondly, clear factors in Lebanon that attract the participants include favorable social conditions, education and business opportunities. To start with, both Hala and Malek travel to Lebanon to attend trainings and workshops for their jobs with international organizations in Syria. Secondly, Elias and Malek both enjoyed years of education in Lebanon. Thirdly, the favorable social conditions became evident when the participants spoke positively about Beirut as a cosmopolitan city with open-minded people. Fourthly, there is some comfort in maintaining their native tongue, although Hala and Malek said they know of people changing their accents, and people in Lebanon are generally perceived as similar to Syrians. Fifthly, Hala and Elias sometimes visit family in Lebanon and all participants, with the exception of Hala, explained that one of the main motivations to visit Beirut is to see their friends and for Malek also to see his girlfriend. Sixthly, another factor is the new experiences Beirut offers, which was explained by Elias who went clubbing and had sexual intercourse for the first time in Lebanon. Lastly, Beirut is seen as an attractive destination which allows the participants to enjoy shopping, safety and relative convenient traveling in terms of visa arrangements, ease of planning and transportation. Moreover, Beirut is seen as attractive because of the freedom, open-mindedness and cosmopolitan vibe, as explained by Malek. It is also a stop on the way to further

destinations, which Malek, Hala and Omar explained as they travel through Rafik Hariri airport now that the international airport in Damascus has very limited options for commercial travel.

However, the participants do not only use their ability to cross for leisure and business opportunities. The participants use the border to take control over their lives. The ability to cross the border has allowed Malek to spend enough interrupted periods abroad to be eligible to pay off his Syrian military service. It allows Nour to accompany her father with his frequent visits to the AUB MC to receive urgent medical care. It allowed all of them to escape conflict in Syria as they pleased and to do so in the future but, most importantly, it also allows them to return.

For years, they have left Syria frequently for Lebanon but always returned. Even when Omar was studying in Lebanon, he would go back to Damascus every weekend. The participants feel at home in Syria. They have capital there that is important to them: they know their way around, as Malek indicated time and time again, they have families waiting for them, they have jobs, they enjoy a specific status, they call it home. Every time Malek returns to Damascus, he feels more confident than abroad. He says it is because he "belongs to Syria" and understands how the society works, he understands the rules of the field. Elias, who has stayed abroad longer than the other participants longs for the good old and safe Damascus, where life was good. Hala says to never want to live in another Arab country than Syria and even Nour, the only one who indicated to prefer life in Lebanon over that in Syria, stays in Damascus because of her family. Although Syria is not how they have known the country growing up, it is their home they keep returning to.

Moreover, even if they desire to leave Syria and Lebanon altogether, they cannot migrate at the moment. For instance, Nour aspires a banking career outside of Syria but believes this is impossible because of the visa regulations and is now waiting to get married to her fiancée in Kuwait so that she could possibly follow him within two years. Another example is Hala who, despite not wishing to continue studying, is applying for scholarships to pursue her education abroad as it is the only legal way for her to leave. Therefore, it can be concluded that the participants do not want to or cannot live in Lebanon, for example because they are looked down upon or because they value their home and capital in Syria more. At the same time, they do not have enough capital to leave Syria and Lebanon as a non-refugee altogether. Because of these reasons, the participants ended up in a type of traveling between Syria and Lebanon, which allows them to enjoy the benefits of travel and home: they are 'frequent opportunity travelers.'

6.4.3 COLLECTIVE IDENTITY OF FREQUENT OPPORTUNITY TRAVELERS

Finally, Melucci discusses how social movements in a globalized world focus on claiming authority over daily lives by individuals who, through their actions, can be viewed as a collective identity. While he focuses on actions by a collective based on individual motivations, I explore individual narratives and argue that the participants are a collective of frequent opportunity travelers in a similar way as well. Without being a social movement, they claim authority over aspects of daily life, including time, space and interpersonal relations. They further share a consciousness of their position in the field, have a shared ability to cross -because of the recognition by others- and return as they operate within a field of constraints. At the same time, they share a sense of emotional attachment to Syria which -looking at their narratives- seems to somehow compensate for their inability to migrate completely.

There is a sense of unity between the participants related to their understanding of being Syrians with the right types and amount of capital to cross. The participants realize they perceive themselves and are perceived by others as different from refugees and other Syrians with less capital who wish to cross the Syrian-Lebanese border. Hala for example explained to feel very privileged to be able to leave as she pleases and have the opportunity to "escape" if need be. Malek even refrains from talking about his visits to Beirut with his friends who cannot travel because it makes him feel bad. Moreover, the relationship of the participants, and that of other Syrians in a comparable position, with the outside, e.g. authorities, Lebanese and Syrians with insufficient capital, defines their field of opportunities and constraints.

The participants take the opportunity to claim authority over aspects of their daily life such as valuable opportunities, from obtaining academic degrees, attending business meetings, enjoying the favorable social conditions to seeking medical care in Lebanon. Bordering as a system of opportunities and constraints allows the participants to claim this authority because of their capital, their privileges. This makes them different and recognizable through the act of repeated crossing.

