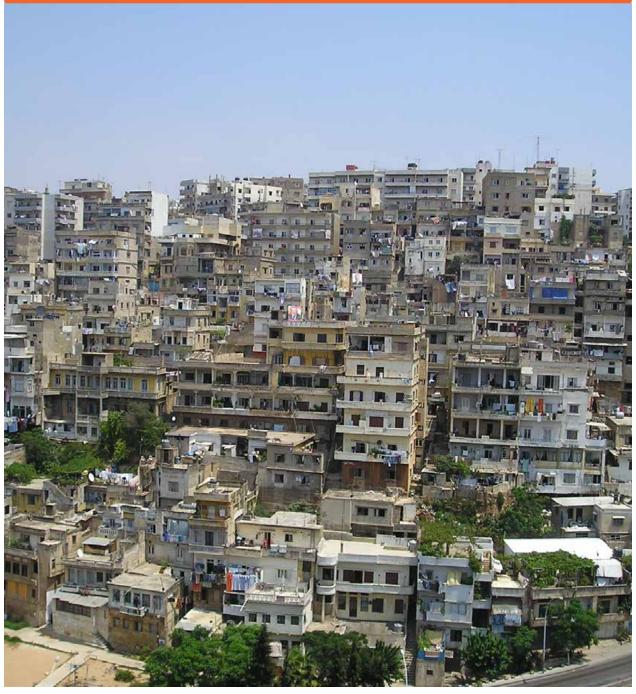# The conflict context in Tripoli: Chronic neglect, increased poverty, & leadership crisis

Conflict Analysis Report, September 2016

Photographer unknown, source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b0/TripoliLebEast.jpg

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About the Conflict Analysis Project

The Conflict Analysis Project aims at understanding contemporary conflict dynamics in Lebanon, in order to better comprehend their root causes and inform interventions and policy-making. It aims to make available and accessible data and evidence-based research and analysis on the social, economic and political effects of conflictuality in Lebanon, its causes, the actors involved, as well as the factors playing into these conflicts. The Conflict Analysis Project includes an interactive conflict mapping, data visualisations, timelines, actor's profiles, investigative articles, research papers, reports, and policy briefs covering multifold aspects of conflictuality in Lebanon.

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Abstract

This report provides an analysis of the current political, social and economic dynamics in Tripoli, Lebanon. The analysis begins with a brief overview of Tripoli's history in the 20th century and the state's securitisation efforts to contextualise the current social and political landscape. The report particularly focuses on how state policy towards the city, along with Tripoli's special historical relationship with Syria, has contributed to ongoing armed conflict, economic stagnation, poverty and political fragmentation in Tripoli.

1.   Introduction

The Northern city of Tripoli is located 85 kilometers north of Lebanon's capital, Beirut. Tripoli is the second largest city in the country and the capital of the Tripoli Governorate that consists of the city of Tripoli and five other districts. Tripoli has a population of 264,895 Lebanese citizens and approximately 20,000 Palestinian refugees. The majority of the Palestinian population lives in the Beddawi refugee camp, which is located in the North district of Minieh-Danniyeh in north of Tripoli[1]. In November 2015, the number of registered Syrian refugees living in the municipalities of Tripoli and al-Mina amounted to 46,142 with an additional 15,570 living in Beddawi.[2]

Tripoli is home to a large seaport as well as commercial and industrial districts. Historically, the city was known as an economic hub competing with the capital of Beirut, but distinguishing itself through its close commercial ties to the neighboring regions in Syria.

In the last few decades, however, Tripoli has lost its regional economic standing due to the rise of communal violence, multifold conflicts and emerging Islamist/Salafist trends. In addition, the city has suffered from an overall socio-economic decline, with increasing poverty and social tension. Such trends have been emphasised greatly by research conducted on Tripoli in the last few years. This research often links to the conflict in neighboring Syria and its alleged spillover effects in Tripoli due to the city's geographical, cultural and socio-economic proximity to Syria. Moreover, Tripoli's developmental, economic and social problems are commonly associated with the growing atmosphere of despair and hopelessness among the city's population.

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1   OCHA, "Lebanon: Tripoli Governorate Profile", 11.5.2014, available at http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20140811-TripoliGovernorateProfile.pdf [last accessed 16.02.2016].
2   UNHCR, "Syria Refugee Response, Lebanon North Governorate, Distribution of the Registered Syrian Refugees at the Cadastral Level", 30.11.2015, available at file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/UNHCR_LBN_REF_MAP_2015-11-30_01_A1_North+5GovernorateSyrianRefugeesRegisteredbyCadastral.pdf [last accessed 16.02.2016].

In general, conflict dynamics in the city seem to reflect an intensified and accumulated version of the national dynamics that have emerged within Lebanon in the recent years. Still, the city distinguishes itself from other parts of the country through the density and prevalence of conflict and the general neglect it undergoes from state institutions, politicians, economic entrepreneurs and non-governmental organisations: "Tripoli has no place on the Lebanese economic, developmental, and tourist map as its name 'has become synonymous with poverty, misery, and deprivation'."[3]

This report seeks to give a contextual and analytical summary of the diverse conflict dynamics in the city today, starting with the city's unique historical position within Lebanese-Syrian relations and extending to the city's underprivileged status in a national context. It seeks to shed light on the city's mutually dependent and recurring dynamics of militarisation and violence and state securitisation with socio-economic stagnation, poverty, political fragmentation, and state neglect. Combined, all of these factors contribute to a culture of fear, despair and hopelessness dwelling within the city and its inhabitants. The report looks at the development of these dynamics in recent years and sheds light on efforts of resilience, inventiveness and capacity building by Tripoli residents and civil society actors that aim to counteract recurring modes of violence, extremism and poverty.

Methodology

This report relied on a multi-type data collection method, desk research and fieldwork in Tripoli. The fieldwork consisted of interviews with 14 informants, including residents of the city, workers, business owners and employees, key figures in state institutions, academics specializing in the city, and NGO representatives working in Tripoli. Interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide and were all conducted in Arabic or English. All interviews were transcribed and analysed. The emerging common themes were placed at the centre of this report, and constitute its core. All interviews were fully anonymous unless the interlocutor explicitly mentioned that they agreed to the public use of their name. The desk research was used to verify the perceptions and arguments made by our informants and compare them against available data, reports, expert analysis and public discourses.

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3   Hilal Khashan, "Lebanon Islamist's Stronghold", *Middle East Quarterly*, 2011, p. 87.

2. A history of occupation, state neglect, and Islamist contention

Until World War I, the city of Tripoli distinguished itself as "one of the foremost cities in the Eastern Mediterranean"[4], a status it maintained largely due to the regional relevance of its port serving the cities of Aleppo, Damascus and Baghdad. The city's socio-economic supremacy declined rather abruptly with the end of the war and the establishment of Greater Lebanon under the French Mandate in 1920. The newly drawn borders of the Lebanese state disrupted Tripoli's trade relations with Syria and Iraq, and situated Beirut, the established capital, as the political hub and center of economic commerce within Lebanon. This effectively redefined Tripoli's economic and political preeminence. The Tripolitanian population met the French Mandate and the city's newly degraded status with resistance, preferring unification with Syria over integration into Greater Lebanon. In the 1930s however, the emerging nationalism and aspirations for independence among the Lebanese population allowed many political figures of Tripoli to give up the idea of a Syrian Tripoli and join in the struggle for Lebanese independence. These political actors' change in position is exemplified by the Tripoli's Abdel-Hamid Karameh, who was once described as "one of the champions of the Arab Union with Syria" but was later "taken prisoner by the French along with the other prominent figures of the independence movement" in November 1943.[5]

