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**Micro-level motivations of combatants in inter communal conflicts.** A look into the case of Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh

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## **ABSTRACT**

The micro-level determinants of fighting is a growing research topic. However, little research has been done on the reasons why people take part in communal violence, which I define as violence between non-state groups that are mobilized along a shared communal identity. This research attempts at filling this gap by looking into the micro-dynamics of violence through a case study of the conflict between the neighborhoods of Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh in Tripoli, Lebanon. This area has seen more than 20 rounds of clashes between Sunni and Shia communities between 2008 and 2014, which have left hundreds of dead and wounded. The research draws on interviews with 13 former combatants from both neighborhoods. In line with expectations on motivations from the civil war literature, I find that financial incentives, sectarian grievances and religious motivations as well as self-defense are important motivations. However, the findings also go beyond the ‘rational violence’ framework and highlight the importance of the psychological functions of violence. The interviews show that the desire to gain respect from the community, to be seen like a man and thrill-seeking are important drivers. Identifying motivations for communal violence is a novel contribution to research on political violence.

**Keywords:** Communal Violence, Civil War, Conflict, Sunni, Shia, Lebanon, Micro-level Determinants, Motivations, Grievances, Politics

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## GLOSSARY

**Alawites.** Alawites are a Muslim minority group primarily centered in Syria, with a few small communities in Lebanon and Turkey. The Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his family as well as most of the residents of Jabal Mohsen belong to the Alawite sect.

**Arab Democratic Party (ADP).** The Arab Democratic Party is a pro-Syrian Alawite party based in the neighborhood of Jabal Mohsen in Tripoli.

**Jihad.** The exact meaning of the term jihad depends on the context. In Arabic, Jihad means striving or struggling. It refers to the human struggle to promote what is right and to prevent what is wrong, especially with a praiseworthy aim. In the West, it is often translated as “holy war.”

**Salafism.** Salafism is a form of Islam that considers the earliest practice of Islam to be the purest form of the religion.

**Salafi Jihadism.** Salafi jihadism is a transnational religious-political ideology based on the idea of global jihad to end the oppression of Muslims around the world.

**Shia.** Shia Islam is a branch of Islam that believes that the leadership of the community after Muhammad belongs to Ali and his successors. Approximately 10% of the world’s Muslims are Shia.

**Sons of the Soil conflict.** This type of conflict involves violence between ethnically distinct ‘native’ or ‘local’ populations concentrated in some region of a country sparked by the arrival of large numbers of migrants from other parts of the same country.

**Sunni.** Sunni Islam is the larger of the two main branches of Islam. Sunnis believe that the Prophet Muhammad died without appointing a successor to lead the Muslim community. Unlike the Shias, Sunnis do not recognize Ali as being the prophet's rightful successor.

**14 March Coalition.** The 14 March Alliance or Coalition refers to an anti-Syrian coalition of parties in the Lebanese government.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Communal conflicts, which can be described as conflicts between non-state actors divided along social, national, ethnic, racial and religious lines, affect many parts of the world. Examples of communal conflicts include the ethnic violence following the 2007 Kenyan presidential election, the conflicts between ethnic groups in Nigeria (Brosché and Elfversson, 2012), the Rwandan genocide and the tensions between Hindus and Muslims in India (Kausar, 2006). Such communal violence may produce significant human rights violations and loss of life, lead to severe political or intergroup conflict (Horowitz, 2001, cited in Claassen, 2014) and even be a trigger of civil war (Fearon and Laitin, 2011, cited in Johan Brosché, 2015). It can therefore easily be argued that communal conflicts are a severe threat to human security (Sundberg, Eck, and Kreutz, 2012, cited in Johan Brosché, 2015). Despite their repercussions, communal conflicts and violence are still an under-researched area within peace and conflict research and little is known about the characteristics of the thousands of people who take part in communal violence and their motivations to take up arms. This research will attempt to fill this gap by looking into the micro- dynamics of violence through a case study of the conflict between the neighborhoods of Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh in Tripoli, Lebanon. This area has seen more than 20 rounds of clashes between Sunni and Shia communities between 2008 and 2014, which have left hundreds of dead and wounded. In this paper, I am interested in identifying and understanding the individual motivations of fighters for taking up arms in the conflict. With data collected through 13 in-depth interviews with combatants<sup>1</sup> who took part in the 2008-2014 clashes, this research explores the personal motivations that drive people to take up arms and participate in communal violence. I identify five main motivations for people to fight in the conflict. The first one is financial incentives. The second one is sectarian grievances and religious beliefs. Coming in third is self-defense, followed by gaining respect from the community and a sense of manhood in fourth and finally fighting for the thrills.

Following this introductory section, the paper presents a historical and social background of the conflict between Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh. The third chapter offers a review of the main existing literature exploring micro-foundations for participation in communal conflicts and civil wars, followed by the fourth chapter outlining my expectations. Next comes the methodology section, which explains the process of case selection and data collection, along with the qualitative research methods used to analyze the respondents' answers and details of the ethics procedures followed to conduct the interviews. Chapter six provides an in-depth analysis of the main findings. Finally, the paper ends with a discussion about the shortcomings of this research and new questions raised by the findings as well as with some concluding remarks.

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<sup>1</sup> See appendix 1 for a description of combatants' profiles.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The media often portray the conflict in Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh in the Northern city of Tripoli as a sectarian spillover of the Syrian conflict, turning the city's Sunni majority against the Alawite minority. While it is true that the conflict in Tripoli has increasingly been expressing itself in sectarian terms, it is also rooted in political fragmentation and in the growing dissatisfaction with the state and the city's socio-economic decline (Lefèvre, 2014).

The origins of the conflict go back to the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990). During this period, the two neighborhoods supported rival political factions. Local Sunnis supported Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in its struggle against the Syrian regime, while Jabal Mohsen's Alawites allied with the Syrian troops and supported their presence in Tripoli (Lefèvre, 2014). In December 1986, the Syrian military and its supporting militia of the Alawite Arab Democratic Party (ADP) (the main Alawite paramilitary group ruling Jabal Mohsen) conducted a large-scale massacre in the Sunni populated neighborhood of Bab al-Tabbaneh. Hundreds of people were killed and injured. Because of the widespread presence of the Syrian regime in Lebanon until 2005, no credible investigation was ever carried into the events and victims were never granted reparation. Until this day, memories of this massacre continue to fuel grievances among the Sunnis of Bab al-Tabbaneh and Tripoli (Lefèvre, 2014).

Today, the conflict between the two areas has morphed into a struggle between supporters and opponents of Syria's president Bashar al-Assad. Tensions were first revived in 2005, with the assassination of then Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and again in 2008 with Hezbollah's seizure of large parts of West Beirut. The conflict intensified after the beginning of the Syrian uprising, as the majority of Sunnis living in deprived neighborhoods such as Bab al-Tabbaneh supported the Syrian rebellion, while Jabal Mohsen's ADP supported the Syrian regime. The Syrian crisis also deepened the political divide in Lebanon as Lebanese politicians, which were already split between pro-Saudi and pro-Iran and Syria groups, used Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen to send each other political messages. "It is undoubtedly rare to witness this sort of large-scale political polarization in such a small space—especially one in which fault lines so neatly match national and regional cleavages." (Lefèvre, 2014, p. 15). Between 2008 and 2014, at least 20 rounds of clashes left more than 200 people dead and hundreds more wounded according to the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC). The clashes have also severely damaged property and affected residents' livelihoods, freedom of movement, and access to education (HRW, 2013).

