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**“When the war started, I was ready”**

Organisational motivations  
for the inclusion of female fighters  
in non-state armed organisations during the  
Lebanese civil war (1975-1990)

**by Jennifer Philippa Eggert**

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics and  
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## **Inclusion of material**

The thesis is my own work. It has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

A revised version of Chapter Four has been submitted – in the form of a journal article – to ‘Studies in Conflict and Terrorism’. At the time of writing, it is under revision after the first round of reviews.

Some of the challenges I encountered during the fieldwork for this research study, which are mentioned in Chapter Three of this thesis, are discussed in more detail in a short article which was published in the ‘International Journal of Feminist Politics’ (Eggert, 2017).

Some of the interviews referred to in Chapter Seven were used for a book chapter, which is currently under review for an edited Routledge volume on the 1968 movement, violence and women.

## Abstract

Analysing individual motivations, organisational characteristics, security pressures and societal factors, this thesis focuses on organisational motivations for the inclusion of female fighters during the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990). It examines why some of the non-state armed organisations (or militias) involved in the war included women as fighters whereas others did not. This thesis is the first comprehensive analysis of the topic, and the first study which takes into account the roles of women in all major militias involved in the war, including the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), Palestinian Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah), Lebanese Kataeb Party (Kataeb), Lebanese Forces (LF), Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) and Amal Movement (Amal).

This thesis is based on semi-structured interviews with 69 former male and female fighters, party members, civil society representatives, researchers and journalists. Fieldwork was conducted during four one- to six-week-long field visits to Lebanon between the summer of 2015 and autumn 2016. Moreover, four (auto)biographies of former female fighters were included in the analysis.

This thesis argues that the main reason for female participation in the militias involved in the Lebanese civil war was women's insistence to be included. Organisational barriers to women's inclusion in those militias that were not entirely in favour of female participation, such as the militias of the (centre) right, was overcome due to the security context. Overall, societal opposition to female participation remained relatively high, which is why (compared with other conflict contexts) the overall number of female fighters was not higher.

## List of abbreviations

Amal	Amal Movement
CAO	Communist Action Organisation
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
Fatah	Palestinian National Liberation Movement
Kataeb	Lebanese Kataeb Party
LCP	Lebanese Communist Party
LF	Lebanese Forces
LFr	Lebanese Front
LNМ	Lebanese National Movement
MDSO (design)	Most different cases, similar outcome (design)
MSDO (design)	Most similar cases, different outcome (design)
NLP	National Liberal Party
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organisation
PSP	Progressive Socialist Party
SSNP	Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party

Jennifer Philippa Eggert

**“When the war started, I was ready”<sup>1</sup>**

Organisational motivations for the inclusion of female fighters  
in non-state armed organisations during the Lebanese civil war (1975-  
1990)

## Chapter 1 | Introduction

### 1.1 | Women, war and political violence

Female participation in political violence<sup>2</sup> is considered a deviance of the norm in most societies worldwide (Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015). This is the case in most state militaries (Kennedy-Pipe, 2000), and even more so in non-state armed groups<sup>3</sup> (Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015). Nevertheless, women have been actively involved in many violent conflicts worldwide, often in combat

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<sup>1</sup> The title is a quote by one of the female fighters interviewed as part of this study (interviewee 31). It stresses the importance of the factor this study found to be the most important reason for the involvement of female fighters in the militias during the Lebanese civil war; namely women’s high motivation and their insistence to be included.

<sup>2</sup> I use the terms ‘political violence’ and ‘violent conflict’ interchangeably, while acknowledging that there is a difference between ‘political violence’ and ‘conflict’ (Kalyvas, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> When I speak of ‘non-state armed groups’ or ‘non-state armed organisations’ in this thesis, I mean non-state armed groups with a political agenda. This is to distinguish between non-state armed political groups and other non-state violent actors such as gangs or other criminal organisations which do not have any political aims. In the Lebanese context, non-state armed political groups involved in the Lebanese civil war are usually referred to as militias, which is why I use the two terms interchangeably.

roles in non-state armed organisations (Henshaw, 2016). Why do women become involved in non-state political violence? What are the reasons for non-state armed political groups to decide to involve women in combat roles? This thesis argues that in the case of the Lebanese and Palestinian militias involved in the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990), the main reason for female participation as fighters<sup>4</sup> was the women's insistence to be included in combat roles. Organisational barriers to female participation as fighters in militias that were not entirely in favour of female participation were overcome in most militias when faced with extreme security pressures (due to the intensifying security context). Overall, societal opposition to female participation remained high hence why when compared with other conflict contexts, the overall numbers of female fighters remained relatively low. By tackling these questions, this thesis addresses a number of gaps in the existing literature on violent conflict in general, and on female perpetrators of political violence more specifically.

In analyses of women's roles and experiences during war and violent conflict, it is often assumed that women are primarily *victims* of political violence (Cunningham, 2003, Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015). At times, their roles

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<sup>4</sup> I use the terms 'fighter' and 'combatant' interchangeably to describe individuals directly participating in combat. For individuals involved in supportive roles, I use the terms 'militant' or 'militia member'. There is however, a grey area concerning fighters and civilians. For the purpose of this study, I do not consider individuals who are involved in one-off violent acts to be fighters.

as potential actors for positive change, peacebuilding and conflict transformation are also stressed. These ascribed roles as either 'the victim' or 'the peacemaker' to women in relation to political violence are linked to deeply entrenched notions of women being intrinsically and essentially peace-loving and innocent (Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015). It is true that in large parts of the world, women are amongst the most vulnerable members of society, and are often perceived to be disproportionately exposed to violence during violent conflict and war<sup>5</sup>. However, women are also often actively involved in inciting, enabling and perpetrating violence during times of conflict and war. In fact, women's numbers in non-state armed organisations with a political agenda have increased across much of the world (Henshaw, 2016). This is true for groups across the ideological spectrum. Far-right, left-wing, animal liberation, Christian, Hindu, Jewish and Islamist groups have all included female fighters (Cunningham, 2003, Eager, 2008, Bloom, 2011, Henshaw, 2016). Female political violence is indeed a global phenomenon, as women have taken on combat roles in groups operating in the Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia and the Middle East (Cunningham, 2003, Eager, 2008, Bloom, 2011, Henshaw, 2016). Within non-state violent political groups,

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<sup>5</sup> This narrative has been challenged by some scholars, such as Adam Jones (2004), who points to the fact that most fighters at times of violent conflict are men and argues that men are, in fact, more affected by violent conflict than women.

women's roles cover a wide range of different activities – with some assuming leadership roles.

Women's long-standing and increasing involvement in political violence (not just as supporters but also as agents of violence) stands in stark contrast to the lack of attention the topic receives in mainstream academic literature on political violence (Henshaw, 2016). Most publications on political violence overlook the roles and experiences of women during war and violent conflict (Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015). If women's roles are taken into account at all, they are often presented as being only victims or peacemakers (Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015). A notorious example is Sageman's theory of terrorist cells which he dubbed "bunches of guys" (2008) – as though women did not play a role in many groups carrying out terrorist (and other political) violence. Similar lacuna can be found in mainstream conflict studies literature, which focuses on civil wars and rebel groups (Kalyvas, 2006, Weinstein, 2006, Gurr, 2012, Staniland, 2014, Arjona et al., 2015). This is the case despite a small but emerging trend in both conflict and terrorism studies, which increasingly take into account women's experiences and gender at times of violent conflict and war (Welland, 2016).

These gaps in much of the literature should be of concern. Firstly, intellectually, it is highly unlikely one can fully understand a social phenomenon without taking into account the role of all of the actors

involved. We cannot understand political violence without making room in our analyses for the women who contribute to it. Secondly, from a practical point of view, this academic blindness with regards to female violence is mirrored in a lack of gender-sensitive conflict transformation, counter-extremism, counter-terrorism, peacebuilding and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes (Eggert, forthcoming, 2017). Non-state armed political actors worldwide are increasingly relying on female fighters – and yet, the states and civil societies affected by their violence do not seem to have adapted to this change in tactics (Cunningham, 2007, Satterthwaite and Huckerby, 2012). In order to contribute to putting an end to violent conflict and to help former fighters reintegrate into their societies (so that they can contribute to rebuilding healthy, peaceful and striving communities), it is essential to understand what made these groups and individuals resort to specific forms of violence, and in this case, what it was that led armed groups to include specific violent actors in the first place. By asking why non-state armed organisations employ female fighters, this study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the strategies adopted by non-state armed actors.