Despite relinquishing its dreams of a Syrian Tripoli in favor of Lebanese independence, Tripoli still faced great neglect from the central state, even after achieving independence in 1943. In turn, this led to persistent economic and social grievances in Lebanon's second largest city. Over time, Tripoli became known as Beirut's "poor cousin".[6] Nevertheless, the city managed to regain some of its economic strength and to rebuild its social and cultural status as the Northern capital of Lebanon, due in large part to private investments and Syrian capital streaming into the city.[7]

During the 1960s and early 1970s, Tripoli joined the dynamics of political polarisation within Lebanon, leading ultimately to armed conflicts from 1975 onward. In Tripoli, the politics of notable figures was gradually replaced by "the hard politics of street militias".[8] During the first two years of armed conflict, a number of different militias adhering to various political ideologies contested for the city's streets; however, such contests concluded in November 1976 when the Syrian army entered Tripoli and dominated the political space. As a consequence, "the effervescent atmosphere of partisan fervour vanished and all political

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4 Hilal Khashan, *op.cit.*, 2011, p. 85.
5 Bernard Rougier, The Sunni Tragedy in the Middle East: Northern Lebanon from al-Qaeda to ISIS, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2016, p. 2.
6 Ross Mountain, "The Peacebuilding in Tripoli – Tripoli Supplement", United Nations Development Programme, March 2015, 2, available at http://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/library/crisis_prevention_and_recovery/tripoli-supplement.html [last accessed, 29.02.16]
7 Hilal Khashan, *op.cit.*, 2011, p. 86.
8 Bernard Rougier, *op.cit.*, 2016, p. xvi.

parties were banned except the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP)."[9] Still, at the end of the 1970s, many militia leaders in Tripoli began to reassume political activism by supporting the Palestine Liberation Organisation's (PLO) struggle against the Syrian occupation. These emerging movements increasingly adopted an Islamist tone, mainly inspired by the success of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. After the large scale Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, operation "Peace in the Galilee", the Tripolitan Imam Sayyid Sha'ban founded the "Islamic Unification Movement" ("Harakat al-Tawhid al-Islami"). In 1983, the movement managed to establish an Islamic emirate in the city of Tripoli that was militarily, financially and symbolically supported by Yasser Arafat's Fatah Movement and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The emirate ended with an attack by the Syrian army and violent battles in September and October 1985, leading to Sha'ban's ultimate defeat. While the Tawhid movement was forced to hand over its weaponry after its defeat, the organisation was allowed to continue operating on a limited scale. Soon afterwards, former members founded a new clandestine organisation and continued to fight the Syrian occupation in Lebanon.[10] In retaliation, the Syrian army and its supporting militia of the Alawite Arab Democratic Party (ADP) conducted a large-scale massacre in December 1986, which targeted the mainly Sunni populated neighborhood of Bab el-Tabbaneh and resulted in hundreds of fatalities and injuries.[11]

In spite of the Tawhid experience, Islamic networks still have a presence in Tripoli and the two surrounding Palestinian camps of Nahr el-Bared and Beddawi. These networks receive attention from time to time when popping up in the context of different political struggles and contestations on a national and regional level as in the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the Nahr el-Bared conflict in 2007. Notably, from the late 1990s onwards, various movements have become more and more integrated into global jihadi networks, accompanied by rising fragmentation and radicalisation.[12]

3.   Political fragmentation, armed conflicts, securitisation, and Syrian refugees: the main trends since 2005

In June 2013, the Lebanese newspaper, Daily Star, quoted a Lebanese security official who warned that the situation in Tripoli was much more serious than it appeared. The source compared the city's fate to the Afghan city of Kandahar, referring to the continuing political instability and fragmentation, recurrent armed clashes and increasing lawlessness within the city's streets.[13] These developments increased in parallel with the outbreak of armed conflict

9   Bernard Rougier, *op.cit.*, 2016, p. 6.
10   Bernard Rougier, *op.cit.*, p. 86-87.
11   Raphael Lefevre, "The Roots of Crisis in Northern Lebanon", Carnegie Middle East Center, April 2014, p. 16, available at http://carnegieendowment.org/files/crisis_northern_lebanon.pdf [last accessed 13.06.16].
12   Tina Gade, "Fatah al-Islam in Lebanon: Between global and local jihad", Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 05.12.2007, pp. 12-14.
13   "Security Official: Tripoli fast becoming like Kandahar", *Daily Star*, June 04th, 2013. http://www.

in Syria, as well as with the subsequent spillover effects of the conflict, such as the rising influx of Syrian refugees migrating into Tripoli. Such factors, along with the continuing precarious economic situation and rising poverty in many of the city's neighborhoods has established the Northern capital as a hazardous and conflict prone region. As such, in order to understand Tripoli's current social, political and economic standings, the city's role in local, national, and regional affairs since 2005 must be analyzed.

After the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in 2005 and the subsequent withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon, the predominant Sunni leadership of Tripoli was exposed to profound political change. While many Islamist groups were able to operate more freely within the city's political arena after the withdrawal of the Syrian army, the death of Hariri also brought investments and efforts of rebuilding within predominantly Sunni cities like Tripoli to a halt and engulfed the Hariri's Future Movement in a political and financial crisis. In the following years, political leaders and figures in Tripoli could not manage to find a unified approach to the political and socio-economic challenges of the city and its predominant Sunni population. These deteriorating conditions were further exacerbated by armed clashes between Hezbollah and Future Movement in Beirut in May 2008, with Hezbollah-led fighters seizing control of several Beirut neighborhoods. This led to the symbolic defeat of the Sunni leadership after this incident, and also to Saudi Arabia's subsequent reluctance to continue providing financial support to the Lebanese Sunni leadership, in general, and to the Future Movement, in specific. In Tripoli, this distanced the population from the Future Movement, reinforcing political fragmentation among the various political actors.[14] Concomitantly to the political void at the time, there was also a vacuum on the institutional religious level since the official Sunni authority institution, Dar al-Fatwa, did not, and still does not, represent the majority of the population, who view the institution with mistrust and skepticism. This void led to different attempts by different religious and often Islamist actors to establish alternative religious institutions with each institution representing a different part of the Sunni community in Tripoli.[15]

Today, the continuing vacuum of political and religious leadership and representation is exemplified by rising neglect of the city's infrastructure, low investments and poor public services for the population's most basic needs. Different studies on the economic situation and poverty in North Lebanon in general and Tripoli in particular demonstrate economic

dailystar.com.lb/News/Politics/2013/Jun-04/219354-security-official-tripoli-fast-becoming-like-kandahar.ashx [last accessed 13.06.16].

14 Raphael Lefevre, *op.cit.*, April 2014, pp. 6-10, available at http://carnegieendowment.org/files/crisis_northern_lebanon.pdf [last accessed 13.06.16]; Tina Gade, "Tripoli (Lebanon) as a microcosm of the crisis of Sunnism in the Levant", Paper presented at the annual meeting of the British Middle East Studies Society (BRISMES), London School of Economics, 26-28 March 2012, p. 28.