Sectarian tensions in Tripoli were undoubtedly exacerbated by the city's economic decline, as poverty reached alarming levels (Lebanon Support, 2016). According to a 2016 report by the UNHCR, in 2009,

67% of the residents of Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen were living under the upper poverty line and 33% under the lower poverty line with an average wage of >US\$800 month (UN-Habitat, 2016). On the brink of the Syrian civil war in 2011, 77% of the families in these neighborhoods were considered to be in economic deprivation (UN-Habitat, 2016).

Poverty and socio-economic disparities in the region seem to have disproportionately affected the Sunni community, provoking the resurgence of discourses based on sectarian identity and centered around the Lebanese State's discrimination against the Sunni sect (Lefèvre, 2014). Socio-economic deprivation coupled with the political void caused by the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, which left the Sunni community in Lebanon without a strong leader, exacerbated the feeling of political marginalization within the Sunni community and opened the door to Islamic radicalization. "The lack of viable, visible political organizations for Lebanese Sunnis is dangerous because it is combined with an absence of sound leadership at the institutional religious level. In this void, the pan-Islamic doctrine in all its variations, including Salafism and Salafi jihadism, is best placed to welcome the growing Sunni resentment of society and the state." (Lefèvre, 2014, p. 9).

### **3. EXISTING LITTERATURE**

Until now, most research within peace and conflict studies has focused on collective violence with a higher level of organization than communal violence, such as conflicts between states or between a state and a rebel group (Brosché and Elfverson, 2012; Oki, 2018). And while a range of studies have attempted to understand and explain the motivations of individuals who take up arms and fight in civil wars (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008), little research has been done on the micro-foundations of participation in communal conflicts.

Yet, communal conflicts, which are often linked to national politics as well as the outbreak of civil war, have created dire humanitarian crises worldwide and led to massive violations of human rights, constituting a major threat to peace and security (Brosché and Elfverson, 2012). In 2018 in Nigeria for example, the intensification of the decades-old communal conflict between nomadic herdsman and farmers in the Middle Belt resulted in the death of 1,600 people and the displacement of another 300,000 (HRW, 2018). This indicates the importance of research on communal conflicts.

A number of scholars have attempted to identify the macro-level determinants of communal violence, offering ecological-level explanations for such conflicts (Brass, 1997; Dancygier, 2010; Olzak, 1992; Wilkinson, 2004, cited in Claassen, 2014). For example, communal conflicts and violence have long been positioned under the umbrella of ethnic violence involving "Sons of the Soil", as early research on civil wars attempted to find a correlation between measurements of ethnicity and the onset of

conflicts (Fearon and Laitin, 2011; Weiner, 1978, cited in Oki, 2018, p. 89). Paul Brass (2003) and Steven I. Wilkinson (2004) have also developed one of the dominant paradigms on ethnic violence by challenging the idea that communal violence and ethnic riots are spontaneous irruptions of anger and arguing instead that such occurrence of violence is premeditated and planned by political elites who play on communal tensions to advance their agenda (Momin, 2006; Petersen, 2006; Roshni, 2005).

Looking into the micro-foundations of participation in communal conflicts is however essential to advance our understanding of this kind of violence. In the past, theories attempting to explain intrastate conflicts have often taken their roots in international relation theories on interstate warfare and regarded the main groups involved in the war as largely homogenous units with a set of common preferences (Christia, 2008). This approach has recently been criticized for not allowing to evaluate internal group dynamics and individual incentives and preferences (Christia, 2008). “This recent line of work has directed interest to the micro-level, compellingly highlighting the need to consider individual-level incentives as a way to get an accurate grasp of the conflict processes at play” (Christia, 2008, p. 462). Other approaches have also started to explore the crucial role played by emotions and group sentiment in ethnic conflict (Horowitz, 1985; Lindner, 2006; Petersen, 2002, cited in Halperin, Sharvit and Gross, 2011), suggesting the pertinence of psychological research in the study of such conflicts. This further highlights the importance of research on the individual motivations of fighters who participate in communal violence, as it can help identifying the origins of conflicts and explain their evolution (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008).

### **3.1 Drawing on concepts from the civil war literature**

Despite new research providing micro-level examinations of individuals’ motivations in communal conflict conducted by Christpoher Claassen (2014) and Alexandra Scacco (2010), most of the contribution regarding the personal motivations of combatants come from the literature on civil war. For example, Kalyvas (2000) challenged the traditional conception of civil war as irrational with a new theory arguing that violence is often driven by personal animosities, family feuds and local factionalism hidden behind political motivations. According to him, violence is the result of rational actions taken by political actors and civilians seeking to fulfill their interests (Rožič and Verovšek, 2008). Another school of thought challenges the importance of grievances as an explanatory variable by highlighting the idea of selective incentives. The latter is described as private goods such as money, spoils of war, land, positions of authority or even protection from violence that can be offered to fighters in exchange for joining an armed group (Lichbach, 1995; Goodwin 2001; Kalyvas and Kocher 2007; Mason and Krane 1989, cited in Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008). Research carried by Paul Collier and Anke Hoeffler (2001; 2004) also finds that countries with low per capita GDP are more likely to experience civil war because low average income makes financial gains through conflict a more profitable



opportunity for fighters. Finally, another approach emphasizes the importance of community-level features such as the strength of a community's social structures as well as the levels of involvement of its members in a conflict in a person's decision to take up arms (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008).

While drawing concepts from research on civil wars might be useful to explore the personal motivations of combatants taking part in inter-communal conflicts, taking into consideration the main differences between civil wars and communal conflicts is crucial as they feature different dynamics. First, conflicts involving the state usually involve a considerably higher level of organization because the government side usually controls the country's army while rebel groups often also enjoy a relatively high level of organization, with access to trained troops and sophisticated weapons (Brosché and Elfversson, 2012). This higher degree of organization and material strength in state-based conflicts lead to higher destructive potential than communal conflicts as well as power asymmetry. Conflicts involving the state also tend to last for a longer period of time. These differences suggest that communal conflicts represent a different type of violence that needs to be studied and analyzed on its own (Brosché and Elfversson, 2012).

#### **4. EXPECTATIONS**

Based on the characteristics of communal conflicts and the specificities of the conflict between the neighborhoods of Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh, I am able to generate a few expectations about the motivations of combatants who participated in the conflict in Tripoli. First, given the high levels of economic deprivation in the area, I expect socio-economic factors to play a central role in the micro-level dynamics of the conflict. Financial and material gains should also be among the main drivers behind combatants' decision to join the conflict. Additionally, I expect combatants' motivations to differ based on the neighborhood they belong to, as one neighborhood is known to harbor more extremist religious views. Finally, given the fact that the conflict is taking place in connection with local, national and regional politics and Lebanon's deeply rooted system of patronage, I expect that an analysis linking social, economic, and political dynamics at a micro and a macro-level will be essential to understand the fighters' motivations.

