# Schools' Role in Shaping Youth Collective Memory of Conflict and Experiences of Sectarianism in Lebanon

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**Abstract**

This study analyzes Lebanese and Palestinian youths' memories of sectarian conflict, their sources of knowledge, and how their memories shape their experiences of current sectarian divides. From 1975 until 1990, Lebanon experienced a civil war characterized by religious violence, and sectarian conflict continues in the country today. However, the nation's history curriculum stops at 1946. Qualitative analysis of 23 interviews conducted with Lebanese and Palestinian high school graduates from a range of educational backgrounds suggests that students are not socialized to memories of conflict – the civil war and that of the present day – in school settings. Students perceive other sources of information such as their parents and the media as unreliable, resulting in limited understandings of the conflict. While youths' vague memories are neutral, students perceive one another as biased. This perception, coupled with a history curriculum that emphasizes rote memorization over critical thinking, fosters the belief that sectarian divides are immutable. The conception of sectarianism as unchanging and everlasting contributes to disempowerment in overcoming religious divisions. History curricula must be strengthened to enable youth to collectively engage with their past and build a more unified Lebanese society.

**Introduction**

What are children learning about Lebanese history in schools? This is a legitimate question, as the unified history textbook stipulated by the civil war's peace treaty has yet to see the light of day. Lebanon's history thus stops in 1946. The following years more or less comprise a black hole, the most absolute of silences. It's as if the fratricidal war that destroyed the country never took place, with its dead, injured, handicapped, widows, orphans; a war that caused 150,000 deaths and 17,000 disappearances, at the very least. – Anne-Marie el Hage, "National Education Lacking... A History Textbook!" Op-ed in Lebanese daily newspaper *L'Orient le Jour*, January 3, 2014.[1]

Lebanon's population belongs to over eighteen different religious groups, and violence between religious sects characterized a civil war that lasted from 1975 to 1990 (see Appendix, Figure 1). At the conflict's end, the Lebanese government charged institutions of education with fostering national unity through civics and history curricula, remedying religious fragmentation. However, as the above op-ed indicates, no official consensus was reached about the Civil War's events. Lebanese schools therefore still teach history as they had before the conflict – through 1946. Strong sectarian social divisions remain, and Lebanon's current political system ties representation to religious affiliation (see Appendix, Figure 2). The ongoing conflict in neighboring Syria has exacerbated divides.

This study addresses the following question: How does socialization in the education system shape Lebanese youths' collective memories of conflict and experiences of sectarian divides? Recent research has examined Lebanese youth's general opinions of conflict and sectarian divisions (Frayha, 2009; Larkin, 2012; Shuayb, 2012, Van Ommering, 2011); however,

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[1] Original text: "Qu'apprennent donc les enfants à l'école sur l'histoire du Liban ? Il est légitime de se poser la question, le projet de manuel d'histoire unifié figurant dans les accords de Taëf n'ayant jamais vu le jour. L'histoire du Liban s'arrête donc à l'année 1946, selon le décret de 1970. Après cette date, c'est le trou noir, le silence le plus absolu, ou quasiment. C'est comme si la guerre fratricide qui a détruit le pays n'avait jamais eu lieu, avec son lot de morts, de blessés, de handicapés, de veuves, d'orphelins. Une guerre qui a fait 150 000 morts et 17 000 disparus, pour le moins."

little is known of the content of youth understandings of conflict, the source of these understandings, and the mechanisms through which they are formed. This study presents findings that contribute to post-conflict education scholarship in several ways. First, I analyze the content of youth memories of conflict, revealing the effect of suppressed dialogue in Lebanon's post-conflict environment. Second, I assess sources of youth collective memories, providing insight into the formation of youth knowledge in light of this educational void and the extent of socialization to different viewpoints. Third, I analyze students' current relationship to their sectarian political environment. This allows me to determine how the dialogue about history in schools relates to student engagement with their nation's politics.

**Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework**

Existing scholarship related to schools' role in shaping Lebanese youths' collective memories originates from several disciplines. Theories of collective memory conceptualize how understandings of history carry social and political implications, suggesting that the formation of a national identity depends at least partly on a collective memory of the past. However, analyses of Lebanese education policy suggest that schools are not socializing students to a common memory of recent history. Generally, Lebanese students do not broach the topics of sectarianism and recent history with teachers. Studies reveal that Lebanon remains politically and socially divided along sectarian lines. Scholarship has yet to examine what youth believe about Lebanon's history after 1946, whether students socialize one another to that history, and how this affects their experiences of sectarian divisions.

*1.1 The Dissemination and Uses of Collective Memory*

Collective memories reflect social groups' lived and conveyed experiences (Hallbwachs, 1992). Group members access shared resources that afford an understanding of the past, and interpret their content based on social and cultural context (Wertsch, 2002). Contemporary scholars conceive as collective memory as a "mediated action of remembrance" in that culturally based resources transmit collective memories (Wertsch, 2007, 647). These resources include linguistic forms such as narratives and cultural practices such as rituals (Wertsch, 2007).

Collective memories accomplish several social functions, including providing a normative basis upon which to assess behavior, valorizing group identity, and mobilizing large groups to act (Licata et al., 2007). In light of these uses, different audiences often construct differing collective memories corresponding to the same events, resulting in the emergence of multiple disparate conceptions of history (Licata et al., 2007). The tool of narrative in particular

selectively employs information, creating narrow understandings of the past (Wertsch, 2002). The historical narratives that compose group collective memories usually conform to preset abstract narrative structures serving to protect group identities by making them static (Wertsch, 2007). For example, a group will often adopt or formulate narratives that cement its status as that of a "victim" because that identity most benefits the group in wider attempts to configure the past (Licata et al., 2007).

*1.2 Key Points in Lebanese History*

In analyzing students' collective memories of conflict, this study broaches the controversial topic of Lebanese history. Many facets of Lebanon's history, and of the civil war in particular, remain contentious today. This study does not attempt to establish the "truth" about that history; however, a summary of key points based on various historians' analysis is necessary to contextualize my findings. The following paragraphs may not align with all perspectives about Lebanon's past, and may not comprise all the historical events that many would consider important to emphasize.

The Ottoman Empire controlled the lands comprising present-day Lebanon from 1517 until 1920 (Traboulsi, 2012). An 1843 agreement between the Ottoman Empire, Austria-Hungary, Britain, and France first introduced a political structure explicitly balancing power between religious groups. The agreement ensured equal Druze and Christian representation in the leadership of the *wilayet,* or administrative district, of Mount Lebanon, which corresponds to present-day central western Lebanon. After World War I, France and Britain assumed the Ottoman Empire's previous holdings, creating Lebanon's modern frontiers – never before seen in history, and wedding central Mount Lebanon's largely Druze and Christian populations to the surrounding predominantly Shi'ite and Sunni regions (see Appendix Figure 3).

Lebanon obtained full independence from France in 1943. In that year, a National Pact between Lebanese leaders built on the nation's constitution and established a sectarian means of representation in government – Lebanon's president was to be Maronite Christian, the speaker of the House, Shi'ite, and the Prime Minister, Sunni. The agreement also established quotas of seats in the legislative body according to religion sect, allowing for a 6:5 Christian to Muslim ratio of representation (Traboulsi, 2012). Political representation's basis on religion has since precluded the nation from conducting any official censuses examining religious affiliation because their results would necessitate redistributing representation amongst sects (Haddad, 2002). Lebanon's current official religious composition is thus unknown. Estimates hover around a 27% Shi'ite, 27% Sunni, 21% Maronite Christian, 8% Greek Orthodox, 6% Druze, and 6% Greek Catholic population (State Department, 2013). The remaining 5% of the population belong to smaller Christian denominations (State Department, 2013). Tying political representation to religion has also caused political parties or affiliations to predominantly form according to religious belonging (Johnson, 2007; Shuayb, 2012).

The 1943 agreement, which granted Christians disproportionately high political power, became all the more inequitable as Lebanon's proportion of Muslims increased in the following decades (Traboulsi, 2012; Appendix Figure 4). An influx of Palestinian refugees starting in 1948 destabilized the country (Gordon, 1980). The ensuing tensions – dividing the country along religious, ideological, and socioeconomic lines – broke out in fighting in 1975, which gradually engulfed all of Lebanon (Gordon, 1980). Fighting between militias of various religious sects or political affiliations characterized the following fourteen years (Traboulsi, 2012). In 1989, leaders from the civil war's various factions met in Ta'ef, Saudi Arabia, and signed a treaty the following year to end the violence (Kanafani-Zahar, 2011). The treaty modified the Constitution,

establishing Christian-Muslim parity in Lebanon's legislative body, and exempted leaders from their actions during the war. Many of them have continued to serve in Lebanon's government through the present day (Kanafani-Zahar, 2011).

*1.3 Lebanese Post-Civil War Educational Goals*

At the Lebanese civil war's end, the newly formed government's Plan for Education Reform aimed to "spread 'authentic Lebanese values, such as liberty, democracy, tolerance, and rejection of violence'" (van Ommering, 2011, 547). The plan also intended to reinforce national belonging and spiritual and cultural open-mindedness through schooling (Gilbert-Sleiman, 2010). These goals correspond to the theory that children are socialized to their national identity in institutions of education (Wertsch, 2002).

The state-sanctioned actual curricular mechanisms of building nationalism have not set Lebanon up for unity, though. The government did re-instate the pre-war mandatory national civics curriculum spanning grades 1 through 12 with updates and modifications (Akar, 2007). All Lebanese schools use a common Civics textbook published by the Ministry of Education (Akar, 2007). However, a unified history curriculum has yet to be formulated due to successive disagreements between the Educational Centre for Research and Development (ECRD) tasked with writing the textbooks and the various Ministers of Education who have succeeded one another since the war (Frayha, 2012). Thus, since the end of the civil war in 1990, the curriculum used at the war's start (and that only addresses history through 1946) has been in place (El-Hage, 2014). Official history textbooks only exist through eighth grade, allowing secondary schools to use private textbooks that must be approved by the ECRD (Nazarian, 2013). The ECRD, however, is essentially powerless in that regard, having long ago given up its assigned function of approving or rejecting history textbooks (Nazarian, 2013). Secondary schools in Lebanon,

then, select interpretations of history to transmit to students on their own volition (Gilbert-Sleiman, 2010). In countries with unified history curricula, though, the promulgation of unified collective memories that instill nationalism in youth constitutes a primary mechanism of forming and preserving the national identity (Wertsch, 2002). The lack of a unified narrative about Lebanon's volatile past, then, implies that students have not been socialized to a national identity in terms of their common history.

In addition to failing to produce a unified history curriculum, the ECRD never developed an official Religion curriculum to be implemented in schools (Frayha, 2012). This has resulted in the current practice of religious clergymen entering schools (even public ones) to teach about religion to students from their respective sects (Frayha, 2012). Schools' handling of religion might thus reinforce religious differences between students that stem from their family backgrounds. In conclusion, the Lebanese state has failed to produce educational standards that will empower schools to adequately socialize their students to a unified identity.

*1.4 Actors Shaping Collective Memory Discourse in Lebanese Schools*

Three main actors affect how the Lebanese government's loose educational standards shape schools' relationships to discourses of collective memory and citizenship. These include teachers and administrators, students, and the Lebanese education system's structure itself.

Teachers and Educational Administrators

Lebanese teachers are generally untrained to address sensitive historical and social topics in school settings. Only 59% of teachers in Lebanon hold an education degree, and teachers' self-perceived ability to teach civics far surpasses their actual content knowledge and training-based ability to do so (El Amin et al., 2008). Rote learning constitutes a common practice in the realm of Lebanese civic education (Akar, 2007). Further, the politically and culturally tense

context in which teachers operate prevents classroom discussion on most topics of Lebanese politics and recent history (Akar, 2007). Adults tend to silence discussions related to politics, history, or collective memory in Lebanon (van Ommering, 2011). Conflicting opinions are managed by not addressing them (Larkin, 2012). Lebanon, in fact, ranked last when compared to six other countries in terms of the prevalence of student discussion of politics with teachers (El Amin et al., 2008). The relationship between a person narrating a collective memory and the receiver determines whether that memory is appropriated or resisted (Wertsch, 2002), so the fact that Lebanese teachers are themselves Lebanese – and implicated in their country's recent history – might bar them from effectively addressing the history in a classroom setting.

Students

Children actively seek out knowledge about their social and political environments, and in the process, shape the discourses in those spaces (Pache-Huber et al., 2011). Lebanese students attach importance to understanding their nation's history, and indicate interest in learning more about it (Akar, 2007). Teachers' avoidance of such a topic simply intensifies youths' fascination with issues of recent history and sectarianism (van Ommering, 2011). By requesting exposure to sensitive political and historical topics, then, Lebanese students shape the collective memories and consciousness surrounding them.

The Education System

Lebanon's current extremely decentralized schooling system of private, public, and foreign schools emerged under Ottoman rule in the 1800's (Frayha, 2003). As a result, in 2000, only 37.9% of students in grades 1 through 12 were enrolled in public educational institutions, with the remaining 62.1% attending private institutions (Frayha, 2003). A community's collective memories form from its shared narratives (Wertsch, 2007). The majority of Lebanese

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students are educated in private school settings, meaning that in classes other than Civics (which, as previously mentioned, operates under a standardized curriculum), they receive different exposure to topics of history and religion. Because textbook use and modes of instruction in these classes can vary widely from school to school, even students in public schools do not experience these topics in schools similarly.

*1.5 Lebanese Youth Attitudes Towards History and Sectarianism*

The repression of dialogue in schools fosters superficial nationalism among students but ultimately reinforces sectarian differences between them.[2] As evidenced by students' strong identification with a Lebanese national identity, Lebanon's existing curriculum promotes some cohesion at the national level (El Amin, 2008; Akar, 2007). However, teachers' silence in the face of sectarian divides reinforces existing differing opinions and bars students from exposure to constructive dialogue and problem-solving methods such as open discussion and consensus-making (van Ommering, 2011; Larkin, 2012).

Preliminary scholarship suggests that students hold disparate understandings of history, and that sectarian divisions exist between them. When prompted to recall their nation's most important figure, 6.5% of Lebanese high schoolers cited Emir Fakhreddine, the most common answer (El Amin et al., 2008). Fakhreddine was a 17th century Druze prince who unified central

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[2] Simultaneous superficial nationalism and religious divisions similarly appear among Lebanese adults. Nearly 50% of Lebanese adults believe that "there can be unity with diversity if a Lebanese common culture is emphasized," while less than 10% agreed that cultural diversity "leads to inter-group conflict" (Haddad, 2002, 302). Despite this nationalistic optimism, over 80% of the same respondents described feeling attached to their sect and feeling proud of their religious belonging, and over 90% of them believed that their sect was best suited to serve Lebanon (Haddad, 2002). Regardless of impressions of Lebanese unity, deep divisions between adults due to religious affiliation remain. It is important to note that many of the adults surveyed lived through the Civil War (as opposed to the youth I interviewed, who were born after the 1990 truce).

Lebanon and is commonly considered modern Lebanon's father (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2014). In response to the same question, "34% of students named too many figures to be classified in one particular category and another 35% did not name anyone" (El Amin et al, 2008, 27). Students' lack of consensus as to Lebanon's most important historical person implies that most of them hold wildly different notions of their country's past. Further, most Lebanese youth view religious leaders as more reliable than the Lebanese government in providing social services and political information (El Amin et al., 2008). This suggests that, despite some nationalistic sentiment, sectarian affiliation still plays a large role in determining student self-perceived identity.

*1.6 Conclusion*

A healthy approach to managing and reconciling post-conflict memories would involve acknowledging and engaging both with the memories associated with social group identities and those associated with a higher-order, national identity (Licata et al., 2007). In order to form a national, more unified collective memory after a period of conflict, opposing subgroups must be able to voice their collective memories to one another and process each other's understandings of the past (Licata et al., 2007). A dialogue must be generated between parties in order for individuals to change their behaviors and beliefs, breaking cycles of misunderstanding and conflict that are perpetuated across generations (Asseily, 2007).

Scholarship has not explored the extent to which dialogue about sectarian conflict exists in Lebanese schools. Some scholars argue that the Lebanese government's failure to provide a unified historical narrative – creating a collective memory among the generation that did not live through the civil war – prevents Lebanese youth from critically examining the past and coming to terms with religious difference (Larkin, 2012; van Ommering, 2011). However, a recent

survey found that schools that made concerted efforts to integrate students from different confessions – even if no constructive dialogue was generated – greatly attenuated the rifts between students (Shuayb, 2012). Research does not indicate cemented divisions between religious groups among youth. Little is known of the content of actual collective memories held by the Lebanese youth, and how exposure to other ideas shapes the content of these memories. There is also no clear documentation of the mechanisms through which memories of conflict concretely relate to youth experiences of sectarianism.

*1.7 Hypotheses*

A primary hypothesis developed after reading relevant academic literature drove my research. I hypothesized that some students are socialized to memories of sectarian conflict in Lebanese institutions of education. This study concerns itself with my hypothesis' validity as well as its implications. Before conducting my research, I expected that socialization to collective memories of sectarian conflict in schools would influence the memories of conflict and experiences of sectarian divides of students who experienced that socialization. For example, students who were exposed to alternate memories might themselves hold less "sectarian" understandings of conflict as compared to those not exposed to alternate memories in schools. Similarly, students socialized to others' memories of conflict might perceive current sectarian divides as less fixed than others.

**Chapter 2: Methods**

*2.1 Data Source*

In order to find out about how students in Lebanon are socialized to memories of conflict, and how this relates to their experience of current sectarian divides, I interviewed students themselves. Because I was interested in learning about the direct product of socialization in educational institutions, I spoke with 23 students who graduated high school in June 2014. The one-time, face-to-face interviews occurred at the headquarters of Unite Lebanon Youth Project (ULYP), an education and conflict resolution organization in Hamra, Beirut, over a month-long timespan from July 15, 2014 to August 8, 2014. The interviews were conducted one-on-one, although the students' parents or friends may have been in a nearby waiting room. They lasted between 15 minutes and 50 minutes. Students were not paid for the interviews. The interviews were conducted in English; all Lebanese and Palestinians are supposedly fluent in either English or French in addition to Lebanese Arabic. While not all my interviewees were fully fluent in English, they all had a strong enough command of the language to discuss topics such as political conflict with me during our interviews. However, conducting the interviews in English may have obscured nuances in students' answers among the weaker English speakers.

*2.2 Sample*

I drew on connections made while interning with ULYP during summer 2013 to find interview subjects. I did not experience difficulties finding subjects. I reached out students I taught in summer 2013 regarding interviews, and staff members at ULYP reached out to other students they worked with about my project. I brought to Lebanon a list of roughly 45 students who indicated interest in participating in an interview either to ULYP staff or to me. Twenty-three of these 45 students responded to my e-mail about participation in my study once I arrived

in Beirut; these students constituted my sample. My sample was not random, as it was more representative of the population served by ULYP – Lebanese and Palestinian youth from a range of religious and socioeconomic backgrounds – than the population of Lebanon as a whole. I interviewed five men and eighteen women of Sunni, Shi'ite, and Christian origin, and of varying levels of religiosity. The main skew in my sample is that fifteen of the students I interviewed were Palestinian. Nearly a half million of Palestinians reside in Lebanon, many of whom entered the country in 1948, or whose progenitors did then (UNRWA, 2014; Purkiss, 2014). While Palestinians clearly should have been included in my sample, their overrepresentation may influence my analysis in this paper.

