Commemorating the Dead in Times of Conflict
Identity construction in the Martyrs' Cemetery of Jabal Mohsen

Photo: Amanda Löwenberg

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02.08.2019

A Thesis submitted to the Board of Examiners in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Arts in Conflict Studies & Human Rights

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02.08.2019

Internship Trajectory 15 ECTS and Thesis Writing 15 ECTS

Word Count: 14 390

To the people of Jabal, and the people of Tripoli,
who opened their hearts and their homes,
who shared their time and their stories,
thank you.

And to Bo-Bo for being proud of me, for looking
after me, for making me coffee in the morning.

But above all to Mouse, for being my biggest fan,
my guiding light and my mechanic in case of
mental breakdown.

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1.0 Introduction

"I have a lot of Sunni friends, in Tabbaneh. But in war, no one knows each other". This unassuming wisdom is formulated by a man who has fought in a war since 1998, and first took up arms when he was just eighteen. He lives in a house on the frontline of Lebanon's forgotten, but now restrained, conflict in the northern city of Tripoli. The city is predominantly Sunni but located on a hilltop in the outskirts of the city, is an enclave where half of the estimated 100, 000 Alawites of Lebanon reside. This neighborhood, Jabal Mohsen, has been involved in a protracted conflict with surrounding Sunni dominated areas since the 1970s. The demographics and geography of the city have left its residents feeling vulnerable and isolated – sentiments exacerbated by the narratives and practice of the neighborhood's dominant political actor, the Arab Democratic Party (ADP). The conflict has been interpreted as a reflection of the Shi'a/Sunni division in regional politics, as caused by structural inequalities in Lebanon, and as driven by poverty and the leadership crisis in Tripoli (Hamoui 2012, Lefèvre 2014a, Lebanon Support 2016). Many have also understood it as a spill-over effect of the war in Syria (Berti 2012, Mazis and Sarlis 2012). These analyses are valuable for understanding the situation in Tripoli. However, they tend to ignore identity as a driver of conflict. When it is considered, it is largely treated in relation to regional and top-down sectarian politics, ignoring the local specificities and micro-level processes. There is a lack of research on such local-driven, neighborhood-level identity negotiation and production, particularly in Jabal Mohsen.[1]

Following Kalyvas and King (Kalyvas 2003, King 2004), I highlight the need to pay attention to micro-politics of conflicts and dynamics at 'the bottom', and to how different actors take part in the power negotiations inherent to the construction of relations between identity groups. The goal is not to explain and analyze the drivers and development of the entire Tripoli conflict. Rather, it is to explore how the processes taking place in Jabal Mohsen constitute one component of many that drive the conflict and maintain hostile relationships between the communities.

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[1] Tripoli in general is under-researched compared to the capital, and the existing research is largely focused on Islamist movements. Bab el-Tabbaneh has been the stronghold for such movements and thus has to a greater extent been subjected to analysis than Jabal Mohsen.
See for example: Rabil, Robert G. *Salafism in Lebanon: From apoliticism to transnational jihadism.* Georgetown University Press, 2014.
Carpi, Estella. "Prisms of Political Violence, 'Jihads' and Survival in Lebanon's Tripoli." (2015). Civil Society Knowledge Centre, Lebanon Support

My particular focus here is the construction and negotiation of identity. The conflict in Tripoli is predominantly framed in terms of sectarian identity, with Alawites fighting Sunnis. Yet there is little further investigation in to how the inhabitants in the opposing neighborhoods perceive and take part in negotiating and giving meaning to the identities ascribed to them. My research is, by analyzing the construction and contestation of identity in Jabal Mohsen, a first step in filling this analytical lacuna. As such, it seeks to contribute to the analysis of the broader conflict through shedding light on how hostile relationships are made, imagined and maintained.

1.1 Empirical context and research question

Social identity labels in Lebanon have limited negotiability: all citizens are ascribed a sect at birth, which has a powerful impact on the relation to, and interaction with, the state. However, the meaning of this sectarian identity can be contested and re-constructed. In this process of construction, the making of the group's relation to other groups is also included. It is the production and content of such identity narratives, and how they articulate the experience of the group and their relation to others, that I aim to outline.

Focusing on the Alawites living in Jabal Mohsen, this thesis is concerned with the 'story' about their presence in the neighborhood. It presupposes that identities are narratives; "stories people tell themselves about who they are and who they are not" (Yuval-Davis 2006, 202). Even when they are individual, they are embedded in the social reality of the person: no one exists in isolation, so individual stories also relate to group belonging. The adaptability of identity according to social reality also indicates what has been widely recognized within social science: that identity is constructed, rather than a primordial feature. When accepting this assumption, one also has to consider who has the ability to influence the story of an identity group, and for what reasons. The narratives about a particular group can be, and often are, employed for political gains. As phrased by Martin: "To put it in a nutshell, the identity narrative channels political emotions so that they can fuel efforts to modify a balance of power; it transforms the perceptions of the past and of the present; it changes the organization of human groups and creates new ones; it alters cultures by emphasizing certain traits and skewing their meanings and logic" (Martin 1995, 13).

There is ample proof of how sectarian identity narratives have been employed for mobilization in politics and conflict in Lebanon, particularly in relation to the fifteen-year civil war, defined by identity-based divisions, that plagued the country from 1975-1990. Still today, narratives

about social identity are a defining feature of Lebanese politics, where the political system hinges upon a delicate power-sharing arrangement that distributes power according to - outdated assumptions of - the sectarian demography of the State.

Beyond the formalized political system, sectarian identity politics are engrained in memory and memorialization practices. After the civil war, no transitional justice mechanisms such as truth commissions were implemented. Instead, a general amnesty was issued and many militia leaders, such as current leader of the Christian Lebanese Forces party, Samir Geagea, and of Druze Progressive Socialist Party, Walid Joumblatt entered parliamentary politics, where they still remain. This also meant that no common historical narrative has been developed: the history of the war is still not taught in schools, leading to contesting narratives of the past often tinted by sectarian belonging. This is reflected in public space, where monuments, memorials and cemeteries often are made by and for a specific sect and therefore reproduce sectarian ideologies and narratives.[2]

In Jabal Mohsen the ADP, the Alawite party in Lebanon, and the Eid family, the founders of the party and informal welfare providers in the area, are the main actors controlling the neighborhood. Hence, they also contribute, directly or indirectly, to memory work taking place there. The clientelism engrained in Lebanese society has to be considered in this case study: it is a system entrenched in both formal and informal politics and power negotiation, and within the context of Jabal Mohsen, the preponderance of the Eid family's influence is clear. The main site for memorialization in Jabal Mohsen is the only cemetery in the neighborhood, the Martyrs' Cemetery, which was established by Ali Eid, the founder of ADP. An analysis of this space enables me to uncover the broader history and politics of the Alawites in Tripoli, while also showing how the cemetery plays a role in the micro-politics of identity construction.

Since the onset of the war in Syria in 2011, being Alawite in Lebanon has taken on new meaning, as has the conflict in Tripoli. Conflicts are multilayered and often contain several conflicts gathered under one label. As shown by Kalyvas and Kocher in the case of Iraq, sectarian violence is a simplifying label that often cloaks several dimensions of a given conflict, including actors with various goals and tactics (Kalyvas and Kocher 2007). Similarly, Cockburn has demonstrated that the conflict in Syria consists of a cluster of conflicts, which feed in to each other. Factors such as

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[2] For a discussion of such memorialization in Beirut, see for example: Sune Haugbolle, "Sectarian Memory Cultures," in *War and Memory in Lebanon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

foreign intervention have added new layers to the existing conflicts leading to complex webs of relations, alliances and goals (Cockburn 2015). In a comparable way, the onset of the war in Syria has added a layer to the conflict in Tripoli, making it denser. The dynamics across the border, where the Alawites also are a minority living among the Sunni majority, have been mirrored in Jabal Mohsen and rivalling Bab el-Tabbaneh, and led to renewed clashes. Even though the political situation is very different in the two countries, and many other factors than identity politics are significant, interviewees from Jabal Mohsen often reiterated that sectarian identity is causing and driving the conflict both in Tripoli and Syria. During the interviews conducted for this thesis, many residents highlighted the increasing discrimination and hostility that they have faced due to their perceived connection to the Syrian regime following the 2011 uprising and subsequent war. For these reasons, I limit my focus to the post-2011 time period. The research question this thesis aims to answer can thus be formulated as:

How are identity narratives of Lebanese Alawites in Jabal Mohsen performed, reinforced, contested and maintained in the Martyrs' Cemetery, in particular since the onset of the Syrian crisis in 2011?

This research is situated in the intersection of space, memory and identity. To demonstrate how this triad is playing out on a local level in Jabal Mohsen, I will first outline the theoretical framework informing my analysis (section 1.2). Secondly, I elaborate on the methodology used to answer the research question (section 1.3). The next chapter situates the case study in the historical context and provides a historical overview of Alawite group formation in Lebanon and Syria (section 2.0). Thereafter two chapters containing analysis of two separate, but interlinked, identity narratives incorporated in the spatial practices in the cemetery follow: heroes and victims (section 3.1) and imagined communities (section 3.2). Lastly, the concluding remarks connect the main findings to the broader academic debate and contain suggestions for further research (section 4.0).