#### **5. METHODOLOGY**

##### **5.1 Case Selection**

This research aims at identifying the different personal motivations of people who take up arms in communal conflicts. I decided to opt for a qualitative case study as a research methodology because it allows to explore the micro-dynamics of communal violence in detail while also taking in-depth

contextual insights into consideration. (Yin, 2009 cited in Baškarada, 2014). Moreover, exploratory case studies allow to verify expectations based on existing theories through a deductive approach while also allowing to generate new hypotheses for later investigation. The case of Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh is particularly interesting because it is a typical case of communal violence, with two rival non-state armed groups belonging to two different religious sects who recurrently engage in armed conflict within the Lebanese territory. This case study also offers a series of social, political, and economic insights that can be generalized to other communal conflicts, while also potentially offering new insights into the micro-foundations of communal violence.

## **5.2 Research technique and data collection**

This article draws on a dataset collected through in-depth interviews with 13 former male combatants that aimed to explore the combatants' personal motivations for taking up arms in the rounds of clashes that took place between 2008 and 2014. As a research technique, I chose to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews with six men from Bab al-Tabbaneh and seven men from Jabal Mohsen who took part in the 2008-2014 clashes. This decision was motivated by the fact that such in-depth interviews would allow exploring the ethno-political complexity of the conflict by capturing information about beliefs, values, feelings, and motivations that underlaid the combatants' behaviors (Berkwits and Inui, 1998, p. 195). A total of 13 combatants were involved, including a community leader who fought during the Lebanese civil war but did not fight during the 2008-2014 clashes and a community leader related to a militia leader, whose role in the 2008-2014 clashes was to coordinate health care support to residents and fighters.

Given the difficulty in identifying study participants by myself and the language barrier, a purposive sampling method was employed with the help of two gatekeepers with access to the communities. Study participants were recruited through two Lebanese men who worked for an NGO called MARCH, which develops peace building and conflict resolution programs in Tripoli and offers professional trainings to former fighters. The interviews were organized by the same men - a current and a former employee of MARCH - who also served as my interpreters. They were carried out during field trips to the neighborhoods, on July 8 and July 12, 2019, five years after the implementation of the security plan in Tripoli by the Lebanese armed forces, which put an end to the clashes.

Interviewing as a data collection method has long been criticized for its lack of reliability and objectivity. The flexibility of in-depth interviews is often viewed as an obstacle to reliability, while their subjectivity means that respondents may not always say the truth and instead say what they think the interviewer wants to hear (Hofisi, Hofisi and Mago, 2014). As a result, researchers are often asked: "How do you know if the informant is telling the truth?". In order to address this issue, I chose to

conduct interviews with a former employee of MARCH who worked with combatants for two years and had previously interviewed them on several occasions, as well as with a journalist who covered the 2008-2014 clashes and knows many fighters personally. These interviews allowed to corroborate and confirm a lot of the information shared by the combatants. The presence, during the interviews, of two NGO workers who knew the respondents personally as well as the rapport they had already established with the combatants prevented the interviewees from giving false information or presenting themselves in a way that they believed would fit in with their perception of my expectations. To complement the information collected during the interviews, secondary sources such as NGO reports and academic articles have been consulted.

Finally, testing hypotheses about combatants' motivations for participating in a conflict requires collecting systematic data on the characteristics of an as representative sample of combatants and noncombatants as possible (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008). Because of time and budget constraints I wasn't able to interview a representative sample of Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh's combatant population. I did not interview non-combatants either, which could have helped isolating the causal factors explaining mobilization. However, while the required number of participants was not decided prior to the study, it is important to note that some degree of data saturation seemed to have been reached at the end of the 13 interviews.<sup>2</sup> The concept of data saturation is hard to define and subject to debate. It has been developed because analyzing large samples in qualitative studies can be labour intensive and sometimes even impractical. For this reason, the sample size in the majority of qualitative studies should generally follow the concept of saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967 cited in Mason, 2010), which is reached when the collection of new data does not enhance nor shed any further light on the issue being investigated (Mason, 2010).

### **5.3 Ethics procedures**

Informed consent was obtained from participants before each interview. Participants had the choice to consent verbally or by signing a consent form<sup>3</sup> and were briefed about the measures taken to protect their anonymity. They were also informed of the sensitive nature of the interview content and given the right to withdraw their consent and from the study at any stage of the interview. Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide in order to obtain nuanced but comparable data between the fighters and between the two neighborhoods.<sup>4</sup> The interviews included a series of open-ended questions about the participants' motivations for taking part in the clashes. The questions focused on the combatants' current and past financial and family situation, whether other members of their family had fought in the clashes or during the Lebanese civil war, the way they felt during combat, their

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<sup>2</sup> See appendix 2 for more information on data saturation in the interviews.

<sup>3</sup> See appendix 3 to view the consent forms in English and Arabic.

<sup>4</sup> See appendix 4 to view the interview guide.

religious beliefs and feelings towards the rival neighborhood and whether or not they would take up arms again. All interviews were carried out in Arabic, with a translator, and lasted from 30 min to 60 min.

## **6. FINDINGS**

Throughout my interviews, five main motivations were identified. As expected, financial incentives and material benefits as well as sectarian and historical grievances seem to be the two primary motivations of fighters. They were followed by self-defense. Furthermore, I find that manipulation of combatants by local leaders and Lebanese political elites played an essential role in the orchestration of the clashes. I identify two different yet complementary dynamics in the conflict. First, the conflict between Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh is characterized by a “top-down” form of economic violence where political leaders and entrepreneurs fuel and use violence to defend their interests (Keen, 1998), enrich themselves and send each other political messages. I also observe a 'bottom-up' dynamic where violence is actively embraced by 'ordinary' people in a sometimes-spontaneous expression of hostility and for specific short-term purposes driven by grievances linked to social and economic exclusion, fear, need or greed (Keen, 1998). Unexpectedly, I also find that motivations highlighting the socio-psychological functions of violence such as fighting to gain respect from one's community and fighting for the thrills played a key role in the combatants' decision to take up arms. This constitutes a novel contribution to literature.

### **6.1 Financial incentives and material benefits**

The opportunity costs argument gained attention in research on rebel recruitment during civil war (Scacco, 2016). In groundbreaking studies, Collier and Hoeffler (2001, 2004) argued that people who participate in armed conflicts usually perform a cost benefit analysis before taking up arms and decide to participate only when the benefits gained through fighting are higher than the benefits of their ordinary economic activities. The logic behind this opportunity cost argument is that people who have viable economic opportunities are not as keen to join rebel movements as those who don't (Keen 1998, Miguel et al. 2004 cited in Scacco, 2016). This mechanism suggests that “unemployed or particularly unmarketable individuals are more likely to be drawn into violence than people with jobs or good job prospects” (Scacco, 2016, p. 39).

