

The Right to Know

A case study of the truth-seeking process of missing and
forcibly disappeared persons' contribution to reconciliation in
Lebanon

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Abstract

When the Lebanese civil war ended in 1990, the government estimated 17,415 persons missing or forcibly disappeared, of which whereabouts remain unknown. This thesis examines the truth-seeking process of the missing and forcibly disappeared people and its contribution to the reconciliation process in the context of Lebanon. The foundation of analysis is the truth-reconciliation theory, in combination with the conceptualizations of unofficial truth-seeking process led by civil society and *thin* reconciliation viewed from a bottom-up perspective. The analysis is carried out as a qualitative case study of unofficial truth-seeking, a particularly under-researched field, based on 11 semi-structured interviews with civil society actors in Lebanon. The findings, derived by a thematical analysis, have shown that the truth-seeking process positively contributes to reconciliation among the families of the missing and forcibly disappeared persons in Lebanon. Consequently, the larger society does not take part in the processes. The result is based on the impact of forensic and narrative truth-seeking activities, including collective memory, on the ‘intergroup contact hypothesis’ and intergroup tolerance. The findings also indicated that the lack of retributive justice potentially hinders the truth-seeking and reconciliation process. Lastly, recent developments have shown a possible establishment of an official-led truth-seeking mechanism.

Key words: Transitional justice, unofficial truth-seeking, *thin* reconciliation, Lebanon, missing and forcibly disappeared persons.

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By giving this opportunity I have experienced that the truth-seeking process of missing and forcibly disappeared persons are not just a subject of academic inquiry, but a study of human beings who never returned to their families – people like you and me — people whose fate remain unknown until today. Thousands of families lost one or more loved members of their family. Some lost their parent, some their partner, some their son and many other relations were broken from one day to another.

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1 Introduction

“It is your – it is our job, it is everybody’s job in Lebanon to claim this right.

Because these families have the ‘right to know’, they are still suffering”

(interview, El Khatib, 17/05/19)

The ‘right to know’ is an inherent right recognized by both the international humanitarian law (IHL) and international customary law. The right is entitled to family members affirming they have the right to know the fate, whereabouts or location of remains, of their missing or forcibly disappeared relative. They have the right to be reunited with their family member either if they are alive or deceased to mourn them with dignity following their beliefs and traditions (Benard 2017: 48). One method to accommodate the families ‘right to know’ is through truth-seeking mechanisms drawing the line between past human rights abuses and the present. Based on the idea of transitional justice, which claims that addressing past human right abuses forward reconciliation by the restoration of a genuine peaceful relationship between groups, there have been involved in intractable conflicts (Bickford 2007: 996-997; Bar-Tal – Bennink 2004: 14).

In the aftermath of the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), the government estimated that 17,415 persons went either missing or forcibly disappeared during the war, most whereabouts remain unknown today. Meaning an even higher number of family members are left in limbo, not knowing the fate of their relatives. Many are presumed to be civilians kidnapped from their home, the streets or checkpoints controlled by armed groups involved in the civil war aiming for political revenge, money or spreading terror among communities. The disappearances were steady throughout the civil war and systematic used as a conventional instrument (ICTJ 2013; Jaquemet 2008: 71-73; Kovras 2017: 129-130, 134-135). Despite the fact that the 15-year-long civil war was characterized by mass violations of human rights, war crimes and crimes against humanity, the

Lebanese government favored amnesty over truth-seeking preventing accountability and truths from emerging. The families never managed to get through the first level of ‘institutional silence’ to fulfill their primary demand of the ‘right to know’. However, no successful attempts have been taken to accommodate this right (Jaquemet 2008: 69, 75; Kovras 2017: 129, 142; Human Rights Watch 2017). In the wake of transition in the post-war Lebanon, the government established three commissions of inquiry to investigate the issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared persons in order to uncover the truth. However, all attempts were unsuccessful, leaving the families marginalized (Kovras 2017: 129-130; Jaquemet 2008: 74). As a consequence of the failure and unwillingness of the Lebanese government to address the past regarding the missing and forcibly disappeared persons, the civil society has taken a leading position in seeking the truth of the unknown fates. The civil society works as a precursor and replacement serving to pave the way for an official governmental-led process (Kovras 2017: 149-150; Bickford 2007: 1004).

This thesis takes a narrow approach by only focusing on the issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared persons, which is one crime among many grave crimes committed during the civil war (ICTJ 2013). The Lebanese context is characterized by a long, complex history of state failure, in which it is impossible to determine whether a person is missing or forcibly disappeared. Therefore, this study includes both groups of victims, although they belong to two distinct legal categories (Kovras 2017: 14). The legal definitions are based on Lebanese law but are comparable to international standards such as the 2006 International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. A missing person is defined as:

“[a] person whose whereabouts are unknown to his/her family [...]”
(UMAM D&R 2019: 11)

Furthermore, a forcibly disappeared person is defined as:

“[a] person missing due to arrest, detention, kidnapping, or any other form of deprivation of liberty [...]” (UMAM D&R 2019: 11)

The terms are used interchangeably unless explicitly mentioned.

1.1 Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to investigate the possible correlation between truth-seeking and reconciliation in a post-war society contributing to the literature of transitional justice. More specifically, this thesis examines and deepens the understanding of the truth-seeking process of the missing and forcibly disappeared people and its contribution to the reconciliation process in the context of Lebanon. The study is carried out as a case study of the unofficial, civil society-led truth-seeking mechanism. In order to do so, this thesis explains civil society's role examined by the truth-reconciliation theory within the scope of the broader theoretical framework based on the truth mechanism and reconciliation from a bottom-up perspective. Hence, the thesis aims to answer the following:

- *If and how does the process of truth-seeking of missing and forcibly disappeared persons led by civil society contribute to reconciliation in post-war Lebanon?*

1.2 Scope and Limitations

The timeframe of the field study was limited to two months, including a significant number of public holidays such as Easter and Ramadan, in agreement with the provisions of the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). As a result, one requested interview was not possible within this timeframe, an interview with the Committee of the Families of the Kidnapped and Disappeared, the most prolonged movement of families in Lebanon. Furthermore, the scope of this thesis was naturally limited by the truth-seeking process in Lebanon is an ongoing process. Therefore, this study focuses on the results achieved by the time this study took place.

1.3 Previous Research

The research question is relevant to investigate in order to an identified research gap within the field of transitional justice, more specifically, in the field of truth-seeking. However, truth-seeking commissions authorized by the state is an established field of study with contested results (for example, Hayner 2011; Brahm 2007; Bakiner 2016; Borer 2006; Fletcher 2009; Wiebelhaus-Brahm 2010; Mendeloff 2004). However, studies conducted through the lens of civil society-led truth-seeking mechanisms within the framework of transitional justice are limited, because it is a newly developed pattern (Bickford 2007; Kovras 2017; Androff 2012; Jaquemet 2008). Furthermore, the relationship between missing persons and reconciliation are particularly understudied (Clark 2010). In the context of Lebanon, many studies have been conducted around the civil war (for example, Picard 2002; O'Ballance 1998; Imad 2009). However, little literature is available regarding the civil society-led truth-seeking process of the missing and forcibly disappeared persons and their families (ICTJ 2016; Kovras 2017). Nonetheless, this thesis contributes to addressing the gap in the existing literature of the civil society-led truth-seeking mechanism of missing and forcibly disappeared people and its possible correlation to reconciliation in case of Lebanon.

1.4 Disposition

Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical framework of the truth-reconciliation theory and complementary framework, as well as the theoretical point of departure. Chapter 3 on methodology discusses the case study, the material of semi-structured interviews, and the method of thematical analysis. In Chapter 4, the analysis is presented divided into four parts based on the operationalization and empirical findings. Lastly, in chapter 5, the results and conclusion will be discussed.

2 Theorizing Transitional Justice

To adequately analyze the empirical material, this thesis first utilizes the truth-reconciliation theory to examine the interplay found in the research question. Second, complementary aspects focusing on the contextual factors; the truth mechanism and reconciliation from below, which may influence how truth-seeking affects reconciliation. Lastly, the theoretical point of departure is presented.

2.1 The Truth-Reconciliation Theory

The theory is based on the idea of transitional justice that knowledge of the past leads to acceptance, tolerance, and reconciliation in the future tested by a causal assumption between truth and reconciliation (Gibson 2004a: 201). James L. Gibson bases the causal assumptions on an examination of the official Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, proven positive under some condition with some groups (Gibson 2004a; Gibson 2004b).

The theory deduces that truth, the independent variable, leads to reconciliation, the dependent variable (Gibson: 2004a: 201-202).