The youth interviewed had lived and attended schools throughout Lebanon. The Palestinian students, except for one, graduated from schools led by the UN's Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA): Deir Yassin School (located in Tyre), Al Aqsa School (Tyre), Bissan Secondary School (Sidon), Galilee School (Beirut), and Amqa School (Tripoli). The other students attended the following schools: National Evangelical School for Girls and Boys (Sidon), Iman High School (Beirut), and Omar Ben Khattab School (Beirut). Figure 5 in the Appendix presents a map of Lebanon with these cities. To maintain student anonymity, the number of students from each school will not be disclosed. I will also not include any respondent names in this paper, using pseudonyms instead.

Because my research is descriptive, and I was not entirely sure what to expect to hear from my participants, I conducted semi-structured interviews. I structured conversations around a list of relevant topics, but instead of asking my interviewees pre-determined questions, I remained open to the different directions that the interviews might have taken. Figure 6 in the Appendix includes the list of topics I broached during my interviews.

*2.3 Data Analysis*

I recorded my interviews and transcribed the recordings. I analyzed my interview data qualitatively, using narrative analysis tools designed by Daiute (2014). I employed her Values Analysis method of grouping interview excerpts by theme. For instance, for my chapter about sources of memories, I created a spreadsheet with each interviewee as a row, and each possible memory source (documentaries, books, family members, etc.) as a column. I then re-read my interview transcriptions and inserted text related to every mention of any memory source into the spreadsheet. If a subject brought up a source that I had not previously included, I created a column for that source. If a subject described more than one source, I inserted all the information relating to the sources into my spreadsheet. Once I had finished looking through my entire transcription document – as it related to source of memories of conflict – I began sorting through my data, determining which sources of memories were most significant.

I also relied on Daiute's method of Significance Analysis. In addition to sorting my transcribed interview content by theme as previously described, I analyzed words within quotes as significance markers in themselves. For example, I suggest that one Palestinian student described the group that massacred Palestinian civilians during the Lebanese Civil War as "some part of the Lebanese community," as opposed to using its actual name, to indicate her reticence to engage with the past.

*2.4 Limitations*

I initially hoped to seek out subjects with a variety of background characteristics (such as religious belonging, level of religiosity, and type of school attended) in order to base my findings on a representative sample. However, I was not able to collect full data about religion because some students were uncomfortable establishing whether they were Sunni or Shi'ite. Also,

Muslim students were overrepresented in my sample, and Christian students, underrepresented. Last, type of school attended did not vary significantly enough within my sample for me to analyze how it related to my research question: as previously mentioned, nearly all the Palestinian subjects attended secular UNRWA schools, and the majority of my Lebanese interviewees graduated from the National Evangelical School for Girls and Boys.

I initially hoped to draw comparisons across background characteristics within my sample, but quickly abandoned this goal. My project's small scale meant that it was unrealistic of me to compare findings across sample subgroups, especially given my research topic that covers a diverse population by nature. As will be detailed throughout my paper, I found that student testimonies did not differ significantly by background. This might indicate that students' background characteristics may not have been crucial to answering my research question.

My small, heterogeneous sample also shaped my method of data analysis. I cannot draw statistical conclusions from my data due to my study sample's small size of 23 subjects. I therefore use the in-depth nature of my focused, structured conversations to undertake a thematic, interpretive analysis of my data. My paper identifies large themes across my data instead of quantifying results or undertaking numerical comparisons across background factors.

**Chapter 3: Student Memories of Sectarian Conflict**

My interviews focused primarily on two categories of Lebanese sectarian conflict – the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) and recent sectarian conflict.[3] Lebanese high school graduates do not hold collective memories of either. Youth hold fragmented understandings of the civil war, which, if combined, could form a collective memory. These understandings are neutral, and avoid assigning blame to any one party. Students hold equally vague understandings of recent sectarian conflict, but feel more comfortable forming their own judgments related to the parties participating in it.

*3.1 The Lebanese Civil War*

Lebanese and Palestinian youth hold disparate, but neutral, memories of the civil war. Some know next to nothing about the conflict, while others hold a sophisticated understanding of its sequence of events. Their understandings of the war vary widely in terms of depth, but rarely contradict one another other, tending to reflect a religiously neutral understanding of the period. Only eight of the 23 students I spoke with were able to cite 1975 and 1990 as years of the war's start and end. Most other students had a general idea of the conflict's time period ("from the seventies to the nineties"), or held incorrect information about its span. For example, students suggested conflict start dates of 1967, 1980, 1982, and 1984. Some of these dates coincide with those of other major events in the region, such as the Six-Day War with Israel, or the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon. This indicates that students likely mix up events from the period omitted from Lebanon's history curriculum. Figure 7 in the Appendix shows how many students knew any details about each component of the civil war (such as causes, events, and resolution) at all.

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[3] I also spoke with interviewees about the Israel-Hezbollah conflict of 2006. However, I do not analyze their memories of it, since it directly involved an outside nation.

Long-Term Causes

Lebanese and Palestinian youth do not share a unified collective memory of the period between Lebanese independence in 1946 and the civil war's beginning. Some students know nearly nothing of the period, while a few others understand it in a sophisticated way, and most are only aware of bits and pieces that constitute the incredibly complex events and factors that wove together after Lebanon's independence and led to the civil war's eruption in 1975. Only eight students were able to articulate long-term causes of the civil war. Students' memories do not necessarily oppose one another, but rather represent small components of the bigger picture of long-term factors that led the nation to war.

Most students brought up Lebanon's independence treaty's allocation of seats between Christians and Muslims, which over-represented Christians in Parliament, giving them a majority. According to this memory, Muslims' discontent over political underrepresentation fueled the civil war. Students displayed vastly varying levels of knowledge regarding the specifics of the sectarian power distribution within the Lebanese government. For example, Ghinwa rather bluntly stated, "The Christians were the dominant [group] in Lebanon and the Muslims were nothing. Like, the government and everything was with the Christians. So the Muslims tried to make a revolution on them to take the rights." Rime explained the situation in a more detailed manner, elaborating:

> Rulers, they were just dividing the seats between Christians and Muslims and there was inequality I guess. Christians were almost 6 to Muslims' 5. This was the rate, I guess. First of all there were 55; I guess 30 Christians and 25 Muslims, and then there were 25 each. In 1990, they did make it an equality.

Rime's understanding echoes Christian and Muslim historians' writings about the civil war's causes (O'Ballance, 1998; Traboulsi, 2012). She articulates the specific sectarian distribution of seats (determined at Lebanon's independence in 1943) and accompanying power imbalance in

the Lebanese government, but glosses over how these fueled tensions between religious sects. She mentions the equality obtained in 1990, but omits entirely the 15-year war that preceded it.[4] The holes in her and Ghinwa's memories highlight how the gap in Lebanese history education has produced scattered youth understandings of history.

Other students cited geographical divides between Christians and Muslims as contributing to the eventual strife between the groups. While misunderstandings between the religious groups may have produced tensions, these students' understanding that sectarian segregation caused the war contradicts evidence that the war actually produced segregation more so than was caused by it. Before the war, religious groups often coexisted harmoniously (Kanafani-Zahar, 2011). During the conflict, in which political entities associated with religious groups brutalized and even massacred other sects' populations, over 22% of Lebanon's inhabitants experienced permanent displacement (Kanafani-Zahar, 2011; see Appendix Figure 7). The war involved large-scale migration that created increasingly religiously homogenous spaces both on a small scale and at a regional level, isolating religious groups from one another (Haddad, 2002). In this case, the relationship between Lebanon's history curriculum's absence and ongoing religious conflict becomes clear: the fact that religious groups often co-existed rather harmoniously on a local level before the war broke out is being obscured to present-day students, making that coexistence perhaps seem less plausible than it actually is. Students went on to bemoan the segregation as plaguing Lebanon today. Nicole claimed,

> The civil war should have happened; people were divided already before the civil war. Maybe people were divided more, maybe there was a, what do you call it… I know the meaning in Arabic, between Black and White people – yes, segregation. Between any different people. Between Christians and themselves, between Muslims, between themselves, between Christians and Muslims, between the Lebanese people. Before that,

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[4] Rime was one of the few subjects who claimed to know absolutely nothing about the events of the civil war itself.

maybe they were really segregated, separated, but, the Civil War was a consequence of that. They didn't know how to live together. Maybe because their countries, you know – in this country, there were only Muslims, and in this country … it's only Muslims. And this one, it is only Christians. They do not live together.

Ghinwa's testimony speaks more directly to how a collective memory of segregation can easily spill over into present day experiences of sectarian divides:

> After the World War, Lebanon was, uh, parted? Yeah, Christians took the very nice areas in Lebanon, the coastal line and Jbeil and that places and the mountains that are very nice places for tourism and for the, the monuments, you know? All of these places are for Christians, and they left the Muslims in the very bad areas, like in Dahiyeh were I live; and those places, it's very, very crowded.

Coastal areas such as Jbeil and Lebanon's mountainous areas continue to be predominantly Christian to this day (Verdeil et al, 2009). And Beirut's southern suburbs, or Dahiyeh, are primarily Muslim (Harb el-Kak, 1996). In this case, Ghinwa's memory of events that took place in decades leading up to the civil war – certainly not based on content taught in schools, and not entirely correct – dictates her impression of being wronged by other inhabitants of her country.

Another student, Hala, mentioned that the war was caused by Lebanon being torn between the influence of Arab nations and Europe. This has been echoed by historians and reflects a sophisticated understanding of Lebanese history (Gordon, 1980; Debié, 2003; Traboulsi, 2012). Hala described,

> The whole area was divided into two axes, or two parties. There were the Arab Nationalists who were with the Palestinian cause … And the other part were the people who were with the axis of the United States, Israel, Europe. And so, when things started erupting in the area … the whole situation in the area was reflected in Lebanon. … I think there were kind of two um, two visions of Lebanon, and some people saw Lebanon as a part of this, this nationalistic Arab state that contained all the Arab countries, and these countries – it was kind of a Socialist, leftist Lebanon, these people saw it this way – and there was this other vision where Lebanon was, um, was a part of the, let's say – the other vision was that Lebanon would kind of lean towards the West, Europe, USA. And so these two visions clashed together, and I think this is what the problem has always been about Lebanon. Everyone has his own vision of what Lebanon should be.

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Hala's sophisticated understanding of Lebanon's sectarian tensions as rooted in its colonial history and the construction of nationalism was an anomaly among the students I spoke with.

Other interviewees held a more simplistic view of the war's causes. Two students blamed general, local brewing tensions between Muslims and Christians. Farah mentioned the creation of a municipality system upon Lebanese independence as exacerbating local tensions between Christians and Muslims:

> In every municipality, they have to choose one, you say, *moukhtar* to head the, like, the suburb, the place, the city. So, uh, the problem is that if this city actually has Muslims and Christians, so that's the conflict here. Because like, let's say like for example, in where I come from, it's actually Muslims, and Shi'a. Okay? So, like, the head of the municipality is actually gonna be, like, one of us. So let's say there's a minority of Christians here. They might not accept. Like first I think they might not accept, as like the people start to get to know this place is for these people, they would stop making conflicts about it, but it still kind of makes small conflicts. … So I think before independence … they didn't have that kind of system.

Farah's understanding of the civil war seems predicated on two oversimplifications of the situation. First, it relies on the notion that before Lebanon's independence, mixed-faith communities lacked stable governing structures that incorporated different faiths. Second, it reduces the civil war down to a conflict borne out of pure religious difference and an accompanying inability to coexist. This reflects Ghinwa's previously noted belief that sectarian segregation led to the war, showing how the Lebanese history curriculum obscures a history of religious coexistence. Adeeb's description was equally vague and simplistic:

> Like, some in a place in Lebanon, some village, the majority are Muslims, and they… don't feel satisfied by living like some Christians between them, so they start, like, poking them, uh, to let them leave the village. And some problems and fights began, and expanded to all Lebanon, and began the war. ... Because they have different thinking, or something like that, because of their religions. They can't accept that religion with them, so they try to let them go. And, of course, Christians like won't accept that, and the fight began. ... Maybe that those Christians started to go up, and the Muslims won't accept that. And so they began started letting them go before they started to be a very large amount, a majority.

The lack of a history curriculum, then, ultimately disserves the project of social cohesion by allowing students to form memories of discord between religious groups. This obscures other causes of the war – such as outside intervention in Lebanon, or the nation's colonial history – as well as reduces the feasibility of coexistence in students' minds.

The Civil War's Immediate Breakout and Beginning Events

Roughly half of interviewees described specific political events surrounding the civil war's breakout. Similarly to the conflict's long-term causes, students' recollections of the specific political events that ignited the war tended to be fragments of a greater web of circumstances leading to the fighting's outbreak. Eight students mentioned tensions between the Palestinian Resistance movement and Lebanese government as leading to the war's outbreak, but out of these eight, only three mentioned the Ain al-Rummaneh bus incident, which historians commonly regard as marking the conflict's start (Traboulsi, 2012; O'Ballance, 1998; Gordon, 1980).[5] Two others brought up Lebanon's political and economic fragmentation. One last student, Lubna, mistakenly cited sectarian disputes between Lebanon's ministries occurring in Ta'ef, Saudi Arabia, in 1975, as the war's cause; however, Ta'ef is actually the location of the final 1990 peace treaty's negotiation and signing.

Students' descriptions of the Palestinian resistance's role in causing the civil war varied. Both Palestinian and Lebanese students brought up this cause of the war. Hala, Lebanese, eloquently described,

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[5] Historians' accounts of the incident are inconsistent. Gordon simply states that members of a Christian political party massacred a bus of Palestinians (1980). O'Ballance claims that a Christian militia (guarding a church in which its leader was attending a consecration) halted disorderly Palestinians and killed one, but that three Christians died in the resulting scuffle (1998). Traboulsi contends that shots were fired at Christians (without establishing by who), wounding some, and that Christians retaliated hours later by killing a bus of Palestinians (2012).

People blamed the Palestinian resistance because they were working here, because they were resisting from here and shooting rockets from Lebanon, and that's why Israel … invaded Lebanon, back then. And so some parties in Lebanon wanted to kick the Palestinian resistance out of Lebanon, and some people were against that, and things started happening, and then … people started to look at it in a religious way because … the people who were with the Palestinian resistance were basically Muslims, and those who were against the resistance were the Christians, and so Lebanon was divided.

While Hala grasps that tensions between the Palestinian resistance and other Lebanese groups fueled the civil war, she does not establish concretely how the tensions led to conflict, simply alluding to it through "things started happening." Tareq, Palestinian, was less precise, saying, "In 1975 I guess there were problems with the camps – Palestinian camps, I guess – and then there was war." Rana, also Palestinian, blamed the civil war's outbreak on problems between "Abu Amar" (Yasser Arafat) and Israel in Lebanon. She also claimed Arafat died in the Lebanese civil war, revealing the misinformation about the civil war that has resulted among students from a lack of a curriculum addressing it.

Few subjects mentioned the Ain al-Rummaneh incident, in which Lebanese Christians likely killed a bus of Palestinians, as marking the civil war's outbreak. In describing the incident, one Palestinian student actually mentioned that the Palestinians fired first, from the bus toward the Christians outside:

Uh, I think first, it started with us as Palestinians. There was a bus and someone shot – that's what they think happened, the Lebanese people. They think someone shot the Christian people. They were passing by a Christian area, and they think someone shoot [sic] from the bus. Then they killed everyone in the bus. It was in, uh, I don't remember the date… Then they started the war, but what happened after this, exactly what happened, I don't know, but I know it started with the bus, and the cause, uh, there was a party in Lebanon that supported us and there was a party that was against it. Like they don't want the Palestinians to fight in Lebanon and free their lands and the other party wanted to support and help us free Palestine.

In contrast, an unreligious Lebanese student from a Muslim background described the Christians as opening unsolicited fire on Palestinians[6]:

> The main thing that kind of made this war erupt was, um, what they call the Black Friday. … There was a bus, uh, it was… in it, there were people from the Palestinian resistance, and then armed men from another party which is Al-Kataeb, they shot at this bus, and it was basically a massacre. And after that, people from both sides started fighting, and there was then the Black Friday, where civilians were killed because – they were basically Muslim civilians – because some people from of these Muslim parties killed people from other parties, and this is how it all went, and places were divided. And um, certain parties started getting affiliated in the war, and then more parties joined…

The fact that a Lebanese student portrayed the Lebanese as first opening fire, while a Palestinian student – who later attributed reading (Lebanese) books and articles about the conflict as her main source of understanding – described the Palestinians as the instigators, reveals how nebulous and malleable the overall memory of conflict is. Both subjects agreed that Palestinians had been massacred in the bus, but disagreed on the details of who started it.

One last student, Sarah, vaguely described the incident as a 1967 car massacre between Sunni and Shi'a, leaving out whom killed whom. This is representative of how the war's formation remains hazy in the eyes of many who did not live through it – although she knew the incident sparking the conflict was sectarian, and involved some massacre in a moving vehicle, she either received false information about it, or was too disinterested in or apathetic about the event to clarify its details.

Two other students' memories contain the overarching political and economic war causes that would likely constitute the last pieces of a collective memory of conflict, if there were one. For example, Zeinab described Lebanon's political shattering, saying,

> The Lebanese militias, they, uh… Like every leader started talking to their followers about how the other party is wrong, and um, and sectarianism started, so uh, like the different major Lebanese parties like Al-Gemayel parties and Hezbollah, and like several

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[6] No Christian subjects mentioned the Ain al-Rummaneh incident.

many others, started having all these weapons and stuff and the war started like… All the interventions – the American intervention, the Russian intervention, all these led to war in Lebanon. [Interventions were] political, economic, anything. The [countries] send their own messengers to Lebanon. Like they choose the leader for a certain party and this leader follows the plan that this separate country put for Lebanon.

Zeinab's understanding aligns with that of historians (Mattar, 2007; Choueiri, 2007). However, few students shared this ability to place the civil war in an international context – the lack of a history curriculum has obscured the role foreign powers have played in Lebanese conflict. This narrative of external forces causing discord could promote national unity by externalizing the causes of war; it is also relevant to the modern-day conflict occurring in Lebanon (Farha, 2007).

The Conduct of the Civil War

Few interviewees held a clear picture of the political or large-scale events that occurred during the war beyond general sectarian fighting. The majority of the eighteen students, both Lebanese and Palestinian, who brought up events within the war, share a collective memory of the conflict itself based on family hardship and struggle for survival. The students recounted aspects of the war that directly tied into their family histories, such as Beirut's sectarian division (see Appendix Figure 8) and Palestinian refugee mass killings. As will later be discussed, no single consistent source of information about history and conflict for youth emerged in my interviews. It makes sense, then, that students who were born after the civil war's end are not certain about the sequence of events comprising the conflict, aside from those that directly impacted their families. Many subjects knew nothing of specific war events themselves at all. As one student summarized, "The problem is that I don't exactly how it happened, what happened first, and what happened next."

The memory of equal atrocities committed by Christians and Muslims predominated among the interviewees who held any understanding of the civil war itself. Both Lebanese and

Palestinian shared this memory, reflecting that present-day youth are reluctant to make judgments or assign blame regarding the conflict. Most of these youths' understandings are tied to their parents' experiences of Lebanon's extreme physical division during the civil war: Muslims trying to enter or travel through Christian-controlled areas were killed, and vice-versa (Kanafani-Zahar, 2011). Dina explained,

> It was between Muslims and Christians, okay? It was really, really bad. Muslims were killing Christians, and the same thing, Christians were killing Muslims. And, I don't know why, but *ya3ni*[7]… It's always politics. … . I don't know, it lasted maybe for… maybe twenty years. I'm not sure. Uh, many people died because of hunger, and, uh, of killing, of course … Uh, the situation was difficult, so difficult. We can't – they didn't even have bread, they ate, I don't know, maybe leaves or some insects, just to live. Yeah, that was really hard. ... [If] a Muslim person went to the Christian area, if they only read on the ID that his name was "Mohammed" – Mohammed, like it was for Muslims, yes – they killed him. The same for Muslims – Muslims also killed Christians. It was really bad.