In the case of the conflict between Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh, I find that the lack of economic opportunities at time of peace and the financial opportunities that arise during armed conflicts create incentives for taking up arms. Ten out of the thirteen combatants interviewed mentioned the opportunity for financial gains as one of their main motivations for taking part in the clashes. Financial opportunities took different forms for combatants and were almost all made possible thanks to funds coming from

Lebanese politicians supporting one neighborhood/community or the other during the clashes, and from the Lebanese diaspora, mainly coming from Australia according to testimonies of Alawite fighters from Jabal Mohsen. This phenomenon highlights the importance of local elites in armed conflicts like civil wars and communal violence, who serve as intermediaries linking economic incentives at the micro (individual) level and ethnic cleavages at the macro-level (Christia, 2008). This phenomenon has already been observed in other conflicts such as the interclan violence in the Muslim- dominated area of the southern Philippines where “political elites serve as political entrepreneurs and warlords in electoral districts to help coordinate and procure arms resources so that disputants can perpetuate or continue the violence.” (Oki, 2018, p. 91)

In Jabal Mohsen, most armed groups are under the direct control of the Arab Democratic Party (ADP), although various neighborhood commanders display some autonomy (HRW, 2013). Some fighters also told me they refused to associate with the ADP and fought on their own. In comparison, Bab al-Tabbaneh and the surrounding Sunni neighborhoods do not enjoy the same kind of centralized control. Instead, various armed groups operate under independent commanders and militia leaders, with varying ideologies and loyalties (HRW, 2013). In its most basic aspect, financial opportunities in Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen took the form of monthly salaries or sporadic allowances in return for taking part in the clashes. The interviews allowed to identify different levels of payments. Local warlords and militia leaders were generally funded and/or received weapons from Lebanese politicians who supported them and their community. According to testimonies of combatants from Jabal Mohsen, the ADP offered financial compensations usually ranging from 200 000 to 1 513 850 Lebanese pounds (LL) a month (\$130 to \$1000 USD) to higher ranking fighters such as group leaders. Lower ranking fighters were sometimes offered what they described as occasional and symbolic allowances to fight. They could also be paid to conduct specific actions. In Jabal Mohsen for example, throwing a grenade could be remunerated 15 000LL (\$10 USD) according to a community leader.

“The people who fought were the poor people. The people who had money didn’t take up arms. Every fighter was getting money from the Arab Democratic Party.” - Combatant from Jabal Mohsen

“Some people from the neighborhood got rich. You don’t see them in the street anymore. They bought fancy cars and apartments.” - Combatant from Jabal Mohsen

In addition to financial compensation, fighters also often received services and food aid from community and militia leaders. A member of a leading family from Bab al-Tabbaneh explained that his family supported combatants and their families by helping them to pay their rent, medical and school bills, while a fighter from Jabal Mohsen explained that he received cigarettes and food such as bread

and vegetables. That same fighter also mentioned that many former combatants from Jabal Mohsen and their families continued to receive money from the ADP after the clashes stopped.

In some cases, economic payoffs pushed combatants to harm members of their own community, as financial opportunities also came in the form of looting. Several fighters in both Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh admitted having witnessed the looting of damaged stores and houses in their neighborhood by combatants from their own community. Another fighter admitted having been part of a small group of armed combatants who would pay visits to shop owners and harass them for money. The fighter mentioned that taking part in these operations was one of the reasons why he decided to participate in the clashes. According to a 2013 Human Rights Watch report, some gunmen from the Bab al-Tabbaneh have also forced Alawite shop owners to pay protection money. In these cases, the prospect of private benefits in the form of material goods from looting acted as an incentive for participation. This phenomenon was typified by Grossman (1991, 1999), whose economic theory “models rebellion as an industry that generates profits from looting” (Grossman, 1999, p. 269, cited in Collier and Hoeffler, 2004, p. 564).

The following example illustrates how economic incentives in the form of legitimate work opportunities could discourage combatants from fighting by relegating ethnic or religious grievances to cleavages of second level importance (Christia, 2008). It also highlights how less marketable individuals with poor economic opportunities are more likely to be drowned in violence. A currently unemployed fighter from Bab al-Tabbaneh with a criminal record who claimed that he mainly fought for sectarian and religious beliefs admitted that he would forbid his children to fight in new clashes if they had a job and interesting life prospects. He also mentioned missing the clashes because the money “coming from outside the neighborhood” as well as the money he would sometimes make from selling his munitions during the clashes improved his living conditions. He added that if he had a job, he would not consider fighting again and would “let others fight”.

## **6.2 Sectarian grievances and religious beliefs**

Although their importance is subject to debate, ethnic and religious divisions are a commonly cited factor in civil wars and communal violence. In my interviews in Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh, historical grievances linked to the Lebanese civil war and the Syrian occupation of Lebanon as well as religious and sectarian beliefs were among the most cited motivations for taking up arms. Sectarian grievances as well as religious and ideological motivations were considerably more prevalent in Bab al-Tabbaneh, where combatants often referred to the crimes committed by the Syrian forces (which to them represents the Alawite-led Syrian government) against the Sunnis during the Lebanese civil war and the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. One fighter mentioned the hanging, during the 2008-2014

clashes, of flyers commemorating martyrs from the neighborhood as well as the 1986 massacre and the involvement of Jabal Mohsen in the killings in Bab al-Tabbaneh. Another said that the death of former Sunni Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005 sparked memories of crimes committed by Syrian forces against the residents of Bab al-Tabbaneh during the Lebanese civil war and the subsequent Syrian occupation of Lebanon.

“We were raised with the ideology that Alawites are the enemies and that they took part in the massacre of Bab al-Tabbaneh during the civil war. (...) Since the civil war, many people had been waiting for the clashes to resume (to get revenge).” – A combatant from Bab al-Tabbaneh

“Clashes are not about the people of Jabal Mohsen, but about the Syrian regime, which is represented through the Arab Democratic Party”, – A member of a leading family in Bab al-Tabbaneh.

In addition to grievances dating back from the Lebanese civil war and the Syrian occupation, the perception of government bias among the Sunni community seems to be an important dimension of the sectarian aspect of the conflict between Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh. As explained by Brosché (2015), a biased government increases the chances for violence to erupt by disrupting and souring the relations between local elites and thereby making cooperation among the communities difficult. A community leader from Bab al-Tabbaneh mentioned the oppression of the Sunnis in Lebanon resulting from the growing influence of the Shia community in the country as a motivation for taking up arms. In Lebanon, the Lebanese Shia party Hezbollah, which is supported by the Syrian regime and Iran and is currently fighting alongside Bashar al-Assad in Syria, enjoys unparalleled influence. Over the years, the militia-turned political party has developed its own parallel institutions within Lebanon’s educational, social, and economic sectors. This unequalled power fuels a Sunni-Shia divide in the country (Lefèvre, 2014).

“It’s a way to fight back against oppression and defend the Sunnis’ honor,” the community leader added.

