Special Section
Mapping Lebanon: State and Society in Historical and Contemporary Perspective

Introduction

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This special section of the *Review* is the outcome of panel sessions organized at the American Association of Geographers in 2010 that explored the intricate links between Lebanese historical specificities, historiographies, and the country's sociopolitical organization amidst the complex geopolitical context in which Lebanon is embedded and remains an active stakeholder. These panel sessions, co-sponsored by the Society for Lebanese Scholarship, endeavored to focus on Lebanon as a dynamic place of study and human sociopolitical process and activity which has been on and off the radar screen of academic and political trends as they have developed and dissolved in recent history.

The notion of mapping as a metaphor for intellectual query is rife with a charged history of colonial meddling and domination (Driver 2000). Indeed, Lebanon's historical formation as a nation-state stands as an entangled case in point of the human implications of "mapping-as-knowing" and the ensuing colonial crafting and forging of colonies and subjugated peoples out of these machinations, borne as they were of colonial systems of historical and political geographical knowledge and misrepresentation. Acutely aware of this baggage, these authors have engaged with this critical history to articulate facets of Lebanese state and society that remain both underexplored and united in the role in which the making of colonial space has provided the structuring elements of Lebanon's lived, political space(s), identity and governance structures, grounded in a long-standing religio-sectarian stratification of state society.

Eric Bordenkircher's consideration of the Lebanese political landscape, and its complex organization and system of ever-changing alliances reveals the dynamically networked and geopolitical contingencies of its prime political actors, and their sectarian contours. Bordenkircher elucidates the critical role

https://doi.org/10.1017/S2151348100058109 Published online by Cambridge University Press

that cooperation and external patrons play in the making of Lebanon's day-to-day political happenings, employing an under-utilized theoretical model to explain the outcomes of the murky threshold space between what the author describes as those "comparative and international relations" contours of Lebanese political organization. Bordenkircher contributes to expanding understandings of the drive for internal power and external patronage by these political actors, offering readers an adaptation of George Tsebelis's Veto Players model of analysis to consider consensus and conflict among Lebanese political actors. This intervention remains timely, given deep divisions within the Lebanese political landscape over issues such as electoral laws, Hezbollah and the Syrian civil war, and the unsolved assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

Michael Bracy and Najwa Raouda's intervention, "One Ideology, Two Paths," offers a unique analysis of one of Lebanon's most important, yet under-researched spaces: the Biqaʾ Valley. Situating this region, and its people within the sociopolitical boundary making of the British and the French in 1920, these authors map the positioning of the Shia community within a stratified, order which disadvantaged them within the freshly-carved political landscape amidst an imperially controlled Levant. Within this post-Ottoman geopolitical order, the Shia peoples of Lebanon, Bracy and Raouda argue, experienced rupture in vital networks, locations and connectivity that drove social and economic life. Within this multi-scalar re-mapping of local worlds forged by the British and French, the impact on Shiite religious institutions is explored by these authors, who expand understandings of how Shia communities were impacted by this intensely spatialized colonial re-ordering. Uniquely, Bracy and Raouda offer readers their own spatial reconfiguration of the production of sectarianism in state and society, centering locations in the country once considered peripheral to the historiography of sectarianism, thereby re-positioning Beirut as the epicenter, and foregrounding the Biqaʾ as a vital place of colonial transformation, integral to a more complete history of Lebanese social and political historical geographies.

Tsolin Nalbantian delves into the fascinating dynamics of making place and politics among Armenian dwellers in the neighborhoods of Bourj Hammoud. This rich historiography details the ways in which Armenian-Lebanese political actors employed space, location, discourse and the media to territorialize control over this political space, effecting, as Nalbantian argues, a distinct spatial configuration of Bourj Hammoud, which set political control of these neighborhoods, outside and in contestation with the Lebanese state. These refugees from imperial Ottoman control over the Middle East not only forged a vigorous political culture, but as agents and actors making local

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Armenian politics they determinedly evoked internal dissension and employed discourses of enemies within this tiny enclave standing outside of Lebanese national space.

Works Cited

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S2151348100058109 Published online by Cambridge University Press