1.2 Delimitation and Language

A few aspects of the use of language have to be highlighted, as well as limitations to my research. Firstly, as argued by Lefèvre, the Alawites of Lebanon are at a political crossroads, as the ADP and Eid family's hegemony has been challenged following the exile of its present leader, Rifaat Eid, to Syria in 2014 (Lefèvre 2014a). Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to elaborate on these power dynamics and what implications this has had on the narratives and micro-politics in the neighborhood. Secondly, and as mentioned above, the conflict has involved the Alawite-dominated

Jabal Mohsen and other Sunni-dominated surrounding neighborhoods, of which Bab el-Tabbaneh is one. In this thesis I use the name Bab el-Tabbaneh to refer to the opposing side in the conflict, even though other neighborhoods are also involved, since this is generally the term my interviewees used. It should also be noted that this opposing side is heterogenous, politically fragmented and has a range of processes of identity construction taking place within it that also affect Alawites in Jabal Mohsen. Most notably, there have been various Islamist movements developing in Tripoli with Bab el-Tabbaneh as their stronghold.[3] Many of the Syrian refugees fleeing to Tripoli have also settled in the neighborhood, which has ideological, social and economic implications.[4] These aspects will however not be covered by this thesis. Thirdly, I use the Arabic term Daesh for the transnational terrorist organization also labelled ISIS or IS. Lastly, the translation of written Arabic is my own, unless otherwise indicated. For spoken Arabic, I have during the interviews relied on a translator, but in some cases adapted the translation myself after listening to the recordings.

1.3 Theoretical framework

Identity is not a primordial feature, or even a stable unit of analysis. Rather, "it is a process - *identification* - not a thing" (Jenkins 2014, 5). Pertaining to a discursive approach, identification is in this view seen as a process that is never completed. The process of identification can involve the recognition of a common shared characteristic or common origin with another individual or group (Hall 1996, 16). If, then, identity is considered a narrative, it is a story constantly being told. The story is an open-ended process, but it has to take care both of permanence and change. It does so through reinterpreting and rearranging past events in a manner which makes the narrative concordant with the present (Martin 1995, 8). The story of the individual or group can thus always be revised and changed. As argued by Brubaker, social identity groups should be conceptualized not as entities but rather in relational and dynamic terms such as cognitive schemas, discursive frames and political projects (Brubaker 2004, 11).

Furthermore, this approach calls for a contextualization of the narratives that are told by, and about, a social identity group. In order to understand the social category, one has to trace the construction of it, but also consider the purpose that it might serve. This holds especially true in a

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[3] See for example: Bilal Y. Saab and Magnus Ranstorp, "Securing Lebanon from the Threat of Salafist Jihadism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 10 (2007): , doi:10.1080/10576100701561236.
[4] A comprehensive analysis is provided in: Lefèvre, Raphaël. *The roots of crisis in northern Lebanon*. Vol. 15. Carnegie Middle East Center, 2014.

setting of violent conflict, since belonging to a group becomes naturalized, articulated and politicized when it is threatened in some way (Yuval-Davis 2010, 266). However, identity narratives are not conjured from nothingness. Castells argues that construction of identity uses building materials from history, geography, collective memory, power apparatuses and religious revelations. Individuals, social groups and societies then process these materials and rearrange their meaning according to the social reality (or perception thereof) in which they exist (Castells 2011, 7).

The narrative also has to resonate with people's emotions. Martin highlights this emotional aspect of identify articulation. According to him, identity narratives must pick up what is, at one particular time, in a particular situation where a particular balance of power obtains, most strongly felt. The production of a narrative entails a selection among events which constitute the global experience of the group (Martin 1995, 12). For an identity narrative to gain traction in a group which it aims to solidify, it has to be relevant for the group members. Even then, and as they participate in the process of identification, they challenge, reproduce and select among the components of the narratives pertaining to the group.

Identity also has a spatial dimension. Geography and place attachment is one of the building blocks of identity narratives, but it draws on different ideas of space. The feeling of belonging – of 'being at home' - can be linked to one's house, the neighborhood, the nation, or the region. Building blocks of identity narratives can also be spatial but transnational, as in the case of diasporas. Construction of identity draws on space and narratives of spatial attachment, but simultaneously space is constructed by identity narratives. This process is what Antonsich is referring to as "politics of belonging", or "the dirty work of boundary maintenance". The landscape itself is used as a resource in this identity construction, as a visual means of communication that is used to convey messages of inclusion and exclusion (Antonsich 2010, 649-650). In this sense, space is also relational: it is a vehicle for the articulation of belonging, and thus itself articulates who belongs – and inevitably defines who does not. By defining space, that is by drawing boundaries, there is always a process of exclusion (Bollens 2013, 191). Analysis of space can thus reveal both what is there, what is included and displayed, and what is removed, excluded and made invisible. It only exists in relation to something else and thus contains 'the other' because no entity can exist in isolation (Harvey 1996, 261).

The making of space is consequently a part of the politics and processes of identity formation. It is not a neutral ground; rather, it – just as identity – is socially produced. It is a product of political processes, and as such it reflects power and social relations. Soja argues that we "must be insistently aware of how space can be made to hide consequences from us, how relations of power and discipline are inscribed into the apparently innocent spatiality of social life, how human geographies become filled with politics and ideology" (Soja 1989, 6). Lefebvre puts it more concisely: "There is a politics of space because space is political" (Lefebvre 2010, 174). To analyze space is to analyze power and social relations. But space is also being used and appropriated by social agents. While power, discipline and ideology are inscribed in space, it is also ascribed symbolic and cultural value by users. In these processes, memory can also play a decisive role.

Beyond the spatial dimension of identity construction, memory constitutes an essential resource for building the story about oneself and the group. We always base our experiences on a prior context, in order to ensure that they are intelligible at all (Connerton 1989, 6). For an identity group, it is their past communal experience that holds them together. The core of any identity group is a sense of sameness over time and space, which is sustained by remembering; as such, what is remembered defines and is defined by the identity. But much like identity groups, memory is not a fixed unit. It consists of constructed representations of reality (Gillis 2010, 3). Commemorative sites are solidified instances of such representations, which make it possible to access the politics surrounding memory construction through an analysis of what is physically there.

Sites such as memorials and cemeteries are sites to process grief, but they are also spaces that provide the community in which it is situated with building blocks for their identity. Past events are invoked to legitimate current narratives of belonging and place. The construction of places of memory is to exercise what Bourdieu called the power of 'world making' (Bourdieu 1998), to attempt to frame the experience of the lived reality in a certain way. Spatial practices of commemoration construct mental boundaries which reify differences between identity groups. Memorials and other physical commemorations constitute territorial markers, demarcating dichotomous boundaries for those living inside the controlled territory as well as those outside it (McDowell and Braniff 2014b). As such, cemeteries and memorials are constructed to ossify, sometimes hostile, narratives of social relations and belonging.

Further, they often contain idealized images of citizens, or community members, and seek to teach the public a lesson (Volk 2010, 25). Fundamentally, they attempt to influence ideas about

morality and righteousness, about what is good and just. Moreover, the construction of monuments and memorials, generally built to reinforce and be a factor in a dominant or competing societal narratives, exemplify the dominance of the power holders over institutions, economics and sociocultural mechanisms that are used to reproduce these narratives (Begić and Mraović 2014,16). This attempt to impose a hegemonic narrative of reality is however not uncontested. Rather, places of memory functions as "rhetorical spaces" where citizens and elite debate images and symbols, values and identity (Volk 2010, 24-25). Memory politics, of which memorials and cemeteries constitute a part, is thus interlinked with identity politics. It is within this academic debate of identity construction and its different components that my research is situated.

1.4 Method and Positionality

The theoretical framework outlined above informed my data collection in Jabal Mohsen. Ontologically the research is positioned in the structuration theory, assuming that structures and agents influence each other since identity is systematically prescribed to individuals, but re-interpreted and restructured by them. Agents also re-produce and 'make' the structures that my research engages with: the micro-political structures in Jabal Mohsen. Due to the interpretive epistemological stance that analysis of the cemetery takes, the data collection is qualitative. It consisted of in-depth semi-structured interviews, and my observations of the neighborhood and the cemetery. The initial phase of data collection involved observations of the urban space and spatial practices, informal meetings with residents, as well as meetings with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in the area. The purpose of this stage of data collection was to identify potential interviewees, as well as gain a better understanding of the current state of the conflict. The NGOs that I consulted work on conflict transformation and peacebuilding in Jabal Mohsen and Bab el-Tabbaneh, and for this reason, had valuable insights on common narratives among the residents in both areas, as well as main actors involved in micro-politics in Jabal Mohsen. The second phase of the data collection entailed eleven semi-structured interviews with eighteen participants, conducted between January and June 2019. The interviewees themselves chose the setting they were the most comfortable with. In three instances, this meant being interviewed with their friends. Some interviews took place in their homes or workplaces, but three of the interviews also included transect walks through the cemetery. I sought to interview a diverse range of individuals, which meant taking demographic features such as age, gender and socio-economic standing into account. However, I also had to be flexible: Jabal Mohsen is not an area that many come to visit, particularly foreigners. While spending time in the area, I was sometimes

viewed with suspicion and questioned about my purpose. Gaining access to interviewees with diverse backgrounds was thus sometimes challenging. The aforementioned NGOs, however, were able to help me identify potential respondents, and snowball sampling was used to reach further interviewees.