15 Raphael Lefevre, *op.cit.*, April 2014, pp. 16-17, available at http://carnegieendowment.org/files/crisis_northern_lebanon.pdf [last accessed 13.06.16].

setbacks dating back to the 1970s[16] but aggravating severely since the 2000s.[17] Consequently, Tripoli is home to wide disparities of wealth between rich and poor communities, which is greatly apparent. Rather luxurious and rich neighborhoods border extremely poor areas like Bab al-Tabbaneh and Abou Samra. According to a 2015 ESCWA report, the economy and living conditions in Tripoli have deteriorated since 2001, with 77 % of households in the city being described as economically deprived.[18]

The outbreak of the Syrian crisis has added to the political fragmentation, poverty and economic deprivation, which are accompanied by feelings of neglect and desperation among the city's population. The geographical and historical proximity of the Northern city to Syria reflects in political proxy dynamics between political actors in Tripoli and the different political actors in Syria. This has often manifested itself in violent and armed conflicts in Tripoli between the predominantly pro-Assad neighbourhood of Jabal Mohsen and the majoritarian anti-Assad neighbourhood of Bab al-Tabbaneh. While the conflict between the two neighbourhoods dates back to the days of the Syrian occupation and the civil war, the Syrian war initiated recurrent and intensified cycles of violent clashes. Within the same political struggles, the city also witnessed other forms of violence, including assassinations of political and religious representatives, street violence and scuffles between different communities, the twin suicide bombing of the two Sunni mosques al-Taqwa and al-Salam in August 2014, and a suicide attack on a cafe in Jabal Mohsen in January 2015. While these conflicts are often described in their sectarian dynamics as an Alawite-Sunni conflict, they must still be viewed in their political dimension and the different political affiliations and contestations by political leaders and their followers. Since March 2014, armed clashes in the city have been mainly contained due to a governmental security plan that was implemented to cease the ongoing inter-district violence. Nearly two thousand LAF troops were deployed to secure Tripoli, and negotiations with militia commanders were conducted to ensure that a truce was held by all parties.

In addition to the political and military spillover effects from the Syrian war, Tripoli is also exposed to a high number of Syrian refugees that amounted to 46,142 in November 2015, approximately one fifth of the city's total population. Many of those refugees settled in the overpopulated and poor neighbourhoods of the city, leading to further demands on scarce resources, facilities and employment opportunities. These rising demands among the deprived segments of the city's population are often met with humanitarian approaches by religious, political and non-governmental actors and institutions focusing primarily on short-term relief of basic needs rather than long-term sustainable initiatives.

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16   Iraq's construction of the Basra offshore oil terminal in 1974 and the opening of the Kirkuk-Ceyhan oil pipeline in the 1970s rendered Tripoli's terminal useless leading to the closure of the city's oil refinery in 1993. See Hilal Khashan, *op.cit.*, 2011, p. 90.

17   In 2008, the North Lebanon Governorate accounted for 23 % of the total poor in Lebanon. See UNDP, "Millennium Development Goals, Lebanon Report" 2008, p. 12, available at http://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/library/mdg/the-millennium-development-goals-2008--lebanons-report-.html [last accessed 13.06.16].

18   Adib Naameh, *A reading of urban neglect (Dalil al-harman al-hadari)*, ESCWA 2014, p. 109.

4. Tripoli today: conflict actors

4.1. Local residents: a story of resilience

The city of Tripoli is home to approximately 264,895 Lebanese citizens. Moreover, an approximate number of 20,000 Palestinians live in the city and in the two surrounding refugee camps of Beddawi and Nahr el-Bared.[19] In November 2015, the number of registered Syrian refugees living in the areas of the municipalities of Tripoli and al-Mina amounted to 46,142. The overall number of residents in the city therefore amounts to an approximate number of more than 300,000 people today. Despite its reputation for communal violence and recurring armed conflicts, many of the people we interviewed emphasised that relations between the different communities and residents of the city are generally positive and based on tolerance and friendliness. Mistrust, fear and hostility are usually described in reference to political tensions but not as dominant notions. One of our interlocutors described the mixture between armed struggles and friendly interaction in the following way: "The clashes were political, that means that there was a battle, the battle ended, life went on as usual, then the truce ended...."[20] The influx of Syrian refugees was also rarely mentioned with negative connotation, although issues of competition for work, benefits and public services were described in relation to the fact that poverty in the city is generally high. On a political level, our interlocutors expressed a lot of sympathy for the Syrian people's struggle against its political regime. The struggle was often related to the city's own historical memory of a long "Tripolitan resistance" against the Syrian regime and occupation.

4.2. Sunni leadership: between communitarianism and Salafism

Tripoli's population is predominantly of Sunni confession. Therefore, political as well as religious representatives of the Sunni community have a strong presence in the city. Within the last couple of years, the political and religious fragmentation among those Sunni representatives in Tripoli has been emphasized by existing research as leaving a void of representation for the Sunni population of Tripoli. Politically, the Future Movement, the main political party of the Sunnis in Tripoli, has lost legitimacy in the eyes of many. For many of our interlocutors, the movement has failed to resolve the socio-economic issues in the city and has not properly countered Hezbollah, instead forming a coalition and aiding them in tackling Sunni militias. Many turned away from the Future Movement and sided with Islamist parties and movements, such as the Islamic League (al-jami'a al-islamiya), which is increasingly trying to fill the political void in the city.

Likewise, on a religious level the official Sunni body, Dar al-Fatwa, has in recent years lost its role in representing the Sunni religious community. Corruption scandals have

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19   OCHA, "Lebanon: Tripoli Governorate Profile, 11.8.214, available at http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20140811-TripoliGovernorateProfile.pdf [last accessed 16.02.2016].
20   Interview with a local resident, Tripoli, 12.09.15.

tarnished it at various levels of its organisation, rendering it illegitimate in the eyes of many. This again contributed to the rise of radical Islamist movements who gained further support from parts of the population.[21]

4.3. Alawite community: an increased isolation

Tripoli is home to a rather small Alawite community who are mainly based in the neighbourhood of Jabal Mohsen and constitute about 11 % of the city's population. For decades, political divisions between the two communities have led to tense relations between the Sunni and the Alawite community. The Alawite community is politically represented by the Arab Democratic Party (ADP). Since the 1970s, the ADP's close ties with the Assad regime in Syria fostered support amongst the Lebanese Alawite population and allowed the party to acquire resources, including weapons for locals, and establish their own militia. Since the leader of the ADP, 'Ali 'Aid and his son Rifa'at 'Aid fled the city to Syria in July 2014 to avoid criminal charges for the twin bombings in August 2014, the ADP is currently leaderless and a rather "dormant" actor. According to our interlocutors, the ADP is not involved in the community in a large capacity. Due to this political void and rising tensions between the Alawites and the Sunni community resulting from the Syrian crisis, many of the Alawites whom we interviewed expressed strong feelings of fear and neglect. These feelings were related to two aspects: a perceived lack of protection in the city that intensified after the suicide bomb attack in January 2015 in Jabal Mohsen and different attacks on Alawites in the city, as well as a lack of political representation and shares in both the city and the countryside. One of our interlocutors described the Alawites' isolated situation compared to other communities in the country the following way:

> *"Lebanon is about political sharing. We in Jabal Mohsen don't have a za'im representing us and we don't have parliament members representing us. So everyone else gets the lion's portion, and we get the mouse portion. If ever we get the mouse portion…"* [22]

4.4. Political leaders and parties: a fragmented political space

As Lebanon's second largest city, many Lebanese politicians are originally from Tripoli, using the city as their local as well as national political stage. Most of these politicians come from influential families and possess great sums of money and economic strength in addition to their political leverage. In 2005, the political elite of Tripoli split between the March 8 coalition, represented by figures such as Najib Mikati, Faisal Karamiand the late Omar Karami, and the March 14 coalition, mainly represented by Mohammad Safadi, Moustapha Allouche, Misbah al-Ahdab, the late Mohammad Chatah and, until recently, Ashraf Rifi. Despite this

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21   Raphael Lefevre, "Tackling Sunni Radicalisation in Lebanon", Carnegie Middle East Center, 24.12.2014, available at http://carnegie-mec.org/2014/12/24/tackling-sunni-radicalisation-in-lebanon/hxuv [last accessed 08.03.2016].