Combatants in Bab al-Tabbaneh expressed significantly more religious motivations in comparison with combatants from Jabal Mohsen. This is undoubtedly linked to the rise of Sunni extremism in Lebanon which can be attributed to several national and international factors. First, the past decade has witnessed a growing feeling of socioeconomic and political marginalization on the part of the country’s Sunni community. As a result, many Sunnis have decided to turn away from the Lebanese state and look for alternative sources of support and protection, which has allowed the political manipulation of the local population through clientelism. “Thus, when it comes to paying the bills, such as rent, medical expenses, or school fees, many inhabitants are left with two options: asking a political leader or joining a religious charity.” (Lefèvre, 2014). Moreover, the rise of Sunni extremism in the Syrian civil war has created

new kinds of religious and security dynamics in Lebanon, with Syrian insurgents finding refuge in Tripoli and extremist groups such as the al-Qaeda-linked Nusra Front and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) tapping into Bab al-Tabbaneh's feeling of disenfranchisement to recruit new followers (Lefèvre, 2014).

One combatant from Bab al-Tabbaneh said that while he first looked at the conflict as one opposing his neighborhood to the Syrian regime (represented through Jabal Mohsen and the ADP), his views of the conflict evolved into a sectarian conflict opposing Sunnis and Alawites as he was exposed to fighters with more extreme religious views. He added that sheikhs (religious leaders) used prayers in local Sunni mosques to motivate people, especially the youth, to take up arms by claiming that the Sunni religion was "under attack" and by playing the prayer for jihad through the mosques' minarets. Another combatant who said he came from a very religious and conservative family in Bab al-Tabbaneh admitted to having fought against the Alawites of Jabal Mohsen because he thought they were "kafr" (infidels).

"It (the fight) was about religion, not about getting something in return" – A combatant from Bab al-Tabbaneh

In comparison, only one of the combatants interviewed from Jabal Mohsen mentioned defending his religion as a motivation for picking up arms. The grievances expressed by fighters from the Alawite neighborhood were mostly linked to the loss of community and family members during the clashes.

"When you see a lot of people getting injured and killed, even though many people are already fighting, you feel like it's not enough", explained a combatant from Jabal Mohsen, who joined the fight after his father was shot while fighting.

### **6.3 Self-Defense**

Self-defense was a recurrently cited by combatants as a motive for taking up arms. Defending their neighborhood against aggressions as well as defending their shops and their houses seemed to be some of the combatants' priority, especially in Jabal Mohsen. A substantial literature on ethnic warfare argues that when a state where ethnic divisions are already politicized is unable or unwilling to provide basic security provision to its citizens, people who find themselves in self-help situations are more likely to "assume the worst" about the intentions of potentially rival groups and take measures to protect themselves. These measures include, among others, acquiring weapons and mobilizing to prepare for a potential conflict (Scacco, 2016, p. 30). Following the logic of the security dilemma, similar theories attempting at explaining ethnic violence also argue that such conflicts are not caused by ancient hatreds and historical grievances, nor the hardship caused by the global economy, but by collective fears of the



future (David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, 1996). This phenomenon, which Barry Posen refers to as “emerging anarchy”, arises when a state’s central authority declines and is no longer able to mediate between groups or to provide them with credible guarantees of protection. In these situations, physical security becomes a primary concern for groups as they start fearing for their survival. As a result, they decide to prepare for violence, paradoxically making actual violence possible (David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, 1996).

The conflict between Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh presents several of the characteristics mentioned above. Although Lebanon is not on the verge of collapse, it can definitely be considered a weak state, a necessary precondition for ethnic violence to erupt according to David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild (1996). The country, whose political system is divided along religious lines and based on a system of patronage and clientelism, harbors numerous ethnic and religious intercommunal tensions, allowing ethnic activists and political entrepreneurs to build upon these fears of insecurity and polarize society. “Together, these between-group and within strategic interactions produce a toxic brew of distrust and suspicion that can explode into murderous violence” (David A. Lake and Donald Rothchild, 1996, p. 41).

One combatant from Jabal Mohsen said he bought himself a gun in self-defense against Bab al-Tabbaneh after the Hezbollah invaded West Beirut in May 2008 because “rumors spread that there would be a big fight.”

Another combatant from Jabal Mohsen said that direct death threats perpetrated by residents of Bab al-Tabbaneh over two-way radio transceiver (walkie talkies) at night pushed him to take up arms to defend his neighborhood. “The ideology was to defend the area. There was no other agenda”, he said.

Testimonies from combatants from both neighborhoods also suggest a distrust towards the Lebanese state and its willingness to prevent the clashes from happening. Combatants on both sides claimed that the army could have stopped the clashes from the beginning instead of waiting until 2014 to implement the security plan. The Lebanese government’s weak security response has also been observed by NGO like Human Rights Watch. In a 2013 report, the organization explained that official security operations had failed to stop the fighting or demilitarize affected neighborhoods, adding that law enforcement and security forces had made no sustained effort to disarm, arrest, and prosecute the perpetrators of targeted attacks against the Alawite population in particular (HRW, 2013).

Lebanese army and authorities’ inaction also raise the question of the potential role played by Lebanese political elites in the orchestration of the clashes. A Sunni combatant who said he fought against the Alawites because he believes they are infidels mentioned the involvement in the organization of the

clashes of two opposing Lebanese intelligence agencies: the Internal Security Forces' information branch called Far' al-Ma'lumat, with ties to the country's Sunni community and the Saudi-backed 14 March coalition and the Army Intelligence Directorate called Moukhabarat-al Jaish, which is believed to be aligned with Damascus (IRIN, 2012). According to him, in some cases, clashes would start after neighborhood leaders received a phone call from one of the two intelligence agencies asking them to start a round of clashes. The fighting would stop when the intelligence agencies would place a new call, asking to end the clashes. This information was corroborated by a journalist who covered the conflict. A 2012 article published in the Lebanese newspaper The Daily Star also claimed that the Hezbollah supplied weapons to both Alawites and Sunnis in Tripoli, suggesting that its objective was to destabilize Lebanon - regardless of the winner - in order to draw attention away from the Syrian crisis (IRIN, 2012). Similarly, a combatant related to a militia leader in Bab al-Tabbaneh claimed that clashes were sometimes provoked by the Syrian regime and its Lebanese proxy the ADP in order to distract from the situation in Syria. Finally, a resident of Jabal Mohsen who fought during the Lebanese civil war but refused to participate in the 2008-2014 clashes pointed to the role of local elites in the organization of the clashes. He explained that the ADP told him he could be given weapons to start a round of clashes after a member of his family was shot by someone from Bab al-Tabbaneh during a wave of targeted attacks against Alawites in Tripoli. He claimed that the ADP tried to manipulate him into joining the clashes because of his influence in Jabal Mohsen and the many people from the neighborhood who would follow his lead. Most of the combatants who said they would not take part in new clashes explained that they realized they had been manipulated. "It was a big lie. Small people became big and big people became small. We lost our jobs, businesses and many young people died on both sides" said a fighter from Jabal Mohsen.