For Dina, the reciprocal nature of atrocities seems definite. However, while many subjects brought up the notion of equal blame between both religions, not all shared the same certainty, as demonstrated by Mona's testimony:

> It was very vicious, and you know, between Christians and Muslims. … Many people died. I don't know much about it. …. Some people of course they know what happened with the war. Uh, *ya3ni*, I know that many Chr- many Muslims have done many bad stuff with Christians, and some Christians have done many, you know, they killed a lot of people. You know, they both did something wrong. That's what I know, that's what I make myself believe, that we both did something wrong.

For Mona, clearly, the notion of equal atrocities is not as concrete, but her use of "we both" reveals her self-identification with one of the groups in question. Perhaps she copes with vague information about brutal acts and her own belonging to a religion that participated in the civil war's fighting – a group that might have disproportionately brutalized another group, or that might have been disproportionately persecuted – by telling herself that the groups' actions were

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[7] Lebanese Arabic colloquial term, meaning, "you know."

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reciprocal and that there is no wronged victim waiting for revenge in her society. Her collective

memory of the civil war's conflict is a product both of historical fact and her social position, as

theorized by Wertsch (2002). Despite a vague conception of the war events' details, Mona's

present social position contributes to her memory of its events. This corresponds to the

conceptualization of collective memory as a tool for defining, and grappling with, one's social

belonging (Licata, 2007).

Palestinian students mentioned massacres that occurred in the Palestinian camps during

the civil war. These massacres did not factor into the memories of any of the Lebanese students I

interviewed. Even though my subjects did not live through the killings, their collective memories

of these massacres carried trauma with them as indicated by their word choice and relationship

with the narratives. For example, Nadera explained, "Um, I think it was the refugee camp war,

between some religion and Palestinians themselves. So, it was kind of horrible. They used to say,

'If you killed a Palestinian, you go to heaven.' .... Um, they were – are – some part of the

Lebanese community." Nadera cannot bring herself to describe the attackers, referring to them as

"some religion," perhaps because that religious group still exists in Lebanese society today. She

corrects herself to emphasize that they "are" a presence of the Lebanese community.

Sarah, also Palestinian, bears a similar relationship to her memory of atrocities committed

to refugees during the civil war:

> There was the massacre of Palestinians in Sabra and Shatila. …. Sabra and Shatila, yes. A
> group of Lebanese people, but I don't really want to mention the name, okay, they killed
> the Palestinians because they were Sunni … in the camps of refugees. They killed them
> and there was a massacre of the Palestinians. They killed them in the buses, and I
> remember my mother was living here during the civil war, so my mother was pregnant
> and she was bringing my brother, and my sister was born – my big sister – and so my
> mother told me about that, how she ran away from that, but she was living in Beirut. …
> Wait, I was mistaken about the details. Sabra and Shatila were because of the Israelis, but
> there were Palestinians who died during the civil war because of Lebanese, yes, … Like
> in Al-Nabatiyeh camp.

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Similarly to Nadera, Sarah cannot bring herself to name of the Lebanese group that indiscriminately killed people of her national origin during the civil war. Another Palestinian student, Nour, found herself unable to even speak of the massacre that occurred in her camp, Ain-el-Helweh, in Saida:

> If they know that you are Palestinian, they kill you, in, uh, your… accent. Just from the accent. Say what is "tomato," the Palestinians say it in different words, and they kill just if they know that he is Palestinian. ... The camps – in Ain El-Helweh and other camps, they told me that there were very, very bad things that happened. They kill people in very bad ways; I really can't say this.

While Nour and other Palestinian subjects described the Palestinian massacres, not a single Lebanese subject did. The lack of a history curriculum has truly erased the intense persecution of Palestinians that occurred during the civil war from the new Lebanese generation's memories of the conflict. And to some extent, it has been removed from the Palestinians' as well. One Palestinian interviewee succinctly explained (sadly, likely for lack of more details about her own people's history), "The civil war – many Palestinians were killed in it, but no one really wants to speak about it. I don't really know why."

Most students described fighting between Christians and Muslims, within the religious sects contained in those two broader categories, or between Palestinians and Lebanese. However, several students I interviewed were uncertain which groups the war was even between. These students expressed confusion about how Syrians, Lebanese, Palestinians, Israelis, Christians, and Muslims interacted with each other during the war. Lack of clarity about the civil war's participants prevented them from understanding anything about the war's events, as none were able to recount any of its details. Indeed, though, all of these groups played roles in the fighting in different ways, and at different stages of the war. Hala chose not to even define the different players in the war's course, preferring to summarize it in the following way:

Certain parties started being formed; they didn't exist before the war, but they got formed, and they started taking place in the war, and, um… Um, and it started in 1975, and it continued for about 13 years, and during these 13 years many things changed. For example, people – a party was with this axis and then at a certain time it became a part of this axis, and um… Yeah. The political, let's say structure, of the war, changed throughout these thirteen years. And um, yeah. And the international interests also changed, which affected how the war was going on here.

Resolution and Conclusion

Only nine of my 23 subjects were able to speak about the war's end at all; out of these, five mentioned the treaty of Ta'ef in Saudi Arabia that ended the fighting, and only three described that the treaty established a parity between Christian and Muslim representation in the Lebanese legislative branch. The Ta'ef treaty's assignment of representatives still holds, and relates to many of the political battles and controversies roiling Lebanon today (Kanafani-Zahar, 2011; Salam, 2007). The fact that Lebanese history curricula do not address the civil war, then, directly impacts how students are able to understand their nation's current politics. This will be explored further in Chapter Five.

In conclusion, most Lebanese and Palestinian high school graduates hold limited memories of the Lebanese civil war of 1975 to 1990. Of my 23 interviewees, eight were able to articulate the conflict's long-term causes, eleven, the events surrounding its immediate breakout, and nine, its end. These understandings of the war were not fully collective, but rather comprised smaller aspects of the conflict that could come together to constitute a full picture of it. The sources of Palestinian and Lebanese students' understandings, described in chapter four, explain this fragmentation.

*3.2 Recent Sectarian Conflict*

Students' memories of recent sectarian conflict were equally disparate and incomplete as those of the civil war. Only fifteen out of the 23 students I interviewed were able to describe a

recent instance of sectarian conflict in Lebanon.[8] Their understandings can be characterized as memories because they incorporated both the students' lived experiences and culturally based narratives and stories. Similarly to the civil war, most perceptions of conflict are superficial; many students did not establish timelines of the conflict, while a small handful of students displayed more nuanced understandings of the situations they described. Lebanese and Palestinian students are divided in their understandings: 7 out of 8 Lebanese students described one or more current events, as compared to 10 out of 15 Palestinians. Less widespread awareness of current Lebanese events among Palestinians than Lebanese reflects similar dynamics to those shaping understandings of the war; numerous Palestinian subjects indicated that they feel distanced from Lebanese issues, and prefer to focus their attention to current events as they relate to Palestine.

Interviewees' memories of recent sectarian conflict also tend to be religiously neutral in that the memories do not so much contradict as complement each other. However, students imbue their understandings of recent sectarian conflict with more certainties and judgments than those of the civil war. They demonstrate greater awareness of the general groups involved and the roles they played in the conflict. Reasons for this will be discussed in Chapter Four, which addresses sources of and socialization to memories of conflict.

Syrian Conflict Spillover

Most students chose the war in Syria and its spillover to Lebanon as their example of recent sectarian conflict. Their memories of the conflict form a consistent picture of how, on a

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[8] When planning my research, I intended to talk about the summer 2013 clashes that occurred in Sidon with each of my subjects. However, I quickly realized that for a variety of reasons – including lack of interest in current events, youths' difficulty finding out the truth about sectarian conflict, and the discomfort of broaching such a topic – it would be easier to make my question more open-ended, allowing subjects to choose any recent event of sectarian conflict to describe.

general scale, the fighting between Sunni rebels (including the Islamic State of Iraq and the

Levant, or ISIL) and Bashir Al-Assad's Shi'ite regime has affected Lebanon. According to my

interviewees, the involvement of Hezbollah, a Lebanese Shi'ite political party and military group

deemed a terrorist organization by the United States and other nations, in support of Assad, has

prompted ISIL to carry out attacks on Shi'ite portions of Lebanese soil. Student understandings

of this situation varied widely in scope. Only eight students referenced specific leaders, political

parties, or groups (such as Bashir Al-Assad, Hezbollah, or ISIL (known as *da3ech* in Lebanese

Arabic)). Most descriptions remained vague and referred to none of these. All students expressed

that they were able to make sense of the situation, and that they had a conviction about what had

actually happened, except for one.

It is important to acknowledge that students' descriptions of current conflict may have

tended to be vague because of the discomfort of talking about Lebanon's politically charged

recent events with a stranger. One interviewee, Mona, made this explicit:

> Um, I don't like talking about [politics], but… Um, there are some people that believe
> that stuff about – I'm just going to say "stuff" – stuff about Syria, and they *khalas*,[9] they
> believe it's 100% right; they don't like to argue about it. But some people believe the
> opposite, some people the opposite, and *khalas*. They're like these people, there's these
> two groups of people that I really, really hate, and there's a group of people that, uh,
> think, that maybe some ideas from both groups are right, and they're somehow inclined
> to both of them. Just… And I stand with this group. That's everything that I'll say about
> politics. [Laughs]

Mona expresses awareness of two opposing discourses surrounding the Syrian conflict's

spillover to Lebanon, but firmly believes that neither can be the absolute truth. Despite not

specifying any details about the conflict involving ISIL, it is clear that she has a defined stance

on the issue. Mona's use of the modifier "*khalas*" to punctuate her claims emphasizes her

insistence that both sides of the conflict are equally at fault. The fact that she has a stance

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[9] Lebanese Arabic, "enough."

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contrasts student memories of the civil war, which involved youth neutrality toward and removal from the situation.

Some of the youth who reported vague memories of current conflict did so not out of fear of discussing it, but out of true confusion. Zeinab, who provided a detailed description of a Syria-related bombing in Lebanon, did not trust her own explanation of the event, finishing her description as follows:

> Nothing is really clear. Everything is really mysterious in Lebanon, like, you can't know anything. Yeah. [Laughs] … There's no consensus in Lebanon at all. [Laughs] Yeah. Everything – every party sees things as the complete opposite of the other party. Unless they're like allies or something. … [Most news] they named, like, the opposite party is indulged in such action. They named the opposite party to sabotage their view, or something.

Despite previously expressing a specific understanding of the bombing, Zeinab ultimately calls her understanding into question. But not all students were even able to begin untangling the information they were presented. Nicole recalled,

> I don't know the actual time, but there had been recent bombing events. It was also close to my house, and usually we were just studying in my class and we heard something very loud and very scary. So we just ran away and started to call our parents. Our parents live in Dahiyeh, so we think our parents are staying at home maybe something happened to them. So we were tense, all the time, daily. Seriously, after these lots of bombs, in our bus on the way to school, we just think, "In this minute, maybe a bomb will come up and kill us all." It's not a good feeling when you come and you know that the bomb is just next to you and you know that it will blow up now. So, we lived a tense month maybe, more, thinking, "Is it today? Is it tomorrow?"

This description constitutes the extent of Nicole's knowledge of current sectarian conflict. It is entirely limited to her personal experience. Although Nicole described frequently watching the news with her parents – and failing to understand its content – no information from the news made it into her memory of the conflict.

The eight students who demonstrated greater understanding of current conflict explicitly grasped the role of parties involved in the conflict and assigned responsibility for the fighting on

Lebanese soil to ISIL, indicating a fledgling collective memory. Gabriel, Lebanese and Christian, illustrated this in his explanation of how religious alliances are shaping the Syrian conflict's spillover to Lebanon:

> Hezbollah got involved in Syria, sending fighters, and because of this many conflicts were raised in Lebanon, some of them supporting Hezbollah, some of them against Hezbollah. It did many conflicts in Lebanon between the two conflicting sides of Muslims – Sunna and Shi'a. And, you know about the bombs and explosions that were happening lately, it's because of this. … Christians are usually – usually support the Shi'a party. Shi'a are against the Sunni party. Ummm. The Shi'a party supports the, supports Bashar al-Assad in Syria, while the Sunni party doesn't support him at all, supports the revolution that is happening there. For example, this affected that in the parts of the country that are inhabited by the Shi'a, many explosions were happening there because of the Sunni that are attacking Shi'a. For here, Hamra, it's a Sunni part of Lebanon, it's unlikely that any explosions would happen because the Shi'a aren't attacking the Sunni as the Sunni are attacking the Shi'a. … So it's heavily influenced by religions too.

Despite perhaps not having a clear understanding of the specifics of events taking place in Lebanon, Gabriel logically organizes the recent sectarian conflict in Lebanon. He considers one religious group – the Sunni – instigators of violence within Lebanon. Many other subjects similarly were able to lay out the general landscape surrounding recent fighting and assign responsibility. Hanin, Palestinian, described a Syria-related bombing in Beirut as follows:

> Well, some of the political parties were blaming each other about the cause of the bomb, but mostly they were saying that it is a terrorist act, and yeah, they agreed that it is a terrorist act ... Uh… I remember, but, I guess Amal[10] said that it is a Hezbollah that is making the bombing. But they, uh, they denied it; they didn't have proof to put the blame on them. ... I guess it's, it's not about the Lebanese people, it's an outside thing. Just making – to make conflicts between them.

Hanin ultimately assigns blame for the bombing to the "outside thing" (presumably ISIL), hinging purely on Amal's denial of instigating the bombing. She is aware of this seemingly one-sided, perhaps biased view of the situation, further elaborating,

> I guess, well, some of them, whenever they try to catch the one who is bombing, and when they do, they say, 'It is the Palestinian people who did that!' All the Lebanese, uh,

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[10] Amal is a Lebanese political party.

can say that the Palestinians are involved in this bombing, but, uh, the Palestinian people, a lot of them think that it's an outside thing that did it.

Hanin admits that her formation of judgment related to recent conflict corresponds to her citizenship group, but accepts this as she is implicated in the conflict. She holds convictions related to blame and guilt when it comes to recent sectarian conflict in Lebanon, as did all the students who brought up specific understandings of the conflict.

Internal Lebanese Sectarian Conflict

Several students described sectarian conflict within Lebanon.[11] This conflict is related to Lebanon's system of assigning political office based on religion, and other government structures created or modified in the civil war's 1990 peace treaty (Salam, 2007). Similarly to students' nascent memories of the Syrian conflict spillover, these understandings ranged in depth. Students who identified specific groups or players in the conflict, though, also assigned blame.

For example, Rana mentioned clashes between Palestinian militias and the Lebanese army, ultimately deciding that Fatah Al-Islam[12] was to blame:

> I'm from Nahr al-Bared camp. They, uh, when Fatah Al-Islam came to us, and then they clashed with the Lebanese army, there were many things happening here. They were bad things. The army had to stop these things from happening in all Lebanon. ... Fatah Al-Islam. It's a – how can I... A group of, uh, Muslims came from many other – many places; they told us, "This is Palestine, and you have to kill the Israelis." We don't know, really, why they told us that; and then they clashed with the Lebanese army.

Rana later explained that she believes Palestinians to collectively remember the 2007 conflict involving Fatah Al-Islam in the same way. She ascribes to a certain, collective memory, of the

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[11] Internal Lebanese conflict can be related to that in Syria, but students whose descriptions fall into this category omitted Syria and its influence entirely and only mentioned events occurring in Lebanon.

[12] Fatah Al-Islam is a radical Islamist military group.

recent conflict. Interviewees never express such conviction in their own beliefs and certainty about their collective nature during conversations about the civil war.

Another interviewee, Farah, similarly felt comfortable inserting her own judgments into her understanding of recent conflict. She described the Sunni *sheikh* Al-Assir's clash with the Lebanese army in June 2013.[13] Farah provides an impressively extensive knowledge of the event's details that surpassed any other recollection – whether it was of a recent or distant event – from my conversations. She said,

> There was this conspiracy, it actually was that, between America and, I think, Qatar. So this guy, this sheikh, he got into Lebanon, he was kind of funded by both, so he was kind of trying to make conflicts between Muslims of the two sects – the Shi'a and the Sunni – so… He came into Lebanon as like this very good religious man and everything and he kind of got this crowd with him. … And, those people that believe in him were Sunnis. And he was actually talking against the other sect of the Muslims, the Shi'a. So, actually, like, those Sunnis that came with him, they kind of got brainwashed by his beliefs and everything. So they kind of turned against the other sect of the Muslims because of this guy.
> He took this kind of like, uh, let's say, a mosque – it's in Saida – in a city called Abra, it's in Saida – so he took this mosque, and like the people that were with him, they were all gathered there. … It turned out that afterwards, after this guy got away and ran away from Lebanon, uh, it turned that this mosque, it has underground stuff like of tunnels of weapons and everything. So before he went, he had actually conflicts with the other sect. They were like very military kind of stuff, so, um, so like the people that he got with, when he left, they stayed with him. The guy left, and he turned out to be like kind of like this conspiracy sent from outside; the people were actually very ignorant to stay with the beliefs of that guy. Even though they knew he was trying to make conflicts between the two sects, which shouldn't happen because they're both Muslims.

Farah assigns blame for the violence to America and Qatar, and also the Sunni Muslims who blindly followed the rebellious *sheikh*. She glosses over the fighting's details, but nevertheless forms a judgment about the situation. Her memory of the conflict is characterized less by its specific details as by how it implicated different political groups and entities.

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[13] *Sheikh* Ahmad al-Assir is a Lebanese Sunni cleric whose followers clashed with the Lebanese army in Sidon in June 2013, killing 14 Lebanese soldiers and two army officers (Aziz, 2013).

*3.3 Conclusion*

My interviews suggest that Lebanese and Palestinian high school graduates carry a limited awareness of both the civil war and recent sectarian conflict in Lebanon. More so than those of the civil war, though, memories of recent conflict include judgments related to blame. However, understandings are still often superficial, and involve social or political groups' relationships to one another rather than concrete timelines of and details about events. Overall, students do not hold a unified, collective memory of the civil war and recent conflict.

**Chapter 4: Memories' Sources and Socialization**

Students are not socialized to the topic of sectarian conflict in institutions of education. Thus, their understandings of conflict are not based on information obtained in schools. Students considered other sources of information unreliable, explaining the vagueness of their memories of conflict.

*4.1 Socialization to Information in School Settings*

Students are not socialized to collective memories of recent or past conflict in schools, even outside of history class. All of my interviewees except one reported that discussions related to sectarianism are not permitted in their schools, and that they are thus not socialized to understandings of these topics in school settings.[14] Either such dialogue is banned outright, or blocked by social norms. (Farah explained, "It's not like teachers say, 'Don't talk about religion,' but people know they shouldn't talk about that. They respect that.") Most subjects indicated that a fear of undermining school unity drove their avoidance of such a topic of conversation.[15] Nicole explained,

> We don't talk about it that much because we are united in the class, we are from different religions, so we don't talk about our history. … We actually, we don't talk about it because I told you, my school has lots of religions, lots of perspectives. People think different ways. I have people that do not believe in God, I have people that are Muslims, Christians, even Druze, *ya3ni*? So, we do not talk about the civil war because we are not separated. And we think that such a subject, if we like talked about it, it would separate us, because I'm Muslim. If someone is Muslim, that person would not agree with, uh, Christians' thoughts. Or even Christians, between each other, or Muslims, between each

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[14] Dina was the only subject who reported such conversations, describing her history teacher – belonging to a different religious sect – as biased, and attempting to instigate them. However, she reported that students "just listen, and uh… They don't refuse with it. Yes. They don't want to make trouble with her. Okay. … we all just forget about it. We don't mention it." In her case, this teacher's attempts to broach sectarian topics do not spill over to interactions between the students or affect their perceptions of conflict.