My limited proficiency in Arabic was sometimes an obstacle. While I have studied Arabic for several years, my learning has mainly been focused on reading and writing Modern Standard Arabic. My knowledge of spoken Lebanese Arabic was of great help when interacting and building relationships with the inhabitants of Jabal Mohsen; however, it was not sufficient to conduct interviews for research purposes. Thus, I had to - in eight of the interviews - rely on a translator. The remaining three interviews were conducted in English. Both mine and the translator's identity have to be considered as factors that might influence the data. Even though I cannot be certain about whether interviewees somehow adapted their behavior and the information they provided me with, due to my presence or their relation to the translator, I have not been able to observe any indications of this. The translator was from the area, which I have interpreted as being a positive thing. The interviewees and the translator shared frames of reference and the respondents seem to be able to speak openly. I also got the impression that those I interviewed were very positive about the research project, and glad that an 'outsider' took interest in their community. Next to all of the interviewees asked me if I was also doing research in the rivalling area of Bab el-Tabbaneh and seemed pleased hearing that that was not the case. Taken together, I interpreted the participants to be enthusiastic about talking to someone who is not from the area, and that my identity in that sense was an advantage. It prompted some to formulate ideas that otherwise are implicit and not discussed, such as the definition of a martyr, according to what some of my interviewees told me.

All participants in the interviews have been informed on the topic of the research, purpose of the data collection as well as management of their personal details prior to agreeing to the interview. Due to the risk of re-traumatization it can entail to talk about topics related to my research, I did not discuss or raise any questions about personal losses. However, some of my interviewees brought this up themselves. Even though I cannot be sure how my questions have affected the people I have spoken to, all participants have had friends or family around when the interview was conducted, which I believe to be important for emotional support. Evidence collected in interviews was triangulated, coded and categorized according to identified themes and patterns. In addition to the generated data, naturally occurring data - primarily commemorations in the cemetery, such as posters, tombstones, and memorials - was also analyzed and categorized.

2.0 History of group formation

The dynamics of the Tripoli conflict is embedded in a larger historical context, including political processes of identity formation that extend beyond the borders of modern Lebanon. The Alawite sect has long suffered oppression, persecution and marginalization due to their different beliefs, in particular during the Sunni Islamic empires. The Alawite minority is considered a branch of Shi'a Islam, which in turn is a minority within Islam as a whole. They differ theologically from mainstream Shi'a in their belief in transmigration of the soul and are also defined by their subscription to the idea of an esoteric religious knowledge which is only revealed to a few, through a complex process of initiation (Farouk-Alli 2015, 29-30). They are a minority in both Syria and Lebanon and have traditionally lived along the Mediterranean coast and in the mountains. In Lebanon, they are concentrated in the north of the country, with Jabal Mohsen as their stronghold.

The oppression of Alawites during Sunni empires is exemplified by a fatwa issued in 1317, during the Mamluk era. It was issued by a Sunni Salafist scholar that declared the Alawites to be heretic and called for their annihilation. According to the fatwa, Alawites were to be considered "more disbelieving than the Jews and the Christians" (Friedman 2010, 62, Farouk-Alli 2015, 32). They were further marginalized during the Ottoman empire, and largely overlooked by Western powers seeking to strengthen ties with local religious minorities for their political gains during the nineteenth century. The divide and rule policies of the French and British, who controlled the Levant following the disintegration of the Ottoman empire, exacerbated the division between different religious communities. Further, the artificial borders drawn up did not take demographic composition of the areas into account. They were perceived to disrupt the natural harmony of *Bilad el Sham*, a geographical area compromising what today is Jordan, Palestine, Syria and Lebanon (Farouk-Alli 2015, 34-40). The French mandate's inclusion of Tripoli in Greater Lebanon was met with resistance from residents and leading politicians, which led to riots, demonstrations and strikes, due to it being seen as cutting the city off from *Bilad el Sham* (Knudsen 2017, 72). These colonial policies and artificially constructed borders contributed to the salience of sectarian identity, fragmented states and the identity politics still prominent in Syria and Lebanon today.

The foundation of the Syrian branch of the Baath party was immensely important for the development of Alawite identity and its politicization. The secular socialist policies of the party, founded shortly after Syria gained independence from the French mandate in 1946, attracted many Alawites who long had been marginalized due to their religion. It was one of the reasons that many

Alawites left their historical homelands along the coast and the mountains, moved to urban areas and became more integrated in Syrian society (Goldsmith 2014, 144). It constituted a decisive step for Alawites rise to political power, in particular after the party seized power through a coup d'état in 1963. A few years later the al-Assad regime began, when Alawite Hafez al-Assad became president of Syria through a coup. His policies were secular but favored many Alawites through a system of clientelism (Cleveland and Bunton 2013, 405-407). Even though it should be highlighted that there were other factors than religious identity influencing social status of Alawites and their access to state resources, Hafez al-Assad's rise to power had great symbolic value and entailed increased chances for Alawites in Syria to climb the social ladder. This elevation of the Alawite minority in Syrian society, and the authoritarian state the regime built, led to discontent and uprisings from the Sunni majority. Among the most notable of such uprisings was the rebellion in 1982 in Hama, initiated by anti-regime forces associated with Sunni Muslim Brotherhood. The regime responded with ferocious brutality, killing at least 10 000 (Cleveland and Bunton 2013, 407). This historical context partly explains the current hostile relations between Alawites and Sunnis in Lebanon. As will be shown, antagonism between the two identity groups, channeled through the Baath party and Muslim Brotherhood respectively also unfolded in Tripoli.

The reification of sectarian differences under the Ottoman Empire and later French mandate also took place in Lebanon. However, the French plan for Lebanon was different in that it aimed to establish a Maronite Christian ruled state, with strong ties to the West. This plan did not reflect the demographic makeup of the area as the Maronites only constituted about thirty per cent of what had been made the Lebanese state (Cleveland and Bunton 2013, 225). Even though the sectarian diversity of the country was recognized in the political system that was set up, where position in the government as well as the seats in Chamber of Deputies were divided according to sectarian belonging, the Christians were favored through a higher proportion of seats. This power sharing system was based on a consensus conducted in 1932, but despite significant demographic development, no new census was ever conducted. The presence of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and significant numbers of Palestinian refugees, predominantly Sunni Muslim, since 1948 added another layer to the conflicts and competition for power already present in Lebanon. The Palestinians were denied citizenship due to the threat to the balance of power, as well as demography that formed the base for the political system, this would entail. An attack on Palestinians on a bus in April 1975 marked the start of the Lebanese civil war, but already in the 1960s several incidents related to what role Palestinian organizations should play in Lebanon led to casualties and injured in Tripoli (Khalaf 2002, 219). The years leading up to the war and its initial

phase is crucial for understanding the politics and dynamics of the Alawite identity in Jabal Mohsen as well as the relation between the Sunnis and Alawites in Lebanon.

Tensions were already present in Tripoli before the outbreak of the civil war in 1975, and it was the years leading up to the war that laid the foundation for the spatial, political and social division of Sunnis and Alawites. The Alawites in Lebanon were at this point not officially recognized as a sect, had no representation in parliament and generally belonged to the lower social classes. In Tripoli, they lived together with Sunnis in Bab el-Tabbaneh and were part of the same social strata and political realm. The Alawite rise to political power in Damascus in the late 1960 however made Lebanese Alawites look towards Syria for support and ideological inspiration. The Sunnis, on the other hand, largely supported Palestinian organization Fatah and the Muslim Brotherhood (Gade 2015, 28-31). It was within this cluster of conflicts and trans-national ideologies that the ADP was established. During the 1960s the Alawite Youth Movement developed, which would later evolve into the ADP. The founder, a Tripoli schoolteacher by the name of Ali Eid, had studied in the US and, inspired by the Civil Rights movement there, aimed to gain further rights for Alawites in Lebanon.[5] The escalating violence in Tripoli during the early 1970s led many Alawites to flee to an uninhabited hilltop above Bab el-Tabbaneh. The hilltop is now Jabal Mohsen, named after the family who owned the land when it first started becoming inhabited.[6] As tension and the anti-Syrian and anti-Alawite sentiment entailed in the first phase of the civil war grew, more and more Alawites left their homes in Tripoli to seek safety in Jabal Mohsen. The newly established neighborhood also became the base for the ADP. This creation of a political organization for Alawites in Lebanon and the spatial segregation that the establishment of Jabal Mohsen entailed can be considered the starting point of 'changing organization of human groups' (Martin 1995, 13), creating the Alawite enclave in Tripoli.