Truth → Reconciliation

The conceptualization of the variables is projected in agreement with Gibson. Truth evokes the socially constructed phenomenon of collective memory as a socially accepted understanding of the meaning of the past, aiming to prevent denial of events in the past (Gibson 2004a: 204). Furthermore, to reach the stage of reconciliation, at first, one must accept the truth as collective memory. Thus, the theory is based upon the willingness of individuals to accept the premise of a

shared history of human rights abuses (Gibson 2004a: 7-8). However, the broader society must be supportive of the process to attach a value of the truth (Gibson 2006: 260-261). The variable of reconciliation is conceptualized by the 'intergroup contact hypothesis', initially developed by Gordon Allport. The object of the hypothesis is to reduce intergroup conflicts and foster reconciliation between groups within a society. The object is that increased positive intergroup contact fuels acceptance of the other and enhances reconciliation. Furthermore, trust between ingroup and outgroups are essential in fragmented societies in overcoming powerful influences, which ignite and maintain conflict by reducing prejudice, which minimize the fragmentation within society. Generally, the theory determines that the truth of the past makes a reconciled future possible (Gibson 2004a: 201-203; Gibson 2004b: 18). Additionally, the theory can only be fulfilled at a national scale if the truth is publicly known and acknowledged. According to Gibson, the truth might not directly create reconciliation, but without the truth, reconciliation is almost unlikely (Gibson 2004b: 6-7, 15).

A critical examination of theory propounds the correlation of variables as contested. Some scholars have proved truth-seeking as unrealistic and hence, the relationship between truth and reconciliation as logically flawed. Moreover, there is disagreement among scholars regarding the importance of addressing the past in order to obtain reconciliation (Fisher 2011: 409-410; Mendeloff 2004: 361-362). However, this thesis emphasize that knowledge of the past might lead to reconciliation between former groupings by a shared understanding of the collective memory creating new relationships. Furthermore, on an individual level addressing the past might lead to healing of the victims (Mannergren Selimovic 2010: 51-53).

2.2 The Truth Mechanism

Broadly, a truth mechanism aims to uncover past serious human rights violations in the wake of transition by formally acknowledging periods of ignorance. Within the framework of transitional justice, this is a necessary component to ensure a peaceful future (Borer 2006: 17-18; Sriram 2017: 2; Mihr 2017: 4-7).

Furthermore, a truth mechanism is classified as a reparation instrument of restorative justice by promoting community building and new political, legal, and social norms to perceive the injustice of the past. The objective of the mechanism is to recognize and empower victims of past abuses in order to fuel trust between former conflicting parts (Herman et al. 2013: 53-54; Aggestam 2013: 38-39; Borer 2006: 18; Aggestam – Björkdahl 2013: 4). In some cases, scholars argue that restorative justice is superior to retributive justice, prosecuting of perpetrators, in deeply divided societies with the aim of minimizing the risk of relapse of conflict (Wallensteen et al. 2013:134; Aggestam – Björkdahl 2013: 3-4).

Under international standards, it is a state obligation to address the past through a governmental driven process referred to as an official truth mechanism. However, a new pattern emerges where the efforts are carried out by the civil society – an unofficial truth-seeking process. Notwithstanding, both processes are characterized by (1) focusing on acknowledgment of abuses in the past within a specific timeframe; (2) investigating a pattern of events that took place over a period of time; (3) prioritizing the importance of knowing the truth; and (4) listening to the testimonies and stories from the victims. The primary difference between the official and unofficial mechanisms are the managing actors of the process (Bickford 2007: 994-995, 997-1002; Hayner 2011: 11-12; Dancy et al. 2010: 50, 58-59). However, the mechanisms refer to contractionary phenomena. An official truth mechanism is often carried out temporary comparable to a commission closing with a final report. They are often *outcome-oriented* and focus on the *macro* truth, the societal truth. In contrast, the unofficial mechanism is carried out as a *process* such as truth-seeking efforts focusing on the *micro* truth, the individual truth. However, in practice, the two mechanisms often resemble and overlap each other. Therefore, they can both be examined by the framework of transitional justice and the truth-reconciliation theory, originally deduced from an official mechanism (Bickford 2007: 1033). In general, it remains contested whether the mechanisms constitute *a means to a higher-end*, for example, reconciliation, or if it is *an end/value in itself* (Bickford 2007: 1001; Kovras 2017: 37-39; Kovras 2012: 733-734; Valiñas – Vanspauwen 2009: 277).

In the case of truth-seeking of missing and forcibly disappeared persons, the *micro* truth is operationalized into two concepts. First, *forensic truth* associated

with the process of exhumation, identification, and return of remains to the families of the missing. The forensic acknowledgment overlaps with the families 'right to know' the fate of their relative. *Forensic truth* is closely related to the psychological notion truth, *narrative truth*, the second operationalization. The *narrative truth* is associated with individuals telling their stories of the past, which is not necessary empirically verified but brings personal perceptions forward (Cohen 2001: 47; Perlevliet 1998: 148).

Thus, the starting point of the truth mechanism in Lebanon is the unofficial truth-seeking *process*, focusing on *micro* truth contributing to a *higher-end* consistent with the theory presented above and furthermore, ascribed the operational meanings of forensic and narrative truth-seeking.

2.3 Reconciliation from Below

The idea of reconciliation is to change beliefs, attitudes, and emotions in order to increase intergroup tolerance. Reconciliation does not always emerge naturally, therefore, requiring active efforts to fulfill the idea (Bar-Tal – Bennink 2004: 13). Moreover, the concept of reconciliation has been widely discussed in peace-building literature (for example, Leaderach 1997; Ackermann 1994; Kriesberg 1999). This thesis will take advantages of these debates to conceptualize the term of reconciliation. One of the debates divides reconciliation into a *thick* and *thin* concept, linked to another debate of whether reconciliation is an *outcome* or a *process*. The conception of *thick* reconciliation presents spiritual forgiveness between individuals and is often spilled over into national reconciliation. The *thick* concept is associated with reconciliation as an *outcome* viewing it as the closing phase of the chronological conflict circle. However, *thin* reconciliation is defined as peaceful coexistence understood as a personal issue, where the social contract between the citizens is central. This concept is viewed as a *process* and often occurs in non-chronological and fragmented settings driven by non-state actors (Mannergren Selimovic 2010: 42-44; Småberg 2012: 274-275). Following the perception of truth, this thesis has taken the approach of *thin* reconciliation as

a *process* closely linked to the micro truth emphasized by the bottom-up efforts of reconciliation, defined next.

A bottom-up perspective is characterized by targeting the broader population at grassroots level consisting of ordinary people (Lederach 1997: 55). Furthermore, the grassroots level entails the civil society representing the people defined as non-governmental organizations (NGO), international non-governmental organizations (INGO), universities, and individual activists according to Mary Kaldor's typology of 'transnational civic networks' (Kaldor 2003: 80-81, 95-97; Verkoren – Leeuwen 2016: 104). Regarding reconciliation, the bottom-up effect fosters an informal and in-depth process between former enemies on village-level. However, the reconciliation process is challenged by conflicting everyday interactions between individuals, which pose the greatest obstacle to a reconciliation process. A side effect of a reunion on the grassroots level is they can act as motivation for the remaining leadership (Lederach 1997: 55; Clark 2010: 434-435). Essential components for successful reconciliation efforts at the micro-level are mutual trust, recognition, and acknowledgment to inclusively deal with the past (Bar-Tal – Bennink 2004: 15, 18). First, trust is defined as an expectation to others, not exploiting one's vulnerability and as a willingness to cooperate (Tam et al. 2009:46). Second, recognition is understood as *thin* recognition as acceptance of other parts in the conflict. Excluding the *thick* concept as mutually understanding of other's fundamental culture, history and identity due to the focus on the micro aspects of reconciliation (Aggestam 2013: 41; Aggestam – Björkdahl 2013: 6-7; Strömbom 2014: 171). Lastly, acknowledgment is clarified as the realization of other's suffering (Ross 2004: 208-209).

Notwithstanding, the starting point of reconciliation is *thin* reconciliation, as a part of the bottom-up movement, achieved through mutual trust, recognition, and acknowledgment between different groups in society.

2.4 Theoretical Point of Departure

To summarize, the point of departure of this study is a combination of the truth-reconciliation theory, while claiming a correlation between truth-seeking efforts and a reconciliation process, and the complementary framework adjusting concepts of truth and reconciliation to the contextual setting. The two central, theoretical concepts: truth, the independent variable, and reconciliation, the depend variable, are assigned operational meanings to undertake a feasible analysis within the scope of this thesis. The entry point of the operationalization is prevailing theoretical. However to be able to uncover the contextual meanings of the theoretical framework due to various deployment of the truth mechanism and lack of research in the field, the empirical material is considered in the conceptualization to be able to answer the research question (Bickford 2007: 995-995).