[15] Palestinian students cited their preoccupations with Palestine's history and Palestinians' current situation in Lebanon (as opposed to a fear of dissent and argument) as a reason for not bringing up the topic of the civil war. No Lebanese students expressed this reason.

other, they would not agree. So we do not talk about such things, so we avoid problems, we avoid issues, between us. We keep it neutral.

Students echoed this avoidance of sectarian topics of conversation for the sake of social cohesion. Zeinab more directly referenced how dialogue about the civil war could wreak social havoc at her school:

> At school? No, we're not allowed to talk about politics. …. We are allowed to talk about history, but like, even in the Lebanese history, it's all about politics, so we go back to the main point. Like because many people believe that the [civil war] started because of the *Ouwet*; they're a Lebanese party, yet we have *Ouwets* in our school and we can't like just humiliate them, so we're not allowed to talk.

Few students reported ever engaging in conversations about sectarian conflict with their friends; all except one did so to no avail. Dina, from Beirut, reflected that she learned never to do so again because Lebanon's tense current political situation: "I asked [my friends] once. Because they really – every time it was mentioned, they avoid talking about it, because it is really bad. Yes. It makes them scared, and I don't know if it's really going here right now. Maybe…. Because, as you know, history events are coming back, yes, and that's bad." Nour reported that her friends refused to engage in conversation with her about recent conflict for a different reason – simply because of their lack of interest in, and knowledge about, the topic:

> Many, many – my friends, the girls – I speak to them about politics, and they, "Don't speak about politics, please! We don't even watch TV news!" I ask them, "Don't you really know what's happening *matalan*[16] in Syria!" They told me, "No way!" But they have to know because we are all Muslims, and we must know what's happening with other people. And Arabs, they are Arabs. They must know what's happening with the other Arabs.

Nour is simply unable to engage in conversation with her peers about current events. She cannot inform herself of their understandings, or expose them to her perceptions.

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[16] "For example" in Lebanese Arabic.

Only one student, Nicole, mentioned ever talking constructively about sectarian politics at school with someone from a different background.[17] She explained,

> My best friend is from a different religion. We are like sisters. .... She is Christian, and I'm Muslim. ... We ask questions about others' religions. And, like, when somebody of my religion does something wrong, she asks me like, "Do you do such things or do you allow such things?" I say, "No, hell no, of course not." And, same thing. When something wrong happens from her religion, a person does something wrong from her religion, I ask if it is allowed and she says, "No, it's not." And we talk about something, how do you pray, how do I pray, how to get closer to God, how do you get closer to God, same thing related to, *ya3ni*, religion. And, we do not have any problems. We just talk it out.

This heart-warming instance of discussing religious differences – especially as they relate to current conflict in Lebanon – was a rarity in my sample. And while these friends at least broach political events in their conversations, the discussions do not seem so much focused on the events themselves, and perceptions of them, as how they relate to the two friends' personal values. Students do not experience cross-religious socialization to differing opinions of sectarianism. Chapter Five will address how the lack of socialization contributes to the youth perception of religious divides as enduring and their sense of political disempowerment as it relates to Lebanon's complex, sectarian political landscape.

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[17] Hala, from Sidon, indicated a willingness to break the silence surrounding the topic of conflict with peers, but later admitted to only broaching such conversation with those who shared her views:
> If you try talking about them in schools, they will tell you, "No political talks in schools." … We do talk, but not in, like… But not publicly, not in school with the teacher, for example. But of course, between friends, of course we talk about such things. … Basically, the people I talk to, it's – they're people from the same political background as I am, so we kind of agree. Yeah.

While Hala does report talking about sectarian conflict with friends, it is doubtful that this resulted in socialization to other understandings, since she makes sure to only bring up the topic with like-minded peers.

*4.2 Sources of Information about Sectarian Conflict*

Lebanese and Palestinian youth understandings of the conflict are not based on memories that they are socialized to in schools. Because of the void of dialogue about sectarian conflict in schools, students rely on other sources such as media and family members for information. However, students characterize these sources as biased, and not entirely credible. Students' difficulty navigating the unreliable, and often conflicting, points of view they obtain about conflict explains the vagueness of their understandings of the civil war.

Similarly to the case of the civil war, students' ability to understand recent conflict involves navigating and reconciling different viewpoints. However, many students are also able to base their understandings of the conflict that has occurred during their lifetimes on their own lived experiences. This reflects that collective memory can be based both on personal experience and learned information (Hallbwachs, 1992). Students' witnessing of events explains how a substantial number of students hold convictions and certainties about sectarian conflict.

<u>The Civil War</u>

Youth reported to have heard or learned about the civil war through: independent research (in books, online, or through documentaries), family, and random social interactions. Figure 8 in the Appendix represents these information sources' prevalence. Palestinian and Lebanese students are divided in terms of sources. Five Palestinian students specifically mentioned that due to their nationality, they shared little interest in knowing anything about Lebanon's history, preferring to learn about their own people's past.[18] (At her interview's start,

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[18] Tareq interestingly mentioned being interested in his father's opinions of the war only insofar as they could be of use to his resistance to Israel. He recounted, "My father was telling me about these incidents …. Like, a memory, to throw our ways to the future, to know how to beat the enemy. So we take some lessons from the Lebanese war and use it in the Palestinian. ... The Israelis come to surrender if they lose a military Israeli, so we have to focus on killing the

Rana, Palestinian, bemoaned, "Why, as Palestinians, do we have to memorize your history? …

We don't know anything about Palestine! If you asked me something about Palestine, I wouldn't

know. It's a problem.") This attitude reflects Palestinian communal insularity that exists in

Lebanon, despite the fact that most Palestinian families have lived in Lebanon since 1948 (Debié

and Pieter, 2003). This also might explain why Lebanese were overrepresented in the group of

students who learned about the civil war through their own research.[19] Also, the students who

spoke of random interactions in their communities as contributing to their understanding of the

war were all Lebanese – this likely speaks to the aforementioned isolation of Palestinians in

Lebanon, and the fact that discourse about Lebanon's past simply is not commonplace in the

environment that Palestinians grow up in. Students could bring up multiple sources of

information about the conflict. On average, each Palestinian interviewed mentioned 0.93 sources

(three subjects reported no understanding of the war at all). However, on average, each Lebanese

interviewee mentioned 2.1 sources of information. This indicates both Lebanese youths'

heightened exposure to the topic of the war, as well as perhaps increased interest about it as

compared to Palestinians.

   While the most prevalent source of information about the civil war for students were

books, videos, and websites studied on their own volition, the majority of students did not trust

the information they obtained about the war in the process. For example, in response to my

question about how she found out details about the civil war, Ghinwa explained,

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military ones in order to break the bonds between the Israeli community. Uh, maybe we know
about the tunnels, where the Lebanese resistance was digging some tunnels to surprise the Israeli
ones, under the ground, so the Palestinian ones use the same way. ... Real life experience, and my
dad told me about them. And they convinced me."
[19] The group includes five out of the 15 Palestinians I interviewed, but six out of the eight
Lebanese I spoke with.

I know because I hear things, I read books … And I don't really trust books because maybe he's Christian, maybe he's Muslim, he'll be biased to someone. [Laughs] So you can't trust anyone in Lebanon now! Especially for me, I don't really care about religion, but Lebanese people really care about religion. If you are not from his religion, he won't like you. Or not from his sect.

Mona, on the other hand, only inferred that information was true if it implied the culpability of its provider. She described:

Some people make others believe what they believe. This is wrong. … [But] sometimes I turn the TV on and listen to some people speaking that… You know, one time, I heard two Christians, they were debating about stuff. So one of them was saying that, "I know that Muslims did very wrong stuff," and stuff like that. And the other one was like, "We did very wrong stuff too. We killed many people…" And he gave some details and dates about massacres that were done in Lebanon, that Christians did. You know, some people really know what happened, and I love to listen to those people.

Three students from a variety of backgrounds specifically referred to an Al-Jazeera documentary about the civil war as a source of reliable information. In the case of Sarah, a Palestinian student, Al-Jazeera's stance as an organization not based in Lebanon (and hence less implicated in the nation's conflict than other providers of information) and inclusion of a variety of viewpoints were crucial in establishing its legitimacy as a source:

Like in Al-Jazeera, I just watched about the Civil War … from my opinion, I think that Al-Jazeera, especially in the history, they mention a viewpoint that anyone, everyone can agree on it. Because Al-Jazeera is not for any group in Lebanon. So they are not working for any groups. They talk about the events, for example, from a third point of view, yes.

In mentioning the film, Hala, Lebanese, noted, "It's not biased, and everyone who was a part of this war, he is in this documentary, and everyone gets to talk about how he views the civil war."

Youth also reported hearing information about the war through family members. However, similar to that obtained through books and media, this information was not entirely reliable: parents and family elders who experienced the war tended to focus on their own lives during the conflict rather than its political events. Hanin recounted,

I – I just only remember what my dad used to tell me, that his university was on the other side[20] and he was in the camp and he had to go to his friend to get his, uh, his studies, and uh, the army used to just – you're driving the car, and they say 'Stop! Hand me papers and go, this is mine.' There was a lot of stealing and, *ya3ni*, whatever happens in war.

For Sarah, family members' recollections of danger also seemed to trump explanations of any larger-scale events that occurred during the war period. She described,

When [parents] talk about the war, I think they mostly talk about the events, but because this period was personally lived by my mother, and my sister lived these events, they – when they mention, they mention their personal adventures about what happened with them. To prove that they were killing people, and… And, you know, the situation was not safe for us, or for any person who lived there in those dates.

Students reported that parents kept their descriptions of political content sparing to avoid creating biased views, but that this prevented them from learning what truly happened before their births. For example, Ghinwa explained:

Actually, uh, my father was someone like very revolutionary, I think. ... Yeah, he won't talk about it. But sometimes, like, I ask him things, he answers, but very… just a sentence. You know? He doesn't give me any specific information because he doesn't want me to get inside those things. Because he knows what will happen next if something happens, and he knows I am a very revolutionary person [laughs] so I think he worries about me and he doesn't want me to get inside these things.

In two instances, the opposite was true – students may have heard information from their parents or other family members, but because of these sources' perceived bias, could not take any of what they heard to heart. Zeinab recounted her childhood memories of listening in on her grandfather's conversations:

He used to always invite his elderly friends and like do these meetings to talk about Lebanon, and like, it's in our garden, so I used hear them and listen to them a little bit, so I got used to their ideas. … My grandpa is kind of biased as well, so I don't believe everything he says. Yeah. ... My parents are not really political, um… They're secular as well, but they don't really indulge in politics. They don't really talk about politics in our

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[20] Sarah's testimony reflects Beirut's physical division between Christians and Muslims during the Lebanese Civil War. Many other subjects recounted this division as well. Figure 9 in the Appendix presents a map of it.

house and stuff. ... I really don't know what really happened. I can't judge; I wasn't there; I didn't observe anything. So, there are just like hypotheses. There is nothing.

Although Zeinab accessed a wealth of information about the civil war through her grandfather, it is useless to her because of its source's unreliability. Her grandfather's memory of conflict cannot become her own, but similarly, she cannot discredit it entirely and cast it aside. She can only get "used to" his ideas, and accept that when it comes to facts about the civil war, ultimately, "there is nothing." Mona's case similarly illustrates this youth consciousness of family bias: "You know, [my family members] really, truly believe that they're right. I don't – *ya3ni*, I don't believe that. I just… We grew in an atmosphere that says no one believe, *ya3ni*, you're not 100% right, the other's not 100% right." Mona's immersion in different viewpoints about politics has allowed her to realize that her family's rigidity indicates bias.

Lastly, in several instances, apathy about history prevented interviewees from retaining any information acquired from their parents, or caused them to just directly accept their parents' views, biased or not. Nour, who knew very little about the civil war, exclaimed, "You have to do an interview with my father! He knows exactly what to think." Others who did not obtain information from their families reported simply not paying attention to their parents' descriptions of war, or mentioned that not being exposed to understandings of recent in school meant that they would never think to bring such a topic up in the home:

> Uh… I heard talks, my parents. … No; if I asked them [about the Civil War], they would [tell]. But, it's like, uh, it's like the educational system doesn't like… raises your attention to this subject, I don't think you're gonna bring it up in your house. It's kind of related to the education system. Yeah… it's messed up. ... If I asked them, they would [answer]. Yeah, they consider I'm mature enough to make my own decisions about this conflict, like to pick my own side.

Farah's parents expect her to seek out and sift through information about the civil war, but the fact that the war was never brought up in her school caused her to never try and obtain that

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information in the first place. As a result, those years in Lebanon's history largely constitute a void in her mind.

Lebanese students described learning about the war through unexpected interactions, indicating that growing up in a Lebanese setting – as opposed to a more insular Palestinian camp – might expose youth to different perspectives. Farah elaborated,

> Sometimes, *ya3ni*, uh, gatherings, like any other gatherings. Sometimes you're just like sitting in the restaurant and you hear like the woman behind is talking about that, and you're like, "Okay…" Or like, it's not like with the family, but people around me, anyone. Like for example you pass by a teacher in school who is just talking about it, okay. It's not something like no one ever talks about. Everyone always talks about it. So I hear an opinion from here and an opinion from that. You just build what you understand.

Hala similarly talked about how she was able to build on different opinions overheard to get a sense of some of the war's events:

> I think it's – like, you grow up and that's one of the things that people talk about. So you kind of collect information about what happened back then. And you can see how different people view the situation back then differently. Like everyone sees it in a different way. And you kind of collect how these different people view it and you form this idea.

Notably, not a single one of the fifteen Palestinian students I interviewed similarly indicated that the war was a topic of everyday conversation in the environments that they grew up in. However, the fact that Palestinian and Lebanese students alike remained uncertain about specific details of the war reveals that this constant exposure to different ideas about the war may not have really helped inform Lebanese students about it.

Two last sources of information about the war were brought up in my research: inadvertent school information and the war's name itself. While the history curriculum and its accompanying textbooks do not include any information after 1946, they end with Lebanon's independence and establishment of a Constitution. Rime (a Palestinian student) and Farah (Lebanese) based their understandings of the war's beginning on one of their books' last

sentences, which described the initial allocation of seats in Parliament between Muslims and

Christians that occurred in 1946.[21] Gabriel mentioned that he inferred the war began in 1975,

because in his economics class, the teacher had mentioned the Lebanese currency became

devalued in that year.

Finally, Adeeb and Mona, students with very limited understandings of the conflict,

inferred that it was between Christians and Muslims simply due to the name "civil," which

implied an internal division to them. The first possible source of such a division within Lebanon

that came to their minds was along religious lines. The fact that students became forced to rely

on the label "civil war" itself – instead of other details – to understand their history reveals how a

sheer informational void can obscure historical complexities and reduce the conflict to one of

pure opposition between religions. The emphasis on learning "truth," establishing sides, and

assigning "right" and wrong" that emerges from this lack of history will be explored later on in

the paper's discussion of students' understanding of very recent sectarian conflict.

Recent Sectarian Conflict

As they had for the civil war, youth reported obtaining information about recent sectarian

conflict through their own research and through family members, but consider these sources (and

the media) biased and unreliable.[22] However, students explained being able to use their personal

experiences to navigate the varied information provided by biased sources, and shape their

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[21] See Rime's testimony on page 22 for details.
[22] For example, Baraa explained: "Well, um, as I have told you, it's media. Media can
manipulate what is happening. Each channel has its own, uh, its own thoughts and own
strategies. I cannot trust any media. If you see, if uh, Syria now are divided into two. Isn't it? If,
uh, I'm watching a channel which is related to this part, or to this uh, then they will talk about
good things for this part, but the other will not talk really good things. So I cannot trust what is
really happening. Unless you are at the place." Baraa's description of media's untrustworthiness
exemplifies how students viewed sources of information of recent conflict as just as unreliable as
those of past conflict.

understandings of the conflict. This explains how their memories of recent conflict tended to carry more certainty and judgment than those of the civil war.

For example, Baraa assured me, "I live here, so I can – I, I know what's really happening." Similarly, Rana prefaced her answer to my question about describing a recent instance of sectarian conflict with, "About Lebanon? Yes, you know, we live here. We know about what is happening here." She emphasizes that her knowledge stems from her life experience. This self-confidence in understanding of the situation mirrors that of other students who recounted recent conflict, and contradicts how most students characterized the civil war. She also uses "we" to refer to Palestinians' collective group experience and understanding. As described on page 38, Rana expressed with certainty how she considered the groups who engaged in clashes to have interacted, and where the blame ultimately laid. Her lived experiences are inherent to ascribing to a Palestinian collective memory of the conflict – other sources, such as the media, did no favors in establishing the situation for her:

> Channels have a special focus on Nasrallah: Al-Manar, if you know. But Al-Jadide focuses on other people. Not all news that is opposite to them, *ya3ni*, they'll explain it. Each one just displays what supports his ideas, religion; what he thinks, *ya3ni*. It's like this everywhere! Each one loves itself! ... I don't trust anyone. [Laughs] Yeah, yeah. Each one talks about something different.

Rana holds a certain memory of the conflict that rocked her camp of Nahr al-Bared in 2007 despite conflicting views set forth by media.

Baraa's recounting of a bombing incident that occurred several months ago reflects how personal experience could directly shape memory of conflict:

> Some media, uh, said that the explosion was because of Palestinians, and they were blaming. But it's not really true. Once I was at school, it was about 9 or 10 am, and we were studying, and then, suddenly, we heard an explosion and the school was upside down, and that time, the media said it was due to the Palestinians, that the Palestinians were the reason of this, but it wasn't really that. Because I was in that place; I was there; I saw what happened.

She is able to use her witnessing of the event to navigate the different perspectives floating around in media about its source. This contrasts the case of the civil war, information about which is often obscured or inaccessible, preventing youth from forming a clear picture of the different memories surrounding it and forming their own opinions.

Farah, who described fighting between a *sheikh* and the Lebanese army in her hometown of Sidon, bases her conviction that her understanding of the conflict is accurate on her first-hand knowledge of the situation:

> Oh! My… the story that happened, yeah, my… Like, it happened five minutes away from us, from where I live. [laughs] So, it's like… It happened so you can hear the bombing, the bullets… The bullets came to our neighborhood. Like our neighborhood is Shi'a, and like the Sunni neighborhood became kind off, like the middle. So you were living in the middle of what happened. So you have to know, *ya3ni*.

Farah (justifiably) considers her understanding of the event completely concrete because of her experiences physically living in its midst.

Other students relied on more nuanced logic – related to their own, perhaps more distant experience with sectarian conflict – to form their understanding. For example, in beginning to form an understanding of the border clashes between the Lebanese army and ISIL that occurred in August 2014, Sarah relied on one narrative's origin of the Lebanese military as verification of its trustworthiness:

> Yes. It also started by, um, so there are two points of view on this, yes. [Laughs] One is about the police, who say that they, that there are, uh, a group of people that kidnapped two soldiers, yes, and because of that, they were fighting, or conflicts in Beqaa.[23] And others said that because of the police take important people of this group, so they started fighting. And they killed like 10 soldiers. And 13 or more soldiers are injured, yes, right now. And from the group, I don't know, they don't tell how much people die from it.... Yes! [I believe more] the police. [Laughs] Because, I know, the police is representing Lebanon, the whole country. And everything he is doing, he is doing for the safety of the country. So I believe the police, of course.