The civil war led Ali Eid to flee to Syria, where he consolidated his alliance to the al-Assad family. Rifaat al-Assad, then-President Hafez's younger brother (and the mastermind of the aforementioned attacks on Hama), provided military training, weapons and support that enabled the creation of the ADP militia on his return to Jabal Mohsen: the Arab Red Knights. In return, the ADP offered an operational stronghold for Syrian military and intelligence services within Jabal Mohsen (Larkin and Midha 2015, 186). Syrian forces, which had already intervened in Lebanon in 1976, were against Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, also active in Tripoli. From Jabal Mohsen,

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[5] According to Ali Eid's son, Noureddine Eid, in an interview with me.
[6] Jabal Mohsen in Arabic means 'Mountain of Mohsen'

Syrian forces conducted operations targeting activists and militias in Bab el-Tabbaneh. Civilians were also arrested and attacked, leading to an increasing anti-Syrian climate. In this context, the newly founded Lebanese branch of the Muslim Brotherhood gained support, denouncing the Syrian presence (Gade 2015, 38). The Islamic Unity Movement (IUM), sprung from the Muslim Brotherhood, consolidated control of Tripoli in 1983. The years following reflected the dynamics between the al-Assad regime and the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria. Fighting between the IUM and the ADP continued until 1986, when ADP fighters and the Syrian army carried out a massacre in Bab el-Tabbaneh, killing 200-400 people. This crushed the IUM and remains a traumatic memory and a source of communal resentment in Bab el-Tabbaneh (Larkin and Midha 2015, 190). This period saw a range of actors with competing goals, ideologies and trans-national alliances. It is within this historical context that the conflict in Tripoli and the Lebanese Alawite identity construction has to be placed and interpreted.
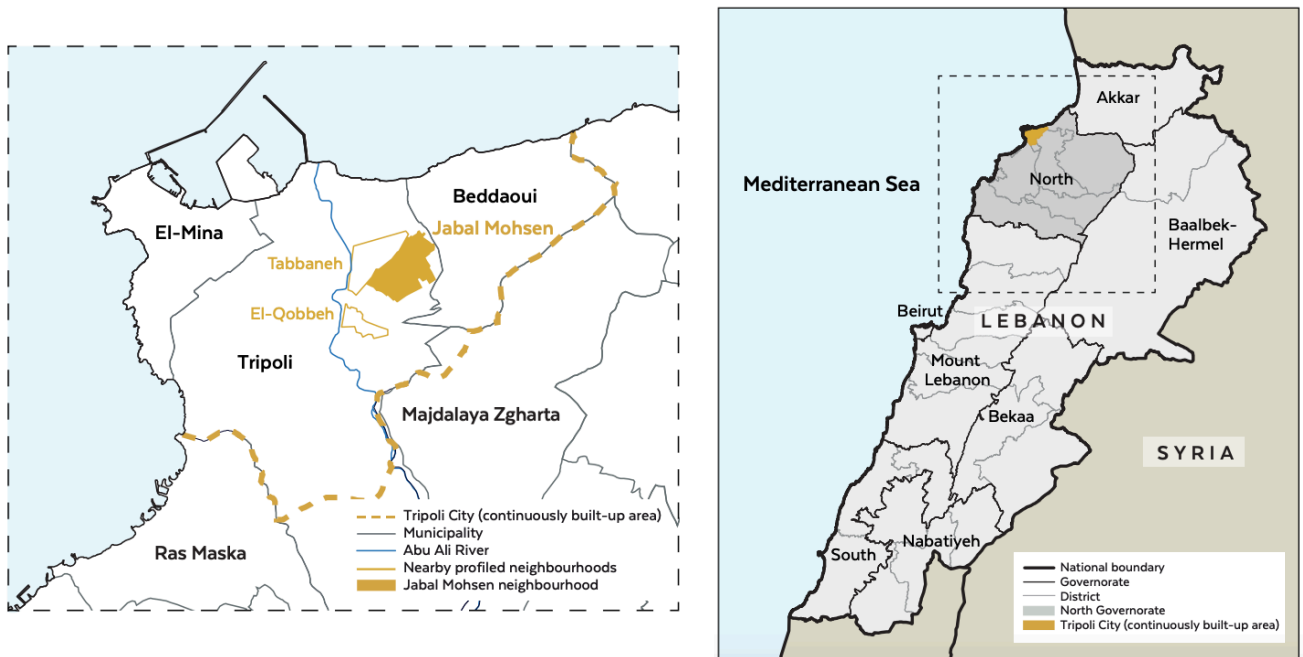

Figure 1 Map showing Tripoli's location in Lebanon (right), and Jabal Mohsen's location within Tripoli (left)
Source: UN-Habitat and UNICEF Lebanon (2018) Jabal Mohsen Neighbourhood Profile 2018, Beirut: UN-Habitat Lebanon

The end of the civil war in Lebanon in 1990 had two important implications for the Alawites of Jabal Mohsen. Firstly, they were recognized as an official sect in Lebanon, and gained their first parliamentary representation when Ali Eid was elected as the first Alawite member of parliament in 1992 (Knudsen 2017, 81). Secondly, Lebanon remained under Syrian control after the civil war. Operating on a mandate from the Arab League, it exercised tight control over political and social life, as well as the media. The Syrian presence hindered reconciliation between the two communities in Tripoli, but it also brought stability to the area (Knudsen 2017, 75). The Syrian

occupation ended in 2005, after the assassination of former prime minister Rafiq el-Hariri, and a subsequent popular uprising called for the end of Syria's presence in Lebanon. The retreating Syrian army reportedly supplied the 1000-man strong Alawite militia of Jabal Mohsen with weapons before leaving the country (Larkin and Midha 2015, 188). The events following Hariri's assassination also divided Lebanon's political life in two camps, largely pro- and against Syria. In 2008, clashes between their supporters also spread to Tripoli and led to renewed violence between Jabal Mohsen and Bab el-Tabbaneh.

This turbulent past, regional identity politics and continuing intercommunal tension has led to the isolation of Alawites in Jabal Mohsen, which is geographically and socially largely cut off from the rest of the city (see figure 1). It has also positioned the ADP and the Eid family, with Ali Eid's son Rifaat now leading the party from Syria, as the most powerful actors in Jabal Mohsen and the ones in charge of the military activity in the area (Lefèvre 2014c). When now turning to the post 2011-period, the cemetery will be employed as a unit of analysis to position Jabal Mohsen and the Alawites living there in the cluster of conflicts and layers of identity politics they are embedded in. Through outlining features of the cemetery, and the narratives surrounding them, it will show how local processes of identity formation unfold.

3.0 The Martyrs' Cemetery of Jabal Mohsen

The Martyrs' Cemetery of Jabal Mohsen is, just as the neighborhood itself, a product of violent conflict. The Alawites' aforementioned move to Jabal Mohsen meant that Alawites left Bab el-Tabbaneh, where many of them used to live, and it also made the establishment of a cemetery necessary. Before the onset of the conflict, Alawites were buried together with Sunnis in Bab el-Tabbaneh but due to the vandalization of their graves in the old cemetery, and the threats against Alawites who wished to visit the graves of their loved ones, funerals there were no longer possible. This prompted Ali Eid to buy land in Jabal Mohsen and designate it a burial place for inhabitants of the neighborhood. The first deceased to be buried in the cemetery in the 1970s were victims of the first phase of the civil war and considered martyrs, giving the cemetery its name. As will be shown, it has been a site and resource for constructing and maintaining Alawite identity narratives in Jabal Mohsen. The next two sections will outline distinct but overlapping narratives about the life of Alawites in Jabal Mohsen. Firstly, the stories about heroes and victims in Jabal Mohsen, and secondly, those of the imagined communities in Lebanon and Syria.

3.1 Heroes and Victims

"These are our martyrs, they died for us to live"
Interviewee, Jabal Mohsen, May 2019

While all inhabitants of Jabal Mohsen are allowed to be buried in the Martyrs' Cemetery, all are not commemorated in an equal manner. Most of the efforts made to memorialize the dead are made by the family of the deceased or other loved ones. In some instances, however, the ADP has also been involved in the commemoration, which I will elaborate on in this chapter. In general, the manner of memorialization reflects the individual's standing in the community. The tombstones used reveal the socio-economic status, where those with less financial assets can only afford the most basic white graves. Other types of stones, such as granite, are more expensive and thus those with a better economic standing tend to have both darker stones and more excessive decorations. Social standing is also reflected in burial styles: the sheikhs, for example, are revered by the community in both life and death. Their graves take up more physical space and are the only ones which should be painted in a dark green color. Their graves are also visited by community members, who believe that it brings fortune and health to pray by their grave and take a string from the green fabric covering it to wear as a bracelet. These practices indicate the importance of religion in the area. The commemorations that stand out the most in the cemetery, however, are those of the individuals who received the honorary title of martyr.

The martyr title is not specific to the Alawite community, or even to Islam. Icons such as Che Guevara and Mahatma Gandhi also advocated self-scarifying ideas, and glorified willingness to die for principles. Gandhi in fact very regularly used the Arabic word for martyrdom, *shahadat* (Devji 2008, 19). Guevara celebrated "the ones who fell early and those still to come [as] the most complete expression of the heights that can be reached by a nation fighting to defend its purest ideas and its noblest goals." (Khalili 2007, 19). In Islam, martyrdom has been framed in religious terms but has no definite definition. In relation to the Quran, Surah Ali-Imran is often invoked to validate the self-sacrifice entailed in becoming a martyr and was also cited by two of my interviewees. It reads "Think not of those who are slain in the way of Allah as dead. Nay, they are living" (3:169 cited in Khalili 2007, 32). This, however says very little about who is to be considered a martyr, and why.

The ambiguity of the concept of martyrdom means that it can be drawn on as a discursive resource in many different contexts and employed as a resource for mobilization. As has been shown by Khalili, martyr narratives are not static. Her research on Palestinian nationalism outlines how they change over time and are responsive to the larger political and historical context and discursive shifts (Khalili 2007). Even though religious and political authorities can declare that someone is to be considered a martyr, there is no institutionalized process for deciding who is a martyr and not. In Jabal Mohsen, declaration of martyrdom is a in many instances done in a collective way, where residents in the area refer to someone who has died as a martyr if the manner in which they died matches the idea they have of being a martyr. Even though my interviewees sometimes disagreed on who is a martyr and who is not, on a conceptual level, one residence also pointed out that such discussions rarely take place in public. He stated that if someone had been labelled a martyr, it would be disrespectful to argue against it, especially towards the family of the deceased who takes pride in their martyrdom. The making of a martyr is thus a social process. In Jabal Mohsen, the martyr narrative has been adapted to the local reality, as well as according to the particularity of Alawite identity.