2.4.1 Truth-seeking

Derived from the theoretical framework the definition of the truth mechanism applied in this study is; a *process* of unofficial truth-seeking led by the civil society focusing on micro truth operationalized by forensic and narrative truth including collective memory. Thus, the operationalization is the following:

- *Forensic truth-seeking activities* defined as collecting data relating to the missing and forcibly disappeared persons. E.g., biological samples, personal details of disappearance, and location of gravesites.
- *Narrative truth-seeking activities* which are associated with the family members of the missing and forcibly disappeared people telling their stories. E.g., psychological support and voluntary gatherings.

The role of *collective memory* is emphasized in both aspects of the analysis.

2.4.2 Reconciliation

The definition of reconciliation applied in the study is; the *process* of *thin* reconciliation operationalized by the ‘intergroup contact hypothesis’ and intergroup tolerance. As a result of the bottom-up approach, the process focuses on the micro aspects within reconciliation. The indicators of *thin* reconciliation are as follows:

- *Positive intergroup contact* based on the ‘intergroup contact hypothesis’ aiming to reduce prejudice. The indicator includes four conditions modified to the context of Lebanon (1) equal status among individuals in the contact situation; (2) commitment and cooperation between groups (ethnic, religious and political groups) in a divided society; (3) work towards common goals; and (4) contact legitimized by institutional support (Hewstone et al. 2014: 40; Gibson 2004b: 4; Gibson 2006: 264-265)
- *Intergroup tolerance* defined as the willingness of the people with different political, religious, and ethnic beliefs to *trust, recognize, and acknowledge* each other.

The findings are based on opinions and experiences from representatives of the civil society as well as procedures of the CSOs. In general, they have a victim-centered approach by working directly with the families of the missing.

Next chapter explores the methodological framework chosen to answer the research question and discover the operational meanings of the theoretical framework.

3 A Minor Field Study – Case, Material and Method

This chapter outlines the methodology used in this study with regards to the theoretical framework presented above. Below the case study design, semi-structured interviews, and thematical analysis will be explored.

3.1 Research Design

The design of this thesis is based on a case study design entailing a detailed and intensive analysis of the explanatory research question. The study has been conducted as a field study to improve the understanding of the complexities by gathering in-depth knowledge and material of the truth-seeking mechanism. The investigation of the possible interplay assumed in the research question is guided by the theoretical framework and aims to contribute to the theoretical development explored by the empirical material in the context of Lebanon (Bryman 2008: 52-53; Halperin – Heath 2017: 117, 156-158).

3.2 Case Study of Truth-Seeking

Based on the typology of Arend Lijphart, this thesis is a *hypothesis generating* case study of the unofficial truth-seeking mechanism concerning the issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared people during the Lebanese civil war. It strives for theoretical development by an intensive examination of the phenomenon to identify the scope conditions of the validity of the theoretical framework within the context of Lebanon (Levy 2009: 74-75). The study has dealt with practical and

contextual factors adjusting to natural changes that have affected the relationship between material and the theory, such as discoveries in the material (Halperin – Heath 2017: 154). Consequently, the interpretation of the theoretical framework is enhanced in close interaction with the empirical material to refine the truth-reconciliation theory (Levy 2009: 74-75). Furthermore, this case study aims to contribute to the wider debate on transitional justice and to be generalized beyond the data. Thus, challenging the general limitations associated with case studies by leaving the conventional wisdom such as neither being able to contribute to the broader academic debate nor generalizable (Flyvberg 2011: 222-223, 225; Halperin – Heath 2017: 154, 214; Levy 2008: 5). A possible limitation of the case study is thus far context-dependent knowledge can be generalized to other contexts (Halperin – Heath 2017: 217).

3.3 Case Selection

The rationale for the selection of this case study is based on that unofficial truth-seeking in Lebanon is a deviant case of the truth-seeking mechanism within the framework of transitional justice. Moreover, this selection serves the objective of hypothesis generation by refining an existing theory (Levy 2008: 3, 13). The selection is classified information-oriented by revealing information related to actors and the mechanism situated in the study, which increase the generalizability of the empirical evidence (Flyvberg 2011: 229-230). Also, the setting of Lebanon is instructive and interesting because it is a neglected story with limited transitional justice mechanisms, which can deepen the understanding of challenges in post-conflict societies pursuing truth and reconciliation (Kovras 2017: 130). Moreover, the choice of Lebanon is also related to security considerations of conducting fieldwork in a post-war country.

3.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

The primary material of this thesis is semi-structured interviews collected in Lebanon from April to July 2019. The purpose was to sharpen and deepen the factual understanding of the truth-seeking process led by the civil society and their challenges and perspectives of the reconciliation process from organizational and individual perspectives. The personal considerations often became a matter of narrative information (Brounéus 2011: 130-131; Brinkmann – Kvale 2015: 176-181). The mixture of the factual and narrative design is a consequence of focusing on the broader civil society, including researchers, activists, and organizations. The format of semi-structured interviews has been chosen due to that the field of unofficial truth-seeking is in its early exploratory phase, which gives occasion to greater insight into the mechanism, especially within the context in Lebanon (Halperin – Health 2017: 289). The guideline for all interviews was a theoretically driven (see appendix I) ensuring relevant empirical data in relation to the research question¹. Furthermore, the guideline had a thematical structure ensuring the interviews covered the essential theoretical aspects.

In total, 11 interviews were collected during the fieldwork consisting of seven different civil society organizations, three activists, and one researcher (for more details, see section 6.3. List of Interviews). Furthermore, the concept of saturation was applied, so at the point where no new information occurred the adequate size of the sample was justified considering the time and resources (Brinkmann – Kvale 2015: 140; Bailey 2018: 84). The duration of the interviews was between

¹ More in detail, the sequence of the interview has been as follows. First, an introduction where the information sheet and consent form (see appendix II) was handed out, read, and signed. All interview persons agreed to be recorded and quoted if they revised and approved before published. Moreover, the purpose of the study was presented, and the respondent was given a chance to ask questions. Second, the warm-up began with information about their ‘personal background’ and ‘the organization/movement’. These subjects aim to make the respondent comfortable and emphasize that there are no right and wrong answers due to their circumstances. Also, this should prevent them from the ‘interview effect’, a tendency where respondents give socially acceptable answers or answers they think the interviewer wants. Third, the main body of the interview consists of generally open-ended questions related to the subjects contained in the guide – truth-seeking, reconciliation, recognition, and bottom-up movement, mostly followed by probing questions. Forth, the cool-off segment took place by talking about the most recent development in the field, the newly passed law 105 concerning the missing and forcibly disappeared people, to move away from the dismal, sensitive questions towards a positive development due to ending the interview on a lighter note. Lastly, the closure of the interview takes place by concluding with asking if the respondents have any questions or comments s/he would like to add and thanking for taking their time.

00:36:00-01:51:00, and approximately one hour on average each. All interviews have been conducted in English, recorded, and transcribed verbatim and furthermore, held in Greater Beirut. The respondents decided the locations based on their convenience. The interviews were predominantly held in their offices, but a few interviews took place at cafés and private homes. The prioritization of fact-to-face interviews was in order to foster the circumstances for accurate data collection by also observing non-verbal events (Halperin – Health 2017: 286-287). Finally, all the interviews were held entirely voluntarily.

3.4.1 Sampling

The selection of the interviewees was based on a purposeful sampling strategy. Meaning systematic selection of information-rich cases relevant to the research problem guided by the principle credibility (Bailey 2018: 119; Brounéus 2011: 134). A theory-based sampling procedure was used to homogeneously select the respondents in relation to their engagement in the civil society and the issue of missing and forcibly disappeared people and their families. Moreover, I also took advantage of the *snowball-effect* by always ending my interviews with asking for recommendations to other relevant persons in the civil society, critically aware of not being enrolled in their professional network (Bailey 2018: 119-120; Halperin – Health 2017: 293-294; Emmel 2014: 38, 40; Jaquemet 2008). Regarding, representing the different ethnic, religious, and political groups in Lebanon was released through the non-discriminative work of the civil society (Höglund 2011: 120).

3.4.2 Ethical Considerations

The major ethical concern of this thesis has been the sensitivity of the subject. Therefore, the civil society is used as the primary subject to deepen the understanding of the victims, their families, and the process of truth-seeking. Instead of approaching the families directly knowing they are very vulnerable due to their loss and have been approached by many journalists and organizations, the last decade. However, civil society is having a well-established relationship with

the family members, whose knowledge the study will draw upon. Thus, ethical-grounded decisions took place at all stages in the process with the minimum ethical standard *do not harm* in mind (Brounéus 2011: 142; Halperin – Health 2017: 162). Moreover, the interviews showed that most people working in the field did not have any personal experiences of missing persons in their family, which encouraged more demanding and sensitive questions about the issue (Höglund 2011: 121). Regardless, written consent was collected through a prepared consent form (see appendix II) (Halperin – Health 2017: 162-163, 308-309; Höglund – Öberg 2011a: 11).