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[23] The Beqaa is a Lebanese governorate bordering Syria.

In this case, Sarah associates more strongly with "the police" (the Lebanese army) than "the other group" (ISIL), and is hence able to adhere to their narrative. This also interestingly represents one of the few instances in which a Palestinian subject identified as Lebanese. She explained, "[The military] represents all of Lebanon. No Lebanese can say, 'I am with that other group which is not Lebanese and not from here,' *ya3ni*?" In the case of the civil war, though, in which groups' motives, let alone the boundaries defining them, were less clear, students are less able to leverage memories' source in understanding them.

Zeinab similarly used her own logic to come to an understanding of the Syrian civil war's spillover. She recounted,

> I was at school and I heard the news about the bombing in Dahiyeh, Beirut. ... It was proven that it was a party from Syria that bombed Dahiyeh. *Da3ech*,[24] if you know them. Yeah. Because the bomb came from Syria. And the only party that is against Hezbollah in Syria is *da3ech*. So that is the most likely explanation. ... Not from the news. From my own logical reasoning. ... But they didn't say it was *da3ech*. They said it was a bomb from Syria; they didn't specify which party from Syria sent this bomb.

Zeinab both establishes a sequence of events and assigns responsibility for the bombing. Key to her interpretation is her understanding of Dahiyeh as a current Hezbollah stronghold; such knowledge (used to support inference) appears less readily available to youth when it comes to the civil war. Correspondingly, in the case of that conflict, students tend to assign equal blame between parties or avoid making any statements at all, distancing themselves from it, due to their lack of certainty.

*4.3 Conclusion*

Lebanese and Palestinian are not socialized to memories of sectarian conflict in schools. As a result, they rely on other sources – most notably, books, media, and parents – to understand the fighting. However, they do not consider these sources fully reliable. This explains students'

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[24] *Da3ech* is the Arabic acronym for ISIL, or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

disparate, superficial, and above all neutral recollections of the civil war. For conflict that

occurred after their births, students leverage their own experiences to logically reason about

different viewpoints and establish certainties. This explains their assignment of fault in relation

to recent conflict and higher degree of conviction about the validity of their memories.

**Chapter 5: Disempowerment in Overcoming Sectarian Divides**

The lack of socialization to memories of sectarian conflict in schools shapes students' experiences of current sectarian divides. Because I found no such socialization, it is impossible to tell whether the socialization – if it had existed, or as it exists in other pockets of the Lebanese population that my sample did not include – would have affected youth experiences of religious divisions. However, my interviews reveal the lack of socialization to be influential in determining experiences of divides, especially as these experiences relate to political empowerment. Students do not understand their peers' views about sectarian conflict due to the lack of avenues through which to engage in dialogue about it – an absence of socialization. In light of this void, youth perceive their peers as biased and believe that sectarianism is, by-and-large, immutable. Despite often not adopting their own parents' views, students regard sectarian attitudes and political beliefs as passed down from generation to generation within other families. History teaching methods that discourage critical thinking in favor of rote memorization fail to equip youth with the analytical skills needed to navigate conflicting memories of conflict, further inhibiting dialogue and reinforcing the perception of sectarianism's immutability. This contributes to youth disempowerment in overcoming sectarian rifts.

*5.1 Awareness of Peers' Views of Sectarian Conflict*

Lebanese and Palestinian students are generally unable to articulate memories of conflict other than their own. They also hold inaccurate perceptions of others' memories. This indicates that they are not aware of their peers' beliefs about sectarian conflict.

Very few subjects were able to mention alternative memories of conflict, and those who did, did so in simplistic terms. For example, I asked Ghinwa (who is Palestinian) if a Christian student her age would understand the civil war differently than a Muslim one. She immediately

jumped to the Ain al-Rummaneh bus shooting, in which she asserted that Palestinians believe

Lebanese Christians shot a bus of Palestinians. Despite having never spoken with a Christian

about sectarian conflict, she answered: "If they were Lebanese, they would be biased to them. I

think they would say, uh, that the guys who were in the bus shooted outside. [Laughs] Instead of

the outside people shooting inside. [laughs] It would be the opposite." She automatically

assumes that a Christian would hold an opposite memory of the fighting than a Muslim. Her

assumption of bias also exemplifies subjects' common oversimplification of Lebanon's internal

conflict as dominated by diametrically opposing sides and interests – Muslim and Christian –

that emerged in their recounting of their memories of conflict.[25]

Two other students' attempts to describe opposing memories similarly reflected this

oversimplified duality. In response to my question about how others her age would remember the

civil war, Sarah lamented,

> In Lebanon, there are many groups. And everyone is trying to blame each other. If you
> ask one from a group, a specific group, they said, "We didn't begin it; they began it."
> And the other group will say the same. Because everyone, um, tries to blame the other
> one that he was the beginner of the civil war and he was the reason of, uh, that many
> people died there.

In this case, Sarah does not draw a comparison between herself and a Lebanese student of a

different background. (In our interview, she reported very little understanding of the civil war;

there would not have been any understanding of her own for her to compare another's to.) She

instead establishes that two other Lebanese youth who did not live through the conflict

themselves would remember it in an opposite manner. This reflects the fact that although all my

interviewees held a religiously neutral understanding of the conflict, they believed that this

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[25] Scholars contend that this oversimplification of the conflict neglects the prominent role played
by other factors such as socioeconomic divisions and international interests (Traboulsi, 2012;
Mattar, 2007).

neutrality was unique to themselves, and did not extend to others. The perception of others' bias will be further discussed in the following subchapter.

Zeinab's recounting of divisions in understanding of current events parallels Sarah's of the civil war:

> Like, parties, uh… Like Christian parties in Lebanon belonging to *Ouwet* and stuff, they believe Hezbollah is the reason behind everything, and like, Hezbollah believes like the opposite. There is always this, um, struggle between them. Like everyone blames the other party, but no one knows what really happened.

Zeinab believes that these party members' perceptions of the conflict do not counter her own so much as each other's. She is only able to articulate other understandings of the conflict as fundamentally opposing one another.

Contradictions between student perceptions of others' knowledge and the information my subjects told me about sectarian conflict further reveal that Lebanese and Palestinian students do not understand their peers' views of the conflict. Several Palestinians I interviewed – who all told me they knew very little about the civil war because of their main interest in Palestinian history – described that they believed Lebanese to be equally, or even more, clueless about the conflict (despite the fact that Lebanese might be more invested in it than them). Baraa punctuated her point by claiming, "The, uh, the song of Lebanon, you call it independence song – most of the Lebanese students do not know it!" Rana contended that Palestinian students actually helped the Lebanese out when it came to the history section of the final exam:

> Yeah. When we applied for *Bac 2*[26] in school, history questions – and you know, we're Palestinians – we memorized more than them. At school, we help them to solve the history exam exactly. It's a problem, you know, history of Lebanon. We as Palestinians memorize it more than the Lebanese students; I don't know why.

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[26] *Bac 2* is the Lebanese end of high school exam.

These perspectives countered the evidence my interviews uncovered. The Lebanese subjects I interviewed held a range of knowledge of the civil war, and certainly did not understand it less than my study's Palestinian subjects.

Another interviewee, Hanin, explained that knowledge of sectarian conflict lay primarily along gender lines, responding to my question about whether other youth her age in Lebanon would know much about the conflict with, "Ah, yes, yeah, especially the boys, because they're into the news and political stuff." However, this contradicted my sample's findings, as only one male interviewee described specific details about the civil war, while numerous female interviewees talked about the conflict quite in depth.

Other Palestinian students acknowledged that their position as Palestinians, growing up removed from Lebanese and among other Palestinians, prevents them from knowing how Lebanese students understand sectarian conflict. Ibrahim explained,

> Our Palestinian camps are a void. So, in Lebanon, there is some charge between people, but Palestinian are independent of that. We won't stand by this group against this group, or by this group against this group. We have our problem in Palestine. We don't interfere in such charges. So, maybe what I'm talking is the perspective of all Palestinian people, but I don't know how many Lebanese think.

In his experience of being removed from Lebanese inter-communal fights as a Palestinian, Ibrahim cannot make a guess at how Lebanese understand the conflict. He also positions himself as neutral in relation to Lebanese sectarian thoughts. Nicole, also Palestinian, and considering herself removed from the more "Lebanese" civil war, gave a nuanced explanation of her perception of others' understandings, explaining:

> It differs between people. Because like, uh, some people's families lived the war, had victims there; maybe they died there, lost their houses. So they just talk about it more often, you know. They would re-occur, and they mention it every time so they would hear, um. In my case, we didn't, my family, we didn't live it like other people did. We weren't like in the middle of the war. So maybe that's why I didn't know other people's perspectives. ... People, you know those who lived it, those who had their families maybe

died there or maybe had to get out of the country, get out of their homes, those people are maybe they have specific opinions about it, they have another perspective about it because, you know, they lived it, it is personal to them. It is not personal to me. I didn't live it. I don't know a lot about it.

Despite her awareness that not everyone shares her lack of a memory of the civil war, Nicole cannot articulate what shape or form others' memories may take.

*5.2 Generational Bias and Sectarianism's Immutability*

Memories of conflict are not exchanged between peers. Thus, students are largely ignorant of their peers' beliefs about sectarian conflict. However, a vast majority of my subjects characterized their peers as biased, especially regarding recent conflict. Interviewees perceived biases as passed down through generations, contributing to a conception of sectarianism as immutable. This did not hold for perceptions of the civil war because peers mostly viewed each other as equally ignorant of the civil war. This distinction might be explained by similar factors to those shaping student understandings of the civil war and recent sectarian conflict. In the case of the recent conflict, students' personal life experiences allow them to much more easily pinpoint certain views and behaviors as biased.

The Civil War

Lebanese and Palestinian students do not generally regard each other as biased when it comes to the civil war. Most of my subjects indicated that they believed most youth their age know next to nothing about the conflict – as they do. This group included some of the students who were relatively knowledgeable about the war, showing that they believe themselves to be anomalies among their peers. Similarly to the students who said that a lack of dialogue about the conflict in schools meant that they would never think to bring it up at home themselves, even more students responded that this would hold for others as well. They thus believe that students are not socialized to (perhaps biased) memories of the civil war through their families.

Only three students – one Palestinian, two Lebanese – out of 23 indicated that they believed other youth their age to hold biased memories of the civil war. Zeinab described parents as "implementing their thoughts into their children" when it came to the war, while Ghinwa explained the perhaps-not-so-extreme situation of murder over disagreement:

> I'm sure they talk about it with the children, but I don't think they would talk about it with someone who is not from their sect or their religion because it would cause a problem and they would kill each other. And I think even nowadays if they talk about it, uh, the sects' situation now is very sensitive.

By stating that nobody would talk about the civil war with others from different sects, Ghinwa implies that she believes the understandings of the conflict to differ by sect. When parents transmit these memories to their children, then, they are necessarily forming partial opinions about the conflict. The few students who believed their peers held biased memories of the civil war assigned the cause to generationally passed-down bias, indicating their conception of sectarian divides as immutable.

Recent Sectarian Conflict

The majority of my interviewees expressed that they believe others to be biased in their understandings of present-day sectarian conflict. The sentiment that everyone else's bias clouds their understanding of Lebanon's current sectarian political situation shapes students' experiences of sectarian divides by contributing to feelings of inefficacy in the face of the situation, and the perception of sectarian divides as immutable. However, this contradicts the reality that students consciously avoided biased sources (such as media and family members) in forming their memories of recent sectarian conflict, relying on personal experience. Perceptions of others' bias also contradicts the agreement that emerged between students' memories of the recent conflict, especially as it related to spillover from Syria.

Hanin based her understanding of others' biases on her personal experience of discrimination as a Palestinian. She explained,

> Not all Lebanese are bad, but most of them… [Laughs] No, their opinions. They're good, we're living with them since like forever, but they have misconceptions about us. … And, they – well basically they hate Palestinians, but it's okay [Laughs].... All Lebanon hates Palestinians. But it's okay. But if you lived here as a Palestinian, you'd feel that you're not welcomed by most of the Lebanese, but we often lived that.

Hanin feels unwelcome in Lebanon, and has accepted this ("it's okay"). She believes that despite Palestinians' existence in Lebanon "forever," Lebanese still misunderstand them to the point of hatred – she views the divide, which is largely sectarian (to be explained below), as immutable.[27]

Nadera similarly expressed that Lebanese youth her age would hold anti-Palestinian bias, a relic from the civil war. She explained, in relation to how peers her age belonging to the Christian groups who massacred Palestinians during the civil war would regard those groups' actions, "I think they would feel maybe they were right to kill the Palestinians. I don't think they think they were wrong. Because even now, when we go to a shopping store, for example, we speak in the Palestinian tone, they say 'Oh, you're Palestinian, that's not nice.'" She believes that the animosity between the groups remains as strongly before, but that it is replicated in the younger generation.

Hala, Lebanese, also conveyed her perception of anti-Palestinian bias, rooted in sectarian view, as passed down generationally and unchangeable:

> Everyone is involved in politics; everyone has his own political doctrine, let's say. But not all of them, like, dig deep into such things. … A current political thing for example that's taking place right now, they wouldn't care, um, but although they don't care about this, they kind of have their already-formed, um, political, let's say… Stand about

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[27] Palestinians continue to experience extensive discrimination in Lebanon today. For example, through laws designed to discourage Palestinians from living in Lebanon permanently, the Lebanese government severely restricts their freedoms, banning them from 73 lucrative professions (Debié and Pieter, 2003).

something. Which depends on what their parents think. And, um, and I've noticed that… Okay. Especially after the Syrian refugees came to Lebanon, and um, and the people started talking more about the refugees in Lebanon, the Palestinian refugees, you kind of notice how, for example, some people at my school were kind of racist against Palestinians. Although I know that they're not even interested in politics. But, because, for example, they come from a Christian family, um, they have this hate towards Palestinians. And because they – because their background is already affected from what happened in the civil war, um…

Hala considers the biases and stereotypes that perpetuate sectarian conflict as passed down from generation to generation. According to her, Lebanese parents whose religious groups opposed the Palestinians during the civil war transmitted their negative perceptions of Palestinians to their children. By emphasizing that these "racist" Lebanese people "wouldn't care" about the events in question, Hala highlights how those carrying the attitudes that can perpetuate conflict might not even be aware that they carry them. This contributes to the view that conflict between political groups or religious sects is deeply rooted in Lebanese society, and that there is little an individual can do eradicate it. Yet, the fact that Hala herself is aware of anti-Palestinian bias, and tries not to perpetuate it, suggests that Palestinians' understandings that all Lebanese are biased may perpetuate divisions too. Zeinab generalized Hala's notion of unknowing bias to all youth, insisting, "Of course [students have political parties] … Um, many pretend that they don't, but like deep inside, they're really brainwashed and like they're not aware of it." She goes beyond Hala's statements about others being "kind of racist," and asserts that her classmates are "brainwashed" without even being aware of it.

Other students more explicitly articulated the futility of trying to alter such biased beliefs that shape the political orientations of other Lebanese. Adeeb explained,

Some parents… oblige their children to follow some, this side. But, my parents never do that. I have my friend, he's, you know, following one side, and anybody who mocks this, he directly can fight him. So I try to neglect him. [laughs] … Anything politics or something like that, I don't talk with him. ... No, no, no. Nothing politics. Only sports!

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Adeeb does not even bother broaching the topic of politics with his friend. There is nothing that can be done in the face of his friend's "violence" that results from opposition. Gabriel similarly mentioned powerlessness in the face of his classmates' bias, stating, about them,

> Their opinions are heavily influenced by which political party they support, and which religious party they support. There are a lot of families that support political parties until death. They get paid by these political parties to support them and vote for them, to get the presidency and uh, official stuff in the government.

In Gabriel's case, the civil war is still immediate. Twenty-five years after the war's official end, Gabriel still perceives other Lebanese to be willing to resort to violence to preserve their political (and religious) interests. He views families as structures within which political views are constant, implying that these sectarian understandings are passed down from generation to generation. The fact that students tend to regard one another as biased indicates a perception that sectarian divisions are long-standing, and that little can be done to attenuate them.

Farah, Shi'a, also perceived her Sunni peers to be biased (despite never engaging in conversations related to politics with them). The previous chapter analyzed her understanding of a Sunni *sheikh's* violent clashes with the Lebanese army. She believes the *sheikh's* Sunni followers would differ entirely from her in blame assigned related to the conflict:

> If people were on the guy's side, they would say that the other sect deserves what they got. Like, a lot of people died then. … So, it actually depends on which side the person is on, to actually talk about the topic. If the people were on the other sect, against the guy, they would say he was a terrorist. It's actually like… the person goes where he benefits enough. If there's a person that, he's actually advocating his beliefs and everything, he'll go with him. Yeah.

Farah expects Sunni Lebanese to assign blame in the memory in the other direction than Shi'a. In conclusion, students generally regarded sectarian bias as passed down generationally, contributing to their conception of its immutability.

Hala summarized how the lack of socialization to memories of sectarian conflict translates to the conception of others peers as biased, explaining,

> And personally, I'm against [the lack of conversation], because like sooner or later, you're going to live in that society, and you're going to have to talk about politics sooner or later. So I think we better understand what happened in schools, so that we form our ideas… Like, so that we can personally form our ideas without our parents telling us how to think, because when you learn something in your school, you kind of form your own ideas, but if you don't learn about it in school – you're not allowed to talk about it, or even debate about it in schools, you're just gonna, uh – you're gonna accept what your parents tell you, or what the society that you live in tells you.

*5.3 Sectarian Conflict: A Cycle*

Compounding students' sense of political inefficacy in the face of sectarian divisions is their widespread sense that historical events and themes – especially those that characterized the Civil War – are returning to light today. As Adeeb put it, when asked to share details about Lebanon's history between its 1946 independence and the present day at our interview's beginning, "They started to develop Lebanon. So, some conflict can begin, until where we are now."

Other students mentioned how they see the economic processes that produced conflict in the past playing out again in Lebanon during their lifetimes. Baraa, who had described the colonialist, extractive interventions in Lebanon before the nation's independence, went on to explain,

> Well history and politics are, uh, connected to each other. If you see that, previously, wars were because of, uh, of you know that developed countries wanted to have their own, uh, resources, so they came to poorer and undeveloped countries to achieve their goals. I think that wars happened because of these reasons. And nowadays also, politics also is related to these things also.

Hala more explicitly established how the conditions that caused the civil war's outbreak still hold today:

If you look at, if you look at their policies right now, nothing has changed. Nothing is different now. ... The Lebanese society is divided in the same way. Like before the civil war, after we gained our independence, the society was divided into these *bourgeois* families who were ruling, but then like after the 1975 and until now, the people who are actually ruling Lebanon are the leaders of the political parties – the main political parties. Like every religious sect has its own political party, and um, that's it, basically. … We had an economic crisis back then, the same thing that's going on now. Basically the people are unemployed, they're poor, there's no education, and so if a war erupts and some political leader gives you a rifle, you're not going to say no, you're just going to fight, because you have nothing to do, no work, no job or anything.