## 1.2 | Existing research on female fighters

The tendency to overlook the role of female perpetrators of violence at times of war and violent conflict in the general literature on political violence is mirrored in the literature on the Lebanese civil war. Over forty years after the beginning of the civil war in Lebanon in 1975 and more than twenty-five years after its end in 1990, a substantial body of literature on the war, its causes, development and different actors, exists. Both local and international scholars have published extensively on the war (see, for example, Fisk, 2001, Hirst, 2011, Traboulsi, 2012, Hanf, 2014). However, the question of women is rarely examined. There is hardly any literature on women, even less so on female combatants during the Lebanese war. Some suggest women did not play any role in the outbreak and sustainment of the war, and that it was only men who were to blame for the violence inflicted on the country and its inhabitants (Shehadeh, 1999, Karamé, 1995). Only a handful of publications (most of them of article-length only) examine the roles women played in the militias – either as supporters or perpetrators of violence (Peteet, 1991, Karamé, 1995, Shehadeh, 1999, André-Dessornes, 2013, Parkinson, 2013). However, none of these systematically address the question of why some of the militias decided to employ women in military roles whilst others continued to allocate non-military roles only to them.

Also, they do not focus on all of the major non-state players during the war but highlight the roles of women in some of the groups only.<sup>6</sup>

Although Lebanon-specific publications on the topic are rare, in recent years, a sound body of relevant literature on other conflict contexts has developed, which will be discussed in Chapters Two and Three. This literature can help shed light on the question of female roles and involvement in the militias during the Lebanese civil war. In this study, I use both conflict/war and terrorism studies literature – not because I believe the organisations described in this thesis were (or were not) terrorist actors, but because I believe the divide between conflict and terrorism studies is largely an artificial one, as will be discussed in Chapter Two.

Relevant literature includes publications on the causes and mechanisms of why people get involved in violent conflict around the world (such as Taylor and Horgan, 2006, Wiktorowicz and Kaltenthaler, 2006, McCauley and Moskalenko, 2011). Whilst this body of literature does not usually take into account the role of women and mostly focuses on the individual (as opposed to the group) level, it still provides us with a framework for studying how

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<sup>6</sup> The main militias during the Lebanese civil war included Lebanese leftist, Palestinian leftist, Christian and Shia groups. Karamé (1995) focuses on the role of women in the Christian militias, whereas Shehadeh (1999) compares the contribution of women in the biggest Christian militia, the Lebanese Kataeb Party (or Kataeb for short) with women's roles in the Shia groups Amal Movement and Hezbollah. Both completely omit the roles of women in the leftist and Palestinian militias. Peteet (1991) and Parkinson (2013) focus on female members of Palestinian organisations only. André-Dessornes (2013) examines female suicide attackers, which were mostly deployed by the SSNP.

and why non-state armed groups include female combatants. Further understanding of how female involvement occurs is provided by the strand of literature focusing on female perpetrators of political violence in other conflict contexts. A substantial number of studies of female political violence has been published in the last few decades, both from a conflict/war studies (Reif, 1986, Burgess, 1989, Vázquez, 1997, Shikola, 1998, Shayne, 1999, Bernal, 2000, West, 2000, Alison, 2003, Sajjad, 2004, Parvati, 2005, Bernal, 2006, Viterna, 2006, Hamilton, 2007, Coulter, 2008, Eager, 2008, Alison, 2009, Gayer, 2009, Parashar, 2009, Ortega, 2012, Roy, 2012, Shekhawat, 2012, Van Hauwermeiren, 2012, Katto, 2014, Cohen, 2013, Parashar, 2014, Magadla, 2015, Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015, Veneracion-Rallonza, 2015, Henshaw, 2016) and a terrorism studies perspective (Weinberg and Eubank, 1987, Cunningham, 2003, Victor, 2003, Berko and Erez, 2007b, Berko and Erez, 2007a, Schweitzer, 2007, Von Knop, 2007, Cunningham, 2008, Eager, 2008, Gonzalez-Perez, 2008, Jacques and Taylor, 2008, Sixta, 2008, Speckhard, 2008, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008, Zedalis, 2008, Jacques and Taylor, 2009, Alison, 2009, Cunningham, 2009, O'Rourke, 2009, Cunningham, 2010, Bloom, 2011, Bloom et al., 2012, Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015, Henshaw, 2016, Davis, 2017). Much of this literature focuses on individual cases rather than group motivations. However, some of these studies can help us to understand why non-state armed organisations decide

to employ female fighters. Analysing existing publications, I identify three explanations which can be found in the literature on female perpetrators of non-state political violence, namely: (1) individual motivations, (2) organisational characteristics, and contextual pressures – which for the sake of clarity, I divide into (3) the security context and (4) societal aspects.

### 1.3 | Research question and aims

Women were involved in a variety of roles in nearly all of the political parties and militias<sup>7</sup> during the Lebanese civil war. They assumed a number of supportive roles such as logistics, first aid, cooking and washing for male fighters, telecommunications, intelligence gathering, recruitment, PR and communications, and almost all militias employed female fighters (interviewees 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66). Some had separate female units (such as the Lebanese Forces (LF)), whereas in others,

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<sup>7</sup> Many political parties in Lebanon either had a separate militia at the beginning of the war or they formed one after the war broke out. In some cases, the lines between the party and the militia became blurred after the outbreak of the war, which led some interviewees to speak of “politico-military organisations” (interviewee 18). For the sake of clarity, I only use the names of the parties in this thesis and specify whether I speak about the party or the militia, when necessary.

men and women fought in mixed units (Shehadeh, 1999: 156, Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 9). The Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) did not include any official female fighters at all. The Amal Movement (or Amal for short) did not include any female combatants before 1978, and even then, involved women in combat against Israel only. How can this variation be explained? Why did some non-state armed organisations operating during the Lebanese civil war include women in combat activities whilst others did not? Why was the percentage of female fighters higher in some militias than in others? And how can we explain variation over time and in different locations? In order to shed light on this question, the four existing explanations which can be found in the literature on female political violence will be examined in regard to Lebanon. For all involved groups, I will demonstrate (in a dedicated chapter of this thesis), the extent to which individual motivations and women's insistence to be included, organisational characteristics, the security context and societal aspects played a role in the group's decision-making on the involvement of women in combat activities.

When I started the project, the focus was only on the group's decision-making. However, during fieldwork, I realised that women's motivation to join the fight played an equally important role. Omitting the individual perspective from the analysis would thus not have allowed me to fully

explain the phenomenon and therefore Chapter One focuses on individual motivations.

The research objective of this study was two-fold. Firstly, I intended to generate new data on organisational motivations for the inclusion of female fighters in non-state armed groups, as this is a field of study that remains relatively under-researched (Henshaw, 2016), both in general, and even more so with regards to the time period of the Lebanese civil war. By contributing to the scarce literature on female militia members in the Lebanese civil war, this study aims to contribute to the literature on the civil war in Lebanon by adding a discussion of the reasons for the inclusion of female fighters in the various militias involved in the war. The generation of new data and exploration of new cases is of paramount importance in the study of political violence due to a tendency to focus on the same group of over-researched cases (Dolnik, 2013b: 4, Ranstorp, 2013: 51). This leads us onto the second aim of my research. Whilst the focus of this study is on militias operating during the Lebanese civil war, I hope that its findings will help advance the study of female political violence and terrorism more generally. In a field of study where many publications tend to focus on the same group of over-researched cases, adding a new group of cases and new data has the potential to stimulate existing discussion and prompt new debates. Finally, I hope that not only researchers but also practitioners

working in conflict prevention, conflict transformation and counterterrorism, will benefit from my research, as it is impossible to develop informed strategies to effectively prevent and counter political violence and limit its destructive effects, without fully understanding the decision-making of the actors involved.

## 1.4 | Methodological approach

In order to answer the research question, I carried out a small-n comparative study focusing on seven non-state armed groups in a single country case study. I decided to conduct a qualitative study for three reasons: (1) to gain a deeper understanding of a highly complex issue, (2) to generate much needed data on the selected cases and (3) to ensure the internal validity of the generated data. In terms of epistemology, I am approaching this research from a largely positivist perspective, whilst acknowledging that interpretivist and constructivist positions are also valid and important. I will refer to and rely on publications by scholars studying female political violence within an interpretivist framework. However, on a theoretical level, the main aim of this thesis is to contribute to theories on involvement in political violence and on organisational decision-making, and not to gender theory.