The martyrs are elevated above other dead, both in the manner that they are commemorated in the cemetery and in the minds of community members. Most of my interviewees distinguished between those martyrs who died fighting for something, and those who were killed accidently - for example by a stray bullet. Individuals who gave their life voluntarily, actively and as a conscious self-sacrifice have been honored as loyal and patriotic, as ideal members of the community in the cemetery as well as in narratives uttered in interviews. This memorialization transforms the individual from a mortal and flawed member of the community to an embodiment of the community's abstract values (Khalili 2007, 140). In contrast, those who were killed due to being at the wrong place at the wrong time did not actively chose to sacrifice their lives. This loss of life is instead viewed as being particularly sad, and the martyr-title is being used to recognize this unfairness. As argued by Volk, "when soldiers die, it is "them" dying for "us"; when civilians die, it is "us" dying" (Volk 2010, 34). In this sense, martyrdom is invoked in two distinct ways in the cemetery of Jabal Mohsen. Firstly, to construct the hero, the ideal group member. Secondly, to remind the inhabitants of the enemy and the suffering they have caused the community.

This dichotomy is demonstrated in the two largest martyr posters placed directly by the entrance of the cemetery. In one of them, the ADP has been involved in the memorialization, through paying for the poster. This contribution is also made known through the incorporation of

their logo, as seen in the bottom right corner (see figure 2). As argued by Kastoryano, an organization must emerge from a community in order to fight against threats or injustices, to organize the members, represent them and speak in their name (Kastoryano 1991). The ADP took on this role, through their emergence in the late 1960s when they were calling for Alawite's rights and later becoming the only Alawite party in Lebanon. As will be shown here, the party is however not only representing Alawites but is also involved in construction and reinforcement of identity narratives in Jabal Mohsen.

Figure 2 Martyr poster for the victims of the 2015 café bombing. The text reads: 'Our martyrs, victims of infidel terrorism, on the altar of the homeland' (shuhadana dahaya el-irhab el-takfiri 3la mathba el-watan). Photo: Amanda Löwenberg

The poster shown above depicts the victims of the January 2015 café bombings, a deeply traumatic event that shook Jabal Mohsen. It was the first instance of a suicide attack in the neighborhood and broke a period of relative calm that had followed the 2014 implementation of a city-wide security plan. Two suicide bombers carried out an attack on the Abou Omran coffee house, a popular café in Jabal Mohsen. It left nine people dead and over thirty injured. After the attack, two large posters containing images of the nine victims were put up on the wall next to the café but were later moved to the cemetery where they now are kept in order to remember the victims. In both posters, the same pictures of the individuals are used.

The images of the victims are placed in a triangle, where one of the men is placed in the middle, above the others. He is known as Abu Ali,[7] and during the attack he made a particular effort to save other people. After the first suicide bomber detonated his bomb inside the café, a second suicide bomber approached and aimed to detonate his bomb in the crowd that had gathered. Abu Ali spotted the second suicide bomber and tackled him, stopping the attacker from reaching the crowd. Abu Ali died when the second bomb detonated. Due to the fact that he scarified himself to save others, he is considered a heroic martyr and for this reason he is placed above the other victims in the posters. This framing is contributing to narratives of the ideal Alawite. In contrast to innocent victims, the heroic martyr is celebrated and admired. As argued by Khalili, such heroic framing gives the death meaning and purpose, replacing grief and any doubt of the cause that he died for (Khalili 2007, 94). This is illustrated by statements of Abu Ali's son after his father's death. When asked how he reacted to the news of how his father had died, he stated that he was very happy since the Alawite traditions and faith "tell us to give martyrs, and my father was a hero and a martyr". He further argued that his father was a martyr of both Lebanon and the "family of Jabal Mohsen" (Shaheen 2015). The causes he died for, both the struggle for Alawite rights in Lebanon, and for Lebanon itself, are reinforced by the text on the ADP poster: 'Our martyrs, victims of infidel terrorism, on the altar of the homeland' (*shuhadana dahaya el-irhab el-takfiri 3la mathba el-watan*). While his belonging in the Alawite identity group in Jabal Mohsen is emphasized through the use of 'our martyrs', the national cause is also invoked through the reference to the homeland. The fact that he was not an official soldier or combatant adds to the process of construction of communal identity narratives, insofar as it makes the ideal more attainable. He had been a member of the community and gave his life for it not because he was obliged to, in the way a soldier would be. Instead, the voluntarily self-sacrifice by one of 'their own' connects the hero narrative to the local reality and social life in Jabal Mohsen.

While the other victims are still being referred to as martyrs, their passive self-sacrifice is remembered with sadness as opposed to the joy expressed by Abu Ali's son. The unfairness of their life being cut short is pointed out by several community members in the interviews. Inevitably, the depiction of victims, meaning 'us' dying as described by Volk, also reminds the viewer of how the martyrs died; that is, who killed them. In this manner, the passive victim is used to build the narrative about the enemy and the constant threat they constitute. Such outside threats strengthen the in-group and this incorporation of 'the other' in the narrative about the self ossifies the identity

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[7] Abu Ali means 'father of Ali'. It is a common in Arabic to refer to men by 'Abu' followed by the name of his eldest son.

boundaries. An identity group is never formed from just inside a group, but it needs an outsider to come into being. The group becomes a community because the members acquire the feeling that they share something that make them distinct from other groups, and this feeling is often spurred by the perception of a common threat or injustice (Martin1995, 10-11).

The depiction of the victims of the café bombing serves this purpose: it strengthens the communal narratives of the identity group and remind the viewers - whether they be people passing through or coming to visit graves of loved ones - of the common enemy. Printing and putting up the poster make the story visible, easily accessible to the wider community. The victims embody the marginalization, discrimination and threat of violence that Alawites are subjected to, which is reinforced by the text on the poster. The text juxtaposes the two narratives of innocent victims and heroic martyrs, but firmly place them as sacrifices for a higher cause. Through invoking both religious imageries, using the word altar (*mathba*) and infidel (*takfiri*) as well as referring to the homeland (*watan*), their death is placed in a struggle beyond Jabal Mohsen. In this framing, the victims of the suicide bombing are not just victims of a political conflict in Lebanon, but a part of a more fundamental confrontation. Rather it is "linked to an invisible, cosmic war: the spiritual struggle between order and disorder, light and darkness, faith and doubt" (Jurgensmeyer 1991, 112). In this narrative of martyrdom and sacrifice, the ADP-sanctioned story about Alawites in Jabal Mohsen and the conflict is placing the community as the righteous ones who gave their lives for the homeland. Consequently, it is positioning the enemy as the immoral wrong-doers.

A second instance of ADPs involvement in the politics of memory can be found further inside the cemetery. In the north-west corner, a small monument has been erected, featuring the ADP logo and a verse from the Quran (see figure 3). Even though the monument has been erected before the period covered by my research (the date engraved on it shows that it was put up on the 25th May 1987) it is meant to include all martyrs in the cemetery. In fact, two of my interviewees initially points it out as a memorial for the victims of the café bombing. For this reason, and due to it illustrating ADP's involvement in narrative construction, I am still including it here. The memorial is placed in the corner where most of the martyrs in the cemetery are buried, including many of the 2015 victims. On the top of the memorial, the ADP logo is engraved, underneath the Quranic verse:

Verily, Allah has purchased of the believers their lives and their properties; for the price that theirs shall be the Paradise. They fight in Allah's Cause, so they kill (others) and are killed. It is a promise in truth which is binding on Him in the Taurat (Torah) and the Injeel (Gospel) and the

Quran. And who is truer to his covenant than Allah? Then rejoice in the bargain which you have concluded. That is the supreme success.[8] (9:111)

Figure 3 Memorial for martyrs in the cemetery, including the logo of the ADP and a Quranic verse. Photo: Amanda Löwenberg

This verse contains a promise of paradise for martyrs, and frames believers as fighters for God. It incorporates violence and war in a religious language and, in line with the religious framing in the poster with café bombing victims, connects the worldly struggle in Jabal Mohsen with a cosmic one. It should be highlighted that there is a rich body of scholarship of historical contextualization of the Quran and various interpretation of the references to war and violence it features. To say that the Quran, or any other religious text, in itself is encouraging or justifying violence is simplistic. In this context, however, it is invoked to remind those seeing the memorial of the righteousness of the Alawites, encouraging steadfastness and patience through reminding them of the higher cause.

Religious language can, as Juergensmeyer has shown, be used by political activists to give them an aura of legitimacy. It bypasses the state's monopoly of violence in nation states and is given a morality through religion, where killing for defense is allowed (Juergensmeyer 1987). Beyond the legitimacy it can give to the ADP, it also gives meaning to the deaths of the martyrs, making death more imaginable and can comfort those who lost loved ones. However, to understand the ADP's role in the area, and the power workings of identity politics in Lebanon, it is necessary to develop further on the clientelism prevalent in the country.