To Hala, Lebanon's sectarian system allowed select upper-class families to use political power to further their economic interests through political maneuvering or armed conflict, and that still is the case today. She believes that little has changed since the civil war, and as this system still serves the interests of Lebanon's powerful elite, little can be done to alter it.

Yet more students chose to talk about how the political processes that fueled the war are still playing into sectarian conflict nowadays. To Farah, the same sectarian tensions that existed before the Civil War are still at play politically in 2014, but to an even greater extent:

My parents used to tell us, "Nothing used to happen about religion. It was nothing. None of the people used to ask you, when they met you, what religion you are in." And now people try to indirectly ask. If they're not in the same party as you are, they kind of infer away, or they kind of talk behind your back. … [The civil war] started politically, people stopped becoming close to each other, and it conflicted until today. … Conflicts are still going on until today.

In her opinion, Lebanese society is increasingly fractured along religious lines. Other students referred directly to political processes that mirror those prior to the civil war's outbreak. Lubna lamented, "I think the politicians should be more polite [laugh] to not return us to this situation of war. … Until now, politicians talk about it in TV and now they speak about how it may return back since there is so much struggle between religions and people, and everyone thinks to delete another and cancel it from Lebanon, and may God help us." To her, although religious divisions may exist between civilians, the power to drive Lebanon back into war lies with politicians, as it

did before the civil war. Mona brought up one of Lebanon's current presidential contenders and

ex-civil war generals, Samir Geagea, to prove her point about the immutability of political

divides:

> Maybe Lebanon because it was uh, its many outside governments *ya3ni* controlled
> Lebanon and when the French government came and stuff, maybe this has left Lebanon
> with many conflicts between the Lebanese people. I remember that … they divided the
> work in the public offices according to sectarian... So maybe this has left us with all these
> conflicts that grew. Even today, everything is about according to sectarian beliefs and
> religion, and this is maybe wrong. ... Someone who killed many, many, many people
> during the war, and now he's – he even wanted to, to become a president. I don't know if
> you heard about it. … Can I not [say his name]? ... Yeah, he killed a lot of people during
> the war, and he was in jail, and now he's out, and many people, you know, they like him.
> So he wants to be the president.

To Mona, the sectarian divides inherent in the civil war have persisted through to the present.

The political system implemented upon Lebanon's independence, before the civil war, still

dictates the tension between religions that characterizes society presently.

*5.4 History Teaching Methods*

Students expressed that the inadequate teaching of history in Lebanon reinforces the

sectarian divides they experience. The lack of a history book addressing years after 1946

demonstrates to students that the sectarianism that pervaded during that period still

predominates. Students' perceived purpose of studying history – passing their end of high school

exam – translates to rote teaching methods that fail to address the complexity of Lebanon's

history, and do not empower students to grapple with that complexity. The inadequate teaching

of history in Lebanon contributes to students' feelings of disempowerment when it comes to their

future navigating the country's sectarian politics as adults.

Students linked the missing history curriculum to ongoing disagreement between the

sects who fought in the civil war. Nour stated, exasperatedly,

> They don't really agree on how to illustrate what happened. Because some people say it in one way, and some people say it in another way. These years that they don't speak about. ... My teacher. My history teacher told me about this, that they always – they don't even agree about one thing in this country!

Nour believes that the same divisions and rigidity that characterized relations between political parties (and, correspondingly, religious sects) before the civil war hold true today. To Nour, the absence of a unified history curriculum – and dialogue about sectarian conflict in schools – is emblematic of the depth of sectarianism in Lebanon. Hala's opinion of the lack of dialogue similarly contributed to her notion that sectarianism still pervades her society, and manifests itself in her peers' biases:

> People who live in this area will think that the other party – that it's the other party's fault that the civil war erupted, and the same thing applies to the people in the other area. And so things can't change. When you, um, when students are allowed to debate such things in schools, uh, when they're allowed to watch such documentaries for example, it becomes easier for them to form – they become more aware about what happened, instead of being blindly biased. .... And, uh, and of course [the politicians] won't allow their stories to be in the history book.

To Hala, the lack of socialization to collective memories of conflict in school settings impedes youth in overcoming the sectarian divides handed down by past generations. Hala is also one of the few interviewees who draws the connection between current Lebanese politicians' participation in the civil war and their role in the lack of a history curriculum about the war. To her, these politicians leverage their power to prevent the new generation from finding out about the conflict. It makes sense, then, that most students conceptualize the lack of a history as stemming from pure sectarian disagreement, instead of as a politically motivated act designed to preserve reputations.

Farah provided a different reason for the lack of a history curriculum covering the years after Lebanon's independence:

As I told you, they stopped when Lebanon gained its independence. I think that what they just actually don't want to show, is that when Lebanon gained its independence, it broke down. I think people don't want – scholars don't want – Lebanese people to learn, Lebanese students to learn, the bad side of what happened after independence. I think so ... maybe.

Farah believes that obscuring Lebanon's history shields students from realizing that coexistence between religious sects is in fact impossible, promoting social cohesion. The lack of a history curriculum – the absence of socialization to an understanding of Lebanese history after 1946 in school – reifies the notion that Lebanese sectarian divides are immutable. Youth are shielded from the reality that Lebanon "broke down" once the French left – the notion that all of its religious sects cannot, in fact, live harmoniously within one set of borders.

Students reported that general history instruction methods reinforced sectarian divisions. Students criticized these methods as overly rigid, attempting to create an objective truth about the past, and foster a coherent, linear memory of events rather than allowing for complexities and opening up room for debate. Nicole described, "We can have class conversations about our new history and our new education and the consequences of it happening in Lebanon, but we are not asked to do any research; it is just a class conversation." Her teachers do not encourage their students to engage with their past on a deeper level, confining discourse about, and memory of, Lebanon's past to the easily contained environment of her classroom walls. This mirrors researchers' findings about inadequate and shallow civics instruction methods (Akar, 2007; El-Amin, 2008).

Ghinwa echoed Nicole's complaint by explaining that she had to rely on her own initiative to expose herself to substantive historical content: "I see that our, uh, our curriculum is very weak. That's why I go and read books and see things. … We have history books in school, but it's not so rich, so that's why. … The Lebanese history in our school, the books, are very

weak, very, very weak." She realizes that Lebanon's history curriculum is not designed to allow students full knowledge of the intricacies of the nation's past. Khaled reflected this realization in response to my question of whether he was aware of large-scale events that happened in Lebanon before his birth: "Larger scale? Schools are responsible for them, and should teach them. And I guess, they teach shallow things about them, but I don't know much about them." He later explained that he had almost no knowledge of Lebanon's history – whether it was before 1946, or after. In his case, an awareness of the shallowness of school curriculum was not enough to motivate him to uncover the truth about his nation's history. It simply disempowered him in untangling the various bits of biased information he encountered about it.[28]

Students also described how Lebanon's education system's structure – with a cumulative exam at the end of high school that determines graduation, and which factors into college admissions and scholarship decisions – discourages critical thinking about history, cementing sectarian divisions. Alaa explained,

> Because we just memorize things, and after we take the test, we completely forget everything. The school… I don't remember about these things although I did a test a few months ago. And I even forgot a lot of things during the test. So I think the way we are taught history is so wrong. It is so rigid. We just… The teacher talks and no one listens, and we go and memorize them.

In her opinion, learning history is driven by a desire to achieve come exam day. The notions of learning for the sake of learning, information carrying intrinsic value, and historical evidence being applicable to the present do not even factor into the classroom environment. The need for students to regurgitate facts causes schools to conceptualize history as a linear, static discipline,

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[28] The extent of his knowledge about the civil war, for example, is as follows: "[I have] not a clue. I think it was about some… sort of religious war or something between Sunna and Shi'a I guess, or Christians or something. … It was 1984 or something; I don't know the year."

compressing its richness and ignoring its multi-faceted nature. Yet, reflecting and understanding

the past is necessary to break cycles of sectarianism (Asseily, 2006).

Students reflected this static, useless understanding of history in my own attempts to pry

their perceptions of details about Lebanon's history from them during interviews. Students

admitted that they only viewed history class as a means to the end of a high score on their final

history exam. Lubna explained, "We have a history book in school, and we remember it and take

exams. Yeah. But, I think it's important only in the school, not outside." This motivation for

learning history disservices the student because history becomes reduced to a meaningless body

of rote content knowledge, only applicable or valid within the classroom's realm. There is no

space for critical thinking about history, or its implications for the present. Rime explained,

> Our program that we are tested on in Lebanon depends just on the history from 1914 –
> the First World War – until 1946, the end of the Second World War. That's all about this
> is the history, this is the Lebanon that they cared about. After that, we don't have… I
> don't know… nothing. Our lessons end with Lebanon in 1946. ... So, I just memorized
> history, I guess, and what I memorized on the exam, I almost forget everything.

Like Alaa, Rime forms an understanding of history based on rote memorization, solely for the

sake of the exam. But, her school's inadequate presentation of history further disservices her:

history becomes defined to her as a body of objective facts only relating to the period between

1914 and 1946. Her school's portrayal of history, then, prevents her from even considering

events after 1946 as part of "history," or as relevant to her in any way possible. She later told me

that she knew next to nothing about the civil war. Her relationship to history clearly

demonstrates how the inflexibility of Lebanese history curricula prevents students from engaging

with the nation's past and present.[29]

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[29] On top of the inadequate teaching of Lebanese history, Palestinian students complained about
the lack of history instruction relating to their own exile, and position in Lebanon. This
compounded schools' inadequacy in addressing Lebanese history. Ghinwa angrily explained,

Across the board, students expressed disappointment at their schools' methods of history instruction. The processes they described were not conducive to critical thinking about the past, especially in how it relates to the present. Mona aptly complained, about the lack of a history curriculum after 1946, "Because we don't take that history at school… It's very hard to know what's going on right now in Lebanon, to understand what's going on right now." The problems associated with current history instruction practices will factor into my policy recommendation for institutions of education.

*5.5 Disempowerment Regarding Sectarian Divides*

Students' perception of their peers as biased and belief that sectarian divisions are immutable (both of which shaped by the lack of socialization to memories of conflict in schools) determine their disempowerment regarding overcoming sectarian divides. Many interviewees emphasized that they hold little to no interest in, or engagement with, Lebanese politics and current events. Other subjects described that current sectarian conflict matter to them, but that they feel powerless in its regard. Language used by students in discussing war and peace in Lebanon, and their hopes for Lebanese society, further indicates political disempowerment. Students used words such as "silly" and "stupid" to characterize conflict as ridiculous, even if they had expressed awareness of its immediate and complex causes in other parts of our

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> The Palestinian history, about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they never taught it, the Palestinian history exactly, and our cause. And I think that is the problem with our schools, that we learn at the UN and it's officially an American school, and America supports Israel. It's not allowed to teach anything about Palestine, and if a teacher teaches history or something about the conflict, he will be detained and arrested. It's not allowed and they will take him away from the school and they will not let him teach or work anymore. ... No, I think from the school I learned nothing about my cause and my history.

According to Ghinwa, Palestinian history is suppressed and students are prevented from learning the truth about their "cause." She expresses complete helplessness in the face of powerful political entities such as the United States and the UN, believing that they ultimately decide what her generation learns, and that nothing can be done to combat this – opposing their decisions about what gets included in a history curriculum results in detention and arrest.

conversations. Their use of these evaluative phrases to designate war indicates weariness about its chronic and unending nature, and the difficulty of delving into its complex and deeply rooted causes. Students used similar language in expressing their hopes for their country, and it reveals their disempowerment in achieving these hopes.

In response to my question about whether she could recount the details of a recent event of sectarian conflict, Rime responded that she could not, because "I don't want to pay attention to politics. During class, or at break, no one brings this up." She knows little about politics out of choice, and since there is no socialization to the topic in her school, learning about politics is of little interest to her. Dina more explicitly laid out the basis for her political disempowerment as it related to school-based socialization in her description of Lebanon's current presidential void:[30]

> Now, like, they are fighting on the president thing here. They don't want – some don't want to vote, others do – I don't know; it's… It's something I can't describe, really in Lebanon. [laughs] It is full of, uh, problems. Really complicated problems. And I don't watch news. Anything. [laughs] .... Yes. And I don't want to understand. Because it's really complicated. Someone just says, "I'm with this!" and then he's with that, and she's with… I don't know. [laughs] I don't really care. .... I was in a school that it was all girls, so we didn't really actually were concerned with politics and those stupid things.

Not only does Dina not understand current Lebanese events because of their complexity, but she does not event want to understand them. She does not want to immerse herself in politicians' "stupid," seemingly unending world of disputes and factions. Her immersion in an environment of like-minded students, "girls" who don't "concern" themselves with politics, and accompanying lack of socialization to the topic of sectarian conflict, explains this view. She identifies with the void of dialogue occurring in her school, emphasizing her and her classmates' common apolitical belonging ("we didn't actually really were concerned with politics").

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[30] Lebanon has not had a president since May 2014, when former President Michel Suleiman's term ended. Since then, legislators within the Lebanese Parliament have been unable to elect a successor (El Khoury, 2014).

Nicole's disempowerment in overcoming sectarian divides is similarly rooted in her

conception of Lebanese sectarian conflict as primordial and unending.

> When we are watching like the news, I ask silly questions, like, "Why isn't there anybody helping these people? There are people dying there, why aren't they helping them?" And [my parents] start saying historical things, like "It's a long story; it has been happening since the dawn of history; they try to help, nothing happens; people just talk, and they never do anything; no action, just talks." And, I listen, usually.

She considers her attempts to find anything out about the conflict as "silly," since all its events

have been "happening since the dawn of history," and form a repeating cycle of conflict,

anyway. Nicole's parents' one-size-fits-all answer to her question conveys the underlying

sentiment that attempts to learn more about politics don't really help shed light on anything, and

that regardless of what is done, "nothing happens." Conflict is an unchangeable status quo to her.

Hanin similarly viewed the situation:

> Whenever I turn on the news, I see that this party is fighting with that party, and that party is fighting with that party, and they just have conflicts and, Lebanese people are divided into whoever is belonging to such parties and they just hate each other. [Laughs] … There's, ah, al-Mustaqbal and Hezbollah. They're different parties. They all talk badly about each other. ...  But they are both Lebanese parties, one that belongs to Mr. Hariri, and the other, Nasrallah. Um, they both see that each of the other one is a terrorist, um, and they will convince the people belonging to that party that they hate the country and are not working to improve it. Just make it worse. .... They both are always, always fighting. Whenever I go on Facebook for pages like this and see the comments, they just fight back and even for silly things, "No, you are nanananana!" "No, you did that, you did that!" And they just have fights all the time.

The tension Hanin describes between the al-Mustaqbal and Hezbollah parties is just as

monolithic and unending as the conflict described by Nicole. Hanin views the different

viewpoints about recent conflict as equally unappealing and meaningless, characterizing either of

their arguments with the phrase, "Nanananana!" She conceives of herself as occupying a third

place, surrounded by others' bias. As previously explained, my other interviewees shared this

notion of their personal impartiality contrasting others' bias. Due to a lack of socialization to

memories of conflict, Hanin is not aware that others might actually share her perspective. She is simply a witness to the political events unfolding before her, and shaping her life.

Gabriel experiences similar disempowerment related to Lebanon's sectarian fighting. He expresses frustration at how parents and children are willing to "fight" for their political parties "until death" (page 63), and dejectedly describes the civil war as "just a stupid war between citizens in the same country fighting together… It's just stupid."[31] He condemns the sectarian conflict, regardless of its cause. Despite expressing this disdain for sectarian conflict, he officially positions himself as neutral in regards to it:

> [Family members and I] don't discuss politics, or we don't support different political parties. … I am not interested. ... I'm more neutral. I don't care if something happens between religions. I stay away from it. My parents were discussing something lately that if a conflict was raised between certain political parties, we are going to leave Lebanon and go to some European country and live there. I don't want to go to… It would be destructive, the war between them.

The situation matters to Gabriel in terms of its looming possibility to alter his life through forced emigration. Lebanese politics are a threat, but in response he chooses to distance himself from them, to "remain neutral" and not care. This position arises not out of apathy, but rather his perception that sectarian divides cannot be reduced.

This apathy and disengagement characterized numerous other interviewees' descriptions of current sectarianism in Lebanon.[32] After describing the recent violence in her country, and

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[31] His dislike for war may be compounded by his perception that another, far worse, conflict is near. He explained, "I'm afraid another war would happen because the supporters of Israelis and the supporters of Lebanon and the Arab world will fight together and it will create a World War Three. It will be devastating because of the nuclear weapons. I was reading about nuclear weapons that the Israeli country has, and never officially admitted it has them, although it did many experiments concerning the nuclear weapons. ... It is most probable that it will happen."
[32] Interestingly, the only two students who expressed interest in political action also experienced an inability to involve themselves in the political process due the lack of an appropriate niche. After stating that she believed all Lebanese teens to belong to political parties, I asked Zeinab if she belonged to one. She answered,

complaining about those classmates "who follow politicians like blind sheep," Mona

emphasized,

> You know some people, just, listen to one politician, and believe in his ideas, and beliefs, and whatever, and just blindly believe in him. They're like sheep. … What happened is that people killed each other for stupid reasons. [Laughs] I know it's big reasons, and it's silly to speak like this; there are true reasons for the war, but there are other ways to solve problems than war. ... They should live together! We're just all humans, why not live together. And everyone has his own belief, *khalas*. Everyone has the right to practice what he believes, whether politically, or religiously. ... I think that the situation in the Middle East is very hard these times, very difficult. And it's not that clear, but what's happening is not just in Lebanon, you know. Syria, Iraq, every country you know is falling down, is falling apart. Nobody can know what happened next.

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> No, I'm secular. ... Mainly, yeah [parties are religious]. Like Hezbollah is for Shi'ites and, um, like Hariri's party is for Sunnas, and yeah, and Christians have their own party and so on. …. Uh, there are alternative movements in Lebanon. There is the Communist party, but like it's not really good in Lebanon. And, like, there are some leftists and stuff, but there is like no secular party. There is nothing like that.

Lebanon's confessional religious system, in which legislative seats are assigned according to religious affiliation, is not conducive to success of secular movements (Jaafar, 2007). Hala also cited that this system excludes her from the political process. She explained,

> For example, let's say the… let's say uh, the electricity for example, or power plants, or anything. They are ruled, or they are controlled by a certain leader. And then the communications sector is ruled by another leader. And so all these sects, all these sectors in Lebanon, each one is ruled by a separate political party. And so each one – it's like a cake, and each one has a piece of it. And um, and yeah, that's why I agree with this way. And none has done any good to Lebanon.  So yeah. ... [I'm] not [aligned] to a certain party, but… I don't know. I would say I'm… I would say I'm a leftist… Living in such a country, you cannot be but a leftist, if you really want your country to get rid of this corruption, um, of the war, of sectarianism, you… I think you would have no other choice.

To her, capitalism and sectarianism go hand in hand. The existence of more socialist or communist political entities is incompatible with the Lebanon's current political economic structure, in which economic interest drives religion's dictation of representation. Hala believes that the only way for her to engage with Lebanon's politics is to eschew this system in which religion, political power, and economic interest go hand in hand, but the system's current configuration prevents such a stance. For Hala and Zeinab, the lack of socialization to topics of sectarianism among peers might also explain the lack of alternative political movements available to them. These movements would not be able to take shape unless youth broached topics of sectarianism together, and tackled reforming a political system that many likely view as flawed.

Mona recognizes that there are very real causes to the sectarian conflict she has experienced in her lifetime, but she the causes exasperate her. Ultimately, the violence occurring in "every country" in the Middle East – and the fact that these nations are all "falling down, falling apart" – can only be deemed "stupid." Her values of tolerance and peace seem meaningless and "silly" in the face of violence and the irremediable nature of religious divisions.