3.4.3 Additional Material

Besides the semi-structured interviews, additional material has been utilized to grasp the complexity of the unofficial truth mechanism and its relationship to the reconciliation process in the Lebanese context. First, six field observations have been conducted², consisting of four locations and two events, used to strengthen the information obtained during the interviews (Halperin – Health 2017: 329-331). The field observations encouraged investigations of micro-processes and images a unique moment in time. Second, academic articles and books, reports, written narratives, and news reports have been consulted theoretically and empirically in the contextual setting (Brounéus 2011: 130-132). Third, in order to the lack of official historical in Lebanon, the available, politicalized sources and statements have been critically revised. Lastly, the method of triangulation has been used among the sources in order to ensure quality (Höglund -Öberg 2011b: 191).

² Locations: (1) The tent set up by the families of the missing in the public garden of United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) in Downtown of Beirut; (2) Martyrs' cemetery in Horsh Beirut, Beirut; (3) Mar Mitr in Ashrafieh, Beirut; (4) English cemetery in Tahwita, Beirut. Events: (1) screening of *Erased, _ Ascent of the Invisible* at the human rights film festival 'Almost There' in Beirut; (2) screening of *Tadmor* at the human rights film festival 'Almost There' in Beirut.

3.5 Thematic Analysis

To answer the research question considering both the theoretical framework and empirical material the method of thematic analysis has been chosen, which is defined as:

“[...] a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun – Clarke 2006: 79)

Thematic analysis is similar to content analysis but pays more considerable attention to the qualitative aspects of the analyzed material (Joffe – Yardley 2011: 56). It aims to provide a rich thematic description across data particularly useful in under-researched areas (Braun – Clarke 2006: 83). The method serves multiple purposes, relevant for this thesis are generating and development of theories. Furthermore, it is ideal for answering explanatory research questions because it provides a contextual and holistic understanding of a sample of the study. Additionally, it systematically summarizes lots of data, an advantage for this study due to the length of the transcriptions (Bailey 2018: 187-188).

Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006) distinguish between inductive and deductive thematic analysis. The former indicates that the themes emerge from the data, and the latter indicates that themes are identified from a theoretical stance (Braun – Clarke 2006: 83-85; Gray 2014: 609). The term *theme* serves two functions, first, composing an overarching theme and second, composing subthemes justifying and underpinning the overarching theme (Braun – Clarke 2006: 82). However, the method chosen for this study is a hybrid approach of the thematic analysis allowing new patterns to emerge inductively and at the same time allowing the theoretical framework to be integral to the analysis by replicate, extend or refute theoretical discoveries (Joffe – Yardley 2011: 57-58; Fereday – Muir-Cochrane 2006: 82-83; Braun – Clarke 2006: 83-84; Gray 2014: 609). Moreover, this thesis focus on the one-dimensional *semantic approach* by identifying the themes based on repetition, indigenous typologies, metaphors, similarities, and differences within discussions of the same topics, missing data, and theory-related material. The identification is based on careful reading and re-reading of the transcriptions of the interviews, the primary material. Furthermore,

the *semantic approach* considers both factual and narrative aspects obtained in the interviews emphasizing what is being said rather than on how it is being said (Braun – Clarke 2006: 84-85; Bailey 2018: 188-189; Bryman 2008: 553-555; Gray 2014: 609).

Nonetheless, there is no explicit agreement about what thematic analysis is and how to conduct it (Braun – Clarke 2006: 79-80). Therefore, this study follows the methodology of Braun and Clarke (2006) based on six phases (see table 1 below).

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Table 1. From Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006: 87). *Using thematic analysis in psychology*. Phases of thematic analysis.

Moreover, the analysis was not a linear process, but rather a recursive process, involving constant moving back and forward between the entire data set (Braun – Clarke 2006: 86). Importantly, the process of thematic coding was assisted by the computer program NVivo 12 used for manual coding.

3.5.1 Thematic Findings

The result of the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews is presented below (see table 2).

Main themes	Sub-themes
Unofficial truth-seeking activities	<i>The right to know; victim-centered approach; collective memory; ante-disappearance data; biological reference samples; mapping gravesites; documentation; urgent matter; preparational work; denial; accompaniment project; tent in Downtown; raising awareness; artistic work.</i>
Retributive justice	<i>The right to justice; accountability; prosecution.</i>
<i>Thin</i> reconciliation	<i>Change of mentality; cross-group cooperation; in-group interactions; secular gatherings; increasing trust; acknowledgement; ignorance; acceptance of others'; narratives; shared history; tolerance; comprehensive entry point; recognition; legacy of the war;</i>
Recent developments	<i>Law no. 105; positive development; implementation; governmental responsibility.</i>

Table 2. Themes and sub-themes of the findings.

The themes were identified in agreement with hybrid thematic coding (as described above). However, the sub-themes mainly consist of concepts, either being a similar or different pattern across the interviews or continuously highlighted and repeated by the interviewees. The material has been treated as a unified entity representing the unofficial truth-seeking process in Lebanon. Therefore, direct comparison of individual statements will not be portrayed. However, similarities and differences within the work of the truth-seeking process are included. Furthermore, the main themes and sub-themes are deeply intertwined and interchangeable to each other, which become evident in the next chapter. Thus, the main themes are not seen as a static matter but somewhat affected by the existence of other themes.

The following chapter includes an in-depth analysis of the empirical material based on the thematic findings in correlation with the theoretical point of departure.

4 The Nexus between Unofficial Truth-Seeking and *Thin* Reconciliation

In this chapter, the analysis based on the empirical findings presented through the lens of the theoretical framework. The chapter is divided into four thematic-driven sections, the main themes (see section 3.5.1. Thematical Findings). Furthermore, the sections are divided into sub-sections defined by the operationalization of the theoretical variables (see section 2.4 Theoretical Point of Departure), including the sub-themes of the thematical analysis (see section 3.5.1. Thematical Findings). The first part of the analysis consists of unofficial truth-seeking activities conducted by the civil society. Second, the notice of retributive justice is analyzed due to its systematic emergence in the empirical material. Third, the process of *thin* reconciliation is analyzed. Lastly, recent developments are analyzed and assessed. In general, this chapter provides an overview of activities led by the civil society and their attitude toward the reconciliation process.

4.1 Unofficial Truth-Seeking

This theoretical-driven section includes the operational meanings as forensic and narrative truth-seeking activities reflecting the local activities defined by the thematical analysis

4.1.1 Forensic Truth-Seeking Activities

Forensic truth-seeking aims to clarify the whereabouts of missing persons in order to give the families answers about their fate. Thus, closely related to the ‘right to

know'. The organizations International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and ACT for the Disappeared (ACT) in Lebanon collect in coordinated effort ante-disappearance data, biological reference samples, and locate gravesites. However, other CSOs such as the Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH) and UMAM Research and Documentation (UMAM D&R) are also contributing to the process by supplying documentation of cases of enforced disappearance (interview, Al-Asmar, 05/05/19; interview, Slim – Borgmann, 26/05/19). Moreover, the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) provides more general expertise, knowledge, and solutions about the issue of enforced disappearance in Lebanon to ensure non-repetition of past human rights violations (interview, El Bejjani, 22/05/19). Thereby, the civil society has an explicit victim-centered approach toward forensic truth-seeking activities.

In 2012 ICRC started collecting ante-disappearance data encompassing accurate data about missing persons either personally or about the circumstances of disappearance. Today, ICRC has collected data of 3000 missing persons. Furthermore, in 2015 ICRC started gathering biological reference samples collected by buccal swabs from family members of the missing. These samples contain genetic information, which later can be extracted to DNA profiles helping to identify missing persons once they are found. Currently, ICRC does not conduct any genetic analysis for identification, but they collected 1700 samples corresponding to 800 missing persons. However, an obstacle to the collection of data is the resistance of some families because they are sick, old or the closest family members passed away, thus leaving the more distant family responsible for the process. The collection of data continues until a national mechanism is established and mandated to give answers to the families of the missing in Lebanon (interview, El Khatib, 17/05/19)

The mapping of gravesites is conducted by ACT. They aim to develop hypotheses about possible gravesites, where the missing persons are buried because many are presumed dead due to the time-gap from the beginning of the civil war until today. The project started in 2015 and is based on interviews with former combatants, witnesses, and families of the missing (interview, Di Mayo, 22/05/19). In Cyprus, a CSO effectively located 60% of the missing people through interviewing former police officers, priests, and shepherds in a highly restricted political context (Jaquemet 2008: 79-81). However, the first step is to

protect gravesites from the destruction of increasing construction, followed by exhumation of the remains. However, these processes are complicated by a lack of political willingness and forensic capacity. It is proved by my field observations at three identified gravesites in Beirut³ no attempt has been taken to protect these identified gravesites. Nonetheless, the information about possible gravesites will also be handed over to an official mechanism once it is established. The idea of ante- and post-mortem data is to compare the data once the gravesites are exhumed to reduce the hypothetical size of people missing in each location (interview, Di Mayo, 22/05/19; interview, Abou Jaoudé, 20/05/19).