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[8] Translated by Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan

Webs of clientelism in Lebanon, stemming from the Ottoman empire, have undermined the power of the state. Political leaders, known as *za'im* (plural *zu'ama*), but not necessarily office holders, provide protection and access to services and resource in exchange for political support. It is usually tied to confessional belonging, with the *za'im* providing for others of the same sect. However, this informal system is not based on confessional loyalty alone but has, as mentioned, a transactional character which can apply to actors of different sectarian identities. Further, the *za'im* is typically the head of a prominent and influential family, and a son would inherent the role as from his father (Hamzeh 2001, 170-174). The weak state has enabled this informal power structure to persist, while the *zu'ama* simultaneously undermine the state power.

Figure 4 Commemoration of Ali Eid, featuring the name of the family who initiated the poster to the right.
Photo: Amanda Löwenberg

The role of the Eid family and the ADP in Jabal Mohsen has to be understood with this in mind, especially due to Tripoli long having been neglected by the state. With the state absent, the ADP and Eid family have provided the only effective protection and support available for the inhabitants of the neighborhood. The Eid family and the ADP are almost synonyms, as is common in Lebanon; political parties, influential families and sectarian belonging are often conflated and intertwined. Beyond providing security, political parties in Lebanon also "serve as a basis for the formation of a new kind of identity, a sense of belonging to an imagined community" (Hamzeh 2001, 173). The sectarian identity politics is thus not a top-down process, or one just taking place in

the confessional divided government. It is dispersed throughout society, and overlaps with material needs. Identifying with or supporting a party also entails access to their services and welfare provision. This participation in the clientelism is also inscribed in the cemetery, where a large poster of Ali Eid, who died in 2015 and was replaced as party leader by his son Rifaat in line with the aforementioned hereditary system, has been put up (see figure 4). The right side is featuring a text stating 'A tribute' (*taqdima*) as well as the name of the family who paid to have it done. Such contributions enable the family to show their support for their *za'im*, and also elevates him as a hero, particularly due to the poster's placement in proximity to posters of martyrs who died in battle. This illustrates both that memorialization is political and indicates the functions of confessional micro-politics in Lebanon.

The ADP are however not the only ones participating in the commemoration and identity construction in the cemetery. Another martyr commemoration has been done by the army, together with the family of the deceased. While several army personnel from Jabal Mohsen are buried in the Martyrs' Cemetery, one such grave is standing out. All who served in the army have green graves, of a slightly lighter shade than that reserved for the Sheikhs. Beyond the color of the stone, there are not many other decorations or features that reveal that the individual served in the army. In the corner of the cemetery reserved for martyrs, however, and elevated above the other graves, is a mausoleum made out of bulletproof glass. One side of it is covered in the logo of the Lebanese army, and features the title The Martyr Hero (*shahid el batl*). The apparent fragility of it is belied by the knowledge that it is bulletproof, which in turn demonstrates the strength with which the deceased – and his memory – will be protected, just as he protected his country when serving in the army. The reason that his grave is decorated in such a unique way, different from the other army service men in the cemetery, may be traced to the battle in which he died. In 2014, the border city of Arsal was seized by militant Islamists from Daesh and Jabat al-Nusra, many of whom had crossed the border from Syria. It was the most serious incursion on Lebanese soil since the start of the war in Syria and led to 42 civilian casualties. After five days of battle, the army restored their control of the area, and the militants retreated into Syria (Al-Solh 2014). The battle of Arsal also had consequences for Tripoli. In Bab el-Tabbaneh, a protest against the army operation - led by Islamic scholars - was initiated. Residents of Tripoli had previously repeatedly criticized the army for discriminating against Sunni Muslims while neglecting Hezbollah's role in the war in Syria (Daily Star 2014). Some of the inhabitants in Bab el-Tabbaneh thus connected themselves to, and identified with, the militants in Arsal. Many of the inhabitants of Jabal Mohsen perceived them in the same way, and still do; as I will return to in the next chapter, the identification of the enemy

(both local and existential) with Daesh is common among my interviewees. With this in mind, the unique way this grave has been decorated can be interpreted as having been done due to him fighting the main enemy of the Alawites. Even though the martyr in the Martyrs' Cemetery died in the army, in another city away from Jabal Mohsen, he still died fighting the same enemy and for the same cause.

Figure 5 Tomb of army martyr who died fighting Daesh in Arsal. Photo: Amanda Löwenberg

The memorialization of martyrs provides examples of how death is given meaning and is instrumentalized by different actors, most notably the ADP, to influence narratives in and about Jabal Mohsen and its inhabitants. The humbler manner that non-martyrs and the less socio-economically powerful are commemorated throughout the cemetery is also telling. While those who have money and influence in the community are honored and made visible to the users of the space, the less well-off civilians are rarely made symbols of Alawite identity narratives, unless having suffered a violent death and considered martyrs. Such a selection criterion for commemoration illustrates the decisive role the conflict plays in the construction of space. It also indicates how conflict has shaped daily life as well as the construction of identity narratives in Jabal Mohsen.

3.2 The imagined communities

They are always destroying the Alawites. So when you say Syria, you say Alawites. From the stress we are getting, from the media… we see the children of Syria getting killed for no reason, the women getting killed for no reason. It also comes from religion. Everyday we see people who share the same religion as us, they are dying. It's like you seeing the people of [your country] being killed in another country, you know?
Interviewee, Jabal Mohsen, February 2019

As will be argued in this chapter, the identity construction taking place in Jabal Mohsen, reflected and sustained in the spatial practices in the cemetery, not only pertains to the community of Alawites living in Jabal Mohsen. Beyond the locality, it also includes the construction of the imagined community: a trans-national community of Alawites. The community in Jabal Mohsen and the trans-national Alawite community are also perceived to share the same enemy, one which is defined in the memorialization in the cemetery. There are thus narratives of three community groups that are expressed and reinforced in the space; the Alawite community in Jabal Mohsen, the transnational Alawite community, and the imagined community that constitute the enemy.

The construction of identity narratives taking place in form of commemoration in the cemetery is also expressed and reinforced by rituals and ceremonies conducted there. Such rituals strengthen the sense of being part of an Alawite community in Jabal Mohsen. Of the residents interviewed, most said they go to the cemetery on Fridays, after the Friday prayers in the adjacent mosque. They look after the graves of loved ones, light *bakhour* (a type of incense) and say a prayer for the dead. During *Eid el Fitr*, the holiday marking the end of Ramadan, it is additionally custom to go to the cemetery and plant new plants on the graves. These rituals in the cemetery constitutes an opportunity to meet others from the neighborhood and build bonds between individuals, but also functions as a cultural memory and a framework for holding the community together. Cultural memory, as defined by Assmann and Czaplicka connects collective memory to observable cultural artefacts and rituals. It can be understood to compromise "that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose "cultivation" serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image" (Assmann and Czaplicka 1995, 132). Rituals such as funerals also operate as a part of this cultural memory. When funerals are conducted, the coffin is usually carried through the neighborhood to the cemetery. Those who encounter the funeral procession along the road are meant to join, and help carry the coffin; in fact it is *wajib*, an obligation, to join the procession. One

interviewee tells me that it is since Alawites are 'like one family' that the funeral is conducted in this way. He states: "We are together in the good, we have to be together also in the sad moments". Others point out that it does not matter if it is someone you know: "It is essential to stay together to decrease the grief and sadness. Even strangers". This ceremony embodies the values of the community, where joining the procession is the honorable thing to do. It also serves to connect the living to the dead, and strangers to each other. Performing identity through reoccurring practices over time, related to specific social and cultural spaces are crucial for the construction and reproduction of identity narratives and place attachment (Yuval Davis 2006, 203). It maintains the identity group over time, reinforces loyalty, commitment, and solidarity to the community through encouraging to join the procession regardless of your personal connection to the deceased. In contrast to the graves, differences of class and social status is erased in this ritual, and instead all community members are honored in the same manner. It functions as a component in building an imagined community, one that is of greater importance than the individual and how he might have led his life.

This cherishing of the community above the individual is fundamental in Anderson's argumentation on imagined communities, even though his research was on nationalism it applies to other ideologies of place attachment and belonging. He claimed that nations are imagined, because even in the smallest nation, members will not know their fellow members, yet in their minds lives the image of the communion. Regardless of inequalities and exploitation, the community is perceived as a deep horizontal comradeship. It is this "fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many people, not so much to kill, as willingly die for such limited imaginations (Anderson 2006, 6-7). Many Alawites of Jabal Mohsen have indeed died for their community and been laid to rest in the Martyrs' Cemetery. Being buried in the cemetery connects the people to the space in a very direct and tangible way, and thus contributes to the relationship between the identity narrative and the space. As Khalili argues, the burial of a body in the soil of a place territorializes the person and reaffirms the 'man-land' relationship that often is at the core of ideologies of belonging (Khalili 2007, 135). Burying the dead in the cemetery of Jabal Mohsen reinforces the notion of Alawite belonging in the neighborhood. It anchors the community in the space, where the family and loved ones are a part of the actual soil.