Because of the conflict, the local, national and international borders no longer align in Syria (Diogini 2017). The participants' ability to cross is an opportunity for them to overcome political conditions that can facilitate and hinder home ties, such as restrictions of movement and shaping of social space (Waldinger 2008; Cisneros 2014). Border policies and regulations deprive most Syrians of valuable opportunities in life and it is because of their habitus that the participants, representing those still able to cross regularly collectively, are able to exercise

control over their own lives. Through their repeated crossing of the Syrian-Lebanese border, the frequent opportunity travelers shape lives, practices and, ultimately, social reality, as described by Berger and Luckmann's social construction of reality and Melucci's collective identity theories. At the same time, through the participants' ability to and act of repeatedly leaving and returning to Syria combined with their constructed idea of Syria as 'home', in contrast with their shared lack of will or capital or their inability to migrate completely, can be seen as a process through which a collective identity discourse as Syrians is developed, distinct from Syrian migrants, including refugees, or Lebanese nationals.

CONCLUSION

To answer how the experience of Syrians frequently traveling to Lebanon can be understood and qualified in light of the concept of bordering, I look at a vast body of literature on spatial movement, including border studies and the Syrian-Lebanese border specifically, as well as theoretical insights to make sense of the participants' narratives.

My findings both reinforce what was already known in the field, while also contributing to the knowledge of border and migration studies. On the one hand, it is clear that the turbulent history between Syria and Lebanon as I describe in my thesis remains relevant today. Through my findings, I show that there is indeed a discrepancy between social boundaries and state borders. At the same time, border practices purposefully exclude people. It reinforces the notion of a multi-dimensional border, which has both liberating and confining aspects. Reflecting the theoretical framework, the participants' narratives highlight the belief that a person is attributed a legitimate position in a field because of their habitus and empowering capital. This causes the border to materialize in different ways, as described in the literature review. In addition, bordering is performed as a cultural practice by the participants as the crossing allows them to enter into different social spaces, as described by Linde-Laursen (2016).

On the other hand, I believe that the participants take part in a rather unique yet undefined type of spatial movement, which led me to label them as frequent opportunity travelers. To start with, different motivations make them explore life on the other side of the border. While most Syrians are unable to do so legally, the participants enjoy this privilege of being able to visit Lebanon because of their social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital. To learn about the meaning of this spatial movement, I look at the concept of bordering through the narratives of the participants: how they live, understand and manipulate the border. I find that the ability to cross enables them to redefine their field of opportunities and claim authority over their lives as they travel for leisure and non-leisure purposes, including the motivational factors of escaping conflict, receiving education, enjoying favorable social opportunities and receiving medical care. Through this exploration, I establish the rules of border crossing and describe how bordering works in practice for some Syrians still able to travel to Lebanon regularly in times of conflict today. I note that it is solely because of the type and amount of capital, i.e. the habitus, the participants bring with them and their understanding of the doxa of the field of the border, that they are able to cross the Syrian-Lebanese border regularly.

Today, the border does not only create a physical distinction between Lebanon and Syria, it also separates Lebanese from Syrian people and makes a clear distinction between Syrians who are allowed to cross versus those who are not based on their habitus. Moreover, my findings indicate that the participants do not fully meet current definitions of migrants and tourists and have more varied motivations. While the participants enjoy the benefits of traveling to Lebanon, most of them do not wish to live there. Instead, most would like to leave Lebanon and Syria altogether. However, they are unable to do so legally and as a non-refugee, because they have enough capital to visit Lebanon frequently but not enough to migrate, for example due to work permit regulations or needing to be accepted into university abroad and receive scholarships. As a result, in light of the concept of bordering and current perceptions of cross-border movements, the participants end up as frequent opportunity travelers between Syria and Lebanon. Whereas Melucci looks at collective identity in relation to social movements, I apply aspects of his theory to identify individual characterists that can collectively be seen as a process of developing a notion of collective identity. These include the participants' shared ability to cross within a field of opportunities and constraints, consciousness of their position in the field in relation to others (e.g. refugees), how they are seen by others (e.g. border actors and Lebanese people), and their shared perception of Syria as home which is looked at in relation to their inability to migrate completely.

With this thesis, I give unique insights into the subjective lived experiences of Syrians able to cross today and how they construct a narrative around the objectively given border. Moreover, I provide an example of the ways in which this construction of a narrative can take place. Ultimately, I offer new understandings to the field of border studies and migration with my findings, in the sense that the participants take part in a yet undefined and underexposed type of spatial movement while using their ability to visit Lebanon frequently for various opportunities, among which temporarily escaping the conflict.

At the same time, my research points at avenues for further research. Firstly, there is a significant gap in research targeting different groups involved in the border crossing, including Syrians from different age groups or those traveling between urban and rural areas. A different perspective could also be offered by looking at Lebanese people crossing into Syria today, those who cross illegally, those who cannot cross, those who face different regulations, such as Palestinians, or simply other actors involved in border policies, such as policy-makers, border officers or taxi drivers. Further, the methodology can be adjusted to come to different insights, including doing a quantitative study on, for example, how the number of people crossing relates

to political events or policies. Lastly, further research can be done with different cases, including neighboring countries with an ongoing conflict on one side. These suggestions can all contribute to the field of border studies, by showing how people live and understand the border and how the border materializes differently for everyone.

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