Stated across the interviews, the collection of ante- and post-mortem data is an urgent matter. For example, Carmen Hassoun Abou Jaoudé expressed in her interview (20/05/19):

“Time is key. It is an urgent matter. We cannot afford to wait. Besides the fact that the families are dying, witnesses are dying – for example, those who might have information about locations and potential gravesites”
(interview, Abou Jaoudé, 20/05/19)

Since the beginning of the collection of data, many family members, witnesses, former combatant, and politicians died or have forgotten information. Therefore, the preparational work of the civil society is needed to facilitate an official truth-seeking process in the future (interview, Di Mayo, 22/05/19; interview, Abdel Latif, 24/05/19; interview, El Bejjani, 22/05/19). In the cases of Argentina, Guatemala, El Salvador, and South Africa, the civil society has successfully handed over their collected information once an official truth commission was established (Hayner 2011: 208, 225).

At a larger scale, the CSOs contribute to the collective memory by addressing the issue of the missing based on forensic evidence. Gibson (2004a; 2004b; 2006) argues that targeting specific memories of the past can create a shared understanding of the collective memory among individuals. Thus, the forensic

³ Identified by the first commission of inquiry established by the government in 2000. The outcome was a 2-page summary where the authorities acknowledge the existence of mass grave on Lebanese territory. They explicitly named three locations without further information of the inquiry: Martyrs’ cemetery in Horsh Beirut, Mar Mitr in Ashrafieh and English cemetery in Tahwita all in Beirut. The outcome of the commission is generally seen as unsuccessful (Kovras 2017: 139; Jaquemet 2008: 73-74; ICTJ 2014: 16-17).

truth might lead to an acceptance of the crime of enforced disappearance in the collective memory, which challenges the state-sponsored amnesia characterized by a denial of the events of the civil war (Jaquemet 2008: 69, 75; Kovras 2017: 129, 142). The crucial point is whether the larger society, not necessarily aware of the issue of the missing, accepts the truth as a part of collective memory due to the general denial of the past (Gibson 2004b: 6; Gibson 2007: 259). However, according to Gibson, the broader society must be supportive of the truth to attach value to it (2006: 260-261).

To summarize, the efforts of forensic truth-seeking in Lebanon consist of ante-disappearance data, biological reference samples, mapping of gravesites, and documentation at large all favoring the ‘right to know’ of the families. The activities are conducted in a preparational manner to an official truth-seeking process needed to fulfill the forensic truth-seeking process in Lebanon. Therefore, only a few missing persons have been identified through forensic investigations. However, the forensic truth-seeking process contributes to the construction of collective memory in Lebanon among individuals. Thus, legitimizing excluded voice and acknowledgement of their suffering (Kovras 2017: 38; Kovras 2012: 750).

4.1.2 Narrative Truth-Seeking Activities

Narrative truth-seeking focuses on the families of the missing by accommodating their psychological need. It encourages people to tell their stories for giving meaning to their reality. In contrast to forensic truth-seeking, narrative truth-seeking brings the personal experiences forward and may not be factually correct, but the validity is confirmed through the telling and the acknowledgment of individual stories (Parlevliet 1998: 148; Cohen 2001: 47). Generally, grassroots initiatives have successfully created spaces where narrative truths are exchanged within an inter-group setting in post-war societies. For example, in Bosnia the civil society successfully gathered relatives of the missing persons to share their suffering and loss, promoting a mutual understanding, despite the polarized social context (Valiñas – Vanspauwen 2009: 277-278). These activities have like forensic truth-seeking a victim-centered approach.

In the case of Lebanon, the ICRC in partnership with ACT have developed a holistic accompaniment project launched in 2015 aiming to undertake the socio-psychological challenges the relatives have faced in the process of waiting (interview, El Khatib, 17/05/19; interview, Di Mayo, 22/05/19).

“[...] they [the families of the missing] are living in a state of limbo for thirty years, and this is recognized as a form of torture” (interview, Di Mayo, 22/05/19)

The primary purpose of the project is to gather the families, actualize the issue, and raise awareness of the ‘right to know’. Furthermore, it aims to create a safe environment for the families to share their experience, distress, and memorialize their relative, knowing that they are not alone. The project includes information sessions, psycho-social sessions, and art therapy, among others. One challenge is to gather the families from different ethnic, religious, and political backgrounds because of the sensitivity of the issue. However, problems have barely been faced during the gatherings (interview, El Khatib, 17/05/19; interview, Di Mayo, 22/05/19). These inter-group gatherings might foster acceptance of the collective memory across the various groups, which in some circumstances can be followed by a large-scale attitude change the society (Gibson 2006: 260). However, this has not taken place in the context of Lebanon.

Moreover, in the aftermath of Pax Syriana (1990-2005) the families of the missing sat up a tent in in the public garden, Khalil Gebran, facing United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) in Downtown Beirut to accede the ignorance and denial in society by raising awareness of the issues (interview; Ghali; 18/06/19). The tent gathered families across ethnic, religious, and political groups who publicly told their collective history and advocated for their ‘right to know’ (interview, Khamissy, 15/05/19). Today, attendance is challenged by the aging of the family members. In general, the public activities are a statement against the political consensus of not dealing with the past (interview; Slim – Borgmann, 26/05/19). In Argentina, the mothers of the disappeared, who gathered in public demanded information about their relatives successfully (Hayner 2011: 208). Furthermore, artistic work, such as pictures and movies, have also been used to raise awareness about the issue (interview, Khamissy, 15/05/19).

In summary, the civil society argues, that the intergroup gatherings encourage the families to listen to the suffering and loss of the other, realizing it is equal to their own, because they suffered the same type of victimization. Furthermore, the result has been that the former conflicting parts contribute to the collective memory at the individual level among the families. However, the risk of narrative truth-seeking is re-traumatization of the families, or further inter-group division entails (Valiñas – Vanspauwen 2009: 177-178).

Both the forensic and narrative truth-seeking activities contribute to collective memory, respectively, scientifically and personally. The outcome of the activities is the starting point of the analysis of its contribution to the reconciliation process.

4.2 Retributive Justice

As emphasized in the introduction of this chapter, the importance of retributive justice emerged systematically and repeatedly during the hybrid thematical coding of the interviews. The theme of retributive justice favors punishment of perpetrators and accountability. However, retributive justice is only shortly mentioned in the theoretical framework as being inferior to restorative justice in divided societies according to some scholars, because truth-seeking is usually associated with restorative justice. Typically, retributive justice is seen as a part of the criminal justice mechanism of transitional justice, including domestic or international trials (Wallensteen et al. 2013:132-138; Aggestam – Björkdahl 2013: 3-4). In the case of Lebanon, retributive justice is possible of the crime of enforced disappearance, because it is considered as an ongoing crime if the remains or people's whereabouts are unknown. Thus, not covered by the amnesty law of 1991. Generally, the amnesty law prevents justice and accountability and is often seen as justice denied, favoring a culture of impunity and lack of accountability (Wallensteen et al. 2013:132-138; interview, Abou Jaoudé, 20/05/19).

The findings of the interviews have shown a various attitude toward retributive justice within the civil society. For example, CLDH highlights the

international recognition of enforced disappearance as a crime thereof, a need for criminalization within the Lebanese jurisdiction. Furthermore, Wadih Al-Asmar explains that truth-seeking without a justice mechanism does not prevent repetition. Moreover, it can avoid the truth from emerging in the first place because the perpetrators will not share their information without a trial (interview, 05/06/19).

“You will never have the truth, if you do not have justice” (interview, Al-Asmar, 05/06/19)

Furthermore, Lokman Slim argues that prosecution is needed to break the silence of hidden information held by former militias who are in power today (interview, Slim – Borgmann, 26/05/19). On the other hand, Assaad Chaftari from the CSO Fighters for Peace, who is a former combatant of a Christian militia holding a leading position during the civil war, explains the fear of a justice process, where he is forced to share information about the past (interview, 05/06/19). Chaftari clarify:

“I gave part of the information I have, the rest I do not own until there is a national, real, serious, campaign to come forward” (interview, Chaftari, 05/06/19)

Chaftari deepens the statement by saying that the information belongs to the militia, and most importantly, the information will only come forward in a parallel process, where all former militias participate (interview, 05/06/19). Moreover, other CSOs view accountability in the sense of knowing what happened in the past, regardless of its association with prosecution (interview, Di Mayo, 22/05/19). George Ghali provides an example of this understanding of accountability by referring to the discovery of a mass grave found on the territory of the Lebanese Ministry of Defense in Yarza ending with a handover of the remains to the families (Shaery 2012: 5; interview, Ghali, 18/06/19). A clarification of the whereabouts and fate is contributing to accountability and a higher form of justice (Benard 2017: 481; Wallensteen et al. 2013:132-138).