The main focus of this thesis lies on seven organisations; namely, the Lebanese Communist Party (LCP), Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Palestinian National Liberation Movement (Fatah), Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), Lebanese Kataeb Party (Kataeb), the Lebanese Forces (LF) and the Amal Movement (Amal).<sup>8</sup> The cases examined in this study were selected with the aim to include the widest spectrum of militias involved in the civil war in terms of ideology, aims, size and age. LCP, PFLP, Fatah and PSP, along with several other leftist groups, were members of the leftist Lebanese National Movement (LNM), which was opposed by the Christian Lebanese Front (LFr). Kataeb and later the LF, as well as several smaller Christian militias, were members of the LFr. LNM and LFr were the two main – adversarial – alliances at the beginning of the war. Moreover, the Amal Movement was close to but not formally allied with the LNM. I thus included all major players except for Hezbollah and the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP) in this study. Despite several attempts to contact Hezbollah whilst in the field, it was not possible to gain access to any former fighters or party members. However, I include the Amal Movement which to a certain extent, shares some similarities and a common past with Hezbollah and has the added advantage of having been in existence since 1974/5, unlike Hezbollah, which was only founded in the mid/early 1980s – ten years

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<sup>8</sup> An overview of the different militias is included in the appendix.

into the Lebanese civil war (Norton, 1987, Norton, 2014). Gaining access to former SSNP members also proved to be very challenging. In both cases, one of the main reasons for the difficulty in accessing these two groups was their continued military involvement in the war in Syria.

The findings presented in this study are based on fieldwork in Lebanon undertaken during four research trips (1.5 months in July/August 2015, 1 month in December 2015/January 2016, 1.5 months in July/August 2016 and 1 week in October 2016). Overall, I conducted 64 interviews with 69 male and female former fighters, party members, researchers, journalists and civil society representatives, with expertise on the civil war, on the involved parties and militias and on the role of women before and during the war. Moreover, I analysed the (auto)biographies of three former female fighters (Sneifer, 2006, El Murr, 2014, Duplan and Raulin, 2015).

## 1.5 | Findings

### Numbers, percentages and roles of women in the militias

Women participated in all of the militias involved in the Lebanese civil war. They were included as nurses, cooks, cleaners, laundry women, smugglers, administrators, political organisers, spies, fighters, commanders, recruiters,

liaison contacts, as well as in telecommunications and PR (interviewees 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66). Moreover, they were also employed as suicide attackers against the Israeli occupying forces, mostly in the SSNP (André-Dessornes, 2013). Identifying exact numbers and percentages is difficult, if not impossible, as several interviewees stressed (interviewees 2, 7, 8, 44). This is due to the secretive (and often highly unorganised) nature of many non-state armed groups, and the fact that many militias either did not keep any archives during the war or archival holdings were destroyed during the war or in the post-war years (interviewees 2, 7, 8, 44). Any figures, both on the overall numbers of fighters and the percentage of female militia members, can thus only be rough estimates. Based on triangulation of interview data with the highly limited information available from secondary literature, I estimate that (at the beginning of the war) the overall number of fighters in the LCP was between 3000 and 6000 (interviewees 1, 2, 7; Badran, 2008), the percentage of female militants between 20 and 60% (interviewees 1, 22, 23, 27, 28, 29, 32, 54), and the percentage of female fighters up to 15% (interviewees 1, 22, 23, 27, 31, 32, 54). The PFLP was a small militia, with only a few hundred fighters at the beginning of the war (interviewees 67, 68, 69). The

percentage of female fighters is likely to have been slightly lower than in the LCP (interviewees 61, Badran, 2008). The percentage of female fighters in Fatah was considerably lower than in the PFLP (interviewees 1, 14, 18, 52, 61, 67, 68, 69). At the beginning of the war, Kataeb had between 4000 and 6000 fighters (interviewees 1, 7, 55, 57, Badran, 2008). Of these, an estimated 2-7.5% were female fighters, with the exact figure probably being more in the lower end of the scale (interviewees 2, 16, 41, 44, 55, 57). In the case of Amal, numbers were probably very low as well.

#### Individual motivations: women's insistence to be included

Contrary to the findings of some scholars working on female participation in other contexts, coercion did not play a role during the civil war in Lebanon. The women who participated in the war did so out of their own choice. Faced with the extreme security context and perceived injustice at the outbreak of the war, women were highly motivated and insisted that they be included in combat positions. This was the most important factor in bringing about female participation in the militias. It is unlikely that women had participated as fighters, if it had not been for the women insisting to be included. The women involved in the militias largely shared the same motivations as men. A minority of interviewees mentioned gender-specific motivations, such as

the fight for women's liberation and gender equality. As far as individual backgrounds are concerned, there were no major differences between the men and women who joined the militias involved in the war. They were often young and many had personal links to the militias – either through friends or family members. For many, non-violent activism was a pathway into violent roles. The fact that women's rights and gender equality were de facto not a priority for many militias did not stop women from joining.

### Organisational characteristics

After women's insistence to be involved, the second most important factors were organisational characteristics. When the women insisted on being included as fighters, they were included in those militias that believed in women's rights and gender equality. This explains the high percentages of female involvement in the LCP, PFLP and the Communist Action Organisation (CAO) – a small communist LNM militia. Those militias with both secular and religious influences with a more ambiguous position on women's roles, such as Kataeb, Fatah and Amal, saw a lower level of female involvement. In the same vein, the main reason why women were not included as fighters in the militias of the PSP was the party's de facto gender ideology. The case of the PSP stresses the importance of looking beyond official labels when assessing

an organisation's gender ideology and instead taking into account de facto practices. Similarly, the reason Amal did not allow women to join as fighters until 1978 was the gender ideology the group ascribed to. Amal's gender ideology allowed female participation in combat only under very specific conditions. It prescribed that female involvement in combat was only permitted in a situation of defence against an external invader – the resistance against whom was perceived as legitimate in religious terms. Internal structure and dynamics also played a role in facilitating female involvement in the militias. The militias of the far-left (including the LCP, CAO and PFLP) whose leadership was in favour of female participation, included women from the outset. In those organisations whose leadership was undivided in their opposition to female deployment, women did not participate in combat (namely in the PSP and in Amal before 1978). In the militias in which the leadership was divided (such as in Kataeb and Fatah), a window of opportunity for women's involvement was opened. Lastly, nearly all organisations which deployed female fighters had had a long tradition of engaging women in separate women's units. Several interviewees saw this factor as crucial in the later participation of female militia members in general, and female combatants in particular, as it provided women with a space to gain political experience and confidence before the war started. As far as external relations of the militias are concerned, the Lebanese left was

clearly inspired by the role of the women in the Palestinian revolution. Female members of the Christian militias, however, did not have similar role models for female involvement, which is likely to be another factor contributing to the relatively low numbers of female fighters in the Christian militias. Lastly, organisational aims, age and size did not play any significant role, as both organisations with domestic aims as well as those with an international agenda included female fighters. There is some evidence that the specific project for the nation-state the various militias were fighting for played a role in the inclusion of female fighters.

#### The security context

In those militias with organisational characteristics that were not conducive to the inclusion of female combatants (including organisational gender ideology and the leadership's position on female employment in combat) female participation was nevertheless rendered possible due to security pressure. Ideological considerations were overcome when the militias were confronted with increasing security pressures. The same security pressures and perceived injustice that had led individuals to join the militias at the beginning of the war facilitated female involvement on the organisational

level. The evolving levels of female involvement throughout the war illustrate this clearly.

### Societal factors

The main reason why female participation in combat remained relatively low, especially when compared with other conflict contexts, was high levels of societal opposition to female involvement in the war. Lebanon had started to undergo a process of development towards a more gender-progressive society in the 1960s and 1970s. These trends were amplified by the war; however, Lebanon remained a comparatively gender-conservative society, with relatively high levels of opposition to female involvement in combat. While there was considerable intra- and inter-community variation, overall most Lebanese did not see a role for women on the frontlines. Those militias that defied communal gender norms and expectations by involving women in combat roles, navigated their relations with the communities with a number of tactical steps, both on a practical and a narrative level, in order to prevent negative reactions from the communities.

## 1.6 | Civil war(s) in Lebanon

Before moving on to the overview of the structure of this thesis, I will provide a brief discussion of the different phases of the Lebanese civil war, its main actors and the debate about its causes. This section is not intended to provide a comprehensive analysis of the war and its causes, which is already covered by others (Fisk, 2001, Hirst, 2011, Traboulsi, 2012). Instead, it aims to provide sufficient context for the activities of the militias whose decision-making I analyse in this study.

### Phases of the war

The Lebanese civil war lasted for almost sixteen years, from 1975 to 1990. It can be divided into four stages.<sup>9</sup> When describing the different stages of the war it is imperative to take into account regional differences, as different parts of the country were subjected to fighting and occupation at different times and to various degrees.

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<sup>9</sup> For an alternative analysis of the different stages of the war, see Hirst, 2010: 102-103.