22   Interview with a resident of Jabal Mohsen, Tripoli, 12.09.2015.

high representation of politicians from Tripoli in the Lebanese government and parliament many of our interlocutors described the ineffectiveness of local policy initiatives by these politicians. While politicians do invest in the city, their policy initiatives are mostly described as rather ineffective. This was often related to the aforementioned political fragmentation, crisis of Sunni political leadership and dynamics of clientelism and competition amongst these politicians. These tendencies were often described as occurring much more often in Tripoli than in other Lebanese regions: "In Saida they kill each other but when there is something related to the city they sit together. In Tripoli they kill each other to gain control of Tripoli and they kill Tripoli too."[23]

> *"The difference is that classical clientelism is sometimes persisting, it's a durable system, the loyalty of your people is durable, those you pay you get loyalty in exchange. In our case, it is very sort of short-term, impersistent. It is rather vote-buying. That makes it different from classical Lebanese clientelism." [24]*

4.5. State and government institutions: a securitisation approach

Political fragmentation, neglect and ineffectiveness are mirrored on the state level in addition to the local. Many of our interviewees described an absence of the state and state institutions in Tripoli as well as the quasi non-existence of political and economic links between Tripoli and the capital Beirut. Interlocutors expressed frustration in regards to the policy initiatives of the Ministries of Health, Social Affairs and Education, which fail to address the city's precarious social situation. The only state institution that has a rising and continuing presence in the city is the army, especially after the implementation of the security plan as a local expert confirmed to us: "The only approach that the state has to the area is the security approach, the armed forces, the violence."[25] The relationship to the army was often described with mixed connotations. While many interlocutors explained to us that the army was met with overall respect, they added that this relationship has deteriorated in the context of recent armed clashes in the city and throughout the country. This is due in large part to feelings of unfair treatment by the army derived from political affiliations and the fact that the army primarily targeted alleged Sunni Islamists feeding into the feelings of neglect and political frustration that the city's residents experience on other levels. One of our interlocutors described the mixed feelings of Tripoli residents towards the army:

> *"In the end there is not a house in the area (i.e. Bab al-Tabbaneh) that doesn't have an officer. They love the army, but sometimes it is too obvious on who they target and who not. Like for example, I have grown my beard a bit recently, I spend two hours at the checkpoint, every time, [but] they don't do this with Hezbollah supporters..." [26]*

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23   Interview with a local expert on Tripoli, Beirut, 12.10.2015
24   Interview with a local expert on Tripoli, Beirut, 15.01.2016.
25   Interview with a local expert on Tripoli, Beirut, 17.12.2015.
26   Interview with a resident of Tripoli, Tripoli, 19.01.2016.

4.6. International and national Non-governmental Organisations: the prevalence of charity approaches

In the absence of state initiatives and with the influx of Syrian refugees, Tripoli is home to a variety of Non-Governmental Organisations that attempt to meet the city's challenges by implementing a variety of humanitarian and development initiatives. When asked about humanitarian and development aid, many of our interlocutors described the role of political leaders in these initiatives. Within the Syrian crisis, these initiatives were complemented by the emergence of the new local NGOs and the arrival of international NGOs. Our fieldwork showed that those different initiatives and organisations usually work together in trying to meet the different cities' challenges. While many NGO representatives with whom we spoke complained of an increasing workload, decreased funding and rising challenges within their work, many beneficiaries and local experts in Tripoli criticised the NGO approach itself as rather ineffective. Our interviewees attributed this to the fact that those organisations' approaches often rely mainly on charity work. In addition, instead of pursuing a comprehensive development plan, NGOs implement short scale, donor oriented projects which fail to address the city's social, political and economic challenges.

5. Tripoli today: Conflict dynamics and topics of contestation

5.1. Radicalisation, militarisation, and securitisation

In March 2014, the Lebanese government issued a security plan for Tripoli. The army's plan involved the deployment of nearly two thousand troops in order to secure the city and included thousands of arrest warrants issued by the judiciary. Accordingly, although the army detained dozens of people, they did not manage to find or arrest any high-profile individuals. In addition to these measures, the security plan included negotiations with militia commanders who were instructed to ensure a truce to be held by all parties. However, the army announced the truce in advance of its implementation, which appeared to have given many wanted militia commanders and political figures time to flee Tripoli.

The security plan's goal was implemented to contain circles of violence affecting the city since 2008, which intensified with the outbreak of the Syrian crisis in 2011. While armed clashes mainly took place between the two neighbourhoods of Jabal Mohsen and Bab el-Tabbaneh, other kinds of security incidents affected the whole city. The security plan was based on the assumption that Tripoli was under increasing security threats manifesting themselves in armed clashes, different kind of violent attacks, and rising incidents of sectarian radicalisation and tensions. While these conflicts have afflicted the city since 2008 and their dynamics go back to the days of the civil war, conflicts have been exacerbated since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis and consequent proxy-/spillover effects.

The implementation of the security plan has certainly helped to contain armed clashes between Bab al-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen and moreover, has brought relative calm to the whole city. Although this effect was confirmed in our interviews, many of our interlocutors questioned the long-term impact of the plan. This skepticism seems equally valid when taking into account that Tripoli was confronted with isolated but major security incidents after the implementation of the security plan such as the twin suicide bombings in August 2014 and the suicide attack in Jabal Mohsen in January 2015. One of our interlocutors, a former Bab al-Tabbaneh militant, described this short scale impact of the plan in the following way:

> *"Shooting has stopped, that's the only thing that changed and 16000 arrest warrant were issued and a decision to be hard on people everywhere. There will be an explosion, that will happen, it is not taking long. The explosion will come soon. Because people are choked like this. They are choked by the security apparatus or by the army."* [27]

In most of our interviews the multilayered complex and deep historical, political and social background of the battles between Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh were emphasised, feeding also into general dynamics of militarisation and religious radicalisation within the whole city. Most of our interlocutors described the amalgam of older and current political proxy dynamics, socio-economic deprivation and historical and current communal resentments as playing a role in provoking the armed clashes between the two Tripoli neighbourhoods. Still, when asked about the conflict, the first reaction of many of our interlocutors was to stress the predominant political nature of the conflict related to regional (Saudi-Arabia vs. Iran) and national (March 8 vs. March 14) issues of contestation and not being directly related to local and/or communal dynamics:

> *"All the politicians in Lebanon, both 14 and 8 are agents, are middlemen, so basically the post office was Tripoli, they were using the Alawite/Sunni sectarian issues to fight a proxy war. It escalated a lot with the Syrian crisis, but it had its roots before, in 2008, when the thing happened with Hezbollah, May 7. … So there [were] many involved, Saudi-Arabia, Iran, Syria, for sure. Just to check and to put pressure on the government in Beirut, because Beirut is more difficult to have this kind of war, once it started between Hezbollah and the Sunnis, it is a civil war. Whereas here it's kind of a test, to see how far can we go. And once there was a deadlock, all of a sudden they stopped, nobody expected this."* [28]

This proxy-related dynamics of the fighting was also confirmed by different accounts assuring the generally good relationship between the communities in times of peace:

> *"The clashes were political, that means that there was a battle, the battle ended, life went on as usual, then the truce ended. The people in Tabbaneh they come up to Jabal*

27   Interview with a local resident and former fighter of Bab al-Tabbaneh, Tripoli, 12.09.15.
28   Interview with a civil society activist in Tripoli, Tripoli 14.01.16.