While the imagined community of Alawites in Jabal Mohsen is produced, embodied and projected in the cemetery, there is also a process of production of the imagined community that constitutes the enemy. Broadly, this narrative about the enemy can be divided as Daesh, and infidel

(*takfir*). As outlined in previous chapter, both the martyr poster of the victims of the café bombing, and the memorialization of the army martyr has a link to the definition of 'the other'. Narratives of the enemy as extremists, terrorists and, most commonly, Deash are frequent in my interviews. Even though there indeed have been manifestations of support for Daesh in other neighborhoods of Tripoli, as during the battle for Arsal in 2014 outlined in previous chapter, this support is not judged to be widespread. Some analysts conclude that display of such support rather is a tactic to express dissatisfaction with the government (Civil Society Knowledge Center 2016). This narrative of the enemy as extremists and terrorists is however reinforced by the ADP, both in the cemetery, through the design of the martyr poster for the victims of the café bombing, and through statements in interviews. Ali Fedda, an ADP senior official, declares "We have been here for a long time, we are going to stay here and everything we are doing is to defend our presence in the face of takfiri Salafists that make no distinction between Sunni, Shi'a or Christian" (Larkin and Midha 2015, 197). In a similar vein, Noureddine Eid, son of Ali Eid and brother of current ADP leader Rifaat Eid tells me in an interview that the Alawites of Jabal Mohsen are fighting fanatics, and "ISIS, this mentality". Such statements about the conflict, from the ADP, can be understood as an attempt to define a hegemonic narrative about the conflict and the community's role in it. As King argues, the aim is, in part, to convince outsiders of the rightness of one's own cause and the perfidy of others (King 2004, 453). The emergence of Daesh has offered a new 'ready-made' way to frame the enemy, and applying the term of the global terrorist organization to the outgroup places the struggles of Alawites in Jabal Mohsen on a global scale. The reinforcement of the narrative of the enemy also serves to position the ADP as the protector against them, which can function to maintain control of and legitimacy in the area.

Narratives of the enemy fuel sectarian discourses, but also sustain a sectarian geographical landscape. They are not made up from nothing but resonates with the inhabitants of the area due to their relevance to their lived experience. To be effective, identity narratives have to "meet fuzzy feelings belabouring the minds of a number of people" (Martin 1995, 11) Alawites have frequently been attacked when leaving Jabal Mohsen, due to their identity. Human Rights Watch has documented such attacks since 2012, when the escalation of the conflict in Syria led to increasing hostility towards Alawites in Lebanon. Several incidents of violent attacks against Alawites solely based on their Alawite identity both in their workplaces and in the streets were documented (Human Rights Watch 2013). The increase of such attacks after the outbreak of the war in Syria shows how the Tripoli conflict is embedded in layers of a larger conflict but also how the local political actor, ADP, can draw on this larger conflict to boost their legitimacy.

Religious legitimacy is also used as a tool in identity narratives through the use of the concept of *takfir*, on both sides in the conflict. It denotes the act of excommunication, to declare a Muslim an infidel. The role of and criteria for declaring someone infidel has changed over time, as has the context. In the mid-twentieth century, it was popularized by the prominent Muslim Brotherhood leader Sayyid Qutub and used as a legal loophole to wage offensive *jihad* and justify killing other Muslims, an act which is otherwise prohibited (Zenn and Pieri 2017, 287-288). It has since been incorporated in the ideology of jihadist movements such as Boko Haram, Al Qaida and Daesh.

In Jabal Mohsen it is being used against the outgroup to signify extremism, and to categorize them as an untrue version of Islam. As the Alawites use it about the Sunnis, so too is it used by actors on the Sunni side, against the Alawites. According to one interviewee, the café bombing was an outcome of this narrative about Alawites. Before the attack in Jabal Mohsen, an attack on two Sunni mosques in Tripoli was carried out in 2013. The twin bombing left 29 people dead and 400 injured. It was later found that members of the ADP, as well as Syrian intelligence, were involved in the plot. Among the ADP members, Ali Eid was suspected of having helped one of the bombers to flee to Syria to avoid criminal charges (Naharet 2013). The attack in Jabal Mohsen in 2015 was, according to community members I spoke to, carried out in retaliation for the mosque bombings: "They say that Alawites do not have religion or praying spaces, they just have cafés to come to. That's why they did it there". The narrative of *takfir* thus played out in real, geographical space through the attacks on symbolical places. In this context, the two places can be considered symbols for the communities. Symbols are "means of representations as they stand in the way of something else" (Psaltis *et al* 2014, 61). When symbols are socially constructed, they also reveal something about the group. They express core values, beliefs and ideas, and thereby have a function within the context of group relations (Verkuyten 1995, 264). The mosque is a clear symbol for the Sunni community, but the café rather was made an embodiment of the Alawites' perceived secularism and irreligiosity. As argued by Psaltis *et al*, artefacts and objects are not symbolic by definition, but become symbolic when they interpreted and experienced as such in a particular context (Psaltis *et al*, 2014, 62). In the religiously framed conflict in Tripoli, the café was made a symbol for *takfir* accusation, and attacked for this reason.

Beyond the belonging in Jabal Mohsen and the definition of the enemy, inscribed in the cemetery is also a belonging to a pan-Alawite community, including also Alawites in Syria. Several

martyr posters put up to commemorate fighters who died in the war with Bab el-Tabbaneh feature the leaders of the Syrian regime, Hafez and Bashar al-Assad. The Syrian flag is also incorporated, as well as Saleh el-Ali, a prominent Alawite leader who led a rebellion against the French during the mandate in Syria in 1919 (see figure 6). The use of the Saleh el-Ali also situates the transnational community in the longer timeframe, where he, as a symbol for resistance, anti-colonialism and freedom, represent the almost timeless struggle of the identity group. Incorporation of him in the martyr posters frames the sacrifice of the martyr in the poster in a way that reveals that he is perceived to have died for the same cause. Saleh el-Ali is selected from history, and functions to mediate and transmit emotions of pride and glory from Alawite's past. He is reinforced as a symbol in the history of the identity group. In this way, he becomes part of the collective memories that can inform current political discourse and connect current generations to their past (Liu and Hilton, 2010). Incorporating Bashar and Hafez al-Assad serves a similar purpose: due to the longstanding marginalization the Alawites suffered before the beginning of the al-Assad regime, they are considered symbols of resilience, liberation and strength. Noureddine Eid noted that: "Seven hundred years of running away and suddenly you have a president called Hafez al-Assad. A president of Syria and he is Alawite. Can you imagine the feeling of Alawites? It's an honor for us".

Figure 6 Martyr poster of fighter who died fighting in the conflict with Bab el-Tabbaneh, featuring Bashar al-Assad and Saleh al-Ali as well as the Syrian flag. Photo: Amanda Löwenberg

The start of the war in Syria has exacerbated the notion of a transnational community of Alawites in Syria and Lebanon and contributed to the emotional investment in the identity group, as illustrated by the quote in the opening of this chapter. The conflict in Syria, and the killing of Alawites there, is perceived to be an attack on the Alawite community as a whole. The same interviewee claimed that the reason for the war in Syria is that "they want to erase the Alawites from existence". Political and violent entrepreneurs can draw on this notion of a transnational community to mobilize Alawites in Jabal Mohsen and frame the conflict in Tripoli. The support expressed for Bashar al-Assad during fighting in Jabal Mohsen has been plentiful (Amos 2012, Fisk 2012) and Rifaat Eid has declared himself honored to be a "small foot soldier in the service of al-Assad (Lefèvre 2014a, 16). This indicates how different actors are involved in constructing the trans-national imagined identity group. Identity groups are not only formed by insiders, but it takes both political brokers and ordinary people, insiders and outsiders to "tangle strategies and feelings into a narrative that will raise an echo" (Martin 1995, 11). The outspoken solidarity with the Syrian regime by the ADP has contributed to the view that all Alawites in Jabal Mohsen are supporters of the Syrian regime and hardened the fault line between Sunnis and Alawites in Tripoli since 2011.

Regardless of the extent individuals in Jabal Mohsen actually support the Syrian regime – not to mention the ADP, for which support has faltered in recent years (Lefèvre 2014c) - they are still viewed as symbols of the al-Assad regime by many outsiders, in particular among Sunnis in Tripoli. A militia leader from Bab el-Tabbaneh has stated that fighting ADP in Jabal Mohsen is like participating in the Syrian revolution, but from home (Lefèvre 2014a, 16). This ascription of Syrian belonging, or loyalty, is not only applied to the ADP, but throughout the community. Certain community members thus reinforce the idea of a trans-national Alawite community, through incorporating Syrian Alawite elements in the commemoration, but the construction of this trans-national Alawite identity group is also done by outsiders. A community member explains in an interview: "Everyone outside of Jabal are looking at us as if we are tied to Syria. Because Bashar al-Assad is Alawite, they think we are tied to him. They look at us with burning eyes.". Regardless of Alawites own attachment to, and identification with, the -Assad regime, they are ascribed this relationship by outsiders.

The ADP loyalty to the al-Assads has also historically been sustained by more material support, as illustrated by the backing they received during the civil war in form of weapons, training and assistance from the Syrian army. In the post-2011 period, it is harder to establish the nature and extent of the support that Jabal Mohsen actually receive from Syria. While the ADP deny receiving

any other than political support, almost all of my interviewees claimed that both funds, food and weapons have been received from Damascus, either through the ally Hezbollah, or trucks coming directly from across the border. This, at the very least perceived, resource provision plays a role in producing trans-national Alawite solidarity, especially considering that the state is as good as absent in Jabal Mohsen.