Dina mirrored Mona's disempowered language in her call for peaceful coexistence: "I think that this whole thing is really stupid! They are fighting about nothing. We are all Muslims and Christians; we have one God. And that really matters. … I wish I had Christian friends, I wish." Fundamentally, she believes that similarities between Christians and Muslims trump their religious differences, which must be put aside to live together as Lebanese. Yet, in her experience of having no Christian friends, the differences prevail. There is nothing she can do to overcome them except "wish."

*5.6 Conclusion*

Students experience strong sectarian political divides. Generally, youth indicated an interest – or stake – in recent Lebanese political events and a strong desire for peace. However, this accompanies a perception of peer bias, and the notion that entrenched sectarian differences are perpetuated across time. Students believe that the historical themes that caused the Civil War's outbreak are repeating today. These obstacles, coupled with weak history instruction methods and a lack of socialization to memories of recent sectarian events in schools, create political disempowerment among Lebanese and Palestinian youth.

**Conclusion and Policy Recommendation**

*Personal Reflection*

I experienced a disconnect between my expectations and my findings due to several presumptions I carried into the project. First, I believed that the lack of a unified history curriculum addressing the years after 1946 was inherently negative, and needed to be remedied. However, after speaking with Lebanese and Palestinian youth about their nation's history, the true complexity of that history – and the danger of reducing that complexity to one, universal narrative – dawned on me. At this point, it is impossible for any one person to be all-knowing about Lebanon's past and present sectarian conflict, and broaching the topic of conflict in schools threatens students' well-being and immediate safety more than it stands to benefit them. Friendships across religious lines were brought up throughout my interviews. The fact that few students have a clear picture of what has happened in Lebanon before their birth, and even what is going on today, may actually be conducive to mending the civil war's scars. My initial belief in the importance of coming to one understanding of conflict was just as problematic as the rote, linear history teaching methods that I later realized are inadequate.

Second, I took for granted that youth would develop their own (biased) opinions and perceptions of history in light of Lebanon's curricular void. However, my evidence strongly contradicted this. Lebanese and Palestinian high school graduates' understandings of Lebanese conflict are not based on their religious affiliation. Students are conscious of bias – often vastly more so than many American students I have interacted with. My subjects regarded any single narrative of conflict with a skeptical eye.

Before conducting my research, I expected my conversations to reveal interactions or circumstances through which understandings of sectarian history and ongoing conflict could be

exchanged between youth, allowing me to recommend that schools create an environment

conducive those interactions. This would work around the lack of a history curriculum to fuel

learning about history. I now realize that simply encouraging dialogue about sectarianism among

youth is an overly simplistic answer to Lebanon's current social divisions. Before trying to spark

such conversations, schools must strengthen their history instruction, especially as it relates to

enabling students to think critically about narrative and bias. Only then will students be able to

engage with one another about the controversial topic of conflict productively. Students will also

then be equipped to learn about their history and country's current state through their own

research and reasoning, empowering them to play an active role in shaping their nation's future

for the better.

*Conclusion*

This paper's goals were threefold: to analyze the content of Lebanese and Palestinian

youth's memories of sectarian conflict, to determine the role socialization in institutions of

education plays in forming those memories, and to assess how this socialization impacts youth

experiences of sectarian divides. To address these goals, I conducted interviews with 23

Lebanese and Palestinian recent high school graduates in Beirut during the summer of 2014. This

study analyzes data collected during my interviews.

Prior to conducting interviews, I hypothesized that some Lebanese and Palestinian

students are socialized to collective memories of conflict in school settings. However, this

hypothesis is false. My data indicate that youth are not socialized to collective memories of

sectarian conflict in Lebanese school settings. The vast majority of subjects reported never

broaching such a topic with their peers. In order to learn about conflict that they themselves did

not experience, youth must sift through bits and pieces of often conflicting information obtained

rather haphazardly over the courses of their lives from family members, media, and their own independent research. Subjects characterized these sources as unreliable, explaining their vague understandings of sectarian conflict. They ascribe to smaller parts of a larger memory that could potentially be collective, and which comprise the larger whole of history. Students' understandings of conflict do not oppose each other so much as complement one another to form the whole of what could be a greater social collective memory. Complete memories of conflict have not formed in the absence of a unified history curriculum.

The lack of socialization to information about sectarian conflict among peers prevents Lebanese and Palestinian youth from knowing what others their age – especially from differing backgrounds – believe about Lebanon's civil war and recent sectarian conflict. Most students regard themselves as occupying a neutral place relative to the conflict, but consider their classmates biased. They also believe many of the political, economic, and religious attitudes that produced the civil war to be deeply engrained in Lebanese society and immutable. This results in a negative experience of sectarian divides and a lack of agency in overcoming them.

*Policy Recommendation*

I recommend that history curricula be strengthened to address student lack of political agency. I do not propose that schools teach content, or try to broach the topic of historical sectarian conflict in schools – doing so could undermine the fledgling inter-sectarian unity within the generation of Lebanese and Palestinians born after the civil war. The fact that few students have a clear picture of what has happened in Lebanon before their birth, and even what is going on today, may actually be conducive to mending the civil war's scars. However, I suggest that schools strengthen their history curricula to empower students to learn about Lebanon's past and

play an active role in civil society, eventually solving problems related to sectarianism later on as adults.

Schools' silence about Lebanese sectarian conflict is crucial in allowing students to form cross-sectarian bonds, fostering social cohesion, and promoting a safe learning environment. Ibrahim explained,

> We are not taught what I told you, [because] in school such a thing may make sensitivities. For example, if you told me that this group of Lebanese did this bad things for this group Lebanese, and if I was a group and I was teaching this and my students were from another group, of course they would work up against that. So of course we won't be taught in the curriculum. ... Talking about such things will develop hatred among us. And would not make us happy. And school is a place to learn and get benefit. Talking about such things would develop enemies. Such things are not allowed to be talked about in schools. They are banished by these.

To him, banning such conversations is a matter of general happiness, and maintaining a healthy relationship between teachers and students. Farah, Shi'a, described her support for policies banning dialogue about sectarianism because they allowed her to feel safe at her school as a religious minority:

> I go against what happens between the two [sects of Islam]. My best friend is kind of like from the other sect. My best friend. … I don't like a society that takes too much importance to the two sects. My school is actually, like, kind of a different thing. It's Christian. So I have more, because like, if it's a Christian school in a Muslim area, and most of the people inside the school are Muslims, according to the area. And there's like – there are more Christian people kind of like that because we make like Christian best friends and Sunni best friends and everything. So I don't think it really affects me to be from a sect other than people. Especially at the school. The school plays a very important role in making students ignore that thing.

Being from a different sect than many classmates, Farah values the elimination of sectarian discourse as a means of allowing her to simply exist, socially, at her school. Underlying this judgment is this same principle expressed by the previous interviewee, that conversations about religion or politics can never be productive.

Nicole characterized the suppression of dialogue about sectarian conflict as instrumental in establishing social cohesion within her school:

> We don't talk about it that much because we are united in the class, we are from different religions, so we don't talk about our history. … We actually, we don't talk about it because I told you, my school has lots of religions, lots of perspectives. People think different ways. I have people that do not believe in God, I have people that are Muslims, Christians, even Druze, *ya3ni*? So, we do not talk about the civil war because we are not separated. And we think that such a subject, if we like talked about it, it would separate us, because I'm Muslim. If someone is Muslim, that person would not agree with, uh, Christians' thoughts. Or even Christians, between each other, or Muslims, between each other, they would not agree. So we do not talk about such things, so we avoid problems, we avoid issues, between us. We keep it neutral.

Despite her belief in the importance of such a ban, Nicole was the only student to report successfully broaching such topics with a peer (page 43). This highlights the importance of empowering students to approach conversations related to sectarianism outside the classroom, on their own terms, as will be discussed.

School history teaching methods need to be strengthened to equip students to grapple with their complex, sectarian political environment, and grow up into civically engaged adults. Students currently learn history through rote memorization for the sole sake of passing their final exams, fostering the perception of history as a linear discipline that serves to establish a sole, rigid narrative about the past. Instead, history must be taught as a complex field that involves analyzing relationships, thinking critically about cause-and-effect, and navigating bias and conflicting evidence. Only then will students feel empowered to make sense of Lebanon's recent conflict and play a role in steering their society to a more unified future.

My interviews suggest that currently, youth feel unable to effect political change in Lebanon. Their exposure to understandings of history and experiences of sectarian divides cause them to conceive of themselves as being affected by Lebanon's political situation rather than having the agency to shape it for the better. However, youth political efficacy is a solution to

Lebanon's survival as a nation. Scholars are currently debating whether Lebanon's current,

vastly dysfunctional sectarian political structure, a direct product of its colonial history and civil

war, will survive at all (Jaafar, 2007; Salam, 2007). The nation has been without a president

since May 2014. The Parliament has illegally postponed elections, extending its mandate, twice

in the past two years. Conflicts in neighboring Israel/Palestine and Syria have spilled over onto

Lebanese territory. My subjects' current vast disempowerment in the face of these political

troubles suggests that their generation is not prepared to grapple with these problems. Institutions

of education have the potential to dramatically alter how youth interact with Lebanese politics –

not by directly addressing the causes of the nation's current political situation with students, but

by empowering students to tackle these causes independently.

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**Appendix**

Figure 1: The current geographical distribution of primary Lebanese religious groups (Verdeil et al, 2007)
Circles' darkness represents their corresponding religious group's concentration in each region. Their size indicates the religious group's total population for each region.

Figure 1.1: Christian groups (starting in upper left-hand corner, clockwise): Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Armenian Catholic and Orthodox, and Greek Catholic.
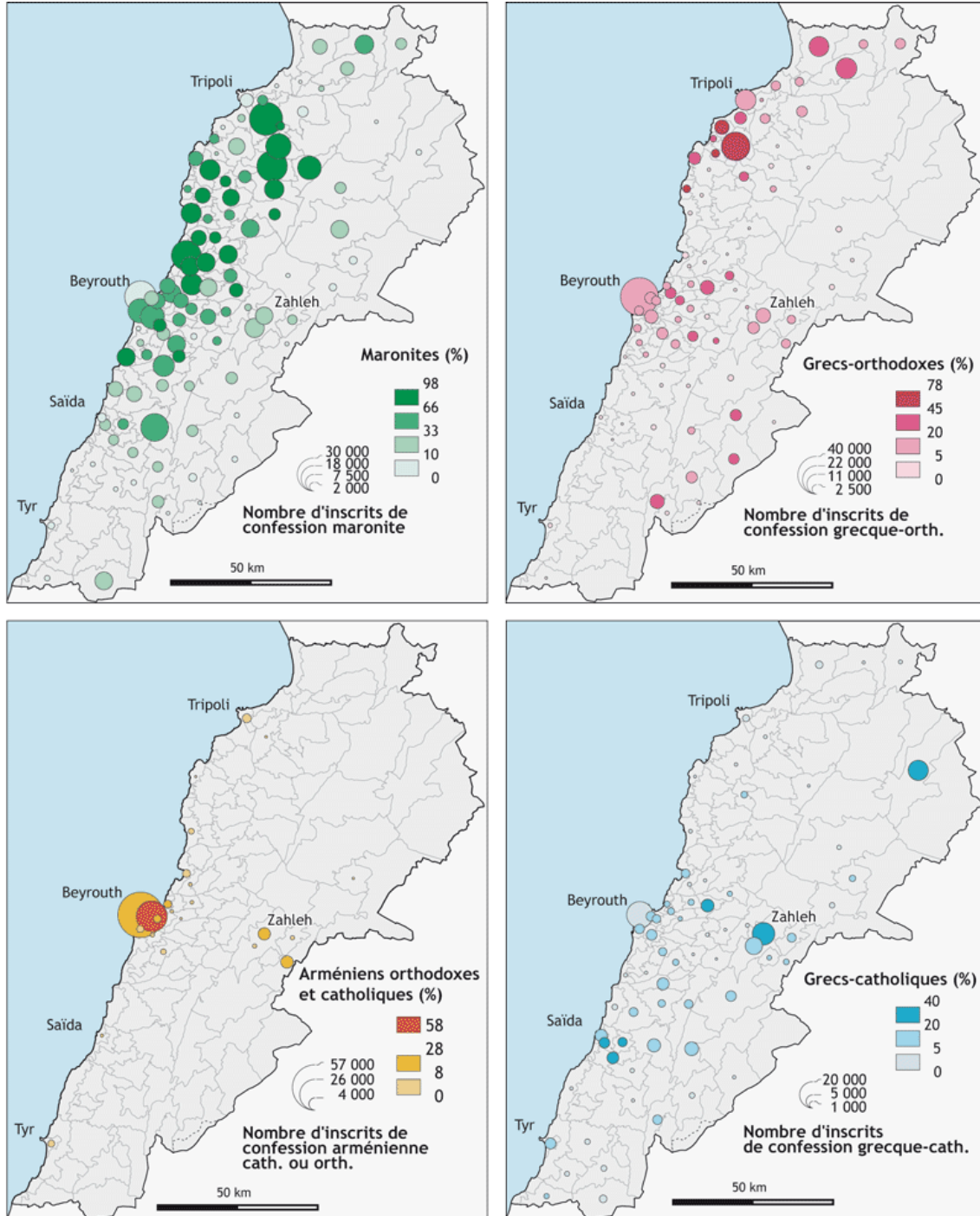
Figure 1.2: Muslim groups (starting in upper left-hand corner, clockwise): Sunni, Shi'a, Alawite, and Druze.
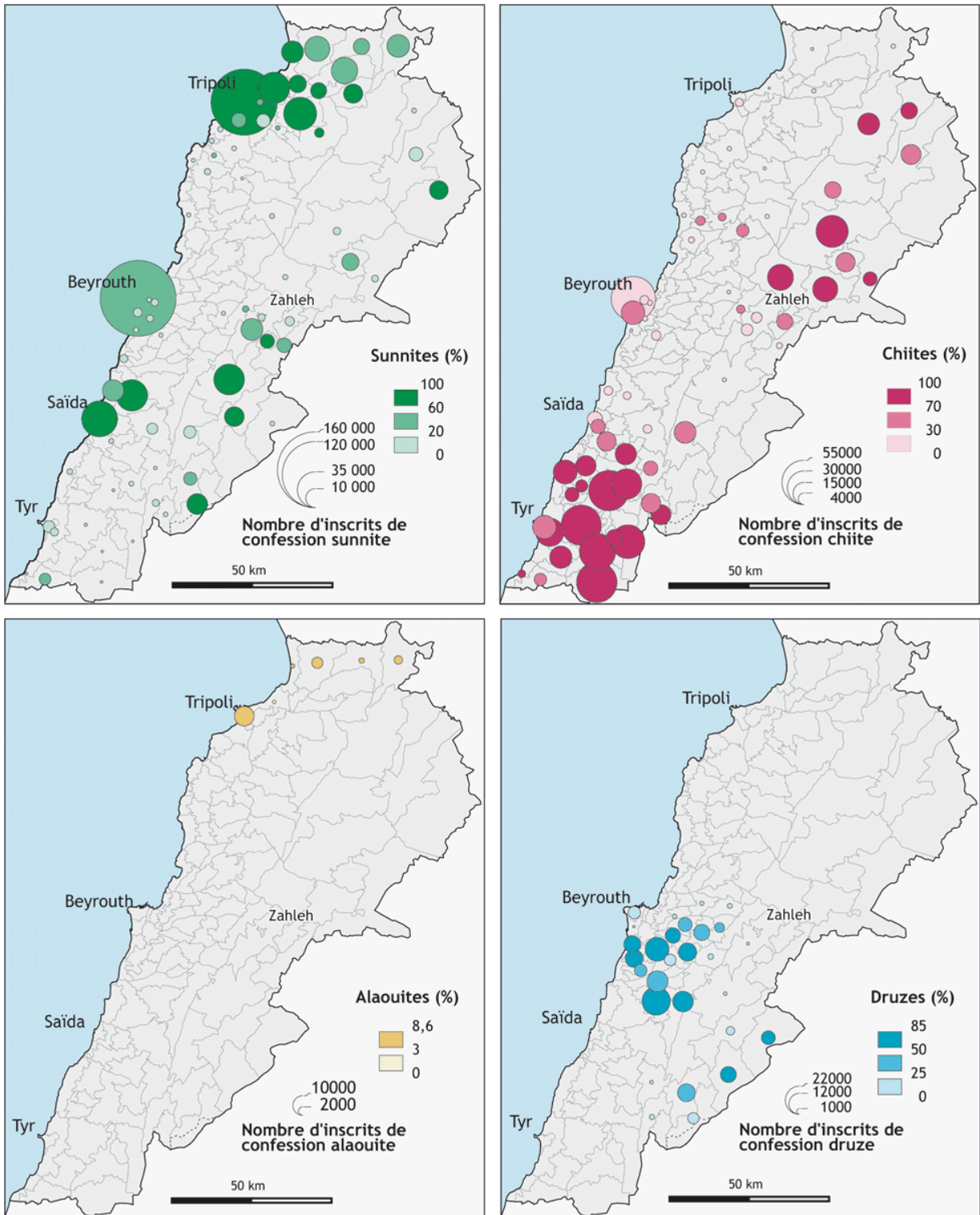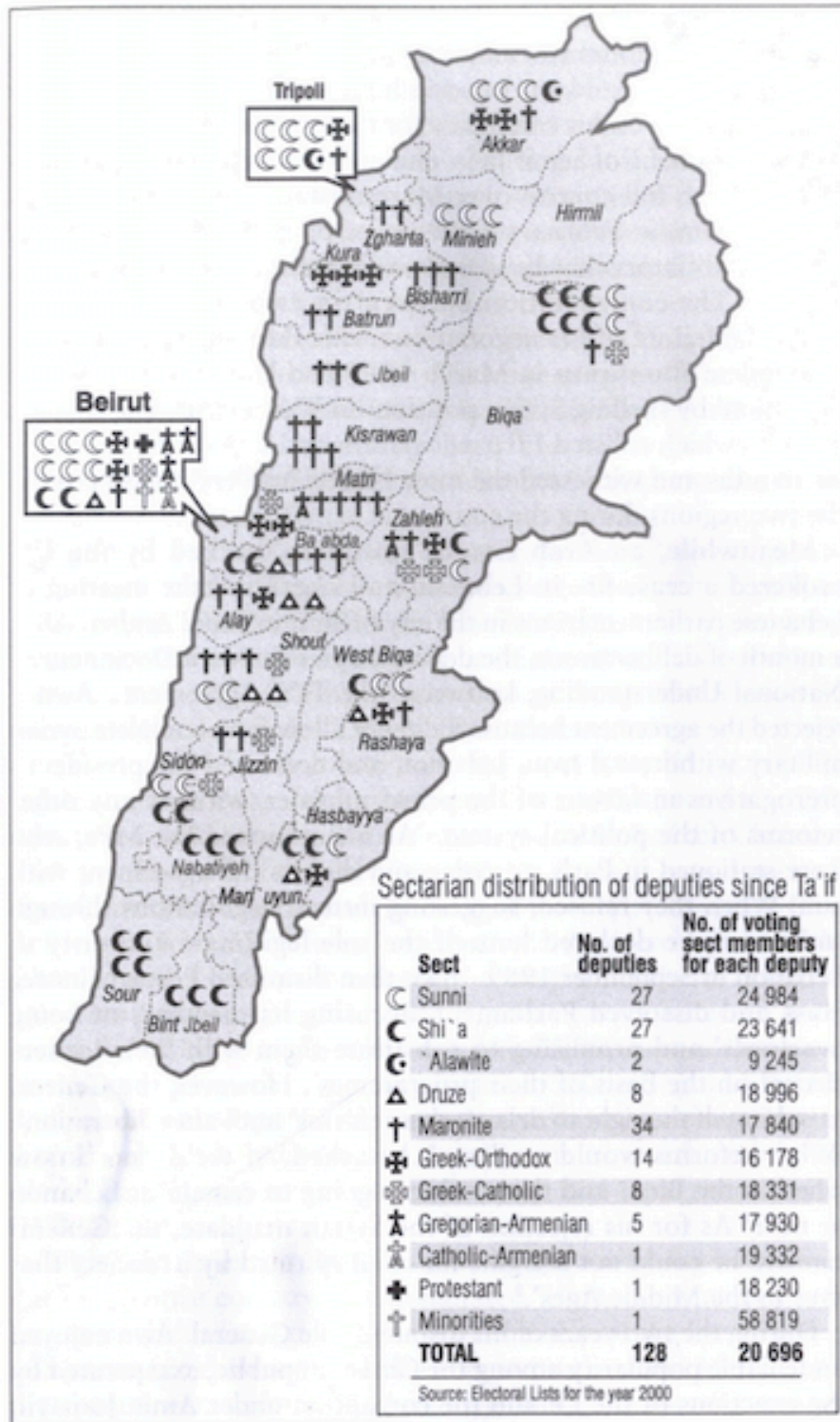
Figure 2: Distribution of Lebanese Parliament seats according to religious sect (Traboulsi, 2012)



| | Sect | No. of deputies | No. of voting sect members for each deputy |
|---|---|---|---|
| ℂ | Sunni | 27 | 24 984 |
| C | Shi`a | 27 | 23 641 |
| C· | `Alawite | 2 | 9 245 |
| Δ | Druze | 8 | 18 996 |
| † | Maronite | 34 | 17 840 |
| ✠ | Greek-Orthodox | 14 | 16 178 |
| ⚜ | Greek-Catholic | 8 | 18 331 |
| Ⴕ | Gregorian-Armenian | 5 | 17 930 |
| Ⴕ | Catholic-Armenian | 1 | 19 332 |
| ✚ | Protestant | 1 | 18 230 |
| † | Minorities | 1 | 58 819 |
| | **TOTAL** | **128** | **20 696** |