#### **6.4 Respect, manhood and the thrills: the socio-psychological functions of violence**

In addition to material gains, sectarian grievances and self-defense, socio-psychological factors such as a search for recognition and respect as well as pride, manhood and thrill-seeking were recurrently cited motivations during the interviews. Although they were always coupled with greed and grievances-related motivations, these types of motivations seem to have played a key role in the younger combatants' decision to participate in the clashes.

Several scholars have developed theories that offers alternative explanations to rational-actor theories based on material incentives and gains. For example, Elisabeth Jean Wood (2003, p. 235) explores the "pleasure of agency", which she defines as "the positive effects associated with self-determination, autonomy, self-esteem, efficacy and pride" that come with the successful pursue of justice. Similarly, David Keen (2002) looks at the psychological functions of violence such as the immediate sensation of power and reversal of perceived injustice that violence can offer and suggests that violence may be a

product of human emotions, such as shame, anger and fear. Finally, Roberto Beneduce, Luca Jourdan, Timothy Raeymaekers & Koen Vlassenroot (2006) argue that violence has an important identity and social dimension, as it can allow young fighters to renegotiate their status within the society and offer them an alternative model of identity.

In both Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh, young combatants not only expressed a strong sense of pride in having participated in the defense of their neighborhood, they also mentioned the importance of the status that fighting made them gain within their community. A young fighter from Jabal Mohsen explained having formed a group of combatants who bought themselves uniforms to be recognized as fighters, highlighting the importance of being identified as a fighter and the desire of young combatants to renegotiate their status and identity within the community as described by Beneduce, Jourdan, Raeymaekers and Vlassenroot (2006).

Several other fighters echoed this reality:

“The more you are shooting, the more they are clapping.” - A fighter from Jabal Mohsen

“If you don’t have weapons, you don’t have value in your community.” - A fighter from Jabal Mohsen

Combatants also often associated fighting with masculinity. A fighter from Jabal Mohsen said that combatants would try to rally men to the fight by shouting things such as: “Those who have guns, come down to fight with us, don’t stay home like the women!” Research in military sociology and gender studies attempting at explaining why war is carried out mainly by men has developed theories on sexual selection for male war heroism (Hannes Rusch and Giessen Joost M. Leunissen, 2015) and argued that war offers an outlet for men to compete and impress both their male rivals and potential female mates (John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, 2012; Bliege Bird and Smith, 2005; Boone, 1998; Grafen, 1990; McAndrew, 2002; Roberts, 1998; Zahavi, 1977 cited in McAndrew, F. T and Perilloux, 2012). A few fighters in Tripoli admitted that some of them took up arms to impress girls or because it was their duty to fight as men. “What should have we done? Stay home like a woman?” two fighters asked. Signaling qualities such as physical strength, courage, and leadership skills through displaying heroism aggression towards members of out-groups, which have been identified as sexually selected traits (Hannes Rusch and Giessen Joost M. Leunissen, 2015), might have therefore acted as a motivation for younger combatants in Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh.

Several combatants also mentioned being perceived as “heroes” and as role models by their community. A combatant who mentioned that fighting made him feel happy and proud talked about the exhilaration he felt when he received encouragement from members of his community when he would come down from a rooftop where he had been fighting from. “This pride would make you cross into Bab al-

Tabbaneh and die for Jabal Mohsen,” he said. “Many studies demonstrate that people who sacrifice for the group by engaging in costly altruistic activities do in fact achieve elevated social status, respect, and recognition as a result of their public selflessness.” (McAndrew, 2016). Fighters also mentioned that being unarmed exposed them to bullying from members of their community, which suggests that violence was used by fighters to find self-worth and empowerment (Keen, 2002).

Finally, several fighters explained having taken part in the clashes for the thrills. This kind of motivation remains underexplored in research about armed conflicts but was mentioned on several occasions during the interviews. Thrill-seeking is defined as “the seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experience” (Zuckerman 1994, p. 27, cited in Nussio, 2017, p. 3). This phenomenon suggests that risk can be attractive instead of being a cost (Nussio, 2017).

“Teenagers like chaos, whether they come from Jabal Mohsen or Bab al-Tabbaneh. They want to be part of it. They don’t really want to invade the other side they just want to hold guns and shoot.” – A community leader in Jabal Mohsen

Reports by governments and international organizations such as the National Counterterrorism Center in the United States (2015), UNODC (2017) and the United States Institute of Peace (2010) have already identified thrill-seeking as a motivator for foreign and local fighters joining terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and ISIL. Yet, very few studies have looked into personality and psychological traits of fighters as an explanation for participation in armed groups. This new avenue is an important one because it can help solve an important puzzle in the study of political violence, which is why some individuals are willing to risk their life fighting for a public good while they could let others take the risk and still enjoy the same benefits (Nussio, 2017). Research in psychology have also found that the level of sensation-seeking peaks at around 18 years of age and that males are more sensation-seeking than females (Nussio, 2017). These findings are in line with my observations in Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh, as all thrill-seeking fighters interviewed started fighting in their teenage years. They also came from low socioeconomic classes, with very few accessible opportunities for adventures and excitement. Older fighters did not mention sensation-seeking as a motivation for their participation in the clashes. “Adolescents in lower socioeconomic classes do not have the opportunities for adventure and excitement available to middle-class children, like travel, scuba diving, surfing, rock climbing, racing their own cars, and so forth. Sex, drugs, and crime are their more accessible sources of sensation-seeking” (Zuckerman 2007a, p. 169, cited in Nussio, 2017, p. 3). Since studies have shown that sensation-seeking can correlate with many risk-taking activities, participation in armed clashes could therefore be one of those accessible opportunities for young and impoverished men like the combatants in Tripoli (Nussio, 2017).

“The lack of work opportunities leads to unemployment. The only thing people can do to pass time and have fun is to fight. It was like a game. When there would be no fighting for two weeks, they would be super bored and excited for a new round of clashes to start.” – A journalist who covered the clashes

“Fighting was fun. It was a new experience. It made me feel better, less bored.” – A fighter from Bab al-Tabbaneh

## 7. CONCLUSION

This project uses in-depth interviews with combatants from Lebanon to investigate why some people choose to participate in communal violence. More specifically, this paper explores the different personal motivations of fighters for joining the clashes that opposed Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh, two rival neighborhoods in the city of Tripoli, between 2008 and 2014. Several motivations emerged from the interviews, demonstrating that different logics of participation may coexist in a single conflict and that different theories attempting at explaining the micro-dynamics of violence can be complementary instead of rival. First, my interviews suggest that selective incentives associated with fighting such as payment for participation from political elites and community leaders as well as benefits in the form of food aid, services and looting played a key role in motivating the fighters from both neighborhoods to participate in the clashes. They also demonstrate the importance of historical grievances in both neighborhoods. However, religious motivations were significantly more salient in the Sunni neighborhood of Bab al-Tabbaneh, where a feeling of political marginalization and the influence of Al-Qaeda affiliated groups has been growing, especially since the beginning of the Syrian conflict. Additionally, the interviews highlighted how the combatants' distrust in the Lebanese authorities pushed people to arm themselves and join the clashes to defend their neighborhood and their properties. They also indicated the importance of political processes and mechanisms driving sectarian politics toward sectarian war such as the manipulation by the elite of ethnic identity, fear, and hatred as well as the role of local elites as intermediaries linking economic incentives at the micro (individual) level and ethnic cleavages at the macro-level (Tang, 2015). Finally, the fighters' testimonies highlighted the role of socio-psychological functions of violence in the combatants' decision to fight. Many of them associated fighting with heroism and manhood. Several also admitted having participated in the conflict for the thrills.