The division within the civil society in Lebanon correspond to a broader academic debate of transitional justice on whether retributive justice is a necessary component of truth-seeking. On the one hand, David Mendeloff (2009)

question the positive correlation between retributive justice and post-war peacebuilding based on retributive justice, because it is not necessarily beneficial for the victims. For instance, both in former Yugoslavia and Rwanda communal violence continued after the process of justice (Mendeloff 2009: 368; Aggestam – Björkdahl 2013: 3). On the other hand, Miriam J. Aukerman (2002) promotes retributive justice for normative reasons such as holding perpetrators accountable to justify that violations of the universal human rights are a crime (Aukerman 2002: 40-41; Herman et al. 2013: 49). Nevertheless, the thematical finding of retributive justice challenges both the view of restorative justice being superior to retributive justice in the case of truth-seeking and the truth-reconciliation theory by possibly missing a variable of justice or accountability to be successful.

4.3 *Thin* Reconciliation

This section is also theoretically driven and organized in accordance with the operational meanings of the variable as positive intergroup contact and intergroup tolerance, including the thematical findings. The starting point of the analysis is that no successful attempts have been made to reconcile individuals belonging to different religious, political, and ethnic groups in Lebanon (Ghosn – Khoury 2011: 386-387). Furthermore, the analysis is based on the results achieved until June 2019.

4.3.1 Positive Intergroup Contact

The indicator of positive intergroup contact is based on Allport's 'intergroup contact hypothesis' invented directly from the truth-reconciliation theory within the bottom-up framework.

First, considering (1) equal status among the individuals in the contact situation concerns mainly the narrative truth-seeking activities because direct contact occurs between the families. The forensic truth-seeking activities only encourage contact between the families and the CSOs. According to the interviewees, the families are likely to change their mentality of prejudices of the

other, when they start listening to each other's stories during the activities. They start to see each other as mutual victims of enforced disappearance instead of former enemies because they share the same stories and distress despite their background. Hence, the families consider each other as equal individuals, while avoiding political polarization and confessional division by rejecting the stereotypes, which is usually predominant in Lebanon (interview, El Khatib, 17/05/19; interview, Di Mayo, 22/05/19; interview, Abdel Latif, 24/05/19).

"[...] for me this is the first step for a reconciliation process, because people listen to each other, see each other suffering, the other is not the enemy anymore, the other is also a relative of a missing person, the other is also someone who suffers like me" (interview, Di Mayo, 22/05/19)

Moreover, the family-led tent in Downtown Beirut has also been able to mobilize the families heterogeneous across religious, political and ethnic divisions, while insisting on equal participation across different groups in society (interview, El Bejjani, 22/05/19; interview, Khamissy, 15/05/19). Regarding the in-group activities, equality among the families are exclusively developed. However, the rest of society are not included in these activities.

Second, regarding (2) the commitment and cooperation between different political, religious and ethnic groups the findings have shown this indicator is inseparable with (3) working toward a common goal in the context of unofficial truth-seeking in Lebanon. The commitment to the 'right to know' is evident across the groups through both forensic and narrative truth-seeking. Moreover, increasing numbers of families are taking part in the activities due to raised awareness, and the forensic preparations have offered some families hope to be reunited with their relative. However, a hindrance to the commitment is the sensitivity of the issue for the families and ignorance of the activities (interview, Abou Jaoudé, 20/05/19; interview, El Khatib, 17/05/19). In terms of cooperation, some families have overcome the legacy of the past by focusing on their common struggle. However, other families are mentally still stuck in the civil war, because for them, the war did not end due to their unsolved traumatic experience of loss, which potentially hinders cooperation among the families. Nevertheless, many families are aware that division is not giving them answers; they need to work together to be stronger (interview, Abou Jaoudé, 20/05/19; interview, Di Mayo,

22/05/19). Generally, the families participating in the truth-seeking activities are committed and cooperate indiscriminately with the other families regardless of their background towards the common goal: the ‘right to know’.

Lastly, considering (4) the contact between the families legitimized by the institutional support is in the case of unofficial truth-seeking institutionalized by the civil society. The advantage of an unofficial process is the proneness to the needs and interests of the families because the solution is derived and built from local resources (Ramsbotham et al. 2005: 222). However, according to John Paul Lederach (1997), the activities need to be legitimized at different levels of society to be successful (Lederach 1997: 60). In Lebanon the process suffers under lack of political willingness.

Summarizing the different indicators of the ‘intergroup contact hypothesis’ in correlation to the unofficial truth-seeking activities in Lebanon, the findings show that the intergroup contact has a positive effect on the in-group relations. Thus, reducing intergroup conflicts and enhancing *thin* reconciliation within the movement of the families. A limitation is that the indicators are based on face-to-face contact, which is a challenge in the movement of aging families (Hewstone et al. 2014: 43).

4.3.2 Intergroup Tolerance

The indicators of intergroup tolerance are derived from both the truth-reconciliation theory and the additional theoretical framework as mutual trust, recognition, and acknowledgment contributing to the fulfillment of *thin* reconciliation.

Gibson (2004a; 2004b) explicitly mention trust as an essential factor in fragmented societies to overcome igniting or maintaining a state of conflict. Moreover, it is conceptualized by the additional theoretical framework as an expectation to others that they will not exploit one’s vulnerability and the belief of willingness to cooperate (Tam et al. 2009: 46). The promotion of trust mainly takes place through the narrative truth-seeking activities, where the families expose their struggle and vulnerability, relying on the confidence of the other.

Rabab El Khatib explains the improvement of intergroup trust among the families as discovering the human element in the other (interview, 17/05/19).

“We are all human being. We are both victims of this war. It should not have happened, we have coexisted thousands of years in this area”
(interview, El Khatib, 17/05/19)

However, a challenge to the advancement of mutual trust is the tight relationship between individuals and their political or religious leaders. It upholds the division in society because many people depend on their leader for providing essential services, which potentially hampers some families in the intergroup relations because the leaders want the people to rely on them to keep power (interview, El Bejjani, 22/05/19). Nonetheless, according to the interviewees, the families have shown a significant improvement of intergroup trust by the willingness of sharing their stories and actively participating in the activities.

Recognition is another essential aspect for the intergroup tolerance based on the definition of *thin* recognition as acceptance of other parts in the conflict (Strömbom 2014: 171). The concept of *thin* recognition is closely related to the first indicator of the ‘intergroup contact hypothesis’, which had a positive outcome. Moreover, *thin* recognition is linked to acknowledgment theoretical defined as realizations of other’s suffering (Ross 2004: 208-209). According to the civil society, both recognition and acknowledgment have taken place between the families within the narrative truth-seeking activities. Primarily through the psycho-social sessions where the families listen and share experiences of distress. However, the families as a collective victim entity are neither recognized nor acknowledged by the larger society due to denial of the civil war. This is an obstacle for the healing process of the families and the reconciliation process (Goldstone et al. 2007: 3; Bickford 2002: 1029; interview, Abou Jaoudé, 20/05/19; interview, El Khatib, 17/05/19). Justine Di Mayo expresses the concern of the lack of recognition as the following.

“The reconciliation process cannot happen and will never happen [...] if we do not recognize what happened. There is no possible reconciliation if the victims are not recognized as victims – if we do not recognize what people did and what people suffered” (interview, Di Mayo, 22/05/19)

Moreover, recognition and acknowledgment are also crucial aspects of the collective memory by accepting the events and crimes that took place in the past as a truth affecting the families (Gibson 2004a: 204; Gibson 2007: 259). In Peru, the truth commission successfully acknowledged the stories and demands of the victims after years of marginalization, contributing to an official version of history (Laplante – Teidon 2007: 238). The long period of no recognition and acknowledgment from the society are an inherent disadvantage of the unofficial truth-seeking process struggling with gaining legitimacy from other levels in society (Bickford 2007: 1027). Again, there have been positive in-group developments, but the larger society is missing in the process.

Generally, the intergroup tolerance has shown positive results within the group of families participating in the narrative truth-seeking activities. Trust is fueled, and increasing recognition and acknowledgment are developing. However, they face difficulties obtaining recognition and acknowledgment from the rest of society, which is not included in the truth-seeking process. Even though this thesis has taken a bottom-up approach, it appears in the findings that the lack of recognition and acknowledgment from society harm the healing process of the families.