Source: Electoral Lists for the year 2000

Map 6    Sectarian representation of parliamentary seats since Ta'if

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Figure 3: Political borders of the Ottoman Empire superimposed with the boundaries of newly created French and British territories following the Ottoman Empire's defeat in World War I (Verdeil et al, 2007)
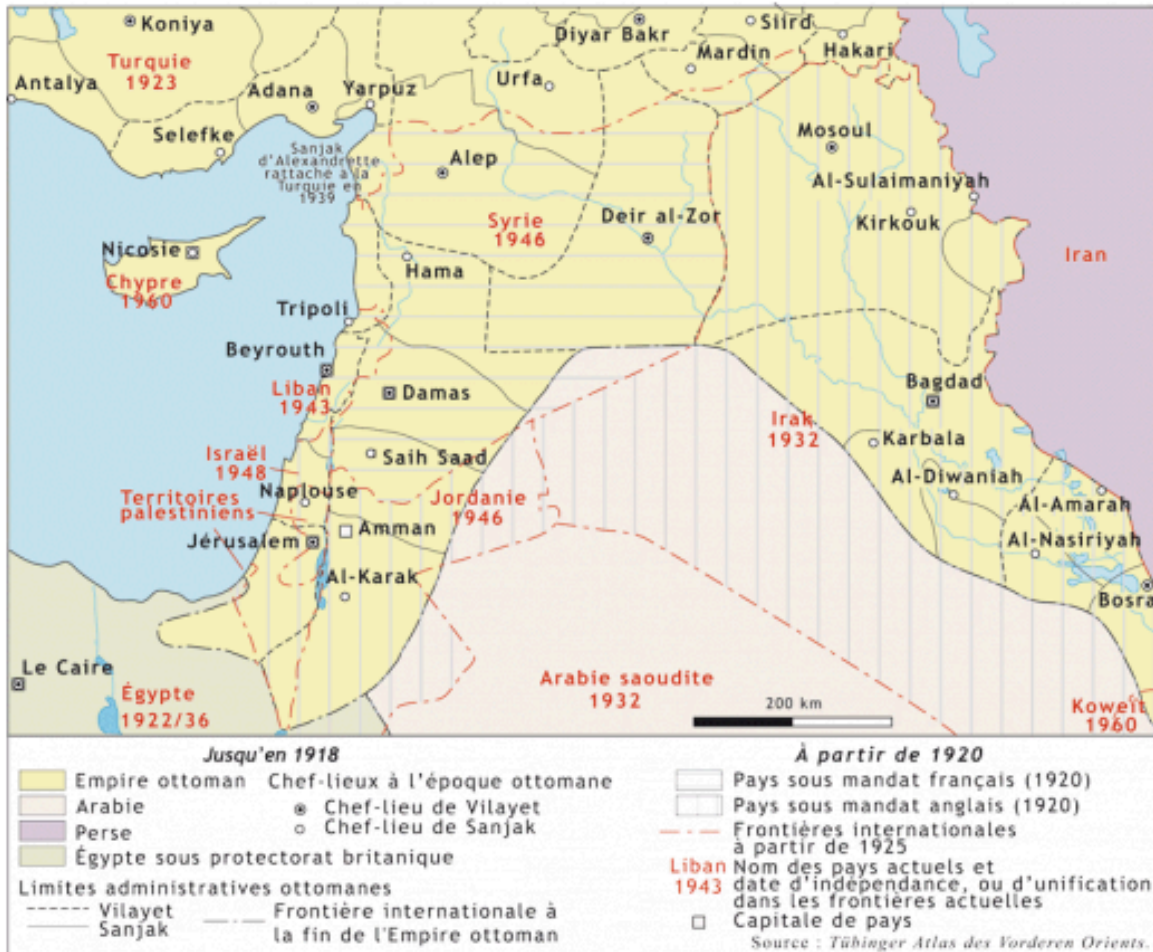
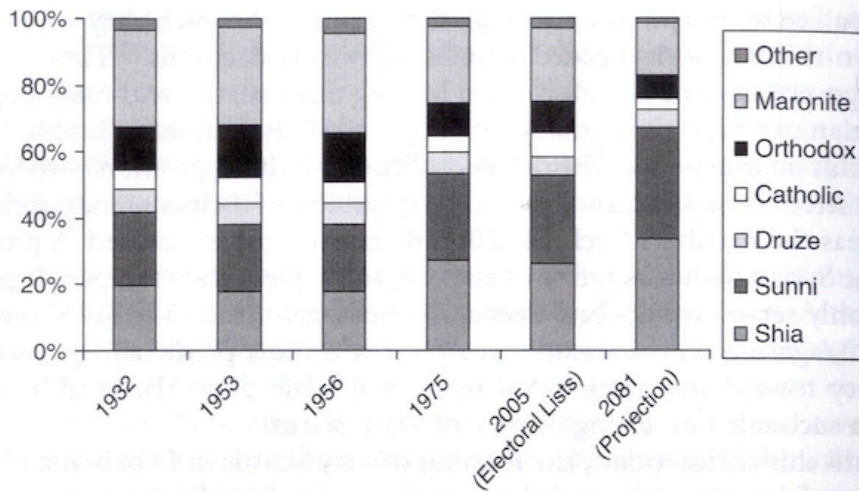Figure 4: Lebanese Demographic Shifts (Farha, 2009)



Figure 5.1:  Historical Evolution of Demography in Lebanon

Figure 5: Map of Lebanon (Traboulsi, 2012)



Map 1  Modern Lebanon

Figure 6: Semi-structured interview topics

Module 1: The civil war
-Understanding of civil war
-Sources of understanding
-Exposure to alternative narratives of civil war, if any
-Perceptions of how others understand the civil war

Module 2: The Israeli conflict (2006)
-Understanding of Israel conflict
-Sources of understanding
-Exposure to alternative narratives of the conflict, if any
-Perceptions of how others understand it
Note: Although I collected information for this module in all my interviews, I decided to omit it from my thesis because the Israel-Hezbollah conflict is not as internal to Lebanon as are the civil war and current sectarian conflict.

Module 3: Current events
-Understanding of current sectarian conflict
-Sources of understanding
-Exposure to alternative narratives of the conflict, if any
-Perceptions of how others understand it

Module 4: Experience of sectarian divides
-Discussion about history and politics in schools
-Discussion about history and politics at home

Figure 7: Youth Knowledge of Sectarian Conflict
This figure illustrates the percentage of subjects able to provide at least one detail about each of the topics listed on the x-axis. The left-hand five topics pertain to the civil war, while the right-hand one relates to recent sectarian conflict.
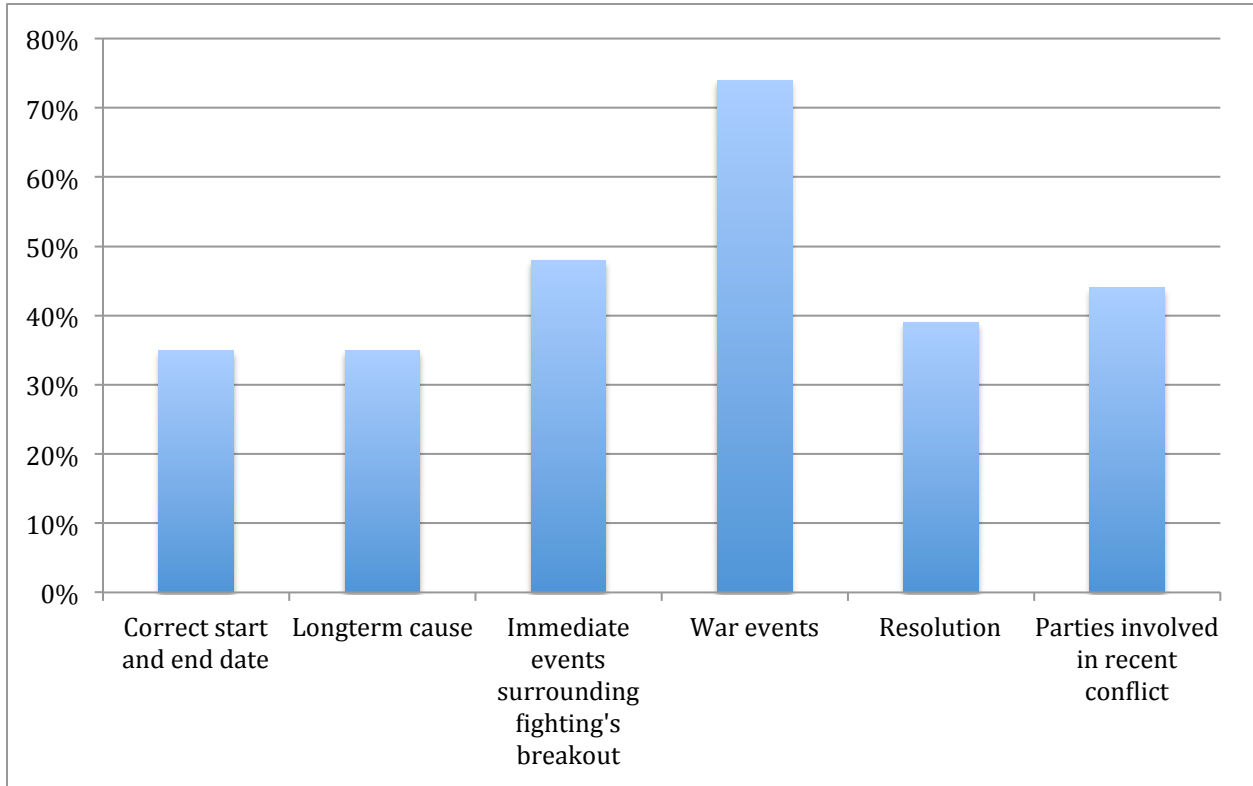
Figure 8: Forced Migrations During the Civil War (Verdeil et al, 2007)
Red arrows indicate migrations to a Muslim area. Blue arrows indicate migrations to a Christian area. Black arrows indicate other migratory paths. The graph depicts displaced persons' regions of residence in 1987. The green bars show the population displaced within each region, while the orange bars show population of displaced people living in a region, but originating from a different one.
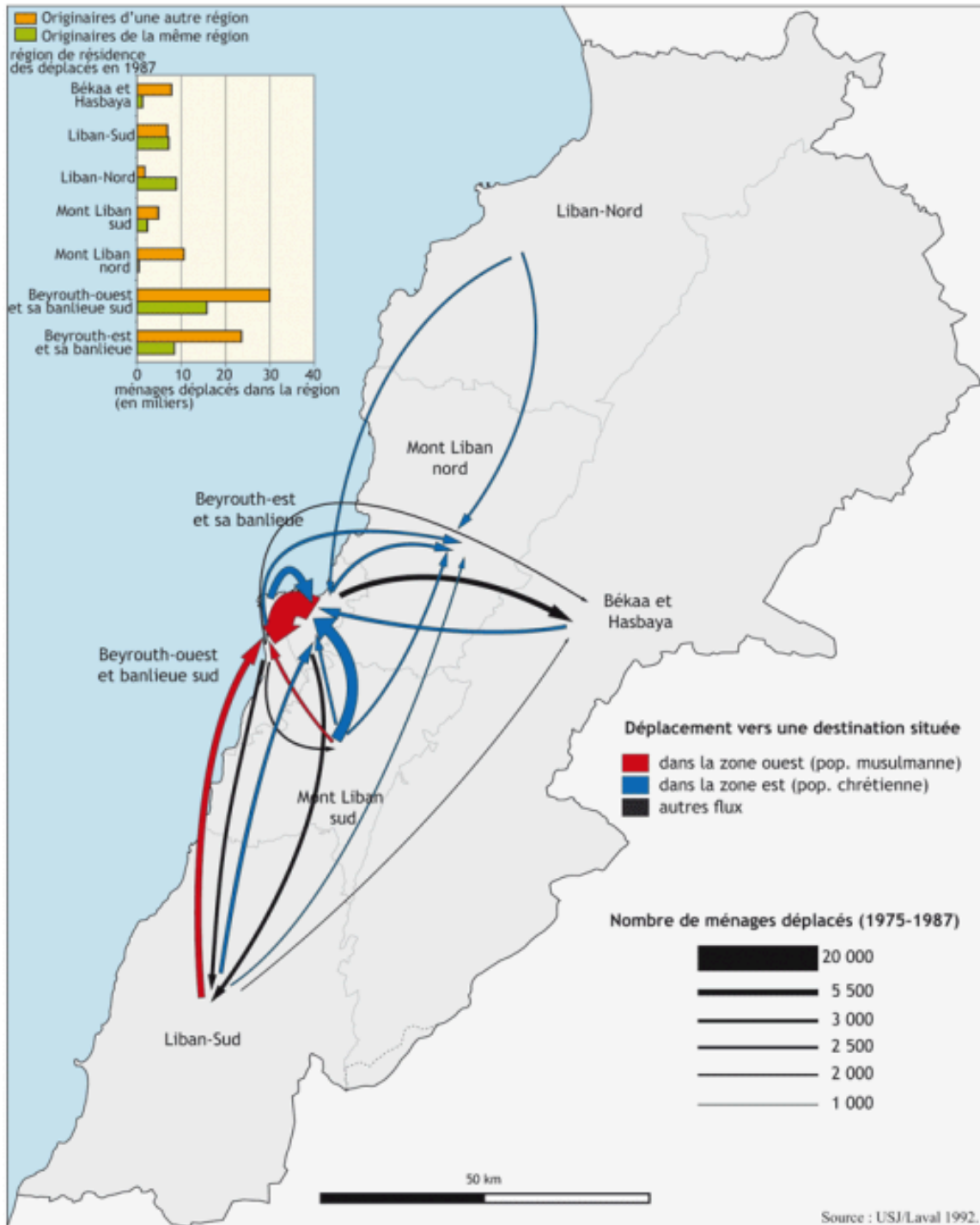
Figure 8: Youth sources of information about the civil war
Note: The percentages do not add up to 100% because some youth reported more than one source.
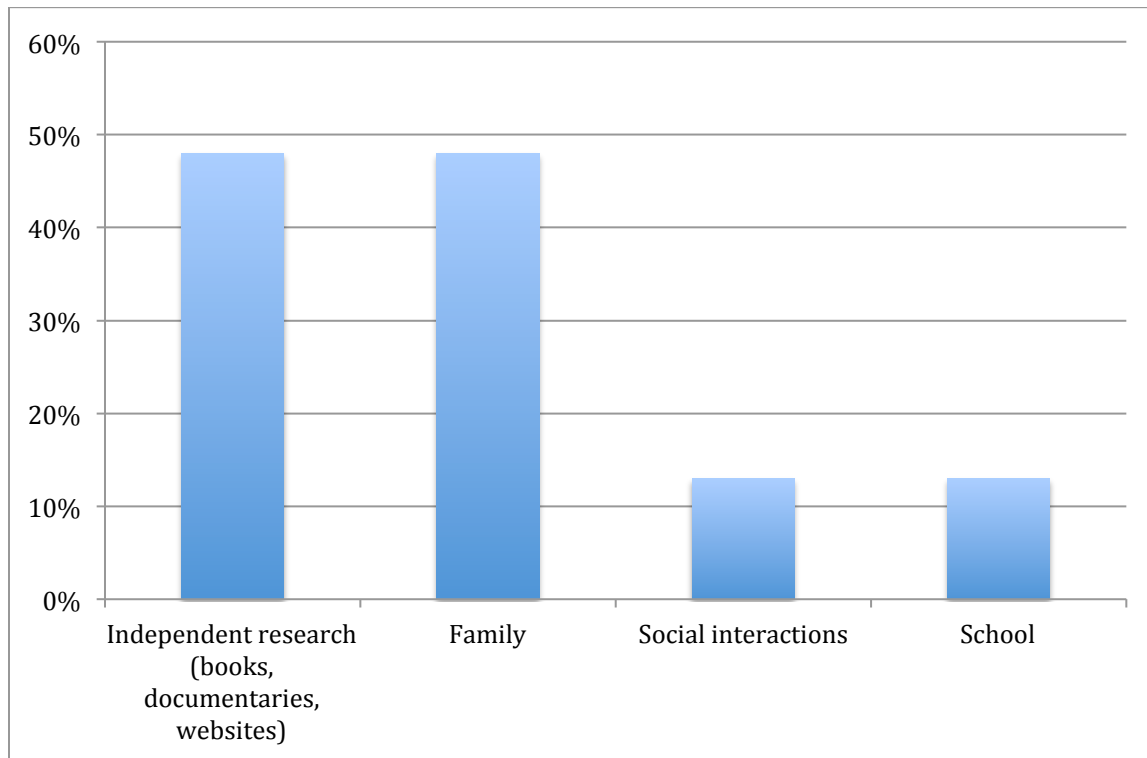
Figure 9: Beirut's division during the civil war between the Christian western portion and Muslim eastern portion (Verdeil, 2007)
The dashed black line is the boundary between Beirut's Christian eastern zone and Muslim western zone. The shading indicates the percentage of daily trips undertaken by each neighborhood's residents toward the eastern (Christian) zone of the city. The red semicircles denote the number of trips undertaken by residents of each neighborhood toward Beirut's western zone. The blue semicircles represent the number of trips toward the eastern zone.