Mohsen and the people of Jabal go down to the farmer markets of Tabbaneh to buy things and everything ... There are guys from Jabal marrying girls from Tabbaneh and the other way around, to this day, there are marriages." [29]

Still, the continuing willingness of young men in the two neighbourhoods to fight each other was often related to their precarious socio-economic status:

"What motivates these guys is the money to shoot, to participate in these battles. They were asked this question many times by university students and during auditions, 'what pushed you to participate in the battles?' They say the money. One asked them did you buy the weapon you were using during the battles, he said, 'we didn't even have money to buy a box of cigarettes. So they were giving us the weapons and they were giving us money to shoot on Jabal or Tabbaneh." [30]

Receiving money to fight in battles was often not only described as a one-time incentive but rather as a sustainable way to improve the precarious economic situation. One of the former fighters described this to us in the following way:

"During the battles the economic situation was much better, people used to get paid for fighting. It was much better than now to a certain extent. For example, now you go to the street and you look around, no one has work. The squares and streets, during the battles it was different. When the battle was over people go down, to eat and drink, to get their things done and then go home. Now you go down, everyone is complaining, this one is crying, this one is unemployed, this one is closing his shop, this one is broke, you feel that during the battles the economy was much better." [31]

In addition to the aforementioned economic and political factors, our interlocutors often recounted the historical and political-sectarian resentments that have been reignited in light of current political developments:

"Revenge is a big component. There is a great number of youth who go and fight. If I have to talk about extremism, for a large number of the youth, it's revenge. Either for his friend, for his brother, father, for his mother and his uncle... Let's say someone has killed my uncle and I am unemployed and I have nothing to do with my life. I would think about my uncle and who killed my uncle and I would go for revenge. If I had something to do with my life I wouldn't think much about it." [32]

These notions of revenge and hatred were often related to the historical feud between Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh after the massacre in the latter neighbourhood in 1986.

29   Interview with a representative of a NGO active in Tripoli, Tripoli, 12.09.15.
30   Interview with a representative of a NGO active in Tripoli, Beirut, 11.12.15
31   Interview with a local resident and former fighter of Bab al-Tabbaneh, Tripoli, 12.09.15.
32   Interview with a civil society activist and resident of Tripoli, Beirut, 17.12.15.

They were likewise rekindled in light of rather recent developments, such as the assassination of Hariri in 2005, the May 2008 conflict as well as the Syrian war, which began in 2011. In regards to the length and intensity of the recent conflict in Syria, many of our interlocutors described increasing dynamics of sectarianism and communal hostility within the city, in general, and Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh, in particular:

> *"So back in the 1980s, there were conflicts, but after 2005 the whole dynamics changed, things went more and more into a sectarian divide, not a political one. Before it was political and even people in Jabal Mohsen used to fight against the Syrian army. But later on it became sectarian so you don't have other sects inside Tripoli, most of them are in these two ghettos."* [33]

In the context of these multilayered and complex factors which underlie the conflict, the security plan was often seen as not only inefficient but actually contributing to these dynamics. This was especially related to the topic of religious radicalisation/Sunni Islamisation and the high number of arrest warrants issued against alleged Islamists. Increasing radicalisation and affiliation with Islamist groups was often described to us as a predominant social and not ideological process, an answer to socio-economic hardships and feelings of neglect and hopelessness.[34] In this sense, the army's harsh crackdown on young men affiliated with different Islamist organisations and accused of fighting in Tripoli itself or in Syria was often seen as a rather ambivalent process that might lead to increased membership in these groups:

> *"There is a big problem, we have 11000 arrest warrants for 11000 wanted young men in Tripoli and its outskirts. Now only 6000 are left. This means that there are 6000 without strong connections. Be careful not all of them are with ISIS or Nusra. Some are just with the Free Syrian Army, some were involved in the fightings between Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh. They are all wanted, for different reasons, some just because they have a relationship with someone in the FSA, or someone who slept over at their place. These 6000 people are a timebomb. They are a target [of] extremist groups. The groups started looking for the wanted ones. So, [give] them an opportunity of not going to prison and give them a monthly allowance. He will tell you I rather not go to prison, let me go and fight with ISIS."* [35]

Equally, the harsh treatment of those alleged Islamists by the army and the judiciary feed[36] into the general feeling of political neglect and supported widespread assumptions of the army's political bias against any kind of Sunni political self-assertion:

33   Interview with a journalist and film director, Beirut, 17.12.15.
34   International Crisis Group, "Lebanon's Politics: The Sunni community and Hariri's Future current", *Middle East Report*, No. 96, 2010, p. 28; Estella Carpi, "Prisms of Political Violence, 'Jihads' and Survival in Lebanon's Tripoli", *Civil Society Knowledge Centr*e, Lebanon Support, 2015, available at http://cskc.daleel-madani.org/paper/prisms-political-violence-%E2%80%98jihads%E2%80%99-and-survivallebanon%E2%80%99s-tripoli [last accessed 15.06.16].
35   Interview with a civil society activist and resident of Tripoli, Beirut, 17.12.15.
36   Camille Lons, "Is justice for everyone? Arbitrary detention and torture of Islamists in Lebanon", *Civil Society Knowledge Centre*, Lebanon Support, 2016, available at http://cskc.daleel-madani.org/content/ justice-everyone-arbitrary-detention-and-torture-islamists-lebanon [last accessed 15.06.16].

"During the clashes, so many politicians, and so many people tried to create this atmosphere that the army is March 8 and against us, it is with the Shi'ites and Alawites. And this led to some attacks on the army, mainly because of the prevailing discourse that the army is against the Sunnis, it is with Hezbollah, it is actually ruled by Iran and Syria... And I can understand somehow because some [of the army's practices], like arresting people out of arbitrary reasons. People are arrested if they have something on their phone, they will be accused of terrorism, of being anti-army, very quickly, and they are beaten up. [...] So they feel it is unfair, [they think] the army can disarm us but they cannot disarm Hezbollah. There was a feeling among those people that they are only targeted because they are weak, because nobody cares about them." [37]

5.2. Perceptions of fear, neglect and despair

"We don't like to talk about this issue, but this is pain. Pain, pain, it's very tough on us, on the city. We feel as though we are animals in this country. No one looks at us... I did not leave the house since one and a half years in the evening, no restaurant, no cafe, nothing. I am always home. Can you imagine how this feels psychological[y]? As if we are not alive anymore... The poor people who remain in Tabbaneh, where would they go? And the poor people in Jabal Mohsen, where would they go? There is nowhere to go... and Tabbaneh. We have no one but God." [38]

While most of our interlocutors confirmed the perception that, even in the deprived areas, matters in Tripoli are slowly returning to normal, our accounts of Tripoli's residents nevertheless demonstrate recurrent and dominant feelings of fear, of being neglected and of growing desperation.