## Phase 1: Spring 1975 to Summer / Autumn 1976

It is generally assumed that war in Lebanon was ignited by two incidents – the shooting of protesting fishermen in Saida in February 1975, and armed clashes between members of the Christian militias on the one side and Palestinian militants on the other in Ain al-Rummaneh in East Beirut in April of that year (Abul-Husn, 1998: 2). David Hirst, however, describes these rightly as the last two of a *series* of violent incidents leading to the outbreak of war (Hirst, 2011: 99-102). This first stage of the war was dominated by fighting between Palestinian and Lebanese leftist militia members in one camp and Christian militia members in the other camp (Mackey, 2006: 157, Hirst, 2011: 109-110). As Hirst argues, “in the initial phase, 1975-6, it was the *civil* war that predominated”, with Lebanese actors leading the way (Hirst, 2010: 108-109). Regional politics did not play a major role yet (Hirst, 2010: 108-109). The first phase was marked by massacres – mostly in Beirut, such as during the Black Saturday massacres in December 1975 and mass killings in Karantina, Maslakh, Damour and Tel el-Zaatar in 1976 (Mackey, 2006: 164; Hirst, 2010: 114), as well as inner-city fighting, such as during the Battle of the Hotels in Beirut in late 1975 and early 1976 (Hirst, 2010: 111). The city was divided along what was called the Green Line – a demarcation line dividing Beirut into a majority Muslim part in the West and a majority

Christian part in the East (Mackey, 2006: 165). Towards the end of this first stage of the war, the fighting largely turned from battles over ideology to fighting over petty interests (Mackey, 2006: 162-163). The first phase of the war ended with an invasion by the Syrian army, which happened over three stages from April to October 1976 (Hirst, 2010: 114). Finally, a diplomatic intervention of the Arab world resulted in a ceasefire (Hirst, 2010: 114-115).

### Phase 2: Early 1977 to Summer 1982

The Syrian intervention and following ceasefire ended the war, but not the crisis. The grievances which had led to the outbreak of the war in Spring 1975 were not addressed (Mackey, 2006: 166-167; Hirst, 2010: 115), and the Syrians were “unwilling and unable to suppress the various militias” (Johnson, 2001: 224). In fact, in some parts of the country, namely the South, the fighting actually intensified. Bomb explosions and assassinations took place in other parts of the country too. Winslow argues that what had changed was the following:

[A]fter 1976, Lebanese were not pitted against other Lebanese to win control over the whole Republic. Instead they fought to carve out a piece of the country either for themselves or as proxies in the regional competition for strategic control (Winslow, 1996: 212).

Overall, the phase from 1977 to 1982 can be seen as a “sullen three-way stalemate” between Christian militias, Lebanese and Palestinian leftists, and the Syrians (Mackey, 2006: 173). Militias of the different camps started to turn against each other, as seen for example, in the intra-Christian fighting that resulted in the massacres of Ehden in the Summer of 1978 and Safra in the Summer of 1980. Musa Sadr, the leader of the Amal Movement, disappeared on a visit to Libya in August 1978 (Mackey, 2006: 201). He has been celebrated as a martyr by large parts of the Lebanese Shia community since and continues to inspire Shia-dominated political parties (and their militias during the war), such as Amal and Hezbollah. In March 1978, the Israeli army carried out its first big invasion, named Operation Litani by the Israelis, into the South of Lebanon. After the Israeli withdrawal, the UN sent UNIFIL troops to patrol the border (Mackey, 2006: 173). However, the conflict in the South was not resolved, and skirmishes between the Lebanese army, pro-Israeli Christian militias such as Saad Haddad’s South Lebanon Army (SLA), the Israeli army and Palestinian militants and their Lebanese allies, continued.

### Phase 3: Summer 1982 to Spring 1985

In June 1982, after years of low-scale conflict along the Lebanese-Israeli border between the Israeli army, their Lebanese allies and Lebanese and Palestinian opponents, the second major Israeli invasion of Lebanon took place (Mackey, 2006: 175-176). The invasion had three main aims: (1) to destroy the infrastructure of the PLO, (2) to establish a new political order in Lebanon under the leadership of Bashir Gemayel – one of the senior members and leaders of Kataeb and the LF, in order to (3) reach an Israeli-Lebanese peace treaty and drive the Syrian army out of Lebanon (El-Solh, 2004: 339-340). The invasion was based on an agreement between Bashir Gemayel and his supporters and the Israeli regime. However, asked by the Israelis to storm West Beirut which was held by Lebanese and Palestinian leftist militias, Bashir Gemayel's LF refused (Hirst, 2010: 149 – 150). In the following weeks, the Israeli army besieged and shelled West Beirut until the Palestinian political leadership, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), agreed to leave the country in August, facilitated by the American government (Winslow, 1996: 233-234, Mackey, 2006: 178- 181). As planned, Bashir Gemayel was elected President in September. However, he was assassinated shortly afterwards (Mackey, 2006: 181 – 182). In response to the killing, Christian Lebanese militias supported by the Israeli army

committed the massacres of the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps in Beirut (Mackey, 2006: 183-184, Hirst 2010: 154-160). These developments led the French, Italian and US American troops – who had been on the ground to monitor the evacuation of the PLO, to re-enter Beirut (Winslow, 1996: 235). This Multinational Force remained in the country until a major attack by Hezbollah killed over 300 French and US American soldiers in October 1983 (Hirst, 2010: 194-196). Israel then pulled out of most of Lebanon at the end of 1982 (Mackey, 2006: 244). However, it continued to occupy an extended “security zone” in the South, which included Saida – one of Lebanon’s three major cities, until June 1985. In 1985, after “three years of increasingly brutal occupation”, the Israelis left all of the South of Lebanon except for a smaller buffer zone near the border (Hirst, 2010: 196-204). It was during this time that Hezbollah, a new Shia Islamist militia, was formally founded by former members of the Amal Movement, even though some analysts date the formation of the group to the early 1980s (Hirst, 2010: 187; Mackey, 2006: 206-207). In the aftermath of the Israeli withdrawal from their positions in the Shouf Mountains in late 1983, fighting broke out between the PSP militia and their leftist allies – supported by Syria and the PLO on one side, and the LF, the Lebanese Army and Israel on the other. During the Mountain War, French and Americans intervened in support of the Christian militias (Mackey, 2006: 189-190).

#### Phase 4: June 1985 to Autumn 1990

During the last five years of the war, Lebanon went through a particularly destructive phase of fighting. Former allies increasingly turned against each other, and intra-sectarian battles resulted in some of the bloodiest parts of the war (Hirst, 2010: 208). While kidnappings of Lebanese had been a frequent occurrence since the beginning of the war, now kidnappings of foreigners also increased considerably (Hirst, 2010: 225, Mackey, 2006: 213 – 221).

The fighting went on and on. But less and less, now, did it serve any discernible military or strategic purpose; it was more and more the institutional, the pathological, activity of a self-perpetuating warrior caste divorced from the society, and its conflicting causes, which had spawned it (Hirst, 2010: 207).

One example of fighting between former allies and even members of the same militia, is the confrontation between two fractions of the LF following the failed Tripartite Accord at the end of 1985 – a Syrian-brokered attempt at ending the war and ensuring Syrian hegemony by bringing together leaders of the LF, Amal and the PSP (Winslow 1996: 251, 254-256). Another example of intra-alliance and intra-sect fighting is the War of the Camps, which started in the spring of 1985 and prompted the Syrian army to enter

West Beirut in 1987 and 1988 to save their ally Amal, from their opponents (which included Palestinians, their leftist allies, and Hezbollah) (Hirst, 2010: 233-236, Mackey, 2006: 250-252, 256, Winslow, 1996: 265). In 1988, the term of Amin Gemayel (who had been elected after the assassination in 1982 of his brother Bashir), as President of the Republic, ended. The parliament, as well as “the outside powers which traditionally influenced its choice”, could not agree on a new president and so for a brief period of time, the country had two rival governments (Hirst, 2010: 209). In October 1989, in the resort of Taif in Saudi Arabia, “[c]onciliation and mediation by a high-profile and authoritative Arab League committee [...] were finally successful” (Abul-Husn, 1998: 5). Lebanese deputies approved a Charter of Reconciliation and elected a new president (Winslow, 1996: 274). However, the fighting continued, until President Hrawi called for support from the Syrian army (Winslow, 1996: 276-279), which invaded the country and stopped the fighting in October 1990 (Hirst, 2010: 213-214). In the following months, “[w]ith the help, and sometimes under the control, of the Syrian army”, the new regime disarmed and dissolved all militias, except for Hezbollah (Hirst, 2010: 215-216).