The *thin* reconciliation process as a result of forensic and narrative truth-seeking activities has had a positive outcome regarding intergroup contact and intergroup tolerance among the participating families. The results are mostly based on micro-processes within the narrative truth-seeking activities because the forensic truth-seeking activities have only given few answers about the missing persons due to the preparational structure of the work. However, an obstacle to the reconciliation process is that the larger society and especially other victim groups do not take part in the truth-seeking activities. Equally stated across all the interviews, a comprehensive approach of addressing the past, including civilian killing, displacement, and permanently disabled etcetera is needed to obtain *thin* reconciliation in Lebanon. The families of the missing have not exclusively been suffering in the post-war era. Nonetheless, a widespread attitude among the interviewees has been that the issue of the missing targeting narrowly within the population might be an entry point to address the larger legacy of the past. Furthermore, leading to a comprehensive mechanism addressing the gap between

the positive development of the families and the rest of the society thus, possibly leading to *thick* reconciliation.

4.4 Recent Developments – A Silver Lining?

The families of the missing have been fighting for their ‘right to know’ the last four decades. Hence, significant developments have taken place within the movement of the families – from fragmented to a unified, organized movement supported by the civil society (Kovras 2017: 129, 135-137, 149-150; Jaquemet 2008: 70, 74-75).

Recently, after years of disappointing governmental actions, the government adopted law no. 105 concerning the issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared persons on November 12, 2018. Twenty-seven years after the civil war officially ended (Kovras 2017: 135; UMAM D&R 2019: 7). The law symbolically recognizes the ‘right to know’ of the family members, and acknowledge their suffering through the establishment of an official, independent truth-seeking commission, which lead to recognition of the families as victims (UMAM D&R 2019; interview, El Bejjani, 22/05/19; interview, Ghali, 18/06/19). In accordance with the analysis of retributive justice (see section 4.2) a controversial section of punitive provisions is included in the law, which was not considered in the draft law submitted by the civil society to the parliament in 2014 (interview, Abou Jaoudé, 20/05/19; ICTJ 2012). However, the interviewees altogether perceive law no. 105 as a milestone of development of governmental responsibility, because it is the first law in the Lebanese history addressing a crime conducted during the civil war. Theoretically, the law can pave the way of tackling other issues of the past equally overlooked as enforced disappearance, causing a ripple effect of recognition and acknowledgment of the past (UMAM D&R 2019: 5). However, many respondents share their insecurity about the implementation process of the law, because the adoption itself is not enough to address the ‘right to know’, expand trust, recognition, and acknowledgment among the families and the society. An effective implementation is needed to fulfill the provisions of the law. At the time this field study took place, no implementation efforts were made, and

the timeframe of the process was unknown. Therefore, the work of the civil society is not accomplished, because there is no commission to hand their material over to for further investigation (interview, Di Mayo, 22/05/19).

“[...] the civil society will not step down until they start seeing results”
(interview, Abdel Latif, 24/05/19).

To sum up, the government has accepted the idea of transitional justice by the adoption of law no. 105, to create a more peaceful and stabilized future by addressing the past. However, some argue that dealing with the legacy of the past could undermine the fragile ‘civil peace’ created in the aftermath of the civil war (UMAM D&R 2019: 5). Nonetheless, only the future implementation will show the ability of the law to solve the issue of the missing and forcibly disappeared persons and the willingness of the political leadership to address the past.

5 Concluding Discussion

This thesis set out to analyze if or how the process of truth-seeking of missing and forcibly disappeared persons contribute to the reconciliation process in post-war Lebanon. With regards to the theoretical framework, this study aimed to explain whether there is a correlation between unofficial truth-seeking and *thin* reconciliation in the context of Lebanon.

The empirical material, analyzed thematically, has shown that the unofficial truth-seeking mechanism positively affects the reconciliation process in post-war Lebanon. Identified through forensic and narrative truth-seeking activities conducted by civil society. However, the process of truth-seeking does only affect the reconciliation process narrowly, because the activities only consist of the families of the missing contributing to the collective memory, which leads to the positive intergroup contact and intergroup tolerance. Consequently, the processes exclude the rest of society. Hence, the truth is not being publicly known, which hamper the reconciliation process at a larger scale in society. To include the broader society requires at first, a comprehensive entry point to the truth-seeking process challenged by the general denial and amnesia of the past in Lebanon. Moreover, the findings indicate that especially the forensic truth-seeking activities are carried out in a preparational manner aiming for an official mechanism to finalize the process of truth-seeking. As a result, the scientific contribution to the collective memory is limited. Therefore, the collective memory is mainly based on personal perceptions. However, the empirical material has shown that sharing and listening to others narrative has a particularly positive impact on the reconciliation process regarding equality, cooperation, trust, recognition, and acknowledgment between different ethnic, religious and political groups among the families. In relation to the governmental adoption of law no. 105, a silver lining has emerged as a potential realization of the families' 'right to know' by the establishment of an official truth-seeking process. However, the specific outcome of the law remains unknown.

With regards to the design of this thesis as a *hypothesis generating* case study of the truth-seeking mechanism theoretical developments and scope conditions of the truth-reconciliation theory have been identified. First, the theory was expanded by the complementary framework of unofficial truth-seeking and *thin* reconciliation from below both ascribed contextual, operational meanings. Second, the theory was applied to a deviant case of truth-seeking as unofficial truth-seeking of missing and forcibly disappeared people in the unexplored context of Lebanon. Lastly, the theoretical framework was challenged by the empirical finding of retributive justice within the thematical analysis as a variable to achieve truth-seeking. Some CSOs argued, that retributive justice occurs as a missing variable of the theory. However, the truth-reconciliation theory has been proved valid within the expanded and adjusted scope of this thesis, which strengthen the application of the theory. Furthermore, the theoretical framework has contributed to the under-research field of unofficial truth-seeking.

A contribution to the broader debate on transitional justice consists of the capability of an unofficial truth-seeking mechanism to fulfill the purpose of transitional justice, within a narrow part of society. A course typically assigned governmental-led mechanisms. One can argue that the ability of an unofficial mechanism challenges the official processes of transitional justice. Nonetheless, this study has also discovered thus far, an unofficial mechanism led by the civil society have gotten in the process truth-seeking in a post-war society, highlighting the current need for a governmental takeover to finalize the process. Concerning the urgency of the issue, without the preoperational work of civil society, a future official truth-seeking process might have been impossible. However, the notice of retributive justice corresponded into a more extensive debate of the relationship between restorative and retributive justice in the case of truth-seeking.

Lastly, within the context of Lebanon, the ‘right to know’ remains unaddressed for most of the family members of the missing and forcibly disappeared people.

5.1 Future Research

Concerning this thesis, additional subjects are interesting for further investigation. First, a top-down approach to the truth-seeking process in the case of Lebanon could be an interesting subject of investigation in light of the recent developments. Second, to explore the additional aspects affecting the unofficial truth-seeking process such as the culture of impunity and political leadership. Lastly, a comparative case study between Lebanon and Cyprus or Argentina could be interesting in order to expand the framework of unofficial truth-seeking.

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6.2 List of Interviews

Name (date of interview). Organization (if applicable): Position. Duration of interview. Place of interview.

Abdel Latif, Sara (24/05/19). *Researcher and volunteer for Act for the disappeared (ACT).* Duration: 00:36:00. Hamra, Beirut.

Abou Jaoudé, Carmen Hassoun (20/05/19). *Activist, former head of International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) in Lebanon and board member at ACT for the Disappeared.* Duration 01:51:00. Hamra, Beirut.

Al-Asmar, Wadih (05/06/19). *Lebanese Center for Human Rights (CLDH): President.* Duration: 01:02:00. Hamra, Beirut.

Chaftari, Assaad (05/06/19). *Fighters for Peace: Vice President.* Duration: 01:00:00. Downtown, Beirut.

'Di Mayo' Houry, Justine (22/05/19). *Act for the Disappeared (ACT): Director and Co-founder.* Duration: 01:00:00. Telephone interview.

El Bejjani, Nour (22/05/19). *International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ): Program Expert.* Duration: 00:01:10. Hadath, Beirut.

El Khatib, Rabab (17/05/19). *International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC): Senior Missing Program Officer, Protection Department.* Duration: 00:48:00. Hamra, Beirut.

Ghali, George (18/06/19). *ALEF – act for human rights: Executive Director.* Duration: 00:52:00. Mar Takla Hazmieh, Beirut.

Khamissy, Dalia (15/05/19). *Artist.* Duration: 00:50:00. Mar Mikhael, Beirut.

Maalouf, Lynn (31/05/19). *Activist, co-founder of Act for the Disappeared (ACT) and Head of research AMNESTY.* Duration: 00:39:00. Hamra, Beirut.

Slim, Lokman – Borgmann, Monika (26/05/19). *Founders of UMAM Documentation and Research.* Duration: 01:03:00. Dahieh, Beirut.