One of the main limitations of this research is the size of the sample studied. Interviewing a bigger sample of combatants and noncombatants would improve the research by allowing for a more thorough examination of the factors that motivate individuals to participate in communal violence. Including noncombatants in the research, more specifically young males who did not take part in the clashes, would allow to better isolate the causal factors explaining mobilization by highlighting the factors that

make noncombatants decide to not take up arms. Going back to the findings, the significant presence of motivations that go beyond the rational violence framework indicate that research in psychology could be helpful to further understand what makes some people decide to fight while others decide not to. In this regard, the interviews implicitly highlighted some of the characteristics of individuals who decide to take up arms. This raises new potential research questions: What make certain people join armed conflicts and others not? What characterizes the individuals who decide to participate in armed conflicts such as communal violence? For example, motivations that go beyond the rational violence framework such as thrill-seeking indicate that a certain type of person (someone looking for adventure and seeking intense sensations for example) could be more inclined than others to participate in armed conflicts. For example, one of the things that the interviews highlighted is the difference of motivations between younger and older combatants. All thrill-seeking combatants were teenagers or in their early twenties when they fought, while older combatants in their thirties and forties did not mention sensation-seeking as a motivation for participating in the clashes. Furthermore, a few older fighters admitted knowing having been manipulated into fighting by the elites, while younger fighters did not. This suggests potential differences between combatants themselves as well as between those who decide to participate in armed conflicts and those who don't. Further research could examine the different characteristics of fighters such as their personality traits, age, sociability and status (Scacco, 2008), which could help better understand why some people decide to fight and what characterizes them. The interviews brought to light another interesting phenomenon, which is the difference between the motivations of fighters in Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh. One main difference was highlighted: religion. Religious motivations were considerably more present among Sunni combatants from Bab al-Tabbaneh than Alawites from Jabal Mohsen. Interviewing a bigger sample of fighters using a more systematic micro-level survey could potentially allow to identify more differences and further develop this aspect of the findings.

Finally, these findings could generalize to other communal conflicts taking place in similar political and sectarian contexts in the Middle East such as the violence taking place between Shias and Sunnis in Iraq as well as communal violence happening within the Syrian civil war. However, it would also be interesting to compare combatants' motivations in Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh with other types of communal conflicts such as the Hindu-Muslim violence in India. This conflict, which has developed in a different context, presents some similarities with the conflict in Tripoli. For example, in addition to the religious character of the conflict, riots and communal violence in India are known to have been supported by actors in the Indian government through an institutionalized riot system (Eckert, 2009). Civil society organizations have also highlighted the role of poverty and unemployment among youth in the upsurge in communal violence (Sarkar, 2019). We could also compare the conflict in Tripoli to the farmer-herder violence in Nigeria. This communal conflict, which opposes Muslim herdsmen and Christian peasants, has developed in a very different "son of the soil" context, but also presents some

similarities with the conflict in Tripoli such as the poor government response and failure to punish perpetrators, the creation of self-defense forces and ethnic militias fueling the violence as well as the presence of Jihadist groups like Boko Haram exacerbating the conflict.

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## **Appendix 1 – Combatants profiles**

### **Combatant 1:**

Age: 36

From: Jabal Mohsen

Schooling: Reached 5<sup>th</sup> grade at age 12 or 13. Quit school because of financial reasons.

Profession: Metalworker

Marital status: Married, 2 children

Fighting: 2008-2014

### **Combatant 2:**

Age: 25

From Jabal Mohsen

Profession: Works for a generator company.

Schooling: Reached 4<sup>th</sup> grade at age 14. Quit school to start working.

Fighting: 2009-2014

### **Combatant 3:**

Age: 26

From: Jabal Mohsen

Schooling: Left school in 2005 because of financial reasons.

Profession: Unemployed

Fighting: 2007-2014

### **Combatant 4:**

Age: 43

From: Jabal Mohsen

Profession: Worked as a delivery man before the clashes.

Fighting: 2008-2014

### **Combatant 5:**

Age: 35

From: Jabal Mohsen

Profession: Tattoo artist

Schooling: Reached 9<sup>th</sup> grade at age 15. Quit school for financial reasons.

Fighting: 2012-2014

**Combatant 6:**

Age: 31

From Bab al-Tabbaneh

Schooling: Reached 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Profession: Currently working as a taxi driver. He owned a shop during the clashes.

**Combatant 7:**

Age: 32

From: Bab al-Tabbaneh

Profession: Painter

School: Reached 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Quit school to pursue Islamic studies at a religious institute.

Fighting: 2010-2014

**Combatant 8:**

Age: 41

From: Bab al-Tabbaneh

Profession: Photographer

Schooling: Reached 8<sup>th</sup> grade at age 15. Quit school because he didn't like it.

Fighting: 2010-2014

**Combatant 9:**

Age: 27

From: Bab al-Tabbaneh

Profession: House painter. He was unemployed when the clashes started.

Marital status: Married, 2 children

Fighting: 2008-2012

**Combatant 10:**

Age: 38

From: Bab al-Tabbaneh

Profession: Shop owner

Fighting: 2008-2014

**Combatant 11:**

Age: 29

From: Bab al-Tabbaneh

Profession: Electricity worker. Unemployed when clashes started

Schooling: Reached 7th grade at age 15.

Marital status: Married, 2 children

Fighting: 2008-2014

**Combatant 12:**

Age: 45

From: Jabal Mohsen

Profession: He was a construction worker before the clashes started. He now works with MARCH.

Schooling: Reached grade 9<sup>th</sup> at age 14.

Fighting: 2008-2014. He also took part in clashes during the Lebanese civil war by bringing ammunition to fighters. He was 7 years old at the time.

Marital status: Married

**Combatant 13:**

Age: 53

From: Jabal Mohsen

Profession: Works for MARCH.

Schooling: Left school in 7<sup>th</sup> grade because the civil war started.

Fighting: He fought in the Lebanese civil war but did not participate in the 2008-2014 clashes.

## **Appendix 2 – Data Saturation**

Number of times different motivations came up in the interviews on a total of 13 fighters:

**Financial incentives: 11**

**Self-defense: 8**

**Sectarian and religious grievances: 7**

**To get respect from the community: 6**

**To be seen like a man: 6**

**Thrill-seeking: 5**

**To follow a family member's footsteps: 3**

**To defend one-self against personal vendettas: 3**

**For honor: 3**

## **Appendix 3 – Consent forms**

### **A) Informed Consent Form**

#### **Title of the project:**

“What are people’s motivations for taking up arms in inter-communal violence? A look into the case of Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh.”