Key non-state armed political actors

At the beginning of the war, two main camps were opposing each other. Key non-state armed actors included the members of the LNM – which comprised of Lebanese and Palestinian socialist, communist and Arab Nationalist organisations, and the LFr – which brought together Christian parties and militias (El-Solh, 2004: 324, Abul-Husn, 1998: 3-5). Moreover, some organisations were not formally part of the LNM but politically close to it. This includes the Amal Movement – which, despite not formally being a member, coordinated its activities with the LNM in the beginning of the war (Abul-Husn, 1998: 4). In short, the LNM fought for a new socio-economic and political order, for an end of Maronite domination of the political system, and for Palestinian rights and their armed presence in Lebanon (Traboulsi, 2012). The LFr on the other hand, fought for the preservation of the status quo in the country and against the presence of armed Palestinian groups in Lebanon (Traboulsi, 2012). While these were the alliances at the beginning of the war, in the later stages, many former allies started turning against each other, which resulted in bloody intra-alliance and even intra-group fighting. In the 1980s, a new group of non-state actors emerged – namely parties with a distinctive Islamist agenda, such as Hezbollah (Norton, 2014).

## Causes of the war

More than twenty-five years after the end of the war (which lasted from 1975 to 1990), there is no single narrative of what caused the war. An overview of the different causes will be provided here for context. The most commonly cited causes of the war include sectarian divisions, political factors, economic aspects and external factors. Most academic authors highlight the multitude of reasons that led to war in Lebanon and maintain that singling out one reason would be an over simplification (Winslow, 1996, Abul-Husn, 1998, Fisk, 2001, Mackey, 2006, Hirst, 2011, Traboulsi, 2012). Some also stress that while several main themes might have been at stake, different antagonisms played a role at the various stages of the conflict, depending on the “ebb and flow of the issue in dispute” (Abul-Husn 1998: 2-3).

The Lebanese civil war has often been described as religious in nature (Johnson, 2001: 21), with authors presenting it as “just another round of conflict in a sectarian system” (Johnson, 2001: 23). Indeed, “[i]ntercommunal tension has been a feature of the modern state of Lebanon since its creation” in 1920 (Abul-Husn, 1998: 2-3), and the Lebanese civil war did have a sectarian dimension. However, the majority of analysts agree that the war was not fundamentally a religious conflict (Abul-Husn,

1998: 2-3; see also Bechara, 2003: 32, Mackey, 2006: 93-94). The fact that, especially in the West, it was assumed early on that the civil war was fought about religious questions (Mackey, 2006: 91) is likely to be a reflection of widespread assumptions about Lebanon and the Middle East rather than the actual nature of the conflict. Indeed, many Western interpretations of conflict in the Middle East continue to be read through a colonial lens, essentialising and othering the region and its peoples as violent, uncivilised and primordial (Said, 1979, Zelizer et al., 2002, Little, 2008, Khalidi, 2010).

Another strand of literature on the Lebanese civil war, highlights political factors. Lebanon's political leaders had developed a very specific political power-sharing agreement and conflict regulation mechanism which "offered each community an opportunity to contribute to the political process in the country according to its numerical weight" (Abul-Husn, 1998: 3-4). The lack of flexibility of this particular form of confessionalism contributed to the increasing alienation of Lebanese Arab Nationalists and leftists (El-Solh, 2004: 334, Abul-Husn, 1998: 3-4). According to this approach of explaining the war, hostilities broke out over divergent interests in changing the "existing power-sharing formula" (Abul-Husn, 1998: 3). Leftists' calls for the "establish[ment of] a new economic and political order" and for reforms had been made since the early 1970s (El-Solh, 2004: 331). The "polarisation of the Lebanese parties along a left-right dichotomy", and

between those who “wanted a secular state with social, economic and political reforms and those who support[ed] ‘traditional chieftains, urban notables, business tycoons’ who run the system” had become increasingly pronounced (Mackerey, 2006: 161, El-Solh, 2004: 331, Hirst, 2010: 89). Related to this were competing Lebanese nationalisms and the question of whether Lebanon was (to be) closer to the Arab or Western world (Johnson, 2001: 24, El-Solh, 2004: ix, 2-9, Mackerey, 2009: 158).

Not many analysts focus on economic reasons for the war (Traboulsi, 2007, who analyses the war from a political economy perspective, is a notable exception). This remains the case even though one of the triggering events of the war was the killing of the politician and activist Marouf Saad, who was killed at a demonstration of fishermen addressing economic grievances in Saida in early 1975 (Mackey, 2009: 156). Authors taking into account economic factors highlight the fact that the LNM and its allies did not only call for a new political order but also for economic reforms (Mackey, 2006: 161), and that one of the reasons especially Palestinians and Shia Muslims engaged in the war was to challenge the traditional clientelist system that preserved economic interests of two dominating societal groups – the Maronites, and, to a lesser degree, Sunni Muslims (Johnson, 2001: 5-7; see also Mackey, 2006: 95-103). Others believe that the country’s economic marginality made it more prone to conflict (Winslow, 1996: 3) or point to the

role economic factors played in fuelling the war once it had started (Johnson, 2001: 226).

Lastly, another frequently quoted cause for the war is external factors, pointing to (1) the activities of Palestinian organisations and (2) the role of a number of Middle Eastern states as well as general developments in the region. The main external actors were Syria, the Palestinians and Israel (Abul-Husn, 1998: 4), even though one could argue that the Palestinians were only semi-external, considering that large parts of the community had fled to Lebanon as a result of the Arab-Israeli war in 1948 and had been refugees in the country since then. Since the expulsion from their homeland in 1948, Palestinian militants had used Lebanon as a base in their fight against Israel, and Israel often targeted Lebanon in its preventive, pre-emptive and retaliatory operations (Mackey, 2006: 142, 150, Hirst, 2010: 92, 95). In 1969, decades of oppression of Palestinians in Lebanon led to the intifada of the camps (Hirst, 2010: 76-78), during which Palestinians and leftist Lebanese – who had been radicalised by the 1967 Israeli-Arab war and internal discord within the Lebanese state and society, confronted the Lebanese army (Hirst, 2010: 90, 96-97, Mackey, 2006: 144-145). The Lebanese government had tried to discipline or destroy the Palestinian organisations to no avail and so in autumn 1969, in the Egyptian-brokered Cairo Agreement, it agreed to Palestinian militias operating from Lebanese

soil (Hirst, 2010: 94). This was seen as threat to national interests by the Maronite elite, especially since many of the Palestinians were Sunni Muslims and thus had the potential to contribute to an imbalance of the traditional sectarian makeup of the Lebanese state and society. In fact, many deprived Sunnis, Shia, Druze and some “Christian intellectuals who shared the revolutionary aspirations of the Palestinian movement” sympathised with the Palestinians and their cause (Mackey, 2006: 143). The Christian Kataeb party started to strengthen their already existing militia, with others joining in (Hirst, 2010: 98, Mackey, 2006: 145-146). The situation intensified when the PLO was expelled from Jordan in September 1970 and made Lebanon their new political base (Mackey, 2006: 147). In 1975, one of the two triggering events of the war (the other being the killing of Marouf Saad in Saida), involved Palestinian fighters in the massacre of Ain Al-Rummaneh. However, the degree to which the Palestinian presence in Lebanon contributed to the outbreak of the war is contested. On the one hand, some suggest that external factors “exacerbated but did not cause the conflict” (Abul-Husn, 1998: 131). On the other hand, there is the claim that “had it not been for the PLO’s militarization of Lebanese politics (and the responsive militarization of the Maronites), all the socioeconomic and confessional tensions in Lebanon could have been contained by the Lebanese state” (Johnson, 2001: 24). The Lebanese civil war had a distinct regional dimension

– and not just because of the involvement of the Palestinian militias (Hirst, 2010: 102-103). In addition to Syria and Israel, the states of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya (and later Iran), were directly or indirectly involved (Hirst, 2010: 108; El-Solh, 2004: 300-301). This outside support – which each militia involved in the conflict benefitted from, intensified and prolonged the conflict, especially since the supporting states were often entangled in inter-Arab discord and rivalries (Mackey, 2006: 247, Abul-Husn, 1998: 4). As Johnson rightly put it, “[i]t would be naïve to think that the Lebanese fighters were innocents manipulated by outside forces,” but they could not have fought as long and as fiercely without the support of regional states (Johnson, 2001: 225-226). The relation between Lebanese militias and their outside supporters was often one of mutual exploitation, purely to the perceived benefit of their own group or state (Winslow, 1996: 6).