Figure 7 Martyr poster commemorating the victims of the 2015 café bombing. The text reads 'Martyrdom for the sake of the homeland is not a bad fate but it is an immortality in a great death... our martyrs are our great ones'. Photo. Amanda Löwenberg

Narratives expressing belonging in Syria have however also been challenged in the cemetery. Some commemorations are placing the deceased in a Lebanese nationalistic framework. Martyr posters featuring the Lebanese flag and other references to Lebanon are mainly used for those who have served in the army, but other instances of symbols representing Lebanon are also present. The two martyr posters for the café bombings incorporate the word homeland (*watan*) and one of them, not paid for by the ADP, also features the colors of the Lebanese flag (see figure 7). Such nationalistic framing reaffirms the Alawites loyalty to, and identification with, the Lebanese nation. Some interviewees also maintain that the conflict with Bab el-Tabbaneh is being fought for the sake of Lebanon, and that the enemy of Jabal Mohsen is the enemy of the country as a whole. The poster above is also indicating that the homeland is viewed as a cause worth dying for, promising immortality for those who do so. The statement by Abu Ali's son in previous chapter, where he

claimed to be happy about his father's sacrifice for the nation, also indicates that many Alawites in Lebanon also are committed to the nationalist cause that is Lebanon and imagine themselves being a part of that community.

It should however be noted that the notion of a homeland is somewhat ambiguous among the Alawites in Jabal Mohsen. One resident states: "We are with Lebanon. But we cannot forget Syria. We cannot replace Syria with Lebanon. We can't compare them". While some interviewees cite *Bilad al Sham* as the real homeland of Alawites and the reason for the solidarity with the Syrian regime, drawing selectively on history as well as geography to construct the identity narrative, one of the community members also rejects the narrative as a 'Daesh idea'[9]. Historically, it was Arab nationalists, in both Syria and Lebanon, who maintained that *Bilad al Sham* should be the Arab homeland. It was thus not an exclusive Alawite idea. Further, it was inhabited by many different religious groups, which also manifested itself at the time of Tripoli's inclusion in Lebanon. Tripolitans from different religions were protesting against the border drawn up by the French, due to it cutting the city of from the rest of *Bilad al Sham* (Knudsen 2017, 72). The proximity to the border and family ties have reinforced the connection to Syria, among both Sunni and Alawites in Tripoli. However, the Alawites' Lebanese belonging is to a larger extent questioned than Sunnis'. The perception that Alawites do not belong in Lebanon can be linked to the minority status in the country and within Islam, as well as a lack of formal political representation and inclusion *vis a vis* the Sunni sect.

The narrative denying Alawite belonging in Lebanon is contested in the commemorations in the cemetery, as illustrated above, and beyond: "The Alawites are a Lebanese sect per excellence, which have not once scrimped on sending their sons to die as martyrs for the nation… so why do some people try to put them in a place where they don't belong? Why do people doubt our Lebaneseness?" (Larkin and Midah 2015, 181). The reason that some of the Alawites in Jabal Mohsen show this solidarity to Syria may be explained by the perception that the Syrian regime offers protection and welfare that the Lebanese state does not. Regardless of the actual resource provision from Syria, the al-Assad regime is viewed as a protector of Alawites, in a situation where no other protection is available. One of my interviewees argue "I don't feel Lebanese. I am a daughter of Lebanon, but I don't get anything from Lebanon. If I go outside the area, I fear that I'll

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[9] My interviewee was here referring to Daesh attempt to dismantle colonial nation borders and establish a Caliphate, though they in their propaganda used the term *Wilyat el-Sham* rather than *Bilad al-Sham* to refer to one of imagined provinces.

get hurt". This ambiguity of belonging illustrates the plurality of identity narratives in Jabal Mohsen, but also links the need for security and safety in order for narratives of belonging to resonate with individuals emotionally.

4.0 Conclusion

This thesis sought to answer the question of how the identity narratives of Lebanese Alawites in Jabal Mohsen are performed, reinforced, contested and maintained in the Martyrs' Cemetery focusing on the time period after the start of the Syrian Crisis in 2011. In order to trace the micro-political processes influencing these narratives, several layers of the context had to be considered. The conflict between Jabal Mohsen and Bab el-Tabbaneh is embedded in other conflicts and ideologies that reach beyond the borders of Lebanon, and which are stemming from colonial policies. To interpret the conflict as a proxy war for other actors is however too simplistic. In particular, it is unhelpful to analyze it in terms of Shi'a/Sunni identity politics in the region where actors in Jabal Mohsen merely are treated as vessels for major powers, such as Syria. As outlined in this thesis, individuals and organizations in the neighborhood take part in the process of identity negotiation and draw on a range of discursive resources to construct the story about their lived reality. These resources are historical, as exemplified by the incorporating of Saleh al-Ali in commemoration, local, as shown in memorialization of local martyrs, and global, illustrated by the framing of the enemy as Daesh.

The most powerful and influential actor in the micro-political processes is the ADP, who doubtlessly are embedded in, and influenced by, regional sectarian politics. This has been illustrated by their role in politicizing Alawite identity in Lebanon, and their relationship to the al-Assad regime in Syria during the Lebanese civil war and continuing to this day. However, the role of the party and of the Eid family is complex, and the clientelism in Lebanese society, the absence of the state in the area and the historical marginalization of Alawites in Lebanon and Syria must be considered to understand their role and function in Jabal Mohsen. Further, the historical context in which Lebanon is situated, including the colonial history and dynamics of the civil war all play major roles in the emergence and dynamics of the conflict in Tripoli, as well as the position of Alawites in Lebanese society.

The identity narratives constructed in the cemetery have in this thesis been divided in two main categories, the martyrs and the imagined communities. In both, religion is acting as the main building block, but it is performed, incorporated and reinforced in different ways. The commemorations installed by the ADP has religion as a defining feature: it is employed to give the party legitimacy and link the struggle of Jabal Mohsen and Alawites to a higher cause. As such, it offers comfort to those who lost loved ones and give meaning to their death. For example, the perceived righteous struggle gave meaning the death of Abu Ali, and offered comfort to his son. Religion is also used to frame the story about the enemy, perceived by residents of Jabal Mohsen to be extremists, terrorists and immoral. Memorialization of victims and heroes within this narrative about the outgroup reinforces the perceived righteousness of Alawites and is employed to explain hostility towards them. Simultaneously, however, this accusation of *takfiri* is used against the Alawites. This can be considered a form of meta-conflict where the religious narratives are employed to justify animosity towards the other, on both sides.

Rituals and ceremonies taking place in connection to the physical space that constitutes the cemetery reinforce the sense of belonging to a community, and solidarity with it. It is also grounding its relationship to the space. The spatial belonging of Alawites is however contested, by both internal and external actors. While the out-group threatens the Alawites due to their supposed belonging in Syria, the inhabitants in Jabal Mohsen have an ambiguous relationship to their spatial belonging. This is performed in the cemetery through the inclusion of Syrian elements in martyr posters, but also contested by others who emphasize their commitment to the Lebanese state in their memorialization. Again, this has to be understood in the historical and political context, where the Lebanese state have left a power vacuum enabling alternative loyalties, and the colonial past reinforced sectarian differences. The weakness of the Lebanese state in general, and the neglect of Tripoli in particular, has enabled the role of the Eid family as *za'im* in Jabal Mohsen, but also made the area receptive to influence from the Syrian regime. Following the onset of the war in Syria Alawites in Jabal Mohsen are being increasingly threatened due to the actions of the Syrian regime - a regime which has come to be seen by many in the community as a symbol of liberation and strength of the Alawites, but decried as dictatorial, oppressive and brutal by others.

Through an analysis of the cemetery, I have shown how memory, space and identity narratives intersect and take place on a local level. Neither space nor memory are neutral; both instead reflect and produce social relations. The identity construction and negotiation unfolding in the cemetery highlight this political aspect and show how hostile relationships can be maintained.

Memory work in the cemetery reveals that the ADP participates in constructing narratives about the Alawites in Jabal Mohsen, in particular in relation to martyrdom. Only briefly mentioned in my analysis, how these narratives can be, or have been, employed for political gains or violent mobilization is a topic well suited for further research. Considering the current contestation of the ADP and Eid family's hegemony, which has not been extensively discussed here, further research on the implications this has on Lebanese Alawite identity narratives would also be a valuable contribution to the analysis of the conflict. It would be of relevance for further exploration of micro-politics in Jabal Mohsen, as well as broader identity politics in Lebanon and the region.

To understand the politics of identity in Tripoli, I argue that a bottom-up approach is more rewarding than a top-down. This is not to say that national and international actors are not involved in the conflict but starting with their perspective in the analysis runs the risk of ignoring how the conflict is reinterpreted, sustained and influences by local actors. Even though many civilians are helplessly drawn into the conflict, targeted and attacked due to their identity and actions of others, they create and possess their own narratives and tactics to make sense of their lived reality. These are worth exploring and listening to – not only in their own right, but also because they can teach us about the broader processes, narratives and conflicts that Jabal Mohsen is embedded in.

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- that this Master of Arts thesis in Conflict Studies & Human Rights does not contain material from unreferenced external sources (including the work of other students, academic personnel, or professional agencies);
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Similarly, the University of Cambridge defines "plagiarism" as *" ... submitting as one's own work, irrespective of intent to deceive, that which derives in part or in its entirety from the work of others without due acknowledgement. It is both poor scholarship and a breach of academic integrity."* (Emphasis added.)[2]

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