Masters’ thesis in international security - Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals (IBEI)

**Project coordinator:** Andréane Williams, master’s student at Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals (IBEI)

**Project supervisor:** Lesley-Ann. Daniels [ldaniels@ibei.org](mailto:ldaniels@ibei.org)

**IBEI:** +34 93 542 30 30 Tel: [ibei@ibei.org](mailto:ibei@ibei.org)

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason.
3. I agree to take part in the above study.
4. I agree to the use of anonymised quotations in publications

Signed and dated by participant and researcher



## B) Informed Consent Form (Arabic Version)

استمارة موافقة مُسبقة

عنوان المشروع:

"ما هي دوافع الناس لحمل السلاح في العنف الطائفي؟ نظرة على قضية جبل محسن و باب التبانة".

(أطروحة الماجستير في الأمن الدولي - معهد برشلونة الدولي للدراسات الدولية)

(منسق المشروع: أندريان ويليامز، طالب ماجستير بمعهد برشلونة الدولي للدراسات العليا)

Idaniels@ibei.org المشرف على المشروع: ليزلي أن. دانيلز

Ibei: +34 93 542 30 30 تليفون ibei@ibei.org

1. أؤكد أنني قد قرأت و فهمت ورقة المعلومات للدراسة المذكورة أعلاه و أُتيحت لي الفرصة لطرح أسئلة.

2. أفهم أن مشاركتي طوعية و أنني حرٌّ في الانسحاب في أي وقت، دون إبداء سبب.

3. أوافق على المشاركة في الدراسة المذكورة أعلاه.

4. أوافق على استخدام الاقتباسات مجهولة المصدر في المنشورات

وَقَّعت و أَرَّخت من قِبَل المُشارك و الباحث

## C) Participant Information Sheet

### **1. Research Project Title**

“What are people’s motivations for taking up arms in inter-communal violence? A look into the case of Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh.” - Masters’ thesis in international security - Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals (IBEI)

### **2. What is the project’s purpose?**

This interview will be used for academic purposes.

### **3. What do I have to do?**

Participating in the interview conducted by the masters’ student. There are no other commitments associated with participating.

### **4. What are the possible risks or discomforts?**

Your participation in this study does not involve any physical risks or harm.

### **5. What are the possible benefits for me or others?**

Taking part in this research study may not benefit you personally, but we may learn new things that will help us understand the dynamics of intercommunal violence.

### **6. What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project’s objectives?**

The interviewer will ask you about your motivations for taking up arms and participating in arms clashes between Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabanneh. Your views and experience are just what the project is interested in exploring.

### **7. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All the information that we collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified or identifiable in the academic work.

**8. How will you protect the information you collect about me, and how will that information be shared?**

Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used. Data will be stored securely and will be password protected. Content will also be stored separately from the identifying details and password protected.

**9. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?**

Your interview will be recorded, and your interview will be transcribed in order to be used in the master's student final thesis.

**10. What will happen to the results of the research project?**

Results of the research will be compiled in the final thesis. You will not be identified in any report or publication.

**11. Who is organizing and funding the research?**

The project is a part of a master's thesis in international security at Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals (IBEI). The project is fully funded by Andréane Williams.

Thank you for taking part in this research.

## D) Participant Information Sheet (Arabic Version)

صحيفة معلومات المشارك

### 1. عنوان مشروع البحث

"ما هي دوافع الناس لحمل السلاح في العنف الطائفي؟ نظرة في قضية جبل محسن وباب التبانة" - أطروحة الماجستير " في مجال الأمن الدولي - معهد برشلونة الدولي للدراسات الدولية (IBEI)

### 2. ما هو الغرض من المشروع؟

سيتم استخدام هذه المقابلة للأغراض الأكاديمية.

### 3. ما الذي ينبغي عليّ فعله؟

المشاركة في المقابلة التي يجريها طالب الماجستير. لا توجد التزامات أخرى مرتبطة بالمشاركة.

### 4. ما هي المخاطر أو المضايقات المحتملة؟

مشاركتك في هذه الدراسة لا تتضمن أي مخاطر أو أذى جسدي.

### 5. ما هي الفوائد المحتملة لي أو للآخرين؟

قد لا تفيدك المشاركة في هذه المقابلة بشكل شخصي، لكنها تمكننا من معرفة أشياء جديدة قد تساعدنا في فهم دينامية العنف الطائفي.

### 6. ما نوع المعلومات التي ستُطلب مني ولماذا يعد جمع هذه المعلومات ذا صلة بتحقيق أهداف المشروع البحثي؟

سوف يسألك المحاور عن دوافعك لحمل السلاح والمشاركة في الاشتباكات المسلحة بين جبل محسن وباب التبانة. وجهات نظرك وتجربتك هي كل ما يهتم المشروع باستكشافه.

### 7. هل ستبقى مشاركتي في هذا المشروع سرية؟

سيتم الاحتفاظ بجميع المعلومات التي نجمعها عنك أثناء البحث في سرية تامة. لن يتم تحديد هويتك أو التعرف عليك في الرسالة.

### 8. كيف ستحمي المعلومات التي تجمّعها عني وكيف سيتم مشاركة هذه المعلومات؟

سيتم التعامل مع بيانات دراستك بأقصى سرية ممكنة. إذا تم نشر أو عرض نتائج هذه الدراسة، فلن يتم استخدام أسماء الأشخاص وغيرها من معلومات التعريف الشخصية. سيتم تخزين البيانات بشكل آمن وسيتم حمايتها بكلمة مرور. سيتم أيضاً تخزين المحتوى محمياً بكلمة مرور بشكل منفصل عن التفاصيل التي تكشف عن الهوية.

9. هل سيتم تسجيل مقابلي؟ وكيف سيتم استخدام الوسائط المسجلة؟

سيتم تسجيل مقابلتك، حيث سيتم تسجيلها لاستخدامها في أطروحة الطالب النهائية في الماجستير.

10. ماذا سيحدث لنتائج المشروع البحثي؟

سيتم تجميع نتائج البحث في الأطروحة النهائية. لن يتم تحديد هويتك في أي تقرير أو منشور.

11. من الذي يقوم بتنظيم وتمويل البحث؟

هذا المشروع جزء من رسالة ماجستير في الأمن الدولي في معهد برشلونة للدراسات الدولية (IBEI). يتم تمويل المشروع بالكامل من قبل أدريان ويليامز.

شكراً لك على المشاركة في هذا البحث.

## **Appendix 4 – Interview Guide**

How old are you?

What is your employment situation?

Did you go to school? When did you quit and why?

When did you fight exactly and how old were you when you fought?

Would you say that you are a religious person? Is religion very important to you?

What was going on in your life when you decided to take up arms?

Were you employed or unemployed?

Were you going to school?

Have you fought in other conflicts?

Are you the only person in your family who has been fighting? Were you looking to follow these other family members' footsteps?

Why did you decide to take up arms? To defend your neighborhood?

Did you get paid?

Is taking up arms valued or honorable in your community?

How did fighting make you feel?

Would you fight again? Why?

How do you think the conflict between Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh come to an end?

How do you feel about the conflict in Syria?