## 1.7 | Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters. After Chapter One, this introduction, Chapter Two provides a detailed review of relevant existing literature and outlines the theoretical framework from which this study is approached. I discuss existing literature and highlight the contribution to knowledge this study makes. I show that in much of the literature on political violence, the

question of female combatants has been omitted and that most contributions from the (limited) body of literature on female political violence focuses on the individual level only, without taking into account what causal factors drive an organisation to allow female participation in combat. I also discuss the theoretical framework used for the purpose of this study and show how theories on involvement in political violence and on organisational decision-making and behaviour in non-state armed groups can help us to understand organisational motivations for the inclusion of female fighters. In Chapter Three, I discuss methodological choices I have made and what the epistemological assumptions underpinning my research are. The study of political violence can be approached via a range of different approaches; in this chapter, I explain why I have decided to conduct a comparative small-n study examining the two groups of cases I have chosen to look at in this study. I also give an overview of the adopted research method, the general research context as well as practical questions including case selection, sampling and access. Two separate sections are dedicated to data management and analysis as well as researcher reflexivity and ethics. In Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven, I examine the four explanations that can be found in the literature of why non-state armed organisations decide to allow female fighters within their ranks. Each of these chapters discusses the findings of my research in regard to existing literature on organisational

decision-making on the inclusion of female fighters, comparing and contrasting findings of my research with claims in the existing literature. Chapter Four is dedicated to individual motivations and the reasons why women decided to join the militias and insist on their inclusion as fighters. I examine the extent to which coercion played a role in the recruitment of female fighters, look at the women's backgrounds, and examine if there were any differences between men's and women's motivations. Chapter Five looks at organisational characteristics and the role organisational ideology, aims, age, size and internal dynamics played in the groups' decision-making on the inclusion of female fighters. Chapter Six analyses the role of the security context in which an organisation operated. I examine to what extent claims made in the existing literature that non-state armed organisations employ women to avoid detection, seek attention or assert a position can be confirmed with regards to groups operating during the civil war in Lebanon. Chapter Seven is dedicated to the importance of societal and communal norms and expectations within the society a non-state armed organisation is based or operating in. I highlight which factors facilitated women's participation in the militias, which factors inhibited it, and how the militias managed communal gender expectations that conflicted with their organisational strategies. Chapter Eight is the conclusion in which I summarise the findings of my research, analyse the interplay between the

four different factors, describe limitations of the study, make recommendations for policy and practice, and sketch scope for future research. Before that, in the next chapter, I will provide a critical analysis of existing relevant literature and outline the theoretical framework of my research.

## Chapter 2 | A Multi-Level, Process- and Context-Focused Approach

Before embarking on the empirical analysis of why non-state armed groups operating during the Lebanese civil war decided to include female fighters, this chapter discusses the theoretical framework adopted (part I below). It also reviews the existing literature on organisational motivations for the inclusion of women in non-state armed groups (part II). This chapter discusses the strengths and limitations of different theoretical approaches to the study of women's involvement in political violence, and organisational decision-making behind female participation in violent conflict. It shows how combining several of these approaches allows for a multi-level, process-focused and context-based approach, which helps avoid some of the pitfalls associated with studies of political violence.

### [Bridging the divide between conflict and terrorism studies](#)

With regards to existing literature, one aim of this study is to contribute to bridging the divide between conflict and terrorism studies. Despite both disciplines focusing on non-state armed political violence (often studying the

same violent conflicts and armed groups), the literature tends to be very segregated. With regards to the topic of female political violence, the divide is particularly strong. Many scholars working on female political violence within a terrorism studies framework do not quote previous works by academics who approach the topic from a conflict studies perspective (see for example Cunningham, 2003, Victor, 2003, Berko and Erez, 2007b, Berko and Erez, 2007a, Schweitzer, 2007, Von Knop, 2007, Cunningham, 2008, Jacques and Taylor, 2008, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008, Zedalis, 2008, Jacques and Taylor, 2009, O'Rourke, 2009, Cunningham, 2010, Bloom, 2011, Davis, 2017). To a certain extent, the same is true for conflict studies scholars (notable exceptions include Hamilton, 2007, Eager, 2008, Alison, 2009, Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015, Henshaw, 2016). Whilst it is understandable that different groups of scholars feel that the work of some academics is more relevant to their research than that of others, it is perplexing that the divide between the two disciplines often results in the complete omission of the work of the other group – even when both work on the same non-state armed groups and conflicts.

Although most of the organisations I analyse in the empirical part of this study are not usually referred to as terrorist groups, I draw on literature from both conflict and terrorism studies. By doing so I join a number of researchers who contend that the distinction between “terrorist” actors on

the one hand, and other non-state perpetrators of political violence on the other hand, is often artificial as most non-state armed groups (and indeed many state actors as well), resort to a number of different violent tactics (Ness, 2005: 357, Khalil, 2013, Moghadam et al., 2014).

## Part I | Involvement in political violence: a theoretical framework

Female involvement in political violence remains a comparatively under-researched sub-field of studies of violent conflict (Henshaw, 2016). One major criticism of existing studies is their lack of theoretical foundations (Alison, 2009). Many interpretivist studies of female political violence work within feminist theory or gender studies frameworks, and include detailed discussions of these frameworks (examples include Peteet, 1991, Vázquez, 1997, Shayne, 1999, West, 2000, Alison, 2009, Parashar, 2009, Roy, 2012, Shekhawat, 2012, Katto, 2014, Parashar, 2014, Magadla, 2015, Veneracion-Rallonza, 2015). Positivist studies of female political violence on the other hand, often lack a sound theoretical basis (see for example Cunningham, 2003, Berko and Erez, 2007a, Berko and Erez, 2007b, Cunningham, 2008, Speckhard, 2008, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008, Bloom, 2011). Positivist empirical studies on female political violence typically include a section on either the history of the term terrorism, or on the particular conflict context

they focus on (see for example Cunningham, 2003, Berko and Erez, 2007a, Berko and Erez, 2007b, Cunningham, 2008, Bloom, 2011). Unless the study takes a feminist theory approach, a refined theoretical framework that goes beyond a terminological or historical discussion of terrorism or political violence is often missing.

This underrepresentation of theory can be found not just in empirical studies on female involvement in political violence, but also in empirical studies on involvement in political violence in general (Jackson, 2007). Traditionally, studies of political violence – especially those undertaken from a terrorism studies angle, have been extremely theory-heavy – often without including any empirical evidence (Dolnik, 2013b). On the other end of the spectrum, many mainstream empirical studies of the topic are characterised by the tendency to not include a rigorous theoretical framework. So while many mainstream studies on involvement in political violence are almost exclusively theory-based, many empirical studies of the topic lack an explicit theoretical foundation. As highlighted in the introduction of this thesis, most mainstream literature on involvement in political violence overlooks the role of women. Combining general theories on involvement in violent conflict with explanations of female political violence allows us to develop a theoretical framework for empirical studies on women's involvement in violent conflict. Combined, the two sets of theories have the potential to

overcome the problem of including theory in empirical studies on the topic. For this reason, I merge general theories on involvement in political violence (which often overlook the roles of women) and explanations of female political violence (which often lack a robust theoretical basis), in this chapter. Since both theories on involvement in political violence in general and those studies focusing on women's involvement tend to focus on the individual (rather than the organisational) level, I combine the two sets of theories with organisational decision-making approaches. This will be discussed in section two of this chapter.

This thesis does not aim to explicitly contribute to feminist theory or gender studies; rather, it takes an empirical interest in gender and women's studies. This approach is mainly due to the particular research question I am asking in this thesis, and the fact that I am interested in causes for organisational decision-making on female involvement, rather than on the meaning attached to their participation. In taking this approach, I join a number of other scholars working on female political violence (including Cunningham, 2003, Cunningham, 2008, Speckhard, 2008, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008, Cunningham, 2010, Bloom, 2011, Parkinson, 2013).

## 2.1 | Theories on involvement in political violence

Existing debates on involvement in political violence have tended to evolve around four broad themes, which all highlight different aspects of how and why involvement in violent conflict can be explained. These include: (1) the question of structure vs. agency, (2) greed vs. grievances, (3) psychological vs. rational explanations, and (4) context-based and process-based approaches. These approaches are not always mutually exclusive. Indeed, in some cases, there is considerable overlap, with some analysts combining insights from different schools of thought to develop our understanding of involvement in political violence.<sup>10</sup> For the sake of clarity, I will look at the key elements of the different approaches separately in the following section.

### Structure or agency

Debates on involvement in political violence in the literature focusing on insurgencies, rebellions, revolutions and civil war were traditionally dominated by state-centric theories. Leading authors, such as Skocpol

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<sup>10</sup> The terms involvement, recruitment or mobilisation on the one hand, and radicalisation on the other, are often used indiscriminately, suggesting they describe the same process. However, as John Horgan (2013) has pointed out, involvement in political violence does not necessarily require radicalisation nor is radicalisation followed by involvement in political violence in all cases. This is why I use the more neutral term involvement in political violence, which can – but does not necessarily need to – be paralleled by a process of radicalisation.