7 Appendix I: Interview Guide

Interview Guide (45– 60 minutes)

Introduction: Information sheet, consent form, tape recorder, purpose of the study

Overreaching Theme	Question	Possible Probes (Follow-up questions)
Personal Background	When and how did you start being interested in the issue of missing and forcibly disappeared in Lebanon?	<p>Because of a specific event?</p> <p>Personal reasons? Did you experience the issue yourself during the civil war?</p> <p>Professionally?</p> <p>Because of a higher purpose? (Reconciliation? Peace?)</p> <p>For how long have you been active in the organization/movement?</p>
The Organization /Movement	<p>Are you a part of any organization? If yes, which organization?</p> <p>What are your current or recent activities regarding the missing and forcibly disappeared persons?</p>	<p>How long have you been engaged in the organization?</p> <p>What is your position in the organization?</p> <p>What is the primary purpose(s) of the activities? (Promoting the right to know, obtain justice, clarify the truth, help the victims)</p> <p>Do the activities bring different religious/ ethnic /political groups together? If yes, are they willing to cooperate for the purpose of the organization/activity?</p>

	<p>How do you think the grassroots activities you are affecting the larger society?</p>	<p>In what way have your organization made a difference for the families and/or victims?</p> <p>Is it generating knowledge? Acceptance?</p>
<p>Truth-Seeking</p>	<p>Do the activities contribute to the truth-seeking process of the missing and forcibly disappeared?</p> <p>What is your experience of the truth-seeking process conducted mainly by civil society organization in Lebanon?</p>	<p>If yes, how? (Clarifying fate? Locating mass/individual graves? Reports?)</p> <p>If no, does your organization contribute to the truth-seeking process in other ways? (Lobbying in parliament?)</p> <p>Does it fulfil the purpose? (Clarifying the fate? Reconciliation? Address the legacy?)</p> <p>Does it contribute to a higher purpose (reconciliation?) or is it an end/value in itself?</p> <p>How does the organization deal with opposing narratives?</p> <p>Does it build trust between different ethnic/religious/political groups in society?</p> <p>Does the process construct positive intergroup relationships across the groups?</p> <p>Does the process lead to acknowledgment of the victims and the families?</p> <p>Does it heal the families?</p>

	<p>Who are the families generally seeking the truth about?</p> <p>What is most important for the families: Truth or justice?</p> <p>Do you think the truth-seeking process contribute to the collective memory of Lebanon?</p> <p>Do you think that the truth-seeking process is necessary for Lebanon to move on from the civil war?</p>	<p>Does it affect the families themselves positively?</p> <p>Parents, children, cousins?</p> <p>What is your experience usually happened to their family members? (Kidnapped? Detained? Death?)</p> <p>Do you think there is a chance that the missing/forcibly disappeared are coming back?</p> <p>Is it knowing the truth?</p> <p>Holding the perpetrators accountable?</p> <p>Was the amnesty law of 1991 justice denied for the victims and their families?</p> <p>Does it contribute to the history of the past? A shared history? If yes, does this contribute to the reconciliation process?</p> <p>Officially?</p> <p>Personally, for the families left behind?</p> <p>What impact does the truth have on the family?</p> <p>Do you think that knowledge of the past leads to acceptance and tolerance in the present and future between the different groups? (Willingness to accept other opinions about the history, polite towards other</p>
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		<p>confessions and socially interact with former enemies)</p> <p>Does the truth-seeking process contribute to a higher level of respect for societal and cultural diversity? (Does it change their view? Does they see former enemies as equal citizens?)</p> <p>Do you think that the truth can be the key to address the larger legacy of the war?</p> <p>Do you think the truth-seeking mechanism is the best mechanism to address the past in the case of Lebanon?</p>
Reconciliation	<p>In general, do you think that truth-seeking is a way to obtain reconciliation (peaceful coexistence between different ethnic/religious/political groups) in post-war Lebanon?</p> <p>Are the families able to forgive the ones who conducted the crime?</p>	<p>Is there a correlation between these two mechanisms?</p> <p>Is it the only way?</p> <p>And the state for not taking any serious attempts?</p>
Recognition	<p>Do you think that the society (both ordinary citizens and the elite) is recognizing the families because of the truth-seeking process?</p> <p>Throughout the truth-seeking process do you experience that the different families recognize the other families experiences?</p>	<p>Has there been a change in the attitude since the movement started?</p> <p>Due to all families experience a loss and suffer from the same crime?</p>
Bottom-up movement	<p>How do you experience the contribution of your organization to the reconciliation process?</p> <p>How do you experience the gap between the grassroots level and the political elite of society?</p>	<p>Is it fostering informal reconciliation? Between individuals? A society level?</p> <p>Do you cooperate? (Apart from the newly passed law)</p>

<p>The New Law of the Missing and Forcibly Disappeared</p>	<p>What expectation do you have to the newly passed law?</p> <p>In general, do you think a governmental led truth-seeking process can help the families of the missing/forcibly disappeared?</p> <p>Do you question anything in the law? Or do you have concerns about the law?</p>	<p>Is it an overall positive or negative step by the government?</p> <p>Is the law just for the show due to the families are getting old?</p> <p>What does this attempt mean according to previous efforts? - 1991 Amnesty Law? - 2000: Commission mandated – outcome two pages report and acknowledge the existence of mass graves across Lebanon, but no attempt to uncover/protect these sites.</p> <p>From a grassroots initiative to national action. What do you expect to change?</p> <p>Punitive provisions?</p>
<p>Ending</p>	<p>Do you have any questions or comments you would like to ask or add?</p> <p>Thank you for participating.</p> <p>Can you recommend anyone else I could talk with regarding the topic?</p>	<p>(Sending the transcriptions?)</p> <p>Others, working in a civil society organization within the field?</p>

8 Appendix II: Information Sheet & Consent Form

May 2019

Information Sheet

Participation in Research Interview (in Beirut)

Bachelor Thesis: Truth-Seeking of missing and forcibly disappeared in Lebanon

Department of Political Science, Lund University, Sweden.

B.A. Student (Supervisor: Professor Annika Björkdahl)

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The aim of the Study:

The objective of this study is to analyze the relationship between truth-seeking of missing and forcibly disappeared people during the civil war (1975-1990) and reconciliation between the different ethical/political/religious groups in Lebanon. The working hypothesis is that truth-seeking leads to reconciliation among individuals. Moreover, this study has taken a civil society approach by focusing on work of local and international non-governmental organizations and institutions and individuals, activists and academics independent of the government in the field to develop the hypothesis.

Participation:

Participating in this research project means providing data and in-depth information about the current situation and current activities based on the legacy of the past. For me, Ulrikke, it means fulfilling the project and thereby contributing both academically and practically to put light on the topic and the importance of truth-seeking in post-conflict societies. However, since a part of the study focus on the relatives of the missing or forcibly disappeared persons, the thesis will clarify the consequences and outcomes for the families left behind by not knowing or partly knowing the fate of their family members. Moreover, the study investigates the correlation between the work conducted by civil society organizations and the reconciliation process.

- **Participation is entirely voluntary.**
- If wished, the participation can furthermore be **anonymous**, only seen by myself and my supervisor.
- **The interview will be recorded, if agreed,** for practical reasons by being able to obtain all information.
- The interview is stored **confidentially**.
- As the participant, you can decide **not to answer** any questions, if you not prefer to.
- You can **withdraw at any time** without giving any reasons.
- Your signed **consent form will be stored separately** from the responses you provide.
- If wanted, you can keep the information sheet for reference and information, and **you can contact me, Ulrikke, at any time, if you have any questions about the research.**

May 2019

Consent for Participation in Research Interview

Bachelor Thesis: Truth-Seeking of missing and forcibly disappeared in Lebanon

I agree to participate in a research project conducted by B.A. student Ulrikke Dyrholm from Lund University (LU), Sweden.

Please indicate

1. I, the undersigned, have read and understood the Study Information Sheet provided before the interviewed started. (YES / NO)
2. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study. (YES / NO)
3. I have received satisfactory answers to any question. (YES / NO)
4. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without any reason. (YES / NO)
5. I agree with the interview being audio-recorded (stored confidentially). (YES / NO)
6. I agree to participate in the study. (YES / NO)

Quotation Agreement:

I also understand that my words may be quoted directly. With regards to being quoted, please initial next to the statements that you agree with:

<input type="checkbox"/>	I wish to review and approve the quotation before the thesis will be published. If agreed, add e-mail address:.....
<input type="checkbox"/>	I agree to be quoted directly.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I agree to be quoted directly if my name if not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
<input type="checkbox"/>	I agree that the researcher may publish documents (only academically) that contain quotations by me.

This consent form will be stored separately from the response you provide!

Thank you for your participation!

Name of Participant:

Name of Researcher:

Participant Signature:

Signature Researcher:

Date:

Date: