

# Working Against the Mainstream

A Minor Field Study on Cross-Sectarian Civil Society  
Peacebuilding in Lebanon

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# Abstract

When the civil war in Lebanon was ended by the signing of the Taif Agreement in 1989, the consociational democracy was reintroduced to mitigate inter-sectarian tension. Although there has been more than 30 years since the war ended, Lebanon is still a deeply divided society, and the current peace is characterized by reoccurring eruptions of violence and inter-sectarian tension. While the sectarian political elite ruling the country use and exacerbate this division to maintain their own power, a small segment of local civil society strives to create a better peace in Lebanon by trying to bridge sectarian divides among the youth, which goes directly against the sectarian mainstream. Through qualitative interviews with representatives of local cross-sectarian peacebuilding organizations and their youth participants, the aim of the thesis is to examine the challenges and opportunities of this work from a multilevel perspective. The theoretical framework draws upon a combination of perspectives including historical institutionalism, ontological security, feminist theory, and critical peacebuilding. Findings suggest that the challenges local peacebuilding organizations face, related to the institutional level stem from the relationship between the state and civil society, which severely restricts the agency of local peacebuilding organizations. The societal condition of inter-sectarian fear is found to be a further challenge, as well as the way in which the sectarian political elite exploits this condition for their own gain. The major opportunity of the work of local peacebuilding organizations is shown to be the transformed relationships between the youths, as these can help break barriers of fear, lower tension and initiate small-scale cross-sectarian cooperation.

*Key words:* peacebuilding, civil society, sectarianism, Lebanon, youth

Words: 19998

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# 1 Introduction

Since the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Arab uprisings in the early 2010s, the Middle East has experienced a rise in sectarian conflict (Hinnebusch, 2016, p. 123). This has brought on intense scholarly discussions about the nature of sectarianism and sectarian conflict (Hinnebusch, 2016, p. 121; Hasheemi and Postel, 2017b; Wehrey, 2018; Finnbogason, Larsson and Svensson, 2019; Valbjørn, 2019). What started as broad cross-sectarian uprisings against authoritarian regimes in both Syria and Yemen, sequentially morphed into extremely complex and highly deadly sectarian intra-state conflicts, creating deep divides in both countries (Hinnebusch, 2016, pp. 142–3).

In light of these developments there is a need to understand not only the onset and dynamics of these types of conflicts, but also the ways in which they can be mitigated. Consociational power-sharing, dividing power representatively between the religious groups in a country, has been argued as a way to govern and minimize conflict in deeply divided societies (Lijphart, 2004; McGarry and O’Leary, 2007). In this regard, Lebanon presents an especially interesting case to better understand peacebuilding in deeply divided sectarian societies. Lebanon is characterized by high levels of religious heterogeneity and comprise 18 recognized sects (Nationalencyklopedin, 2022). The country has since the time of the late Ottoman empire been governed through different sectarian power-sharing systems (Traboulsi, 2012, p. 41). This institutional setup did however not stop a devastating civil war from erupting in 1975. While the civil war did not start as a sectarian conflict, it ended as one and Lebanon emerged from the war as a society deeply divided along the lines of sect (Haugbolle, 2010, p. 69). There was no nationwide reconciliation process after the war and the post-war period has been characterized by reoccurring flareups of sectarian violence and conflict (Nagle, 2016, p. 34). Looking at Lebanon, the large-scale violence has ended, but peace has never taken root and the country is in a condition that is neither peace nor war.

The reinstitutionalization of the consociational democracy after the war and the absence of reconciliation between sectarian communities have contributed to the entrenchment of sectarian cleavages (Ghosn and Khoury, 2011, p. 389). Sectarian division is rarely addressed as a problem politically, as the sectarian parties making up the political sectarian elite spur division to prevent cross-sectarian mobilization to maintain their power (Salloukh *et al.*, 2015, p. 12). Attempts to strive for a better and more comprehensive peace, that could bridge divisions, has since the end of the war been almost exclusively led by a small segment of civil society. Their aim is to transform the conflictual dynamic between sects and create a society, not underpinned by fear for the sectarian other, but by empathy and cooperation. This thesis is about their tireless resistance towards the divisive sectarian politics of the political sectarian elite and their inexhaustible fight for a better Lebanon.

## 1.1 Aim and research question

The aim of this study is to explore how cross-sectarian civil society peacebuilding organizations (peacebuilding CSOs hereafter) who target youth, strive to create a more positive peace in Lebanon. The the challenges and opportunities of this work will more specifically be unpacked in relation to the institutional and societal level, answering following research question and sub-questions.

*How can we understand the challenges and opportunities of cross-sectarian peacebuilding CSOs, targeting youth, striving to create a positive peace?*

- *How can we understand the challenges and opportunities on an institutional level?*
- *How can we understand the challenges and opportunities on a societal level?*

## 1.2 Delimitation

I have chosen to focus on peacebuilding targeting youth, defined as individuals between 18-29, of two reasons. The Middle East is currently experiencing a “youth bulge”, young people make up 55% of the population in the MENA countries but they hold a dual position in relation to politics (OECD, 2022). While this group comprise a large part of the demography in the region, they are often excluded from formal politics and have thus found their own ways of expressing themselves politically. This was especially evident during the Arab uprisings where youth were a driving force (Murphy, 2012, p. 7). Although they might currently be excluded from formal politics, today’s youth will subsequently shape the political future of the Middle East. It is thus especially relevant to examine peacebuilding targeting this group.

## 1.3 A definition of peace

Peace is defined as a process and a spectrum. A process, in the sense that peace is practiced in society rather than a goalpost to reach (Mac Ginty, 2006, p. 18). Peace is viewed as a spectrum, ranging from negative peace defined as the absence of direct violence, to positive peace, defined as the absence of direct as well as structural violence, such as discrimination, harassment and fear (see Galtung, 1969, p. 170). When I refer to a positive peace I draw on MacGinty’s definition “the facilitation of non-exploitative, sustainable and inclusive social relationships free from direct or indirect violence and the threat of such violence” (Mac Ginty, 2006, p. 24).

## 2 A political history of Lebanon: the making of sectarian difference

This chapter aims to illustrate how the hegemony of sectarianism as a way to organize political and societal relations and form identity in Lebanon, has emerged in synergy between three main factors; the entrenched and institutionalized character of sectarian identity in Lebanon as a result of years of political sectarianism, the failing Lebanese state which has produced the current state of crisis, and foreign interference (see Mabon, 2019, p. 26; see Tınas and Tür, 2021, p. 322).

### 2.1 The Mutassarifiya, the French mandate and the National Pact

The emergence of sectarianism as a knowledge, practice and primary way to form identity in Lebanon, should be viewed as a product of the exchange between a colonial western *mission civilisatrice* and the logics of a declining Ottoman empire, trying to survive modernization (Makdisi, 2000, pp. 9-10). Although people of different religious denominations lived together in the area that is now Lebanon, the “tribes” of Mount Lebanon are products of a European imagination of tribalism and difference (Makdisi, 2000, pp. 23). Following pressure from the Europeans to protect the Christians in the Mount Lebanon-area, the agreement *Règlement Organique* established the *Mutassarifiya* system as a new political sectarian power-sharing order (Salibi, 1988, p. 16). This system became the institutional product of the colonial encounter between the Ottomans and the Europeans (ibid).

After the collapse of the Ottoman empire, the French created *Grand Liban* through the annexation of surrounding previously Syrian and predominately Muslim areas to Mount Lebanon. This territory roughly constitutes contemporary Lebanon (Salibi, 1988, p. 17). The French colonial mandate continued to govern using sectarian power-sharing, applying a consistent divide and rule strategy, favoring the Christian sects over the Muslim ones (Chamie, 1976, p. 176). The demographic engineering that the invention of Grand Liban entailed also implanted a national and cultural cleavage into the country. While the Muslim sects imagined a pan-Arabic Lebanon, the Christian sects predominately held a more Francophonic-leaning imagining of the nation, underscoring the country's Phoenician heritage (Salibi, 1988, pp. 173–74).

Lebanon became independent in 1943 and was founded upon the constitution and the unwritten agreement, the National Pact. The agreement was aimed at balancing the divisions over the content and identity of the Lebanese nation, by enshrining consociational power-sharing as the frame of Lebanese politics (Traboulsi, 2012, p. 111). The agreement set out a division of power between the three major sects in which the President would be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim and the Speaker of the House a Shia Muslim (Salloukh *et al.*, 2015, p. 15). Despite it having no judicial status, the agreement still functions as the frame for the current consociational democracy. The National Pact should be seen as a contributing factor for the further institutionalization of sectarian modes of subjectification and political organization (Salloukh *et al.*, 2015).

## 2.2 The Civil War 1975-1990

The civil war (1975-1990) resulted in approximately 144 000 deaths 1.3 million displaced people and morphed as a conflict several times in the 15 years it was ongoing (Nagle, 2017, p. 151). Several, both domestic and foreign parties, were involved in the conflict at different points, including domestic sectarian militias, Israel, PLO and Syria to name a few (see Ghosn

and Khoury, 2011, p. 383). I will not delve deep into the conflict as it is not the war itself, but rather certain processes during the war and the aftermath of it, that is of relevance here. The outbreak of the war can very simplified be seen as caused by a complex mixture of internal and external factors. Lebanon had a weak state and suffered from a socioeconomic crisis, in addition, there was a broad dissatisfaction with the dominance of Christians in government (Haugbolle, 2010, p. 16). Tensions also ran high between Muslim and Christian sects because of external factors such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the expelling of PLO from Jordan, which led to an increased PLO presence and activity in Lebanon (Haugbolle, 2010).

Sectarian militias engaged in cleansing of heterogenous areas, with the aim to establish sectarian homogenous territories, tax the population within their areas of control and engage in import and export to finance their operations (Rizkallah, 2017, p. 2065). The relationship between the militias and the sect they claimed to protect, was organized as patron client relationships, militias provided the population with some basic services to establish themselves as guardians of “their” sectarian community (Hamzeh, 2001, p. 174). These sectarian divided enclaves, controlled by militias, functioned as states within the state and made up a war economy that enriched the militia leaders (Zahar, 2000, p. 122).

During the war, state sponsored elites, proxy actors and sectarian militias carried out countless acts of violence (Rizkallah, 2017, p. 2065). Kidnappings, sexual violence, massacres, and assassinations were carried out along the lines of sect (ibid). These processes in which sectarian militias, among others, manipulated sectarian identity by exerting violence against the sectarian other, while “caring” for the “own” community, made sect as a feature of identity take on new, more radical emotional and physical dimensions. The violence established a fear of the sectarian other, which contributed to the construction of sectarian communities as coherent, and the sectarian other as a threat to the own community (Nagle and Clancy, 2019, p. 2). At times this fear resulted in communal level mobilization and violence (ibid). The cleansing of heterogenous areas carried out by sectarian militias and others, also led to a physical separation between sectarian communities. A condition that persist to a high degree today, which is illustrated in Figure 1 (see Ghosn and Khoury, 2011, p. 388).

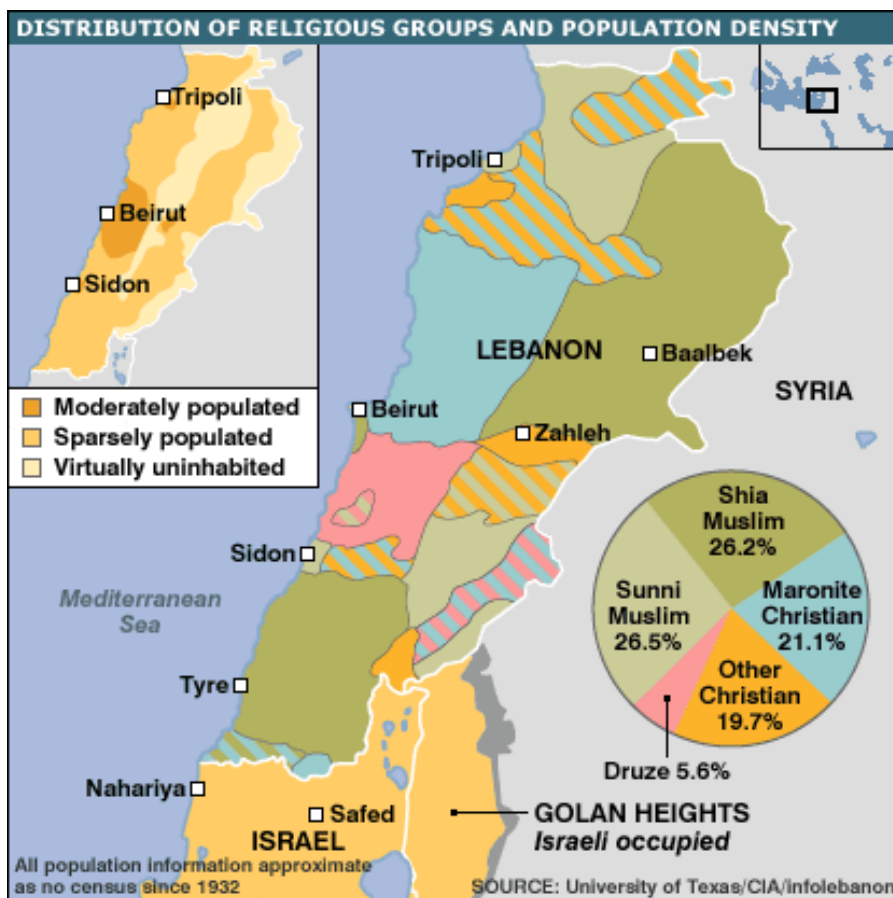


Figure 1: Map of post-war Lebanon illustrating distribution of religious groups (BBC News, 2006).

### 2.3 The Taif peace

The civil war ended with the signing of the Taif agreement in 1989, under the banner “no winner, no vanquished” (Makarem, 2012). The Taif set out to dismantle the sectarian power-sharing system because it was seen as one of the reasons for the state’s failure to deal with the tensions led to the war. The agreement did however not set a deadline for this and power-sharing was subsequently reestablishment to balance the power between sects (Blanford, 2009, p. 36). The division power between a Maronite President, a Sunni Prime Minister and a Shia Speaker of the House was reestablished, with a slight tweak for more accurate Muslim

representation (El-Husseini, 2012, p. 13). Power was to be further divided in relation to Lebanon's 16 other sects and replicated throughout the public sector (Blanford, 2009, p. 37).

In 1991 the parliament passed an amnesty law pardoning all crimes committed during the war and prohibiting all investigations into these crimes. The law was viewed as necessary to make parties lay down their weapons, but granted impunity for severe war crimes and removed a discussion of accountability and transitional justice (Knudsen, 2010, p. 11). This allowed militia leaders to access politics by transforming their organizations into political machines. They built on the sectarian communal legitimacy developed during the war, by continuing to provide services to their sectarian constituencies through clientelist networks, to mobilize them for demonstrations and elections (Cammett and Issar, 2010, p. 383; Rizkallah, 2017, pp. 2062–2063). The former militia leaders' rise to power as politicians and their current power is thus directly connected to the impunity after the war, why any attempts to deal with the atrocities of the war or change the consociational system, is viewed by the political sectarian elite as a direct threat to their power and the Taif peace (see Haugbolle, 2010, p. 70). The implementation of the Taif took place within the frame of Syrian hegemony in Lebanon between 1990-2005 (El-Husseini, 2012, p. 187). Syria's initial role was to maintain peace and stability in Lebanon, but because of the enormous political and economic gains this protectorate-role provided, they never encouraged any reconciliatory attempts (Ghosn and Khoury, 2011, p. 392).

The Taif also set out to create a common history curriculum, which was never developed and today most history-textbooks end at independence in 1943 (Hourani, 2017, p. 256). This aspect of the failed implementation shrouds the national trauma of the war in silence, and makes polarizing sectarian specific narratives the main source of information about the war for young people (van Ommering, 2015, pp. 202–3). Polarizing narratives about the war has worsened the prospects of creating a common memory about the war, and fostered the reproduction of division and inter-sectarian fear also in younger generations (see Ghosn and Khoury, 2011, p. 392).

The reestablishment of the consociational system and the amnesty law was supposed to lead to a more stable and peaceful Lebanon. Instead, it gave old militia leaders access to the state, leading to the continuation and strengthening of the sectarian, divisive and clientelist politics that the militias had practiced during the war, but now on a national scale. The Taif peace, which the political sectarian elite supported and still support, was ultimately an elite agreement, prioritizing stability over reconciliation, justice and reforms (Ghosn and Khoury, 2011, p. 389; El-Husseini, 2012, p. 29). Shortly, the agreement achieved a negative peace that ended large scale violence. However, it did not include any nationwide attempts to create a positive peace, entailing a reconciliation process between sectarian communities that could confront the root causes of the war and the atrocities committed during it (Ghosn and Khoury, 2011, p. 388).

## 2.4 Contemporary Lebanon

Lebanon is today considered a failing, or according to some, already failed state in a serious and deteriorating financial crisis, with a government in power vacuum and a state apparatus unable to provide citizens with basic goods like electricity (OCHR, 2022). The Lebanese lira has experienced extreme devaluation since the liquidity crisis initiated the wider crisis in 2019 (ibid). Lebanon is currently facing an acute socio economic crisis, in which around 80% of the population lives in poverty (World Bank, 2022a). This condition can partly be attributed to how the consociational power-sharing system and the weak state has bred the power of the political sectarian elite. The political sectarian elite actively sabotages attempts of cross-sectarian mobilization, foster anti-democratic practices like clientelism, engage in intense corruption and deliberately promote entrenchment of sectarian identity and state weakness to further their own particularistic sectarian interests. This at the expense of the welfare of the country and its citizens (Nagle and Clancy, 2019, p. 5; Khatib, 2022, p. 176).

The political sectarian elites' use of the state for their own purposes, is especially prevalent in relation to the sectarianized welfare regimes, as a way for sectarian forces to penetrate the

state and access its resources, while upholding sectarian divides. Most welfare in Lebanon is provided by sectarian civil society welfare organizations. These organizations are funded by members of the political sectarian elite, who divert state funds through patron client networks. Organizations then distribute services in their own communities primarily, making sectarian organizations and leaders rather than the state the “guardians of the community” (Salloukh *et al.*, 2015, p. 46; Khatib, 2022, p. 179). Sectarianism as formal and informal political practice is further strengthened by turnout-buying. Sectarian organizations provide members of their sect with smaller cash payments or food, if they vote for the political leader of the sect they are affiliated to (Cammett, 2015, p. 78). The sectarianization of welfare highlights how clientelist practices strengthens the hegemonic power of the political sectarian elite as a logic partly based on consent. As people are forced to privilege their sectarian affiliation to access to basic goods and welfare, sectarian divides are deepened and national unity is eroded (see Nagle, 2022, p. 1350).

When sectarian loyalty becomes crucial for survival, frustration with economic deprivation often express itself as conflict with a sectarian “other”. This increases sectarian tension and sabotages cross-sectarian mobilization (Salloukh *et al.*, 2015, p. 7). Sectarian politicians continuously blame the representatives of other sects for being responsible for crisis, which deflects their own responsibility and provides their sectarian constituency with a culprit of crisis in the sectarian other. In addition, media channels affiliated with the respective sectarian parties, support the divisive politics of the political sectarian elite by engaging in hate speech and fake news about the sectarian other and their political representatives (Cochrane, 2007). The political sectarian elite should be seen as highly responsible for maintaining divides between sectarian communities. The stimulate sectarian conflict by instrumentalizing sectarian identity, which prevents cross-sectarian mobilization and keeps the elite and their families in power. This active politics of sectarianization undermines positive peace, the creation of a national identity and effectively constructs sectarian identity as the primary feature of identity (see Salloukh *et al.*, 2015, p. 10).

## 3 Literature review

This review briefly highlights the contributions of critical perspectives to the wider field of peacebuilding, presents some strands of the work done on local cross-sectarian CSO peacebuilding in Lebanon and the contribution of this thesis to the subject. The research presented is the foundation for my understanding of peacebuilding as a practice and an object of study and has also guided my choice of theoretical perspectives.

### 3.1 The liberal peacebuilding paradigm and the emergence of critical peacebuilding

The field of critical peacebuilding emerged as a response to the liberal peacebuilding paradigm, that became the dominating way to approach post-conflict contexts after the Cold War (see Donais, 2009, pp. 5–6; Mac Ginty, 2012, p. 288).

The liberal peacebuilding paradigm departs from an understanding of peacebuilding as an ambitious and quite technical endeavor, with strong emphasis on interventionist top-down and state-centric processes, like the establishment of good governance, free markets, the rule of law and human rights to create peace (Newman, Richmond and Paris, 2009, p. 7). Critical scholars argue that the liberal peacebuilding discourse holds certain assumptions, norms and values equal, this allows it to claim that liberal peace can be built anywhere if actors with the right knowledge are present, which reduces peacebuilding to a task of problem solving (Paris, 2010, p. 339; Pugh, 2013, p. 14). The most fundamental assumption that the liberal peace formula depends on, is the idea of a straight line running between the establishment of western style democracy as a universally superior system of governance and peace, as well as

this formula's transferability into fragile post-conflict contexts (Little, 2014, p. 20). According to Paris, this view of the superiority of the liberal democracy, makes peacebuilding a project governed by actors and norms of the Global North. Whereas the Global South becomes the subject of an exercise of power, peacebuilding thus becomes a quieter *mission civilisatrice*, where the line between consent and force becomes ambiguous (Paris, 2002, p. 638).

Critics have further argued that the focus on conflict resolution within liberal peacebuilding is a simplification that constructs peace and conflict as dichotomous societal conditions, and understands peace as the absence of conflict (Peterson, 2013, p. 322; Duffield, 2014, p. 124). Critical peacebuilding views the relationship between peace and conflict as more of a spectrum with stronger relational aspects (Galtung, 1969; Kriesberg, 2007, p. 43; Oelsner, 2007, p. 263; see Diehl, 2016, p. 7). Conflict is viewed as an inherent trait in all societies and a potential source of societal change. Violent conflict is viewed as not only playing out as direct violence but also as structural violence, in the shape of harassment or discrimination between people and groups (see Galtung, 1969; Donais, 2009, p. 8; Ramsbotham, 2010, p. 53; Mac Ginty, 2012, p. 292). This means that the objective of peacebuilding is not to eliminate conflict, but to transform antagonistic relationships and violent modes of conflict into more cooperative relationships and non-violent forms of social struggle (Lederach, 1996, p. 17; Miall, 2004, p. 70). Peacebuilding is thus a process of trying to improve society, this emphasizes the political aspect of peace left out in problem-solving approaches of liberal peace building (Donais, 2009, p. 8; Ramsbotham, 2010, p. 53; Mac Ginty, 2012, p. 292).

### 3.1.1 The local turn and the role of civil society in peacebuilding

One of the most central strands of critical peacebuilding is the local turn. The local turn is a critique towards the kind of top-down, elite-led peace processes, promoted by liberal peacebuilding that push an Ikea-package peace-as-governance, which is insensitive to contextual conditions and specific local needs (Autesserre, 2014; Leonardsson and Rudd, 2015). Critics argue that for a sustainable, positive and emancipatory peace to prevail, the

peace process needs to be owned, produced, and continuously reproduced by the people living in the post-conflict context. This entails emphasizing the potential and importance of including local agency and bottom-up processes (Lederach, 1997; Pugh, 2011, p. 316; Hughes, 2013, pp. 152–3). Localization in peace processes is in short viewed as an opportunity for the local level to challenge universalist ideas about peace, conflict and progression defined by the Global North, and talk back to the international level, by putting particularism and local notions of peace at its core (see Pouligny, 2005, pp. 608–9; Björkdahl, 2012, p. 288; Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013, p. 772; MacGinty, 2015, p. 846)

The inclusion of local civil society in peace processes have been shown to contribute to higher levels of representation, a greater sense of ownership, lower risk of a resorting to violence, higher levels of accountability and inclusion of local knowledge, which can contribute to addressing the structural causes of conflict and create a more sustainable peace (see Wanis-St. John and Kew, 2008; Andrieu, 2010, p. 545; Nilsson, 2012; Paffenholz, 2014, p. 74; Alashqar, 2022, p. 134). However, others have cautioned against essentializing and romanticizing civil society as an automatically “good society” pushing “universal” values, such as democracy and human rights, as this de-politicizes the meaning and content of civil society (Paffenholz and Spurk, 2006, p. 2; Heathershaw, 2008, p. 609; Kappler and Richmond, 2011, p. 266). Some argue that the reason for this simplification and de-politicization of local civil society, is that the relationship between civil society and the state is frequently undertheorized and based on the clear separation between civil society and the state common in western democracies. A condition that is less of a rule in post-conflict contexts often framed by more porous state structures, where civil society often reflect the specificities of the state to a greater extent (see Kjellman and Berg Harpviken, 2010, p. 34; Spurk, 2010, pp. 7–8; Odendaal, 2021; Hellmüller, 2022, p. 148). This means that civil society actors are not always peace-promoting. They can also encompass “uncivil” aspects, resist peace and be spaces that are conflict-inducing and exclusionary, reproducing existing power-structures and encompassing patriarchal and discriminatory practices (Orjuela, 2003, p. 210; Marchetti and Tocci, 2009, p. 205; Brühl, 2010, p. 191; Zanker, 2017, p. 36; Wallis, 2019, p. 175)

## 3.2 Local civil society peacebuilding in the Lebanese context

The literature on cross-sectarian and civil society peacebuilding in Lebanon has three broad strands relevant to this study. The opportunities of social movements, interfaith dialogue and youth. Social movements like the women's movement, the HBTQ+ movement, the You Stink movement in 2015, and the Thawra-uprisings in 2019 have been viewed as possible openings to more cross-sectarian peacebuilding, and resistance against the sectarian regime, as they have the ability to establish cross-sectarian cooperation in a way that challenges the "logic of the existing political structures" (Nagle, 2018, 2022, p. 20; Leonardsson, 2020; Vértes, van der Borgh and Buyse, 2021; Nagle and Fākhūrī, 2022). The Thawra and the YouStink should be understood as spontaneous movements that started as protests against specific issues and then widened to systemic protests (Majed, 2020, p. 307). The women's movement and the HBTQ+ movement focus on specific policy issues but in a cross-sectarian way (see Chaderjian, 2015; Alameddine, 2021). The object of study for this thesis is three peacebuilding CSOs who view cross-sectarian peacebuilding as a core goal as well as a practice. They work in a systematic and coherent manner; this differs from above studies which focus on CSOs and social movements who work on specific policy issues in a cross-sectarian manner.

The body of research on interfaith dialogue in Lebanon focuses broadly on the possibilities of ecumenism for greater social cohesion and peace on the societal level. However, this strand of research does not connect the challenges within interfaith peacebuilding to political conditions or the consociational state in Lebanon, but accepts this as the frame of society (Khoury, 2005; Corstange, 2012; Haddad and Fischbach, 2015; Gutkowski and Larkin, 2021). I view sectarian identity formation in a constructivist way which sharply differs from the accounts of several examinations of inter-faith dialogue where sectarian identity is de-politicized, and thereby essentialized in a similar way as in sectarian discourse (see Fahed, 2020, p. 206; see Shaery-Yazdi, 2020, p. 335).

Research on local civil society peacebuilding with the target group youth, has mainly been focused on efforts within schools and formal education. This strand of research examines CSOs work in schools around the production of collective memory, contested heritage and common history education (Barak, 2007, p. 53; see Badine, 2012, p. 159; van Ommering, 2015, p. 202). In relation to this strand my object of study is peacebuilding CSOs who primarily engage youth in voluntary civil society engagement.

### 3.3 Contribution of this study

This thesis aims to contribute to existing research on civil society peacebuilding in sectarian contexts specifically. Firstly, in relation to calls within previous research to more fully consider the environment within which civil society peacebuilding is conducted, this thesis contributes as a thick analysis of civil society peacebuilding, developed in close dialogue with the Lebanese context (see Kjellman and Berg Harpviken, 2010; see Paffenholz, 2015). Secondly, I argue that the rise in sectarian coded conflict and violence in Middle East in the last 20 years, has increased the need to examine the ways in which sectarian conflict can be mitigated. By focusing on the challenges and opportunities that peacebuilding CSOs face on different levels, this thesis contributes with contextual knowledge to the study of civil society peacebuilding in Lebanon as a sectarian context.

## 4 Theory

The theoretical framework consists of four perspectives including peace gaps, restricted agency, securitization of subjectivity and transversal politics, and begins with a conceptualization surrounding sectarianism. The framework is used to theorize and unpack the participants views of the challenges and opportunities of cross-sectarian peacebuilding in Lebanon, in relation to the institutional as well as societal level.

### 4.1 Conceptualizing sectarianism

Sectarianism is defined as the politicization of religious differences, underscoring the difference between religious identity as a social category and politically mobilized religious groups (Cammett, 2019, p. 2). I further build on Valbjørn who argues that a conceptualization of sectarianism should be built as LEGO in relation to its use (Valbjørn, 2020, p. 101).

When conceptualizing Lebanese sectarianism, I depart from an overarching constructivist perspective, highlighting that sectarianism becomes a political and social imaginary, a hegemonic way of organizing politics and defining identity, in certain contexts at certain points in time (Makdisi, 2000, p. 11). Lebanon can be seen as having been wrapped up in a “sectarian moment” since the time of the late Ottoman empire (ibid). These “sectarian moments” should be understood as the outcome of processes of sectarianization (Mabon, 2019, p. 25). Sectarianization is the way in which sectarian identities become loaded with political meaning through the construction, instrumentalization and institutionalization of these identities (see Haddad *et al.*, 2022, p. 185). In a constructivist sense, the boundaries,

valuation, and salience of sect as a feature of identity, are fluid and changes over time (see Fearon and Laitin, 2000, p. 848). Sect as a collective identity is aggregated from the individual to the collective level through the experience of shared points of reference. However, collective identities are not coherent communities consisting of “people of the same kind”, but heterogenous ones which appear distinct in relation to an out-group, or a constitutive outside, in this case in relation to the sectarian other (see Neumann, 1999, p. 4; see Hall, 2011, p. 5). Sectarianization is also stimulated through instrumentalist politics. The Lebanese political sectarian elite instrumentalizes sectarian difference to mobilize people politically, which sectarianizes society and deflects from larger cross-sectarian issues (see Hasheemi and Postel, 2017a, pp. 4–5). Institutions like the consociational regime, which divides power along the lines of sect, should also be understood as having sectarianizing effects, increasing salience of sectarian identity and making it appear “real” (Deeb, Nalbantian and Sbaiti, 2022, p. 5).

De-sectarianization is the opposite process of sectarianization, referring to the detangling of religious identity and politics to “move beyond identity politics, towards more issue based forms of political organization, through the re-imagining of the role and place of identities in political life” (Mabon, 2019, p. 29). De-sectarianization brought down to the individual level, should be viewed as post-sectarian identity formation and in the Lebanese context as a counterhegemonic way of forming identity (Mabon, 2020, p. 3). Post-sectarian identity formation is characterized by forming political identity, not in relation to one’s religious identity primarily, but in relation to certain values or issues (see Murphy, 2012, p. 6; Mabon, 2019, p. 29)

## 4.2 Peace gaps

Peace gaps refers to the distance between different notions of peace in different places, levels or groups (Aggestam and Strömbom, 2013, p. 110). Peace gaps can be vertical in terms of distance between elite level and local level understandings of peace, which raises the

question, which peace? Peace gaps can also be horizontal in terms of processes of inclusion and exclusion of actors and groups that are heard in the peace process, which raises the question, whose peace? (Aggestam and Strömbom, 2013, p. 111). The concept of peace gaps is derived from work on deeply divided societies, where peace accords have been agreed upon but not been able to deliver a positive and stable peace. Instead, they have resulted in a condition that is neither peace nor war, where tension, occasional eruptions of violence and inter-group fear is prevalent (Mac Ginty, 2006, pp. 4, 82). What these conditions reflect, is a large gap between the brittle peace that exists, and a positive peace free from both direct and structural violence (Mac Ginty, 2006, p. 82).

The notion of peace gaps is a descriptive rather than normative concept. Although critical peacebuilding has frequently criticized the domination of elite-level approaches to peacebuilding and underscored the importance of the localization, it is important to not get wrapped up in static notions of the elite level as “bad” and the local level as inherently “good”, in a way that locks peace gaps in a normative frame about the content of different levels (Mac Ginty and Richmond, 2013, p. see; Leonardsson and Rudd, 2015; Randazzo, 2021). A different expression of a vertical peace gap could be an elite level peace agreement that is spoiled by actors at the local level (see Orjuela, 2003; Visoka, 2012, p. 35).

Taking cues from Aggestam and Strömbom who highlights the tendency to “overlook the relationship between local agencies and wider societal structures”, the notion of peace gaps is used to create a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities for civil society peacebuilders, striving for a positive peace (Aggestam and Strömbom, 2013, p. 111). Peace gaps are generally defined as the distance between the existing peace and a desired peace. Vertical peace gaps refer to the distance between the notion of peace promoted on elite level among the sectarian political sectarian elite, and the notion of peace expressed on the local level among the peacebuilding CSOs. Horizontal peace gaps are viewed as the distance between notions of peace between different groups placed horizontally on the societal level.

## 4.3 Restricted agency: theorizing the relationship between the state and civil society

Restricted agency is used to theorize the impact of the strong sectarian regime and the weak state structure on the workings of civil society, and builds upon Kingston's adaptation of the concept in the Lebanese context (Kingston, 2013)

### 4.3.1 Consociationalism as a resilient regime and a social and political imaginary

Consociationalism as an expression of political sectarianism has proved itself to be a highly resilient regime in Lebanon (Traboulsi, 2012, p. 250; Kingston, 2013, p. 10). The rationale for its existence and legitimacy, as a way of organizing politics, rests on the premise that people stick to their separate groups (Elazar, 1985, p. 28). If they do not, consociationalism as a system loses all meaning (*ibid.*).

From a historical institutionalist perspective, this resilience should be understood as a consequence of path-dependent dynamics, meaning that once sectarian power-sharing as an institutional trajectory was introduced during the Ottoman empire, it has been increasingly difficult to reverse (Kingston, 2013, p. 5). The current institutionalization of sectarianism should also be seen as sustained by processes of sectarianization, which makes religious difference the primary marker of political identity (Makdisi, 2000, p. 50). The political sectarian elite's power is based on the consociational regime, but as Elazar points out, consociationalism only makes sense as long as people are committed to their sects (Elazar, 1985, p. 28). This means that the sectarian leaders are served by engaging in an active politics of sectarianization, which keeps groups apart (see Mabon, 2019, p. 24). It is thus through the interplay between path-dependent dynamics, and an active politics of sectarianization, that

political sectarianism in the shape of consociationalism emerges as both a hegemonic political imaginary and a regime highly resilient to change.

#### 4.3.2 Weak states, strong regimes and the making of restricted agents

Migdal argues that civil society cannot be assumed to contain a set of normative goals or ideas in every social context, but should instead be considered a reflection of the state which can function to reinforce the state (Migdal, 1994, p. 28). An examination of the workings of civil society must thus involve a clear understanding of the state.

Regimes underpinned by strong states which are highly institutionalized, tend to structure the relationship between state and civil society in relation to formal political rules set out in the constitution. This makes it possible for civil society to profit from institutionalized and universal access to the state when furthering their issues (Kingston, 2013, p. 12). In weakly institutionalized states, the relationship between society and state tend to be characterized by a hybridity in which the formal and informal is intertwined (see Kingston, 2013, p. 13). In such contexts, the access of civil society to the state is not even or universalistic, but determined by the elite upholding the regime and their particularistic interests (ibid). Weak and often post-colonial states does not function as unitary rulers but are often penetrated by different social forces (Migdal, 2001, p. 59). This is evident in Lebanon, where the weak post-war state was penetrated by sectarian forces in the shape of the sectarian parties, who use their access to the state to serve themselves and their sectarian community, rather than the country by engaging in clientelist practices (Salloukh *et al.*, 2015, p. 2). This includes the diversion of state funds to civil society organizations who comply with, and support the sectarian regime and the power of the sectarian elite (see Cammett, 2015, p. 77).

The concrete effects of this on the workings of civil society, is asymmetric access to the state and its resources. Actors considered as the sectarian regime's allies within civil society, will be empowered, while leaving the segments of civil society which are non-sectarian, counterhegemonic and challenges the regime, marginalized with little to no access to

government funding and the political arena (Kingston, 2013, p. 9). Sectarian or sectarian affiliated organizations, enjoy access to state resources on the premise that they uphold rather than bridge sectarian difference in compliance with the sectarian regime. In this sense they function as feedback-mechanisms reproducing the hegemonic power of the political sectarian elite, in a way that strengthens the path dependent stickiness of political sectarianism (Kingston, 2013, p. 14).

The sectarian regime in Lebanon viewed as a path-dependent and bounded system create barriers for counterhegemonic CSOs. Katznelson and Pierson argue that path-dependent systems are durable but not immutable (Katznelson, 2003, p. 297; Pierson, 2004, p. 52). While institutions help agents organize and constitute their choices in a way that reproduce the same institutions, agents within highly bounded systems should not be viewed as powerless or unimportant, but instead as active but restricted agents (Katznelson, 2003, p. 293). There are thus spaces where structurally disadvantaged agents have the ability to transcend existing structures and power asymmetries (ibid). It is within these spaces that the possibilities for restricted agency emerge, and opens up for counterhegemonic agents to exert political influence within extremely bounded institutional environments (Kingston, 2013, p. 229).

The concept of restricted agency is operationalized in two ways. It is examined as an expression of the challenges that institutionalized sectarianism as a bounded system poses for counterhegemonic agents striving for a positive peace (see Kingston, 2013, p. 233). It is also used to describe the agency counterhegemonic agents do exert (Kingston, 2013, p. 229). I further specify Kingston's conceptualization of counterhegemonic agents by conceptualizing them as agents actively pursuing de-sectarianization when striving for a positive peace.

## 4.4 The affective pull of identity (politics) and the securitization of subjectivity

To understand the appeal of instrumentalist identity politics, the emotional appeal of sectarian identity for the individual in relation to security need to be unpacked. Identities are signifiers we ascribe to and/or are assigned, they are narratives telling us about who we are in relation to the other who defines us (Yuval-Davis, 2010, p. 266). From an psychoanalytical ontological security perspective, collective identity signifiers, like sect, are emotionally appealing because they tell us about our place in the world, making us feel a security of the self, or an ontological security, which allows us to take action in our lives (see Kinnvall, 2004, p. 746). The connection between identity and ontological security becomes especially evident in times of crisis, as crisis introduces a deep, abstract, anxiety-inducing and agency-crippling uncertainty into our lives (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 741). In response to these feelings, we try to regain a security of the self by intensifying the search for one stable identity we can hold on to by securitizing subjectivity. This makes collective identities emotionally appealing, as they provide coherent narratives about ourselves and the other (Kinnvall, 2006, p. 42). But drawing closer to collective identities in crisis, also entails drawing clearer boundaries between the self and the other (Chernobrov, 2016, p. 586). This is done by constructing the other not just as a stranger other who we become in relation to, but as a threatening other (Kinnvall, 2006, p. 54). When we affirm identity in this more radical way, we appear more distinct as a community, because it clearly demarcates the “us” from “them”, securitization of subjectivity is thus also a sectarianizing process. When a condition of crisis makes us experience an obscure anxiety about the external world that we cannot act upon, securitization of subjectivity provides us with a concrete object we can project our anxiety upon. In the other, we find someone we can fear, blame, and fight, someone we can act against, this concretization lowers feelings of anxiety (see Kinnvall, 2006, p. 53). It is by engaging in emotional governance, stimulating securitization of subjectivity that identity politics,

affirming the own group while portraying the other as a threat, becomes emotionally appealing to individuals in times of crisis (Kinnvall, 2004, p. 742).

Securitization of subjectivity, is used to unpack the emotional appeal of sectarian identities and instrumentalist politics and understood as a societal level challenge for peacebuilding CSOs. I specifically look at how the “sectarian community” functions as a safe space in response to crisis and entails constructing the sectarian other as a threat (see Kinnvall, 2004, p. 74). This lowers feelings of anxiety, as it gives people a culprit of crisis and allow them to step into a familiar pattern of conflict within which they know how to act. This briefly reintroduces a sense of security of the self (see Kinnvall, 2006, p. 53). Instrumentalizing politics is further understood as emotional governance, which stimulates securitization of subjectivity.

## 4.5 Transversal politics

Transversal politics is derived from feminist literature and used to theorize a politics of cooperation, that contradict the norm in contexts where certain features of identity have been mobilized for war (Cockburn, 1998, p. 211). The aim of transversal politics is to transform the mode of differentiation between the self and the other, by structuring a relational space between individuals of polarized collectivities that can alter the view of the other as a threat, and make political cooperation possible (Cockburn, 1998, p. 215). Transversal politics is used to theorize the opportunities of peacebuilding as a relational practice, in line with the view within the wider field of critical peacebuilding that transforming relationships should be a core feature of peacebuilding.

### 4.5.1 The three pillars of transversalism

Transversal politics build on three pillars: dialogical standpoint epistemology, encompassment of difference by equality and distinction between positioning, identity, and

values. Dialogical standpoint epistemology is the view that we construct meaning in relation to our situated imagination and knowledge. Situated imagination refers to the broader frame of what we imagine to be possible within existing society (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002, p. 326). The world is from each positioning seen a little differently, which is why knowledge based on only one positioning is unfinished. “Truth” is thus approached through dialogue between people of different positionings (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002, p. 315). Encompassment of difference by equality means that although equality should always be the basis of social relations and politics, it must be able to hold difference (Werbner and Yuval-Davis, 1999, p. 10). Differentiating between positioning, identity and values means that people identifying themselves as belonging to the same collective social category can still be positioned differently in relation to other social locations (gender, class, ability etc.) (Yuval-Davis, 1999b, p. 95). People with similar positionings and/or identities can also have different social and political values (ibid). This destabilizes the notion of coherent communities by shedding light on the absurd core of identity politics, entailing a reduction of identity formation resulting in the distorted view that just because a group of people shares one feature of identity, they can be represented politically as group (see Yuval-Davis, 1999b, p. 94).

#### 4.5.2 The practice of transversal dialogue: rooting and shifting

The practical core of transversalism is transversal dialogue and entails the practices of rooting and shifting to transform the relationship between identities.

Rooting means that participants of a dialogue should bring a reflexive knowledge of their own identity and positioning, a rootedness in their situated subjectivity (Yuval-Davis, 1999b, p. 96). Participants should then try to put themselves in the shoes of the person they are in dialogue with, from whom they are different, and stand on the other’s standpoint (ibid). The self-reflexivity that rooting entails is not just an act of describing our identity and positionings, it is a constructive process that we create, which alters our view of our own subjectivity (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 284). The further aim of transversal dialogue is for participants to reconstruct themselves as well as their relationship with the others engaged

with them in dialogue, which can lead to new ways of living together (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 286). For rooting and shifting to succeed, imagination is essential, because as Cockburn notes “the differences that transversal dialogue deals with are differences for which we kill, torture and die” (Cockburn, 2015, p. 5). The practice of transversal dialogue and the possibility of transcending situatedness is dependent on the mobility of imagination, making possible the belief that the relationship between the self and the other can be different (Cockburn, 2015, p. 6). Imagination should be viewed as a political practice crucial for the formulation of social goals, values and meanings in society (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002, p. 327). Our situated imagination shapes what we believe is possible, but the idea of our imagination as mobile allows us to travel between standpoints and imagine different futures beyond the realities of existing society (Cockburn, 2015, p. 5).

#### 4.5.3 The boundaries and promises of transversal dialogue

Both the promises and boundaries of transversal dialogue lies within the notion of epistemological communities. Epistemological communities are value systems functioning as common points of meaning from which we derive our sense of right and wrong, and our notion of reality (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 284). The notion of epistemological communities separates social positioning and identity from social values, and builds on the idea that common value systems can exist across different positionings and identities (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002, p. 320). This creates a possibility to transcend materially, socially, politically, and historically produced locations and identities (ibid). As the content of epistemological communities is not stable or clearly demarcated, but changes over time and differs between contexts, transversal dialogue, which entails the reconstruction of the self and the other, opens up for the possibility of creating new epistemological communities, as the creation of new truths, goals and knowledges on the basis of coalitions between participants of different identities (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 285). The boundaries of epistemological communities are also the boundaries of transversal dialogue, meaning that transversal dialogue do have boundaries and that not all conflict is reconcilable through this practice (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 132).

Transversal dialogue is in Cockburn's words "a creative structuring of a relational space between collectivities marked by problematic differences"(Cockburn, 1998, pp. 9, 211). To operationalize transversal dialogue, the practices of the CSOs are analyzed in relation to the operational concepts of rooting and shifting and viewed in relation to three core dimensions of transversal dialogue. Rooting refers to self-reflexivity in relation to the sectarian feature of identity, and shifting refers to the practice of seeing from the standpoint of the sectarian other (see Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 126). The first dimension is finding a way into dialogue by identifying points of commonality in the participants' identities or experiences (see Cockburn, 1998, pp. 53–57). To my knowledge transversal politics has only been applied in women separatist peace projects where the commonality is gender (see Byrne, 2014, pp. 113–14; Cárdenas, 2022, p. 7). My analysis will highlight other commonalities as the peacebuilding CSOs are open to people from different gender denominations. The second dimension concerns strategies to deal with differences between participants. Here the creation of a safe space where participants can "own" their fears is crucial in an environment where difference in identity is connected to fears which are sometimes projected onto the other (Cockburn, 1998, p. 215). The third dimension is the building of coalitions in relation to what participants want to strive for as a group, and includes identifying issues they are all interested in cooperating on (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 126). This ideally counteracts identity politics, as new epistemological communities based on common values and positions are created which transcend identity boundaries (see Yuval-Davis, 1999a, pp. 131–32).

## 4.6 The theoretical framework

The schematic below illustrates how the theoretical perspectives relate to each other and make up the theoretical framework to analyze the challenges and opportunities of cross-sectarian civil society peacebuilding in Lebanon. While restricted agency is used to theorize the institutional challenges, securitization of subjectivity is applied in relation to challenges on the societal level. Opportunities of cross-sectarian civil society peacebuilding are analyzed

using transversal dialogue. Peace gaps will be used to deepen the understanding of challenges and opportunities by putting them in a broader perspective.

Challenges	Restricted agency
	Securitization of subjectivity
Opportunities	Transversal dialogue

Table 1: A table illustrating the theoretical framework and how the theoretical perspectives will be applied. Source: Made by author.

# 5 Method

The aim of this chapter is to present my methodological points of departure. The chapter begins with a presentation of my ontological and epistemological stances and the design of the study. I further describe how the case and participants were sampled and how the interviews were conducted. The chapter concludes with a description of how the material was analyzed and a reflection of my positionality.

## 5.1 Seeing from somewhere

My ontological position is non-foundational, I view social reality as “done” rather than just “there” (see Bryman, 2016, p. 33). From this follows a subjectivist epistemological point of departure, meaning that I don’t view the production of knowledge as neutral (see Clark *et al.*, 2021, p. 34). As I view my gaze as inextricable from the knowledge I produce, intersubjectivity is attained by being reflexive about my positionality, making my transcripts available and thoroughly explaining all of my methodological and theoretical choices, as well as the grounds for them, in an as transparent manner as possible (see Boréus and Bergström, 2018, p. 42).

## 5.2 On qualitative case studies

This thesis has been designed as a qualitative case study on cross-sectarian civil society peacebuilding with Lebanon as a single case, as it allowed me to obtain a holistic and in-depth understanding (see Silverman, 2010, p. 139; see Denscombe, 2017, p. 58). The case study

design is further motivated by my view that the real-world context (Lebanon), within which the social phenomena (civil society peacebuilding) takes place, is especially important for the analysis (see Yin, 2018, p. 15). The higher goal of research is according to Flyvberg learning about the world, this thesis contributes to this goal as an analytical narrative or a “case story” about civil society peacebuilding in Lebanon (see Flyvbjerg, 2013, p. 238). The aim of the thesis is not to make generalizable claims. I view this as a partial perspective which in some ways has more descriptive aims, I argue that it still has the capacity to contribute to the overarching goal of science as the collective process of knowledge accumulation, by producing context specific and concrete knowledge within the field of civil society peacebuilding (see Flyvbjerg, 2013, p. 227; see Denscombe, 2017, p. 59).

### 5.3 Sampling of case and participants

The sampling of the case of Lebanon and the peacebuilding CSOs was overall based on purposive sampling (see Denscombe, 2017, pp. 43–4; Clark *et al.*, 2021, p. 379). I went into this project with a research interest in peacebuilding in divided and sectarian post-conflict contexts. Lebanon is characterized by deep inter-sectarian divisions and reoccurring inter-sectarian violence (Nationalencyklopedin, 2022; ICG, 2023). These are traits common to other deeply divided sectarian societies like Bosnia Herzegovina and Northern Ireland as well (see Nagle, 2016, p. 11). Lebanon was thus sampled as a single case to study cross-sectarian civil society peacebuilding in a sectarian divided post-conflict context based on its status as a typical case (see Clark *et al.*, 2021, p. 379).

During my fieldwork I was based in Beirut at the INGO Search for Common Ground (SFCG) who acted as my contact in Lebanon. SFCG is an American international peacebuilding organization who develop and fund peacebuilding projects in Lebanon (SFCG, no date). The organization and the staff functioned as key actors, providing me with contextual knowledge and tips about CSOs to contact (see Bailey, 2018, pp. 74, 80).

In relation to the overall topic of the thesis being cross-sectarian civil society peacebuilding among youth in Lebanon, six criteria for the sample of local CSOs was established: the CSO should be local, Lebanese founded (1); it should work on peacebuilding explicitly or implicitly (they should have peacebuilding as an aim but could conduct a wide range of activities) (2); be non-affiliated in sectarian terms (3) non-religious (not based on only one faith) (4); be explicitly cross-sectarian (5); and have youth as their target audience (6). Most of the sampling of CSOs was done through the website Daleel Madani which is a CSO network where most local CSOs in Lebanon are registered. This sampling strategy resulted in a particular focus on three peacebuilding CSOs: Fighters for Peace (FFP), Dawaer Foundation and Adyan Foundation. They all have different focuses in relation to peacebuilding which contributed to variety in the material (see Clark *et al.*, 2021, p. 387). After I came in contact with an organization, snowball sampling was used to get in touch with more representatives working at the CSO and their youth participants (see Clark *et al.*, 2021, p. 384). The choice to also include youths engaged in peacebuilding was initially a means to answer a research question that was later removed, but it became clear that the views of the youths that take part, who are both the objects and subjects of peacebuilding, were crucial to fully grasp the opportunities of CSO peacebuilding.

The level of gatekeeping varied between the organizations. Two of them invited me to events and let me contact any of the youths there. Another organization provided me with an already set contact list, which limited my influence over whom to talk to out of their participants. The group of youth was delimited to only include youths between 18-29, in contrast to the UN definition of youth that is 15-24, which was done for practical reasons to not have to obtain consent from their legal guardians (see Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 71; UN, 2022). Besides the age criteria when sampling the youths, all participants were sampled with the aim of including individuals of different genders and sectarian backgrounds to attain a variation in the sample (see Clark *et al.*, 2021, p. 389).

## 5.4 Semi-structured interviews

The material was collected through semi-structured interviews over the course of two months of fieldwork in Beirut, financed by an MFS-grant from SIDA. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method for material collection in relation to the aim of the study to attain in-depth understanding of cross-sectarian peacebuilding (see Denscombe, 2017, p. 204). The interviews were conducted in line with an interview guide that included open-ended questions connected to overarching themes related to the research question and previous literature on the topic (see appendix 1)(see Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, pp. 130–1, 134; Flick, 2023, p. 212). To remain open to additional themes or reflections that the interviewees had that could be relevant to the study, questions were sometimes skipped or posed in a different order than indicated in the guide (Patton, 2015, pp. 426, 473).

Interviews were made both in person and through video call, I let the participants choose to make them more comfortable and maximize the number of interviews (see Bailey, 2018, pp. 112–13; see Clark *et al.*, 2021, p. 440). To ensure consent, a written form was used stating the objective of the study, that participation was voluntary, my contact information and the possibility of retracting consent during or after participation (see appendix 3) (see Flick, 2023, pp. 123–24). The form was provided to participants before the interviews, it was also underscored verbally that participation was voluntary, and that consent could be retracted at any time. All interviews but one was conducted in English, one was translated from Arabic by another member of a CSO. In total, 33 interviews were conducted and transcribed, 23 of these were connected to the three CSOs in focus of this study. The other ten were informative interviews with representatives of the Lebanese civil society peacebuilding-community.

## 5.5 Thematic analysis

The material was analyzed using thematic analysis as a way to derive meaning and to structure the views expressed in the material (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 16). Thematic analysis is in this instance a way to provide an interpretive analytical account of cross-sectorian CSO peacebuilding in Lebanon and builds on Braun and Clark's six step model (see Silverman, 2015, p. 213; Braun and Clarke, 2022).

The first step is familiarization with the material and included the transcribing in itself as well as reading and rereading transcripts and fieldnotes (see Braun and Clarke, 2022, pp. 42, 46). During this step I made notes of possible themes and tensions in the material. In the second phase, the material was content coded with focus on what was explicitly said in relation to the research question and the theoretical perspectives (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 58). In the third phase, themes were developed by identifying common patterns and clusters including several codes which expressed the meaning of the material in a broader sense (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 80). The fourth phase included checking the themes against the material in its entirety to ensure that the themes were distinct and actually expressed a part of the material (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 98). The fifth phase entailed the naming and clear definition of themes (*ibid*). The last part was the write up of the analysis where the analytical themes were structured into a case story (see Flyvbjerg, 2013, p. 238; Braun and Clarke, 2022, p. 128). The process was abductive and consisted in making sense of the views of the participants in a social scientific sense, practically it was a process of going back and forth between the material and theory during the first two phases (Clark *et al.*, 2021, p. 355).

### 5.5.1 Themes

The table illustrates the themes developed in relation to both challenges and opportunities of cross-sectarian civil society peacebuilding, they also function as a structure for the analysis.

<b>Themes connected to challenges</b>	<b>Themes connected to opportunities</b>
Being counterhegemonic	Commonalities: Sharing age and crisis as common
Working under constraints	Dealing with difference: Disentangling identity and politics
Fearing the other and the appeal of sectarian instrumentalist politics in crisis	Creating coalitions: Exploring a new imaginary

Table 2. Themes related to challenges and opportunities.

## 5.6 Positionality

My positionality in relation to my fieldwork and the thesis at large has been characterized by my status as an outsider (see Scheyvens, 2014, p. 33). Although I do not want to push the dichotomy between insider/outsider too hard, I had never been to the Middle East and I had no practical knowledge of this context outside my reading and contact with the people who briefed me before I left. To try to counter this part of my positionality, coming from the Global North as a student within academia holding a certain power to say something about the work of peacebuilding activists in the Global South, with all the discrepancies in power that entails, while at the same time having quite limited practical knowledge about the context, I tried to shape my research process as an interaction between “knowing subjects” (see Gunzenhauser, 2013, p. 58). This means that I of course came into the field with preconceptions, due to where I come from and in relation to what I thought I “knew” about Lebanon and peacebuilding. However, in conversations and interviews, some of these

preconceptions were corrected by my participants and colleagues, they asserted themselves as knowing subjects by letting me know when I misinterpreted or got things wrong (see Gunzenhauser, 2013, p. 64). This made me shift the focus of the study early on into the fieldwork. The fieldwork in itself provided an invaluable possibility to create relationships with my participants, in which we together created an exchange, rather than me carrying out an interrogation (see Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p. 102). In this regard the knowledge of my colleagues at SFCG who I spoke to daily, as well as that of all my participants and the friends I made was essential. Without their listening and patient explanations to all my questions, this thesis would not have been possible.

## 6 Analysis

In the following chapter I present the analysis of the challenges and opportunities of peacebuilding CSOs in Lebanon. The analysis is structured in relation to the theoretical framework and the six themes presented in the methods chapter, beginning with themes connected to challenges and moving on to the themes connected to opportunities.

### 6.1 Being counterhegemonic

This part shows in what sense the Adyan, Dawaer and the FFP can be considered counterhegemonic, by highlighting the discrepancy between the existing peace in Lebanon built on the Taif order and the notion of peace the CSOs strive towards.

*[...] when we go to schools also ideally go in set of two people from different use to belong to different militias so that they can convey different perspectives and different experiences different messages they used to believe in so that students they have at least two views of the same period of time, so that they realize that there's is not only one story, one truth, there are many truths (Christina)*

As Christina describes above, the work of the FFP strives to create a better peace by spreading awareness of the civil war and educating youth on non-violence. The FFP recruits former militia fighters who go to schools and universities to give testimonies of their personal experiences of the war, why they participated and how their participation has impacted them (Interview Ziad). When testimonies come from two ex-fighters, formerly on different sides of the civil war, children and youth get a possibility to hear multiple perspectives about the war. This possibility is otherwise largely absent due to the lack of a common history curriculum (see van Ommering, 2015). The transparency and accountability the ex-fighters showcase in

relation to their participation in the war, defies the hegemonic Taif order built on a peace as stability, at the expense of accountability. Assad expresses the tension between the aims of the FFP and the environment within which they work in the following terms:

*Also, the feeling that we are swimming against the mainstream, [...] on the tv and the talk shows, there are never dialogues between our politicians, we're swimming against the mainstream, we're doing something totally opposite to what everybody else is doing. (Assaad)*

When asked about what she thinks peace should look like in Lebanon, Christina states:

*Unless we reach some kind of justice for all the crimes and conflicts that happened in the past, it will be hard or impossible to create peace. (Christina)*

This notion of peace is very tightly knit to the work of the organization, but also gives away that there in Christina's view, are big parts missing from the current peace. There is a huge gap between the peace that exists and the peace that the FFP strives to create, and it is on these missing parts the FFP focus their work.

Adyan is engaged in different forms of inter-faith activities and advocacy (Interview Ana). Their youth projects gather youth from different sects and aim at breaking stereotypes by letting the youths get to know the sectarian other (Interview Ana). Adyan's youth initiatives target the tension between religious and national identity, by aiming to cultivate a Lebanese national unity that can encompass the diversity in religion present in the country.

*Adyan is committed to foster diversity inclusive citizenship, and citizenship is not religious, it's the public space, it's how do we live together [...] we're not bringing the religious to the public we're building a bridge between how to live in public space together with our diversities while respecting and keeping our part of identity that has to do with our spirituality [...] (Tanya)*

One of the core-aims of Adyan is to detangle religion from politics, one aspect of this is to lobby for civil citizenship. In Lebanon, parts of the current personal status law regulating marriage, divorce and child custody is under the authority of the religious leaders of the respective communities. This entrenches sectarian difference by conditioning parts of the citizenship upon religious identity (Farha, 2015, p. 32). As Tanya describes, Adyan aims at acknowledging difference in religious identity as diversity instead of division. This understanding is based in the belief that difference in religion can coexist with unity and equality on other issues, such as citizenship for example. Re-dressing difference as diversity should be understood as a de-sectarianizing aim, attempting to reduce the importance of religious difference in relation to politics. Viewing unity in diversity as a possibility is highly deviant from the politics and practices of the political sectarian elite. Their existence and politics are built on a notion of religious difference as inherently conflictual and so far-reaching, that division is the only way to uphold stability and coexist together in society. This view effectively shuts the door on the possibility of cross-sectarian unity. Further, in relation to what kind of peace she would like to see in Lebanon Tanya states:

*The peace I imagine for Lebanon is civil personal laws, unified diverse history, free high quality secular education for all, high education for all, subsidized by the government, private sector enhanced but monitored, laws and regulations that answer the actual needs, representation of all sects in all high positions in cycles, and a real in-depth reconciliation. (Tanya)*

This conceptualization of peace echoes the aims of Adyan trying to find unity in diversity. It also highlights the need for in-depth reconciliation and a unified history, touching upon the statement made by Christina in relation to the lack of comprehensive and state-led reckoning with the crimes committed during the war.

Dawaer base their activities around media literacy for youth and conduct peacebuilding in communities, through creation of collaborative committees (Interview Lama). The media literacy programs are directed at encouraging critical thinking among youth by discussing

fake news and hate speech, which is widespread in Lebanese media as well as on social media (WHO, 2020; MDI, 2021). The community committees that Dawaer has initiated work on solving communal conflicts and finding solutions to common problems, by including all sectarian groups living in the community.

*[...] we formed committees that are composed of local stakeholders, municipalities, youth so really like people from the community, representatives who are capable of analyzing their local context, so what is really our tension, or conflict, what are the causes of the conflict and how can we realistically respond. (Lama)*

*[...] we train youth and children how to be critical when receiving any kind of media message so they can protect themselves, so they can know what to believe, what to not believe [...] also media information literacy consist of combatting hate speech. (Rouba)*

*[...] why you see Lebanon is collapsing but people are still hanging on, is because of the initiatives, maybe not only organizations, individual initiatives, initiatives from the diaspora, it's always like this, it's never the government, never, they are totally absent. (Lama)*

Dawaer aims to meet needs in an environment characterized by a polarized media landscape, a lacking educational system and lacking inter-communal cooperation and conflict resolution. We should understand the relationship between the needs identified by Dawaer and government led initiatives and policies as characterized by a lack, or an absence as Lama describes it. The civil society is filling in where the state should really be. The work of Dawaer highlight another aspect of what it means to be a counterhegemonic agent. Dawaer's activities are not primarily about resisting hegemonic practices and understandings of peace promoted upheld by the political sectarian elite. Instead, the core of Dawaer's work is about highlighting issues that are largely absent from the agenda, which are either not viewed as problems that need intervention, or just shrouded in complete silence from the side of the government. This is a way to try to compensate or fill in the gap between the current peace and the peace that Dawaer is striving towards.

*[...] luckily for us, there are non-governmental institutions doing the work that had to be done by a government, we're replacing it because we don't have an effective government for years now, and the work, the impact these institutions are doing is holding people together, fostering the culture of knowing the other (Tanya)*

The current peace in Lebanon is the outcome of the implementation of the Taif agreement. It builds on a notion of peace as stability and a relationship between sectarian communities based on separate coexistence rather than cooperation (see Ghosn and Khoury, 2011, p. 390). The Taif peace is upheld by the political sectarian elite because their continued power is partly dependent on the continued division between sectarian communities, the intertwinement of religion and politics and the impunity that the amnesty law institutionalized (see Elazar, 1985, p. 28; see Haugbolle, 2010, p. 70).

Although the CSOs work on peacebuilding in different ways, they share a view of the current peace as fundamentally lacking, and the government as absent in relation to peacebuilding. They also share an ambition to create a better peace by trying to fill in this lack by creating conditions, relationships, and spaces otherwise absent within the current peace. The work and aims of the CSOs take aim at some of the core-elements of the current peace, such as the amnesty law and stability through division (see Ghosn and Khoury, 2011, p. 390). The peace the CSOs strive to create should be understood as a positive notion of peace, entailing the absence of direct violence as well as structural violence such as discrimination, tension, hate speech and impunity (see Galtung, 1969). The aims of the CSOs to build a positive peace by bridging sectarian divides, should be seen as completely opposite to the interests of the political sectarian elite. It is this way of going against the “sectarian grain”, or as Assaad says, “doing something totally opposite of what everybody else is doing”, that constitute the CSOs as counterhegemonic agents. Further, as their vision of peace entails a re-negotiation of the role of religion in politics and society at large, their vision of peace should also be viewed as tightly knit to a process of de-sectarianization (see Mabon, 2020, p. 4).

The absence the CSOs have identified and try to fill in, should be understood as a vertical peace gap between elite level notions of peace and local notions of peace. In this instance it is however not just a gap, but a void. The CSOs work towards a counterpart that is near to completely absent in relation to peacebuilding. This deviance between the interests of the political sectarian elite, and the aims of local peacebuilding CSOs, shapes the possibilities for these CSOs to grow and exert agency in the Lebanese society. It is to the conditions under which these organizations work that we now turn.

## 6.2 Working under constraints

Representatives of civil society as well as youth participants express that there is a need for institutional change to reach a better peace. However, they also conclude that the possibility for the counterhegemonic segment of civil society to achieve the change they wish to see, is limited given the conditions they work under.

*There is basically no institutional funding anymore except for women NGOs. This is a real problem because we go from project to project, never have enough money to give proper pay for NGO staff, especially administrative, or for office rent. There is no stability and no continuity, even if you can prove that your projects are evaluated and have an impact and the financial part is also in a good cost-service relation. This is especially true for local NGOs. (Christina)*

The most evident challenge for CSOs to sustain their activities and create continuity in their operations relates to funding. The shortage of funds, is as Christina states, related to the fact that there is no financial support for civil society to be had from any governmental body just in capacity of being a CSO. This leaves two options to secure funding: foreign funding, or funding through political or religious affiliation. Most, if not all, of the funding that the three CSOs acquire, comes from foreign aid or larger international organizations (Interview Christina, Interview Lama). However, as Christina states, foreign funding is an unreliable source because it is always connected to specific projects. Several of the CSO representatives

describe how funding suddenly shift when donors decide they want to focus on different types of projects. The FFP, Adyan and Dawaer have identified needs in relation to peacebuilding in the Lebanese context. However, when these needs do not correspond with the needs that donors want to work on, locally identified needs are not met. It is often an external evaluation that determines which needs are in fact needs “worth” working on. While these organizations have contextual knowledge and insight into the workings of the Lebanese society and its conflict dynamics, they share an experience of being extremely vulnerable as organizations because of their dependency on foreign, project-based aid.

*[...] at the end of the day my organization is small why, because I don't follow any politician who will give me millions of dollars because I don't change my proposal for the donor, who suddenly wants to work on women empowerment and suddenly it is a women's empowerment expert [...]* (Tala)

Tala expresses a widely shared sentiment among the representatives that pertains to the second way of attaining funding, which is to get in support from a politician, religious leader, or representative of a government agency. As Tala describes, attaining funding from a politician or a governmental body, is connected to a certain conditionality in relation to the character of the projects and the CSO itself. This conditionality is a direct consequence of the condition Kingston describes. In weak states with strong regimes, access of civil society to the state is structured by hybridity, informal rules and clientelism, rather than formality and universalism (see Kingston, 2013, p. 9). This conditionality in relation to governmental funding for CSOs can be further clarified considering the composition of civil society in Lebanon.

The largest segment of civil society in Lebanon is comprised of religious CSOs who make up around 80% of all associations, of which some have budgets exceeding those of individual ministries (Haddad, 2020, p. 10). Religious CSOs can grow and advance because of their interdependent relationship to the state (Khatib, 2022, p. 180). Religious CSOs are primarily active within their own communities in a way that strengthens affiliation to specific sectarian communities and upholds division (see Haddad, 2020, p. 11). They enjoy access to state

resources because their work reproduces rather than challenges the power of the sectarian regime, they are empowered because they function as feedback mechanisms for the sectarian regime.

The conditionality connected to accessing state funds and the political system creates an extremely hostile environment for counterhegemonic agents, explicitly engaged in work aimed at changing the current order by bridging sectarian divides. While religious organizations can put on nationwide programs that reach large parts of the population, the agency and outreach of counterhegemonic CSOs, unwilling to compromise with their aims and methods, should be understood as severely restricted (see Haddad, 2020, p. 10).

*[...] you can have some change on some people and these will yeni, they will multiply, but the change needs really big time, and this is not because it's the fault of civil society organizations, all the situation is very hard and very critical and usually the donors, they fund a project and they don't build on this project, they disappear, or they launch a call for another or different project, so like as if you are giving money on this yeni, if you want to like plant a garden, so you give money for one year, and then after one year you have no money to continue, to continue it like to be able to water this garden, to bring like all what you need, so it will die, so this is what's happening I believe, this is my opinion, in Lebanon. (Rouba)*

The analogy that Rouba makes about the counterhegemonic segment of civil society, as a garden that must be continuously watered and cared for, points to the root of the problem for counterhegemonic agents. While Lebanon is said to have the “most diverse and active civil society in the region”, the agency of counterhegemonic agents is heavily restricted by the informal sectarian and clientelist practices, which structures the access of civil society to the political system and state resources (see Hawthorne, 2005, p. 90). This relationship ultimately stems from the combination of a weak state structure and the consociational democracy as an institutional condition, which has bred a corrupt political sectarian elite who use their access to further their own particularistic sectarian interests, rather than broader national ones. As there are no ways for counterhegemonic agents to access state resources or the political arena without compromising their aims, they are dependent on the goodwill of external donors to come water the garden from time to time. This is of course an untenable situation when CSOs

are trying to build trust and make change in communities, an endeavor that, just as Rouba describes, has to be sustained over time to produce results. What the concept of restricted agency helps us understand is how the bounded environment within which these organizations operate is created and how it shapes and restricts the agency of counterhegemonic agents striving for positive peace.

The restricted agency of counterhegemonic CSOs should also be understood in relation to vertical peace gaps. The lack of access to state resources and the political arena, in combination with the discontinuity that the dependency on external funding constitutes, creates a kind of glass-ceiling for counterhegemonic CSOs. It is technically possible for almost any CSO to get registered at the Ministry of Interiors and work in Lebanon, counterhegemonic or not. Practically however, only organizations who comply with the sectarian clientelist logic of the political sectarian elite will have access to the state and be able grow and operate freely. Organizations who aim to create political change by organizing in a cross-sectarian way, will at best be marginalized and left to fend for themselves, as Rouba describes, or at worst actively targeted and coopted by the political sectarian elite (see Clark and Salloukh, 2013, p. 733). This glass-ceiling prevents counterhegemonic CSOs from growing and making up a bigger part of civil society as well as sustaining continuity in their operations. These two aspects should be viewed as central for gaining more influence and try to “fill in” the vertical peace gap between local notions of peace and elite level notions of peace from the bottom up.

### 6.3 Fearing the other and the appeal of instrumentalist politics in crisis

The most evident challenge for CSOs in their strive towards a positive peace is the barriers that exist between sectarian communities on the societal level. Initially, the tense, and at times violent relationships between people from different sectarian communities were attributed to elite instrumentalization.

*I think it's easy for people to live together, so the religion, me being Christian and you being Muslim is not an issue [...] these religious differences are mainly instrumentalized by political leaders for their own gain. [...]. (Ana)*

*[...] the divisions that's happening is to their benefit, to the leaders of the sects benefit, the day when the economic crisis was happening in the country, these leaders started losing power, how did they regain it, by firing tension among the lower classes, because the lower classes are the ones that vote, the lower classes are the masses, the lower classes are their soldiers on the ground, to regain their power they had to throw a bomb down there, like we are the defenders of this sect [...]. (Radwan)*

These views lie very close to hardcore instrumentalist perspectives, arguing that sectarianism is not intrinsically valuable, but primarily a way for elites to gain more power by mobilizing the masses through instrumentalization of religious identity in their politics (see Varshney, 2009, p. 282). In the excerpts above, Lebanese sectarianism is framed as a top-down process, something people are exposed to rather than enact with strong focus on the agency of the elite. The problem is according to Ana not a problem between people. Instead, sectarian tension is primarily an outcome of how sectarian identity is manipulated by the political sectarian elite, who drive people apart for their own gain. However, when delving deeper into the issues of sectarian divides, another view emerges that alters this notion of sectarian identities as superficial and the way it presents a challenge to CSO peacebuilding.

*[...] the population is afraid of the other; the Sunni is afraid of the Shia, who are afraid of the Sunni, the Druze are afraid of Shia, the Christians are afraid from everybody (laugh), and so on and so forth [...]. (Assaad)*

*I think that the yeni, the division and the fear is really, is hidden, is hidden each persons, education and belief [...] because from where did you learn this, from your school, from your parents and from your community, right? The other is a no go, you don't have to engage with the other, because they will destroy us, they will eat us, they will eat us alive. (Tala)*

*Passive aggressive maybe, it's a tough word but on the level on living together as people, people love each other, they live together, they discuss many things, they sit together, they eat together they have friends, but*

*sometimes when it comes to politics and power sharing the struggle appears and we realize that people are not really living together. (Adriana)*

*[...] every time there is a new problem in the country people are going back to their original attachment even though they say that they are free, and they are not so extreme, but when it comes to a problem related to a political decision or a religious thing it will create a crisis in the country [...]. (Malak)*

This excerpt highlights a fear of the other on the societal level which nuances a strictly instrumentalist perspective. Assaad describes it as a societal condition where everybody is fearing everybody, and no one feels safe. The relationship between sectarian communities is, as Tala says, characterized by a relatively constant “hidden fear”. The hegemonic way of forming sectarian identity in Lebanon, is in relation to a threatening sectarian other who will “eat us alive”. This means that sectarian identities are not just superficial and instrumentalized by the political sectarian elite. Identities are enacted by people in a certain way on the societal level, which reproduces division and fear. Malak’s remark about people going back to their “original attachment” is especially interesting in relation to this. Sect functions as people’s “original attachment”, while the sectarian other has become a kind of “natural enemy” whom one relates to through fear. In Adriana’s quote, it is also clear that the relationship between sectarian communities is fluctuating and that they are more prone to return to their “original attachments” when there is a problem in the country. This should be understood as the first step in the process of securitizing subjectivity. In response to external events like political or religious disputes, because these activate already present but “hidden fears” of the sectarian other as a threat to the “own” community (see Kinnvall, 2004, p. 746). The crisis should be seen as a condition that has increased division between people on the societal level.

*some groups or communities or parties whatever are accusing the other of being behind what’s happening, or indirectly being the reason, either being the reason for what’s happening, or being behind what’s happening, [...] so the tension is high now [...] The divide between the Lebanese is enlarging because of the financial and political situations. Christians and Muslims of all denominations are accusing each other to be behind the crisis. (Assaad)*

The period from 2019 onwards in Lebanon, has been characterized by a multilayered and extremely pervasive crisis that has deteriorated into a deep and wide socioeconomic crisis, affecting the lives of almost all Lebanese (see World Bank, 2022b). I experienced the crisis as a severe condition of societal collapse being abstract and tangible at the same time. On the one hand, there was no real up or down to it because it permeated society so fully that it had become a new normal. On the other hand, there is nothing more concrete than the electricity being shut off during parts of the day. Because the crisis has made life so precarious for most Lebanese, it has introduced a deep anxiety-inducing, kind of existential uncertainty which lacks a clear object, because there are no real frames to a societal collapse. This makes people seek to regain a sense of security and order, one way of dealing with extreme uncertainty is to securitize subjectivity (see Kinnvall, 2004, p. 25). What happens first is what Malak describes. People go back to their sectarian communities or “original attachments”, which provide them with positive feelings of stability and belonging. As identity is relational, defining more clearly what “we” are also entails defining more clearly what “we” are not (see Kinnvall, 2006, p. 54). In Lebanon, there already exists a blueprint both for who “we” are (the own sect) and for who the “other” is (the other sects). Demarcating the in-group from the outgroup is a two-way process in which we essentialize the “own” community as connected to positive forces, while demonizing the other as an enemy. It is through this transformation of the other we find a concrete object of our anxiety that we can direct our negative feelings towards and blame for the crisis, as Assaad describes (see Kinnvall, 2006, p. 51). In the Lebanese context, securitization of subjectivity also puts the blueprint of sectarian conflict over the crisis. This is important because sectarian strife has been a historically reoccurring pattern of conflict and political contestation which people are familiar with and know how to act within, going back to the civil war for example. Knowing how to act is crucial because it gives us back some sense control. Although securitization does not solve the crisis, it briefly gives us back some stability and lowers feelings of anxiety. When the lira is plummeting, existential anxiety about the welfare of ourselves and our family is reduced if we turn it into concrete animosity towards a previously, and once again threatening other. There is a familiarity in this pattern of conflict that allows us to act which makes us choose it over

agency crippling uncertainty. This is also how instrumentalist politics becomes emotionally appealing to individuals.

*[...] the politicians, how they are using this to manipulate the people following them and brainwashing them into like vote for me or else the other party will eat us and take half of the cake so this fear of the other. [...]*  
(Tala)

While the instrumentalist politics that Tala describes above constitutes powerful emotional governance stimulating securitization of subjectivity, the reason it works is that it resonates emotionally with people on the societal level. It resonates because people already form sectarian identity by relating to the sectarian other through a “hidden fear”. What instrumentalist politics does, is to draw on these hidden fears by affirming sectarian identity in the same way it is formed on the societal level, in relation to a blueprint of the threatening sectarian other who will “eat us”. This way of forming identity runs deep and is connected to past traumas, like the inter-communal violence during the civil war for example. Instrumentalist politics become especially effective during times of crisis when people seek to regain their stability. When politicians provide people with a concrete culprit of crisis, the perception of uncertainty is lowered, and action-paralyzing anxiety about the world can be turned it into active fear and loathing for this “natural enemy”. This is, as Radwan describes initially, a way for the political sectarian leaders to deflect their responsibility for the crisis by “firing tension” between sectarian communities.

The securitization of subjectivity people engage in on the societal level in response to the crisis and which sectarian political leaders exacerbate, increases division, and makes tensions run higher than usual. The increased division and fear between people present a challenge to peacebuilding CSOs who aim to bridge sectarian divides. There is very little space within this environment to explore cross-sectarian cooperation. The message from politicians, family members and the media are conveying that the sectarian other is a threat, there is nothing that you share or can unite around, because ultimately, the other wants to harm you. What peacebuilding CSOs are trying to do is to convey a very different message, aiming to enlarge

the space where cross-sectarian cooperation and relationships can be cultivated, based on mutual understanding and empathy rather than fear. It is to the possibilities of the project to create a better peace within restricted agency we now turn.

## 6.4 Commonalities: sharing age and crisis as common

This section is about what points of commonalities local peacebuilding CSOs focus on when working with the youth, instead of the identity feature sect which is the main difference they are trying to bridge. The three points of commonality identified as important for bringing youth participants closer together and cooperating are; a shared experience of the crisis, age and post-sectarian identity formation.

*[...] peacebuilding is all about people, from different religious groups, from different opposing groups. If we want to take Shia-Sunni or Shia-Druze or anything else, to talk to each other and understand that we have middle ground, we have commonalities [...]. This goes without saying, we don't have electricity just like you don't have electricity, we don't have water the same way that you don't have water, we don't have services the way that you don't have services [...]* (Jad G)

*we call this building a reconciliation, that's for one, rebuilding trust, and we build trust based on religious, it's not based on religions it's based on understanding the differences, the fears of the others, and that human beings we share much more than what separates us, we have the same needs, look at us in the crisis, we are both suffering from the devaluation, from the economy, be it Christian or Muslim, we are all victims, so we build on that [...]* (Tanya)

Although there are class-differences between people in relation to their access to basic services, all Lebanese are somehow affected by the crisis due to the unpredictability it constitutes. Assaad expresses in a previous excerpt that the crisis has been divisive because different groups are blaming the sectarian other for the crisis. However, Tanya underscores

that building on the common experience of suffering in crisis, participants engaged in peacebuilding can see that they share much more than what separates them from the sectarian other. The difference that sectarian identity constitutes can thus be downplayed if the crisis is highlighted as a condition that makes almost all Lebanese, independent of sectarian identity vulnerable. This common experience functions as a steppingstone from which dialogue and further cooperation can depart, because it gives participants a possibility to start shifting by imagining the standpoint and the fears of the sectarian other in the highly cross-sectarian condition that the crisis constitutes.

As all CSOs have youth as their target group, age and being part of the category “youth” is an evident commonality that both representatives of the CSOs, as well as the youth participants themselves, highlight as an important shared feature of their identity.

*I would say there is a shift. How big is that shift I cannot say but in my opinion, there is a shift, young people because they are engaging with individuals from different backgrounds, in their universities, in their places of work so they are more open. They did not live the Lebanese civil war, they lived the remnants of the war but they did not live the actual war so it's easier for them to look at the other not as a threat [...] (Ana)*

*[...] it sounds like a cliché, but they are the future, and they are you know they ask critical questions. (Christina)*

*Lebanese people generally are so conservative, so religious but the next generation, like our generation or the next generation is not so religious and conservative, we are more open minded more open to others, but still there is some cases who are still attached to what their parents or grandparents told them (Jad G)*

The reason why age is important has to do with the fact that “the next generation” carry very specific connotations in relation to the opportunities of peacebuilding. There is a strong and widespread belief among both representatives of the CSOs and the youth participants themselves, that a generational shift is happening in Lebanon. Youth is by almost all representatives and youth participants presented in line with Ana’s and Christina’s quotes. As

a rather homogenous group, almost inherently holding more moderate attitudes towards the sectarian other, being more open-minded and thinking more critically in comparison to their parents and grandparents' generations who experienced the war. However, in interviews with the youth participants, the general notion of youth as inherently open-minded is further specified as being more about this groups self-reflexivity in relation to their sectarian identity.

*[...] I wanted bigger platform to engage with people because I always felt that I wanted to know more about other people, because, I wasn't fully understood in my own society for example, so that invited me to check new perspectives and see how can other people like me who aren't fully heard or fully represented as themselves, be engaged in common space with other people from different backgrounds, or religions [...]* (Ali)

*[...] suddenly I was interested more to know more about religions, and specifically Islam, because I wasn't in deep, I didn't have a deep knowledge in Islam, and to get an idea of the other religions, so I saw on Facebook an Adyan-page that there was an educational program about religious and public affairs in Lebanon so I understood I would get an idea about all the religions [...] so okay, this is what I need now [...]* (Maha)

All youth participants express previous interest or curiosity about engaging with the sectarian other. Most of the youth also had some previous experience with cross-sectarian engagement, someone had been engaged with the scouts and someone else with the Red Cross. No one expressed any hesitation or nervousness about engaging with the sectarian other. The first step of engaging in transversal dialogue is rooting. The process of rooting requires a certain amount of self-reflexivity, because it entails centering in one's standpoint while being aware that it is not the only valid standpoint there is, and that knowledge from just one person's standpoint is unfinished (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 129). Maha expresses this when she says that although she initially wanted to know more about her own religion, it wasn't enough, she had an urge to learn about the other. Ali shares something similar when he says that he wanted "a bigger platform", he wanted to increase his knowledge about the other to know himself more fully. This kind of reasoning is exemplary of several other youth participants. These youths should thus be viewed as having engaged in a process of rooting prior to their engagement in peacebuilding, this should also be understood as a reason to why none of them expressed

being certainly nervous or unprepared. It is also clear that this self-reflexivity has bearing on how the youth participants identify themselves.

*[...] we are Lebanese, we should prioritize that, before the sect and before religion and that, because our origin, our country of origin is Lebanon, it's not Phoenicia it's not the united nation of Arab countries, you know, because we are living in the same country, why should I identify myself as a Christian or as Sunni or as Muslim [...]* (Jad)

*[...] now the difference is that younger people have, are searching for new identities for themselves, which represent them as individuals more than a group of people, so that's the contrast here, and from that they are engaging with other people who share the same view and are also interested in peacebuilding [...]* (Ali)

In addition to having engaged in self-reflexivity prior to engagement, most youth speak about their own sectarian identity in a way that is quite distanced. Jad for example expresses more identification with his nationality than with his sect. He also distances himself from the discussion about the national heritage of Lebanon being either Phoenician or pan-Arabic, which has been an ongoing debate since the time of independence (see Firro, 2004, pp. 5–6). Ali connects the search for new identities to engagement in peacebuilding and this is especially important. In relation to these excerpts, the youths engaged in peacebuilding should be viewed as not only self-reflexive in relation to their sectarian identity, but also having a strong attachment to a post-sectarian identity formation. What these youths do when they distance themselves from their sectarian identity, and argue that they are searching for new ways of identifying themselves, is that they re-negotiate the role of sectarian identity as a feature of their identity as a whole and thus engage in a process of de-sectarianization on the individual level (see Mabon, 2020, p. 5). The connection that Ali makes between post-sectarian identity formations and engagement in peacebuilding is also expressed by Hussein:

*[...] a thing that is unfortunate in Adyan that I saw, is the absence of very religious or properly religious people. Among the members I saw and interacted with on several different occasions and noticed very accurately, I saw no properly religious or conservative member [...] You only get to see the kind of loosely religious ones in such organizations. And you also don't find hardliners in such places. (Hussein)*

Two things should be highlighted here. Firstly, all youth in this sample have engaged in self-reflexivity and rooting in some sense prior to their engagement. In addition, they share an attachment to a post-sectarian identity formation, which sometimes is what inspired their engagement. Secondly, it is also expressed that this type of reflexivity is not something that is necessarily tied to being a part of “the next generation”. Jad says that some are “still attached to what their parents or grandparents told them”, and Hussein observes that there are no “hardliners” engaged in Adyan. This means that being rooted and identifying in a more post-sectarian way becomes a requirement rather than just a commonality when engaging in cross-sectarian peacebuilding. This is further clarified by Christina:

*[...] you have to be willing to change you have to be open to, you have to have an inner drive to leave a group to leave a certain ideology behind and you have to have to this willingness to change to be ready for that you cannot force it on anyone so yeah. That's a precondition. [...] (Christina)*

Broad inclusion of youths is stated as central to all the CSOs (Interview Christina, Interview Lama, Interview Tanya). However, CSO-representatives also acknowledge that a certain amount of rootedness, or what Christina calls a “willingness to change”, is required to structure the relational space that cross-sectarian peacebuilding constitutes. Within this context, it is an attachment to a post-sectarian identity, as a counterhegemonic way of forming identity, that seems to be the commonality that make possible for the youth to engage with the sectarian other. Considering the already established “rootedness” of youths that CSOs manage to engage, the agency and outreach of the CSOs on a societal level should be viewed as quite limited. Youth already ascribing to a post-sectarian identity formation become even more able to engage in a cross-sectarian manner, while youth who are more strongly attached to their

sectarian identity seldom enter these spaces. This creates distances within “the next generation”, these distances should be viewed as horizontal peace gaps. Within some segments of the “next generation”, cross-sectarian relationships, spaces and cooperation are cultivated. Within other segments at the same level, sectarian rhetoric still find resonance which reproduces sectarian division also in “the next generation”. This raises questions about what inclusivity really means in practice in relation to these CSOs, but also in relation to peacebuilding in general.

## 6.5 Dealing with difference: disentangling identity and politics

While the youths share aspects helping them come together, friction do arise at times which means the CSOs need to find ways handle differences and tensions. This is done by creating a safe space and helping detangle identity from politics.

In an environment where sectarian difference is connected to fears, which are often projected onto the other, a requirement for transversal dialogue to work is that dialogue takes place in a safe space where participants feel affirmed and can “own” their fears rather than project them (see Cockburn, 1998, p. 215). All organizations express that they start their activities by establishing a safe space characterized by mutual respect. It is within this space that participants can enter into constructive dialogue with the other and form new relationships that has space for disagreements and differences.

*[...] tension arises from the fear, [...] because people become defensive when they feel threatened in their beliefs, in their attitudes in stuff like that, when you recognize their belief, when you show appreciation for their experience, for their narratives, this is where the fear starts to diffuse, and they are now willing to listen more [...] (Tanya)*

*[...] So, you ask yourself a lot of questions, yeah, but then the good thing is that you have this platform which you can go back to which would let you*

*ask those questions and be in places of doubt and be in places of confusion and fluctuate and still be engaged within change itself (Ali)*

*[...] when they see us coming from different sides of the former conflict, and even today, we don't have the same political opinion all of us, we're divided, of course we're divided, so seeing us divided in politics let's say, but able to work together for peace is also a proof that when they are among us, we are not biased, we cannot be biased, because we are so different [...]* (Assaad)

What is highlighted here is that to create a safe space where people feel comfortable going into dialogue or conducting activities together, participants need to feel accepted, respected and listened to from the start. Ali's description of Adyan as a place where he can be confused and fluctuate should be understood as a description of a rooted position. It is from this position, of not being completely locked in one's standpoint, that the possibility of shifting and imagining the relationship between the self and the other in new ways arises. To bring the youth to the position that Ali is describing, the CSOs acknowledge the sectarian difference between participants and appreciate their specific "narratives". This acknowledgement is a way to help the youth root in their own identity and experience and opens up to shifting. When they do not feel threatened in their beliefs anymore, they are "willing to listen more" as Tanya says. Assaad and the ex-fighters of the FFP showcase the core of transversal dialogue. They acknowledge the sectarian and political differences between them, while showing the youth that this aspect of difference does not preclude the possibility of shifting to see from the other's point of view, to empathize and cooperate with them. The CSOs acknowledge sectarian difference while coding this difference as a something that does not necessarily have to be a source of fear and conflict. This constructs a space for the youth that opens for the possibility of relating to the sectarian other in new and more constructive ways.

A very concrete example of how CSOs deal with sectarian difference and conflict arose around a situation that took place while I was conducting fieldwork. In the end of March, the shift to daylight savings-time aligned with Ramadan. In relation to this, the Sunni Muslim caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati announced that the shift to summertime would be postponed a month. Many saw this as a move to try and score Muslim votes, as it would allow

fasting Muslims to break their fast earlier, while deflecting from larger cross-sectarian issues such as the economic and political crisis (Al Jazeera, 2023a). This decision was opposed by the Christian churches which led to a division in the country along the lines of Christian and Muslim sects who set their clocks to different times. The two time zones lasted for about a week and then Mikati reversed his decision (Al Jazeera, 2023b).

*[...] concerning the time zones, I won't deny it actually, I was annoyed from the reaction from the other that represent the other sects, the other religions, it's one hour, what does it, it's actually really easier to us, to me to wake one hour later to go to work and come eat food earlier, [...] Adyan showed us that this is not what Christians actually, this is not a Christian opinion, this was politics, you know what I mean, we sat together everyone combined, and we ate iftar together, so this annoyance, this hidden, this hidden... I won't say hate, but it was (animosity?) yeah, was thrown out loud and was managed, they said that this wasn't logical but at the same time, so they gave both views, if you know what I mean, it was relieving, it makes you accept the other and you continue like normally, these are your friends, this wasn't their opinion, even if they were with like the time thing, but they didn't mean anything against, it was nothing religious, it was people themselves and corruption, they made it [...]* (Radwan)

A member of the political sectarian elite made a decision that placed Christian and Muslim sects on opposing sides which effectively sectarianized the issue (see Al Jazeera, 2023a). As sectarian divisions already exist, and function as a kind of standby blueprint for political conflict politicians use from time to time to divide the people, the issue of daylight savings time was read through a sectarian lens on the societal level. This becomes clear when Radwan describes how he experiences an annoyance with the decision of the representatives of the Christian churches. But this annoyance and “hidden” animosity towards representatives is also aggregated up to an annoyance with Christians as a group, who become constructed as a homogenous group acting collectively against Muslims during their holy month. It is “the Christians”, as in all Lebanese Christians, who deny Muslims to break their fast earlier rather than just the Christian representatives. Radwan’s description of his initial feelings constitutes a very locked position where subjectivity is securitized, negative feelings like the “annoyance” Radwan describes, is projected onto the sectarian other who becomes the culprit of conflict,

the one to blame for this division. During a dialogue in Adyan on the topic, this animosity was opened up, taken apart and resolved. Adyan gave the youths a space where they could see both views, and this should be understood as a space where shifting was made possible. In this dialogue, Radwan could shift and see from the standpoint of the Christian others he was initially annoyed with. After this shift, he expresses relief and feels he can accept the Christian others again, who are also his friends. Lastly, he says that he sees that it is not an issue of identity but politics. The opinion to not postpone daylight savings time, is not a “Christian” opinion that all Christians hold in capacity of their religious identity, but a political one. Although his Christian friends might agree with the Christian position, this isn’t an attack on him as a Muslim, they did not mean to make him feel threatened in his religious identity. This is also an example of how the youths learn to “own” their feelings of fear or “annoyance” and deal with them through empathetic listening and shifting, instead of projecting them onto the other (see Cockburn, 1998, p. 215). This means that the shifting that takes place in the CSOs spaces, helps the youths detangle identity from politics which leads to small moments of de-sectarianization. The youths learn to not shy away from difference but instead acknowledge their differences, while still accepting and respecting each other as friends and people they can cooperate with.

## 6.6 Creating coalitions: exploring a new social imaginary

Learning about the other, breaking stereotypes and creating friendships between the youth participants are central components in order to lower fear and make possible for youths to create cross-sectarian coalitions on common projects. The first step towards working together is lowering fear by letting the youths learn about the sectarian other.

*[...] youth were given the opportunity to ask questions, so to ask questions that are in their minds are actually stereotypes, so “why don’t you drink alcohol”, or “we hear that Christians are not as religious as Muslims why is that”, so we gave them this space to express what they hear in the media,*

*what they hear from their families, what they hear from society and encourage them that asking questions is not wrong, but it depends who you're asking, how you're asking, and the other person he's safe enough to answer as long as you are asking question without judgement. (Ana)*

*[...] we have this fear of other, fear of the other, it breaks when we get into a conversation, and though the other thinks the same, why am I afraid of him, so this stereotype, this misinformation about other people, it breaks when you go, when you go like in livelihood conversations, what do you think of this topic, you know [...]* (Miguel)

Described above is how the view of the sectarian other is primarily derived from within the situated imagination of the own sect, it is formed and reproduced through the media and in families on the societal level. This situated imagination constructs the other in relation to stereotypes, but also as someone to fear, which of course shapes how youths relate to the other. The CSOs provide the youths with a safe space where they can ask questions and talk to the other. By listening, getting to know the other and shifting to see the perspective of the other, the fear is broken. The situated imagination is ideally altered, complemented, and widened in a way that makes the youth relate to the other in a new way, not through fear but with the interest and curiosity. Miguel describes how the participants start to ask each other questions, genuinely interested in what the other thinks about different topics. It is this new way of relating to the other, that helps transform the relationships between youth participants from different sects and opens for cross-sectarian coalitions and cooperation.

*[...] after this year, me and six other participants from other regions, we came up with an initiative, called Sawab, [...] Sawab is an initiative to combat fake news in Lebanon, so we, the seven, are working together, since November toward a healthier community with no fake news, in all Lebanon, so I've experienced that we can unite on a goal, which is good for others, good for other communities and a step forward to peacebuilding because fake news is something that really spread quickly in Lebanon and sometimes it leads to clashes between communities [...]* (Miguel)

The creation of *Sawab* is one concrete outcome of what the CSOs' peacebuilding efforts have the possibility to create, and should be viewed as the outcome of transversal dialogue. By

learning to relate to the other in a new way, listen to the other and shift to see from the standpoint of the other, common views on problems like fake news can be identified. This experience of identifying a problem and the capacity of the youth participants to “unite on a goal” as Miguel says, is the core of transversal politics as a practice. The participants are from different sects and from different regions, but through listening and creating friendships with each other, they have been able to bridge differences that are often coded as irreconcilable. All projects the youths develop and conduct together should thus be seen as an expression of transversal politics. Not primarily in relation to the content of the projects, but more importantly in relation to their cross-sectarian character. For transversal dialogue to work, imagination is crucial. Cynthia Cockburn calls imagining a political practice and I think the political practice of imagining is perfectly exemplified in projects like Sawab. What the youth participants share together is that they all want a better Lebanon, they want a better peace. Through their engagement in peacebuilding, they are aided in both imagining and doing this better peace practically. It is this intent, this willingness to know the other and listen to them that should be understood as the boundaries of the epistemological community that the work of the peacebuilding CSOs takes place within. The cross-sectarian projects that youths conduct are small explorations of what inter-sectarian relationships could look like in Lebanon, what a better peace could look like. Ultimately, the youths are exploring their shared imaginings of a different future for Lebanon that lies outside the current social and political imaginary.

## 7 Concluding discussion

This study has presented an analysis of the challenges and opportunities of cross-sectarian civil society peacebuilding targeting youth in Lebanon. The study answers the overarching research question *How can we understand the challenges and opportunities of cross-sectarian peacebuilding CSOs striving to create positive peace in Lebanon?* through the two sub-questions *How can we understand the challenges and opportunities on an institutional level?* And *How can we understand the challenges and opportunities on a societal level?*

The core premise of my argument is that the current peace in Lebanon is neither a peace nor a war, but characterized by deep sectarian division and reoccurring eruptions of violence. This current “peace” is very different from the positive peace that the peacebuilding CSOs in focus of this study strive to create. The distance between the current peace supported by the political sectarian elite, and the notion of peace envisioned by the peacebuilding CSOs on the local level is theorized as a vertical peace gap. My understanding is that the peacebuilding CSOs who strive to close this peace gap face several challenges. In capacity of promoting notions of peace challenging the current hegemonic notion of peace, peacebuilding CSOs are viewed as counterhegemonic agents. The challenges counterhegemonic CSOs face in relation to the institutional level stem from how the institutional environment in Lebanon shapes civil society’s possibilities to access the political system and state resources. Civil society’s access to the state is determined by the political sectarian elite who make up the sectarian regime. The political sectarian elite exploit their access to the state and engage in clientelist practices to empower civil society actors who uphold sectarian division and thus reproduce the division the sectarian regime and the power of the political sectarian elite is built upon. The access of counterhegemonic agents to the political system and state resources is shut off as these challenges the power of the political sectarian elite, rather than reproduce it. This lack of access severely restricts the agency of counterhegemonic peacebuilding CSOs. I conclude that

the restricted agency of peacebuilding CSOs creates a glass ceiling preventing them from growing and exerting increased influence. The restricted agency of the CSOs thus prevent them from filling in the vertical peace gap between the current peace and more positive notions of peace.

The challenges identified on the societal level concerns the interplay between the societal condition of inter-group fear and the current condition of crisis in Lebanon. The dominating way to form sectarian identity in Lebanon, after years of sectarianization and reoccurring sectarian violence, is in relation to a sectarian other whom one relates to through fear. Within the current condition of crisis in Lebanon, people experience extreme levels of uncertainty which makes them seek to regain a sense of security. I claim that this is partly done through securitization of subjectivity. By returning to “original attachments”, people affirm identity and strengthen in-group cohesion by demarcating from the sectarian other and constructing them as responsible for the crisis. Constructing the sectarian other as the culprit of crisis, reintroduces some order because it provides a concrete threat and fits a pattern of conflict that people recognize and know how to act within. This process is also sustained and exacerbated by sectarian political leaders who blame the sectarian other to deflect their own responsibility for the crisis. This dynamic deepens divides, spur fear and animosity on the societal level and makes it harder for CSOs to gather people in peacebuilding initiatives. In relation to the institutional opportunities of counterhegemonic peacebuilding CSOs, I would argue they should be seen as non-existing to marginal. They can be seen as marginal only in the sense that the CSOs are allowed to work at all, although the political sectarian elite is well aware of the kind of work they engage in. This relates back to the analogy of a glass ceiling. Counterhegemonic peacebuilding CSOs are allowed to work, but they are not given space or agency enough to have any institutional, legal, or any otherwise large-scale influence. There is simply no interest to strive for a positive peace between sectarian communities on the elite level.

In relation to the societal level there are however opportunities related to the work of the CSOs. These opportunities are limited to changes in individuals, their families and sometimes

smaller groups or communities. The opportunities of cross-sectarian civil society peacebuilding among youth are especially tied to the youths themselves to my understanding, CSOs have the capacity to lower fear between the youths by letting them learn about each other, they have the capacity to train them on self-reflexive rooting in relation to their own identity as well as listening and shifting to see from the standpoint of the other. They can solve conflicts and tensions between their participants, and they can stimulate cooperation on common projects. However, it is the youths' commitment to creating a better peace in Lebanon as well as their post-sectarian identity formation that is the key to these initiatives. These shared attributes function as the boundaries of the epistemological community within which the CSO-peacebuilding takes place. I claim that these boundaries create horizontal peace gaps within "the next generation", between post-sectarian groups of youth and groups of youth who have a strong attachment to their sectarian identity. This group of "hardliners" will most likely draw even closer to their community in the face of the crisis, creating an even further space between them and post-sectarian youths. This decreases the chance of the broad cross-sectarian mobilization that large scale change towards a more positive peace would require. Despite this, I argue that the small opportunities that the CSOs create do matter. The friendships that the youths make with the sectarian other are real and transformative for them, several describe their engagement as a life-changing experience. The spaces that CSOs give them to imagine a different Lebanon and a positive peace together, have the opportunity of creating cross-sectarian networks and bonds. Although the work of peacebuilding CSOs might not create institutional or large-scale change overnight, it contributes to cultivating cross-sectarian knowledge and experiences in segments of the "next generation" on the societal level. The peacebuilding work of counterhegemonic CSOs, which entails cultivation of cross-sectarian relationships and spaces, should in conclusion be seen as important to prepare youth on the societal level for future change and more large-scale efforts for a positive peace.

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# Appendix 1

<b>Interview guide practitioners</b>	
<b>Baseline</b>	<b>Possible follow ups</b>
<b>Can you tell me a little about yourself, your background and the work you do?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What is your position at the organization?</li> <li>- What made you want to engage in peacebuilding work?</li> </ul>
<b>The organization</b>	
<b>Can you describe the kind of work your organization carries out, what kind of projects do you engage in?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Can you give some examples of methods, activities and projects that you engage in?</li> <li>- How would you describe the main goals of the dialogue/work that your organization engage in?</li> </ul>
<b>In your view, what do you think that the peacebuilding/dialogue work can achieve or change in Lebanon?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you have any examples or experiences of your work in this organization you want to share?</li> <li>- Does your organization have any religious, political or sectarian affiliation?</li> <li>- If yes: In what ways do you think that impacts your peacebuilding efforts?</li> <li>- If no: Would sectarian, religious or political affiliation pose a challenge or be an advantage when you do peace work in Lebanon?</li> </ul>
<b>You work with the group youth, what is the reason for working with this specific group?</b>	
<b>How do you work to include participants from different groups and backgrounds in your work?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you recruit participants to your projects and how do you decide which can participate?</li> <li>- Are certain groups harder than others to get to engage, why?</li> <li>- How do you spread the word about your organization?</li> </ul>
<b>Sectarianism</b>	
<b>Can you describe the relationship</b>	- In your view, how is sectarianism and

<b>between different sectarian communities in Lebanon as you perceive them?</b>	sectarian division expressed in Lebanon? - Are there any spaces where people from different sects meet naturally in their everyday life?
<b>What would you say are some factors that lead to tension between sectarian communities in Lebanon today?</b>	- How do you address this in your work at the organization?
<b>How has the work changed since the crisis started in 2019?</b>	
Challenges and opportunities, difference	
<b>In your peace building activities, how do you try and make people feel safe when they partake? /</b>	- How do you build trust and respect between participants? - What strategies and methods?
<b>When doing cross-sectarian peacebuilding do you build solidarity between participants based on something specific?</b>	
<b>If tension or differences arise when you carry out peacebuilding activities, how do you deal with this or handle it?</b>	What are the most common differences/conflicts/tension that arise
<b>What are the main opportunities/benefits with your peacebuilding work?</b>	- Things that you achieve with your work
<b>What are the biggest challenges in your work with bringing people together in relation to the tensions that exist?</b>	
<b>What are the limits of peacebuilding in Lebanon?</b>	- Do you see areas or lines of conflict that you do not have the capacity to impact with the type of work you do?
Impact of domestic/regional/geopolitical	
<b>Are there any domestic, regional or geopolitical developments or events that impact your work?</b>	- Syrian civil war - Are there things that have posed challenges or made your work easier? - Iran/Saudi conflict - Israel/Palestine The political and economic situation
Final questions	
<b>- Do you think I have misunderstood anything when it comes to the relationship between sectarian communities in Lebanon or something else related to Lebanon in general? - Do you want to add something that I</b>	

haven't asked about?	
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<b>Interview guide youth participants</b>	
Baseline	Possible follow ups
<b>Can you tell me a little about yourself, your background and what you do?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you live in an area with various sectarian groups, or an area dominated by one sect?</li> <li>- Do you have any close friends/colleagues from another sectarian group?</li> </ul>
Involvement in the organization	
<b>Can you tell me how you learned about the organization and why you wanted to get involved?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What part of the organization's activities have you participated in?</li> <li>- Were there any challenges to your participation in the organization's activities?</li> </ul>
<b>In your view, what do you think that the peacebuilding/dialogue work can achieve in Beirut?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What do you think happens in a dialogue process to those that participate in it?</li> </ul>
Sectarianism in Lebanon and vies of Sunni-Shia relations in Beirut/Lebanon	
<b>What role do you think sectarian identity plays in Lebanon/Beirut today?</b>	<p>In your view, how is sectarianism and sectarian division (between Shia and Sunni) expressed in Beirut?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Are there any spaces where people from different Sunni and Shia meet naturally in their everyday life?</li> </ul>
<b>Can you describe the relationship between sectarian communities in Beirut as you perceive it?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you feel about the sectarian other?</li> <li>- Do you have any close friends that are from another sect?</li> <li>- How did you meet them?</li> </ul>
<b>What do you think are some of the main reasons for the tense relationship between sectarian communities in Lebanon today?</b>	
Impact of domestic/regional/geopolitical	
<b>Are there any domestic, regional or geopolitical developments or events that you think have impact on the relationship between sects in Lebanon?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How has the Syrian civil war, the refugee situation, the unstable political situation in the country impacted the relationship between sects?</li> </ul>
Impact and possibilities of conflict	

transformation	
<b>What were your expectations before participating in the dialogue?</b>	What thoughts and feelings did you have? Where the expectations fulfilled? In what way?
<b>How did you experience your participation in the organization's activities?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Did you feel safe when participating in x's activities, why?</li> <li>- Do you feel that you have gained anything by participating in x's activities?</li> <li>- What do you think the goals of peacebuilding activities should be?</li> <li>- Were these fulfilled?</li> </ul>
<b>Do you feel that your participation in the organization's activities has impacted your views of other sectarian groups?</b>	- Positive or negative? How?
<b>Do you feel that you have gained anything by participating in x's activities?</b>	
<b>What do you think the goals of peacebuilding activities should be?</b>	
<b>Do you think these were fulfilled?</b>	
Final questions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Do you want to add something that I haven't asked about?</li> <li>- Do you think I as a foreigner have misunderstood anything when it comes to the relationship between sectarian communities or something else related to Lebanon or peacebuilding in general?</li> </ul>	

## Appendix 2

### List of participants

CSO Representatives		
Name	Organization	Conducted
<b>Assaad Chaftari</b>	Fighters for Peace	2023-02-22
<b>Nour Nasr</b>	Fighters for peace	2023-03-10
<b>Christina Foerch</b>	Fighters for peace	2023-03-01
<b>Ziad Saab</b>	Fighters for peace	2023-03-01
<b>Walaa Samer Nimer</b>	Fighters for peace	2023-03-25
<b>Tanya Awad Ghorra</b>	Adyan Foundation	2023-03-14
<b>Adriana Bou Diwan</b>	Adyan Foundation	2023-03-21
<b>Ana Maria Daou</b>	Adyan Foundation	2023-03-08
<b>Rouba Abo Ammo</b>	Dawaer Foundation	2023-03-27
<b>Lama El-Awad</b>	Dawaer Foundation	2023-03-
<b>Rania Zaatari</b>	Dawaer Foundation	2023-03-30
<b>Anonymous interviewee</b>	-	2023-03-16
<b>Vana Minassien</b>	Search for Common Ground	2023-02-17
<b>Slayman Fawaz</b>	Search for Common Ground	2023-03-10
<b>Clara El Warrak</b>	Search for Common Ground	2023-03-16
<b>Fadi Hachem</b>	Search for Common Ground	2023-02-22
<b>Rabieh Kays</b>	Lebanese Foundation for Permanent Civil Peace	2023-03-09
<b>Fadi Abi Allam</b>	Permanent Peace Movement	2023-03-30
<b>Delphine Darmency</b>	Director of exhibition <i>Allo Beirut?</i>	2023-04-02
<b>Riwa Ghawi</b>	Mercy Corps	2023-03-23
<b>Tala Khlal</b>	Min ila	2023-03-28
<b>Shafik Abdulrahman</b>	Utopia	2023-02-23

Youth participants		
Name	Organization	Date
<b>Radwan</b>	Adyan Foundation	2023-04-01
<b>Hussein</b>	Adyan Foundation	2023-04-14
<b>Maha</b>	Adyan Foundation	2023-04-08
<b>Mona</b>	Adyan Foundation	2023-04-03
<b>Ali</b>	Adyan Foundation	2023-04-08
<b>Miguel</b>	Dawaer Foundation	2023-03-20

<b>Antoine</b>	Dawaer Foundation	2023-03-20
<b>Yasmin</b>	Dawaer Foundation	2023-03-21
<b>Jad G</b>	Dawaer Foundation	2023-03-23
<b>Jad</b>	Fighters for Peace	2023-03-26
<b>Malak</b>	Fighters for Peace	2023-03-26

# Appendix 3

## Information Sheet

### Participation in Research Interview (in Beirut)

Master's Thesis: Cross-sectarian civil society peacebuilding in Beirut among youth

Department of Political Science, Lund University, Sweden

M.A. Student (Supervisor: Lisa Strömbom)

Aina Boris

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Tel: +46736247282 (WhatsApp)/+96171995287

#### The aim of the study:

The aim of the study is twofold, the primary objective is to examine the practices and methods of civil society organizations in Beirut who engage in cross-sectarian peacebuilding. The second objective of the study is to explore how the peacebuilding activities that civil society organizations carry out impact the views of the youth participating in them. The study will focus especially on how civil society organizations work with youth.

#### Participation:

Participating in this research project means providing data and in-depth information about the current situation in Lebanon and current civil society activities related to bridging sectarian divides. For those interviewed that participate in peacebuilding activities, taking part in this study will also entail providing in-depth information about views and experiences related to civil society peacebuilding activities, sectarianism and the relationship between sectarian communities in Beirut. For me, Aina, your participation means that I can fulfill the project and thereby contribute both academically and practically to highlighting the importance of civil society peacebuilding and activities in post-conflict societies as well as the impact of these activities on those participating in them.

- **Participation is entirely voluntary.**
- If wished, the participation can be **anonymous**, only seen by me 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 a participant, you can decide **not to answer** any of the questions, if you prefer not 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, Aina, at any time if you have any questions about the research or if you wish to withdraw your consent.** I will then delete all information I have obtained from you and not use it in my research.

## Consent for Participation in Research Interview

*Master's Thesis: Cross-sectarian civil society peacebuilding in Beirut among youth*

I agree to participate in a research project conducted by M.A. student Aina Boris from Lund University (LU), Sweden.

1. I, the undersigned, have read and understood the Study Information Sheet provided before the interview started.
2. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
3. I have received satisfactory answers to my question.
4. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, without any reason.
5. I agree with the interview being audio-recorded (stored confidentially).
6. I agree to participate in the study.

### 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:

	I wish to review and approve the quotation before the thesis will be published.  If agreed, add e-mail address:.....
	I agree to be quoted directly.
	I agree to be quoted directly if my name if not published and a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
	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:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_