(1979) and Goodwin (2001), considered the state, its capabilities and the political context states create as key factors in how political violence can be explained. Studies of political violence often focused on states rather than individuals or organisations (Arjona and Kalyvas, 2012: 143). In recent years, state-centric approaches were increasingly criticised for their failure to take into account the agency and autonomy of individuals and organisations involved in political violence (Staniland, 2014: 3-4). Research on civil wars has witnessed a shift away from quantitative, cross-national comparisons to more qualitative, sub-national studies (Arjona and Kalyvas, 2012: 143), often combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. A similar shift from studies focusing on states to research on individuals and organisations occurred in the field of terrorism studies. Whilst terrorism studies focused very much on state terrorism in its earlier stages, the unit of analysis now is mostly individuals and, to a lesser degree, organisations (Horgan and Boyle, 2008, Jackson, 2008). Similarly, recent studies focusing on civil war and rebel movements stress the importance of taking into account the roles of individuals and organisations (as well as communities), in the study of political violence (Arjona and Kalyvas, 2012, Guichaoua, 2012, Gutierrez Sanin, 2012, Arjona et al., 2015). However, the question of which roles structure and agency play is still being debated in the conflict studies literature, often now with a focus on organisations rather than states (see

for example Weinstein, 2006: 20-22). The focus in these debates lies on the question of whether it is organisational characteristics or deliberate decision-making which shape the behaviour of non-state armed groups. These debates on structure or agency in the conflict studies literature reflect very similar debates that have been led in the field of terrorism studies since the 1980s, when Crenshaw discussed the role organisational characteristics and external constraints play in the decision-making of, as she calls them, terrorist groups (Crenshaw, 1987).

#### [Psychological approaches and rational perspectives](#)

While state-centric and structuralist theories had a place in early debates on terrorism (Horgan and Boyle, 2008), another set of theories had an even wider impact on debates in involvement in political violence in the field of terrorism studies. Psychological approaches to the analysis of involvement in political violence have been drawn upon, mostly by terrorism scholars, since the 1960s and 1970s (see for example Hubbard, 1971, Laqueur, 1977, Post, 1990). Many earlier studies of this strand of literature attempt to explain involvement in political violence by focusing on supposed psychological problems on the individual level (Hubbard, 1971, Laqueur, 1977, Post, 1990). As per this approach, individuals and organisations that

perpetrate political violence are characterised by their irrational behaviour. They are essentially different from individuals and organisations not involved in political violence. In this vein, the field was long characterised by attempts, especially by scholars with a background in psychology, to identify profiles and specific psychological features of perpetrators of political violence. While psychological approaches to the explanation of terrorism had its peak in the 1960s and 1970s, they remain largely influential, particularly in the media and non-academic discourses.

In recent years, these earlier psychological approaches to political violence have been increasingly criticised. Empirical studies on political violence stress that most individuals involved in terrorism (or other forms of political violence) are not inherently different to those not involved in violent movements (Wiktorowicz and Kaltenthaler, 2006, Sageman, 2008, Horgan, 2009). Instead of essentialising perpetrators of political violence, more recent empirical studies stress that elements of rationality can be identified in the decision-making and behaviour of perpetrators of political violence. Rather than focusing on (supposed) psychological problems, rational approaches contend that, on a psychological level, individuals (and organisations) that perpetrate political violence are not inherently or essentially different than people who do not get involved in political violence. They stress that even seemingly irrational actions such as suicide

bombings can be guided by rational motives (Hafez, 2007: 218, Hassan, 2011: 48, 50). An illustrative example in this context is a study by Wiktorowicz and Kaltenthaler (2006), which explains why the decision to join (and stay involved with) an illegal organisation can, despite the related costs, constitute a rational decision to the individual, by focusing on the perceived inner logic of high-risk behaviour:

[T]he perceived spiritual payoffs outweighed the risks and costs associated with activism for those who chose to participate. Indoctrinated individuals viewed activism and even risk itself as means to achieve salvation and entrance into Paradise. [...] From this perspective, the strategy of high cost/risk is strategically rational (Wiktorowicz and Kaltenthaler 2006: 302).

In their study, Wiktorowicz and Kaltenthaler focus on a religious group. However, there is no doubt that secular sets of beliefs can be just as strong and powerful as those based on religious interpretations.

Most leading terrorism studies scholars now concede that the actions of perpetrators of political violence are characterised by elements of rationality (Horgan, 2009, Dalton and Asal, 2011, Shapiro, 2013). The discipline of conflict studies has undergone a very similar process, with theories stressing the alleged irrationality of rebels and insurgents being increasingly replaced by approaches that underline elements of rationality in the behaviour of

non-state armed groups and their members (Lichbach, 1998, Guichaoua, 2012, Gurr, 2012). Nevertheless, despite such studies, the assumption that perpetrators of political violence are irrational (or even mentally disturbed) remains widespread. This claim is particularly common when speaking of female perpetrators of (political) violence (Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015). It is linked to highly simplistic and often inaccurate depictions of female perpetrators of political violence, which are based on widespread gender stereotypes (Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015). These gendered assumptions continue to dominate some of the academic literature on involvement in political violence, as will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Some terrorism studies authors have developed and redefined the psychological explanations discussed here since the 1990s. Rather than implying that involvement in political violence can be explained by psychological disorders, they now often focus on how contextual factors, such as state violence and ongoing violent conflict, affect and motivate individuals and organisations to support violent movements (Horgan, 2005, Taylor and Horgan, 2006). These theories thus overlap with a similar approach in the conflict studies literature, which focuses on the role of grievances and greed.

## Grievances or greed?

The extent to which grievances or greed play a role in the involvement of political violence has been debated in the conflict studies literature for decades, and increasingly so since more state-centric theories are declining on the decline. Gurr, one of the pioneering advocates of the grievances approach, focuses on the role one particular grievance, namely relative deprivation, plays in involvement in political violence (Gurr, 1971). His explanation, which he has since further refined (Gurr, 2012), is often juxtaposed with the position of scholars such as Collier and Hoeffler (2004), who instead stress the importance of greed, or in other words, economic interests and materialistic benefits, in involvement in political violence. To a certain extent, these approaches overlap with the explanation focusing on rational vs. psychological motivations, with the grievances approach sharing similarities with psychological explanations and the greed approach partially overlapping with more rational approaches.

The dichotomy of the greed vs. grievances debate has been criticised by several authors who stress that involvement is more complex than the debate implies at times (Guichaoua, 2012: 3-4, Gutierrez Sanin, 2012: 175). In the words of Arjona et al., the debate has moved on from focusing on “[b]road economistic interpretations concentrating on the material interests

of actors” to “more nuanced conceptions of human rationality” (2015: 2). Indeed nowadays, even Gurr who developed the relative deprivation framework in the 1970s, concedes that his initial analysis was too simplistic and that elements of rationality can, of course, be identified in grievances-based non-state armed movements (Gurr, 2012). One other major criticism of the work of Gurr was that grievances alone cannot explain why only a fraction of the people experiencing the same relative deprivation decide to join non-state armed groups (Gutierrez Sanin, 2012: 190-191). These authors stress that in order to fully go beyond the greed/grievance dichotomy, it is essential to take into account the role of the organisational and societal context (Arjona and Kalyvas, 2012: 160, Guichaoua, 2012: 14, Arjona et al., 2015). Interestingly, greed is rarely invoked as a reason for women to get involved in political violence – an aspect that is also likely to be linked to widespread gender stereotypes.

### Context-based theories and process-focused explanations

In recent years, increasing calls for the consideration of contextual factors have emerged both within the fields of conflict and terrorism studies. In conflict studies, these claims are borne out of the desire to overcome the dichotomy of the greed or grievances debate (Arjona and Kalyvas, 2012: 160, Guichaoua, 2012: 14, Arjona et al., 2015). In terrorism studies, the context-

based approach on involvement in political violence partly builds on the psychological approach, albeit in a more refined way, as some authors in this broad school have moved away from the initial focus on (assumed) mental defects and psychological issues. Instead, they emphasise the importance of the specific context an individual, group or community find themselves in prior to and during the process of involvement (Horgan, 2005, Taylor and Horgan, 2006, McCauley and Moskalenko, 2011). According to this approach, contextual pressures cause grievances, which facilitate and motivate involvement in political violence. Another aspect of the role the context plays is the fact that contextual factors can also create opportunity, such as through personal links to non-state armed groups (Sageman, 2008). Similar claims can be found in conflict studies literature, which also stresses the role of the societal context and of personal ties to violent networks (Arjona et al., 2015).