Feelings of fear and insecurity were often connected to mistrust and scepticism towards each other resulting from the long-lasting and recurrent incidents of violence and armed clashes. Many interlocutors, especially in the neighbourhoods of Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh, often recounted their fear of going out at night because they do not feel protected outside their own neighbourhood. This fear was often admitted despite simultaneous accounts of intercommunal and inter-neighbourhood friendship. Often times, feelings of insecurity were not related to a clearly defined enemy but more so to a rather subtle and unknown "other" as the following quote from a resident of Jabal Mohsen demonstrates:

"For example, you and I are working together, we are cleaning this street and suddenly 6-7 young men come and beat me up. You never told anyone that I am from Jabal Mohsen, but they come and beat me up. Can you convince me that you haven't snitched on me? Nobody knows who told those young man that I am an Alawite. It's not writ-

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37   Interview with a civil society activist and resident of Tripoli, Beirut, 14.01.16.
38   Interview with a resident of Tripoli, Tripoli, 12.09.15

ten on my forehead that I am Alawi and my ID says I am from Tabbaneh. How did
they know that I am an Alawite? There is fear. There is carefulness. This is how social
bonds are broken." [39]

The increasing and long lasting psychological stress was confirmed to us in interviews conducted with interlocutors who work in the health sector and witnessed an immense increase in the need for psychological interventions on behalf of the population in Tripoli: "In the beginning we had one psychiatrist coming once a week, today we have consultation hours every morning and a team of psychologists and psychiatrists. People just have too much street in this city, they need some relief."[40] This rising stress was often connected to poor coping mechanisms, such as increasing substance abuse and drug addiction. Some of our interlocutors described increasing drug abuse, especially among the rather deprived youth of Tripoli, as one of the biggest social problems in the city that the political actors and NGOs do not address. There are currently very few intervention programmes or support for rehabilitation in the city:

"We also have other problems like drugs, the drug use found in Tripoli... It is mainly
Captagon pills, and paint thinner, the cheap stuff, especially in marginalized areas, [such
as] the old city, Tabbaneh, Jabal Mohsen, and Mankoubin. [...] Drug use is one of the
biggest social problems found in Tripoli and in these marginalized areas in general." [41]

Our interlocutors often attributed psychological pressure to a rather diffuse amalgam of socio-economic hardship, histories and anticipations of unspecified violence and attacks, intercommunal mistrust and a rather hopeless outlook for the future. In addition, active feelings of anger and rage were often directed towards state institutions and local politicians who are blamed for the underlying causes of people's suffering. This has often been connected to politicians' insufficient efforts to improve the situation within the city and their active involvement in the incitement of armed struggles. Since the end of the fighting the feeling of betrayal was further intensified due to the high number of arbitrary arrests. These arrests were viewed as part of the agenda of the same politicians who previously supported the armed struggle:

"The main work that has to be done is psychological [in relation to] the issue of oppres-
sion and discrimination. For example, there was this guy, recently, ... who killed himself.
His cousin... said the main component was that he was wanted. The army issued an
arrest warrant based on nothing, it was discrimination and oppression. But if they
catch you, you will be beaten up by the secret service. And based on what you say you

39   Interview with a resident of Tripoli, Tripoli, 12.09.15.
40   Interview with a NGO worker in Tripoli, 12.09.15.
41   Interview with a civil society activist and resident of Tripoli, Beirut, 17.12.15. The use of Captagon resembles increasing evidence of its production and usage in Lebanon, especially among young men fighting in Syria. Captagon is a highly addictive form of amphetamine which provides alertness and fearlessness in the short term, whilst long term usage risks psychosis and increased levels of violence. See Justin Salhani, "Tripoli's poor find solace in substance abuse", *The Daily Star*, 27.05.14, availabe at http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Mar-27/251389-tripolis-poor-find-solace-in-substance-abuse.ashx [last accessed 24.05.2016].

are turned into an oppressor instead of being the oppressed. This is the psychology that is worked on... Can you imagine the change that is happening in people's mind[s]?" [42]

"But now all those who were in prison, the leaders of small groups, … [a]re speaking overtly, saying it's the same people who gave us support, encouraged us to fight, [who] handed us over to the government. And they are very bitter and accuse political leaders of having used them as their disposable people." [43]

In addition, many of our interlocutors raised the subject of people from Tripoli migrating by sea, often with Syrian refugees. While the media highlights illegal immigration by sea of the latter, an increasing number of Lebanese and Palestinian residents of Tripoli are taking the same route with a hope of a better future in Europe. One of our interlocutors told us: "People thought that with the security plan job opportunities will be created but nothing happened. People are migrating they are dying in the sea, Syrians, Lebanese and Palestinians. They are making suicidal acts."[44] This understudied phenomenon sheds light on the fatalistic mixture of continuing hopelessness, economic fatigue, psychological pressure, frustration and anger. However, most interlocutors insisted that the situation had changed or was about to change for the better. This was often described as a mixture of a general "sense of tolerance and forgivingness" prevalent in the city "in an extraordinary way"[45] and a currently positive outlook in the future that takes hold of the population especially after armed struggles have ceased. People are convinced "that the instability that has marked their lives for the past years is over ... [and they] are eager to get on with their lives."[46]

5.3. Poverty and economic stagnation

Tripoli's economy has struggled for decades, beginning in the 1960s, continuing through the civil war, the Syrian occupation and after Hariri's assassination and the Syrian withdrawal in 2005. In particular, the current economic stagnation can be seen as a result of the national government's decades-long neglect of the city, its lack of economic initiatives to support Tripoli's economic potential. Moreover, in the last few years, the recurrent clashes in different neighbourhoods as well as several security incidents have inhibited any kind of sustainable economic development and increasingly isolated the city from the rest of the country. The resulting economic stagnation has led to high poverty and unemployment rates in Tripoli, whose statistics perform poorly compared to other Lebanese cities. In 2014, it was estimated that 23 % of people in Tripoli live in poverty and on a daily amount of less than 2 USD.[47] According to a 2015 ESCWA report, the economy and living conditions in Tripoli have

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42   Interview with a local expert on Tripoli, Beirut, 12.10.2015.
43   Interview with a local expert on Tripoli, Beirut, 15.01.2016.
44   Interview with a local expert on Tripoli, Beirut, 12.10.2015.
45   *Idem.*
46   Interview with a local expert on Tripoli, Beirut, 15.01.2016.
47   Maurice Matta, "Tripoli's poverty hampers development", *Al Monitor*, 16.11.2014, available at http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/business/2014/11/lebanon-tripoli-poverty-development-economy.html [last

deteriorated since 2001, with 77 % of households in the city being described as economically deprived, while unemployment rate are estimated to exceed 35 %.[48]

Poverty and unemployment was described in most of our interviews as one of the major challenges that Tripoli faces, and a decisive factor for social and political challenges prevalent in the city at present.

In addition to the weak job market, low wages, long working hours and no social security system, a number of our interlocutors told us that, in general, they receive scarce, irregular or no government support - adding again to the feeling of neglect described above. The insufficient government support was often described through references to the reconstruction of buildings after the end of the armed conflict between Jabal Mohsen and Bab al-Tabbaneh in March 2014.[49] Due to widespread property damage, the government allocated L.L.30 billion as compensation for locals, to aid in reconstruction in October 2014. However, this money did not begin to arrive until January 2015, with many people only receiving $100 each[50], from which tax and administrative payments were reportedly then deducted. These sums were much less than required to rebuild property and replenish destroyed stocks for stores.[51]

Given the government's absence, many civil society groups and NGOs, such as the Coalition of Civil Campaigns Against Violence in Tripoli work to aid reconstruction. Poverty in Tripoli is likewise described as primarily affecting certain neighborhoods while others remain relatively prosperous. Therefore, Tripoli is often depicted as a city divided between the "new town" that is full of "cafes, they're full at night, people are eating, going out, spending money, (...) people have got money, there's cars (...), they have banks now opened, they have malls. (...)" and "the souks, the old town, Tabbaneh, Jabal Mohsen, you don't see anything like that, there is poverty all over the place."[52]

Adding to these poor conditions in many neighborhoods in Tripoli is the fact that most Syrian refugees settled in these neighborhoods when they arrived in Tripoli throughout the last five years. Challenges related to the arrival of Syrian refugees were relatively downplayed in many interviews that we conducted; our interlocutors stressed that most Syrians have been in Tripoli longer than the Syrian conflict and are therefore often seen as part of the local population. Still, some interview partners described that the already strained economic and social

accessed 24.05.2016].

48   Adib Naameh, *op.cit.*, 2014, p. 109. accessed 24.05.2016].

49   "Cabinet Allocates L.L.30 Billion for Tripoli, Secures Payment of Civil Servants Wages", *Naharnet*, 30.10.14, available at http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/153347 [last accessed 24.05.2016].

50   Antoine Amrieh, "Tripoli residents demand higher compensation", *The Daily Star*, 24.02.15, available at http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Feb-24/288604-tripoli-residents-demand-higher-compensation.ashx [last accessed 15.06.2016].

51   Misbah Al-Ali, "Needy Tripoli residents still waiting on compensation", *The Daily Star*, 27.11.14, available at http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Nov-27/279048-needy-tripoli-residentsstill-waiting-on-compensation.ashx [last accessed 15.06.2016].

52   Interview with a civil society activist and resident of Tripoli, Beirut, 14.01.16.

conditions in poorer neighborhoods were further challenged due to either the newly arriving refugees or the fact that many Syrian workers brought their families after the deteriorating security situation in many areas in Syria. This was mainly expressed in issues as competition for work facilities, reinforced by weak government regulations and informal working structures:

> *"For example, in some restaurants everything on the inside, they hire Syrians, everything on the outside they put Lebanese. Here you have hundreds of youth who used to work as barber[s], now the Syrians began to work as barbers. For example two Lebanese guys who used to work at a butcher. One day the butcher says let me fire the two guy and bring two Syrians instead of two Lebanese. Or instead of one Lebanese, let me bring two Syrians. There has been great competition in the work market between the Syrian refugees and the Lebanese, especially because the Lebanese are in a very bad economic situation and the Syrian comes to compete with them."* [53]

In addition, many of our interlocutors stressed the rather ambivalent role local that politicians play in the poverty/economic stagnation cycle. While many local politicians are chairing or have established some kind of charity organisation in the city, these initiatives are primarily directed towards short-term relief and do not provide any long-term sustainable improvements:

> *"We have ineffective policies... All the zu'ama opened schools and clinics. They made loan programmes. They gave left and right. We had parliamentary elections and municipal elections. They spend a lot of money. That all shows that it hasn't decreased poverty. It isn't that there was spending. There was of spending tens of millions of dollars in Tripoli... If I study the level of poverty I see that the poverty has been increasing, this means these policies and interventions are not effective at all... The first conclusion is that we need to change. We can't just do the same thing over and over again: loans and vocational training for the youth and the municipality does bicycle marathons and literacy courses for women, center for education here, health center there, and I don't know what. It all didn't and doesn't work."* [54]

Likewise, the shortsightedness of such initiatives was often confirmed by a number of accounts, which described how many local politicians actually benefit from the economic stagnation in Tripoli since they are seen as the hidden masterminds behind armed clashes in those poor neighborhoods. One of our interlocutors, an academic and local expert on Tripoli described these dynamics:

> *"And every now and then you hear that there are now in Tripoli among politicians about 3 or 4 billionaires, and people say, why don't these billionaires invest in their own city*

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53   Interview with a civil society activist and resident of Tripoli, Beirut, 17.12.15.
54   Interview with a local expert on Tripoli, Beirut, 12.10.2015.

instead of investing in those young people to fight in the streets of Bab el-Tabbaneh?
Why don't they start a factory in Tripoli and give them jobs? It is a good question I
think, Tripoli needs major investment, but also government sponsored development,
mostly about creating job opportunities for young people, because when you don't find
a job you either emigrate or you take up arms." [55]

In most of our interviews, the need for big investment plans for Tripoli has been stressed in order to rehabilitate the city's economy. Still, actual envisioned investment plans by local politicians and businessmen have been criticised by our interlocutors. This especially applies to plans that have been made to develop Tripoli's port, its oil refineries, the Qulaiat Airport, the Rachid Karame International fair and the creation of a special economic "freezone" to facilitate exports, international investment and to create jobs. However, these ideas and projects are several years from completion and may well suffer setbacks. One interlocutor warned that a commercial free zone may not be subject to Lebanese labour laws, providing jobs for cheaper foreign nationals, rather than locals. Without strong state supervision a deregulated market risks many unknowns, including exacerbating wealth gaps. Given the ongoing failures of the Lebanese government to properly support Tripoli, this seems like a potentially risky project. In a similar vein, the issue of investments to rehabilitate Tripoli's economy seems to fall into the same deadlock dynamics of political neglect, fragmentation, exploitation and clientelism, thus facilitating social mistrust, divide and discrimination.

5.4. Political fragmentation and alienation

The rather fatalistic mixture of a city and society faced with permanent risks and antici-pation of radicalisation and armed struggles, a resulting fragile security situation, as well as ongoing poverty and economic stagnation, is accompanied by a continuing crisis of political representation in the city. This has been described in our interviews as an increasing aliena-tion of the city's population from its local politicians as well as the Lebanese central govern-ment. Tripoli's political fragmentation – although affecting all communities in the city – is often described as part of a broader crisis of political representation of Sunni Islam, given the fact that the majority of Tripoli's population is Sunni. This crisis is said to have increased in the last couple of years in the city due to a decreased presence and popularity of the March 14 coalition in general and the Future Movement in particular. This development has been triggered by the assassination of Rafic al-Hariri in February 2005, Hezbollah's invasion of Beirut in May 2008, as well as the Syrian crisis and a rising region-wide Sunni-Shia divide since 2011. These different events have created a crisis of Sunni political representation and self-understanding in general and the Future Movement in particular. Likewise, it was these developments that led to a decrease in financial support from Saudi-Arabia and other Gulf

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55   Interview with a local expert on Tripoli, Beirut, 15.01.2016.

countries to many Sunni political actors including the Future Movement, often to the benefit of supporting Islamist movements and actors. The crisis of Sunni political representation in Tripoli can therefore mainly be attributed to a profound political and growing financial crisis caused by many political actors who haven't managed to meet the city's and its population's multifold social, economic and political challenges, which further distanced the population from the different political actors. Most of our interlocutors described the double-edged nature of Tripoli's politicians' and the Future Movement's crisis in the city: On the one hand, as described above, those political actors are often blamed by Tripoli's population for fueling dynamics of poverty, economic stagnation and armed struggles while on the other hand, they do not manage to sufficiently address a seemingly pressing and broader reaching political discourse, such as the Sunni-Shia divide, the Syrian crisis and Hezbollah's role in Lebanon and Syria.

The crisis of political representation in Tripoli is often said to have contributed to the rising popularity and influence of Islamist movements in the city, an impression often reinforced by the rise of the Islamic State in the region, its alleged plans to establish an Islamic emirate in the Northern city as well as its ostensible popularity among Tripoli's population.[56] Although often related to the Syrian war, the phenomenon of Islamist movements in Tripoli has to be looked at in its multifold and historical root causes and local, national and regional dimensions:

> *"The roots of the phenomenon run deep – sometimes local or national, sometimes regional – and [the reach of] extremism… extends far beyond the walls of Tripoli to include whole segments of Lebanese society. The rise of Sunni extremism in Lebanon, and particularly in Tripoli, is also often explained... as a product of the Syrian conflict. However, although the radicalisation of elements of the Syrian opposition… has an [undeniable] impact, this trend has at least as much to do with national and sometimes even local Lebanese dynamics as well."* [57]

Salafist and Islamist movements – although having a certain historical presence in the city since the 1950s – began their re-emergence mainly after 2005, the assassination of Rafic al-Hariri and the end of the Syrian occupation. This was also reinforced by the fact that in the aftermath of 2005 the Future Movement formed an alliance with some Islamist leaders. Soon, however, this alliance collapsed. Still, Islamist movements exhibit a certain presence in Tripoli today and manage to partly fill the political void through a vivid street presence, aid and charity structures as well as a political discourse hostile to Hezbollah, the ADP and the

56   Fernande van Tets, "Islamic State: Battle of Tripoli is won but hearts and minds are lost", *Independent*, 28.10.14, available at http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/islamic-state-battle-of-tripoli-iswon-but-hearts-and-minds-are-lost-9824297.html [last accessed 15.06.2016]; Hussein Dakroub, "Tripoli battles part of ISIS-Nusra scheme to establish Islamic emirate", *The Daily Star*, 28.10.14 availabe at http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Oct-28/275584-tripoli-battles-part-of-isis-nusra-scheme-to-establishislamic-emirate.ashx, [last accessed 15.06.16].
57   Raphael Lefevre, *op.cit.*, p. 4, available at http://carnegie-mec.org/2014/12/24/tackling-sunni-radicalisation-in-lebanon/hxuv [last accessed 08.03.2016].

Syrian regime. Being mainly active in deprived regions of the city, Islamist movements have been able to recruit "mainly disenfranchised, marginalised young Sunnis in areas such as Bab Al-Tabbaneh… [suffering] from a dangerous blend of appalling living conditions, inadequate social services, and a shortage of schools," while they were also often faced with different forms of state repressions.[58]

However, Islamist movements and actors also contributed to political fragmentation, often lacking a coherent political project and/or leadership. In addition, many of our inter-locutors described the rather limited legitimacy and popularity Islamist movements enjoy in Tripoli, often precisely because of the city's history of the tawhid's emirate in the mid 1980s: "There has been Tawhid. What Harakat al-Tawhid al-Islami did is that people would not be in support of an emirate in Tripoli today. Because they saw the hell when the emirate was there, they would never be in support of it again."[59]

The result of Tripoli's recent municipal elections, which took place on May 29th, 2016 is yet another indicator that Tripoli's crisis of political representation cannot only be looked at through the prisms of Islamism, the Syrian war and the hostility towards Hezbollah. Prior to the elections, the consensus list by the Future Movement, Mikati, and Safadi to back former Mina Mayor Abdel Qader Alameddin as a consensus candidate was criticised and rejected by civil society actors a a number of other political actors, such as the Islamic League and Ashraf Rifi, who described the list as a "division of spoils".[60] Likewise, the media reported the general disinterest of the city's residents prior to the elections, often attributed by our interlocutors to the general fatigue and hopelessness prevalent among the population as well as among civil society: "In every region, in every city we have those new movements, there is hope and inter-est that we can change things. Only in Tripoli, there is silence, a complete disappointment. No one moves in this city."[61] Still, the actual outcome of the elections caught many observers as a surprise. Although the election turnout was only 26 %, affirming the aforementioned politi-cal apathy and hopelessness, results demonstrated the population's desire for change. Rather surprisingly, the list of the former minister of justice Ashraf Rifi, Qarar Trablos (The decision of Tripoli) that was set up against the coalition list Li-Trablos (For Tripoli) won 16 seats out of 24, a decisive defeat for the coalition consisting of the Future Movement and Tripolitan nota-bles. The outcome was interpreted differently, however: While some political actors (such as Tripoli MP Robert Fadel), media reports and the Alawite community stressed and criticised

58   International Crisis group, *op.cit.*, p. 28, available at http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Lebanon/96%20Lebanons%20Politics%20-%20The%20Sunni%20Community%20and%20Hariris%20Future%20Current.ashx [last accessed 15.06.16].
59   Interview with a civil society activist and resident of Tripoli, Beirut, 17.12.15.
60   Antoine Amrieh, "Islamists to contest Tripoli municipal elections", *The Daily Star*, 28.04.16, available at http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2016/Apr-28/349628-islamists-to-contest-tripoli-municipal-elections.ashx [last accessed 15.06.16]; "Consensus lists in municipal elections harmed Tripoli: Rifi", The Daily Star, 29.04.16, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2016/Apr-29/349879-consensus-lists-in-municipal-elections-harmed-tripoli-rifi.ashx [last accessed 15.06.16].
61   Interview with a civil society activist, Beirut, 15.05.16.

the sectarian nature of the results by the fact that the list of Rifi merely consisted of Sunni representatives, others celebrated the breach of the status quo and the Tripolitan's desire for change as the following blog post demonstrates: "Tripoli, you may not have voted the way I wanted on Sunday, but you should be immensely proud in ... saying no to your reality and seeking out change. Beirut Madinati tried in Beirut. It did well but did not succeed. Other alternatives to the political hegemony tried in other places and did not succeed as well. Political hegemony was brought to its knees on your streets. Respect."[62]

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62   A separate state of mind, "Tripoli Is Not A Sectarian City, It's The Only City To Be Respected These Elections", https://stateofmind13.com/2016/05/31/tripoli-is-not-a-sectarian-city-its-the-only-city-to-be-respected-these-elections/, 31.05.2016 [last accessed 10.06.2016].

Conclusion

This report gives a contextual and analytical summary of the diverse conflict dynamics in Tripoli in the last years.

It seeks to provide a short overview of the city's history in the 20th century, focusing on conflict dynamics emerging from foreign occupation, a continuing neglect of the city from the local and state government's side, as well as Islamist contentions, most notably during the Tawhid-era. The report examines these historical factors in addition to the current perception of Tripoli as an economically deprived and politically radicalised city. Our research puts a focus on recent cycles of militarisation and armed struggle within the city, dynamics of radicalisation and Islamisation, political fragmentation and regional allegiances, economic stagnation as well as resulting perceptions of fear, mistrust and hopelessness among the city's population. The report demonstrates the interconnectedness of these dynamics, leaving the city in an endless cycle of deprivation and lack of perspective, in a context characterised by state absence and the prevalence of charity organisations.

This report goes beyond the mainstream framework of identity politics and confessionalised discourses often applied to Lebanon in general and the city of Tripoli in particular. Specifically, it focuses on socio-economic tensions and challenges, dynamics of state neglect, ineffective policy initiatives as well as notions of political patronage and competition that mainly affect the lives of vulnerable citizens in certain neighbourhoods of the city.

Finally, the report sheds light on the need for strategic and broad interventions on political, social and economic levels by different stakeholders.

Recommendations for action:

At the State level:

•	Develop policies and measures that ameliorate economic, social and political challenges affecting the country, with special attention to vulnerable and marginalised areas and groups.

•	Launch local development initiatives by investing in and helping fund community and social programmes, as well as youth start-ups within Tripoli.

•	Launch an investigation to reveal who provides arms and weaponry to groups engaged in armed conflict in Tripoli. Ensure those responsible are held accountable and placed on trial.

At the associative level:

• Advocate and participate in a two-part discussion with first, track-two and then, track-three dialogue. In track-two dialogue, political, religious, and social civil society leaders would come together to collectively identify and seek solutions to economic, social and political conflicts within Tripoli. Afterwards, these leaders may seek recommendations based on track-three dialogue discussions they host between community members and conflict affected residents. This will strengthen ties between leaders and ordinary residents of Tripoli to help foster a more peaceful and resolute network for future conflict mitigation efforts.

• Launch better awareness campaigns for security entities, political figures and the general population addressing their respective responsibilities and duties, as well as their legal limits and obligations under the law.

• Develop rehabilitation programmes that offer educational, and training and capacity building services for drug addicts. It should include recovery programmes, vocational classes, skills training and more. This will allow addicts to reintegrate into society better by strengthening their livelihoods and social understanding.

• Shift from charity work to more sustainable development initiatives.

At the grassroots community level:

• Create a space and platform for people of different political and religious backgrounds to come together and address their grievances as a community, training community members how to foster a peaceful environment and tackle socio-political problems peacefully.