The context-based approach is closely linked to, and partially overlaps with, process-based explanations of involvement in political violence. The process-based approach – which can be found in both terrorism and conflict studies literature, is based on the assumption that involvement in political violence emerges as part of a process (Taylor and Horgan, 2006: 586). Similarly to context-based approaches, this explanation is opposed to simplifying accounts and stresses the complex, dynamic and multi-layered

nature of this process (Taylor and Horgan, 2006: 587, Staniland, 2014: 5), which leads “different people with different backgrounds [to] engage with the process in different ways” (Horgan, 2005: 51). Various interrelated factors play a role in this process, such as individual social backgrounds, the social, political and organisational context, and personal factors (Taylor and Horgan, 2006: 590-591, Staniland, 2014: 14, Arjona et al. 2015: 10). The process-based approach has its roots in qualitative historical research with its emphasis on the importance of detail, sequence and causal mechanisms of events (Staniland, 2014: 14).

## Summary

Whilst involvement in political violence remains relatively under-researched, in recent years a substantial body of literature has developed which helps shed light on why and how individuals and groups decide to engage in political violence. Rational, process-based and context-focused explanations in particular provide useful insights into involvement in political violence. However, these approaches have a number of limitations.

First, the roles and experiences of women are usually not included in these theories. The vast majority of studies on involvement in political violence omit this aspect completely. This is despite the growing involvement of

women in non-state armed groups (Henshaw, 2016). Some of the more general studies of involvement in political violence (such as those focusing on structure vs. agency, greed vs. grievance, rational vs. psychological factors as well as context and processes), could potentially be very useful in an analysis of why and how female participation occurs. It is one of the aims of this study to contribute to overcoming this lacuna in existing literature on political violence, by focusing this analysis on the reason why non-state armed organisations decided to include women in combat.

A second limitation is that while general theories on involvement in political violence can provide us with a general understanding of how to study female involvement in political violence, the framework they provide are necessary but not sufficient to understand decision-making on women's involvement in armed organisations. In order to trace which context-based factors were decisive and exactly how the processes took shape, in-depth studies examining case-specific details are still required. Only this kind of data will enable us to explain which of the several factors mentioned in the frameworks evoked by previous studies were decisive in the case of non-state armed groups involved in the Lebanese civil war. It thus remains to be seen if, in the case of the militias operating in Lebanon during the civil war, decisions on the involvement of female fighters were indeed made on the basis of rational considerations, greed or grievances (and, if so, which ones);

if women's involvement was a process (and if so, what factors shaped this process); and what role the context, structure and agency played (if any). In Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven, I will use empirical findings from my fieldwork in Lebanon to consider the theoretical claims provided by previous studies.

Third, theories on people's involvement in political violence are often dominated by a focus on why individuals become involved in political violence, while the role of the organisation (and the community or wider society) is often neglected. This remains the case despite increasing calls for multi-level analyses (Guichaoua, 2012). This individual-bias limits our understanding of how and why involvement in political violence occurs, as the majority of perpetrators of political violence are members of, or at least supported by, a group. This will be discussed in the following section.

## 2.2 | Explaining organisational decision-making

Theories on involvement in political violence provide a useful theoretical basis for the study of female inclusion in combat in non-state armed groups. However, apart from the fact that the roles of women are generally overlooked in this part of the literature, one of the main limitations of mainstream theories on involvement in political violence is its heavy

individual-bias. With the shift away from state-centric theories and an increasing focus on individual and organisational factors (Arjona and Kalyvas, 2012, Guichaoua, 2012, Arjona et al., 2015), another relevant branch of literature has emerged. It has its roots in the 1980s and focuses on decision-making processes in non-state armed organisations. This part of the literature argues that non-state armed groups are not essentially different from non-violent organisations – such as political parties or business companies, which organisational theory has traditionally focused on. This – relatively new – strand of the literature thus calls for the study of non-state armed organisations through an organisational theory lens (Crenshaw, 1985, Oots, 1989, McCormick, 2003, Zwiakel, 2007, Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008, Dalton and Asal, 2011, Shapiro, 2012, Shapiro and Siegel, 2012, Hegghammer, 2013, Shapiro, 2013). Theories on organisational decision-making overlap with some of the theories on involvement in political violence (which were discussed in the previous section of this chapter), insofar as they also focus on the rational character of organisational decision-making. By focusing on the decision-making of groups, this approach offers the additional advantage of overcoming the strong individual-bias (which can be found in existing theoretical literature), on why involvement in political violence occurs.

In the following sections, I will provide an overview of these theories and

discuss the extent to which this branch of the literature will be used to help explain organisational motivations for the inclusion of female fighters in non-state armed groups.

### Applying organisational theory to the study of non-state armed actors

Organisational theory, which has its roots in sociology, economics and political science, is concerned with the study of political or business organisations such as companies or bureaucracies (Cunliffe, 2008). Analyses tend to include organisational structures, norms, behaviour, dynamics and decision-making.

Organisational theorists working on non-state armed groups oppose many non-academic depictions of non-state armed organisations – which tend to present violent groups as essentially different from other socio-political actors, by often stressing their alleged irrationality. Efforts to view non-state armed groups through an organisational theory lens go back as far as the mid-1980s and Martha Crenshaw's work on non-state armed group's behaviour (Crenshaw, 1985, 1987). Crenshaw argues that, just like many non-violent organisations, non-state armed groups are characterised by their members' "functionally differentiated roles", collective goals, defined decision-making structures and authoritative leadership (Crenshaw, 1985:

466).

Another problematic aspect of some representations of non-state armed actors is their depiction as one monolithic unit. Detailed analyses of intra-group dynamics, for example, are often missing. To a certain extent, this is due to the often secretive nature of these groups and the fact that it can be difficult to gain access to the inner circle of illegal armed organisations (Dolnik, 2013b). However, the lack of analyses focusing on intra-group dynamics is also due to a tendency to vilify and essentialise non-state armed groups, and to present them as irrational evil actors, rather than depict them as the complex organisations they tend to be.

Taking into account the intra-group structures and dynamics affecting non-state armed groups is of particular importance when studying organisational decision-making processes, as these often have an impact on why and how decisions are being made (Crenshaw, 1985, Crenshaw, 1987, Oots, 1989, Shapiro, 2012). Applying insights from organisational theory to the study of non-state political violence can be helpful in this context as it takes into account the organisational decision-making, whilst also acknowledging that these organisations are comprised of individuals. Early studies of non-state political violence from an organisational theory perspective illustrate how analysing external group relations (including coalition forming, outside support and external competition), and internal cohesiveness (or the lack

thereof), can help us to understand how and why group decision-making occurs (Oots, 1989: 148-149).

One of the main assumptions of the literature that applies organisational theory to non-state armed groups is that violent political groups are not essentially different from non-violent political or business organisations. In this vein, Oots (1989: 149) rightly stresses that it is only their focus on (psychological and physical) violence as a strategic and tactical tool which distinguishes non-state armed groups from other political organisations. By analysing documents produced by non-state armed organisations, Shapiro and Siegel come to the same conclusion:

Indeed, groups as diverse as the Polish Underground in Warsaw, Red Brigades, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), Aum Shinrikyo, Fatah, al-Qaeda, and al-Qaeda in Iraq generated paperwork that, were it not for its violent subject matter, could have come from any traditional organization (Shapiro and Siegel, 2012: 40).

If non-state violent political organisations are indeed organised as any other organisation, Oots rightly points out that it can be expected that their decision-making is influenced by the same, or similar, motivations than those of non-violent political organisations (1989: 150).

## Studying non-state armed groups as rational actors

Whilst the notion that perpetrators of non-state political violence exhibit pathological features is widespread in media and political discourses (as discussed in section one), approaches to the study of political violence based on organisational theory stress non-state armed groups' rational decision-making. In this regard, they are consonant with other rational approaches to the study of political violence such as the theories of involvement in political violence discussed above. Both reject notions of irrationality of non-state armed individuals' and groups' behaviour, because "[t]o assume that someone is 'crazy' implies that his or her behavior is neither explainable nor predictable" (Oots, 1989: 149-150). If we believe that all non-state armed actors' actions are indeed entirely guided by irrational thinking, it is impossible to explain or predict possible behaviour. If that is the case, there is no reason to study political violence or the individuals, states and organisations involved in them – at least not from a political science perspective. On a practical level, to assume that all perpetrators of non-state political violence are guided by irrational motivations can even be dangerous, as it can lead those opposing them to underestimate non-state armed groups' capabilities – which can result in increased vulnerabilities of possible targets of non-state political violence. Another related risk is that

ascribing irrational motives to non-state armed groups can lead states to eschew political, negotiated settlements of conflict and instead advocate for ruthless military responses in the struggle against non-state armed organisations – as there is arguably not much point in trying to negotiate with inherently irrational actors.

But what does viewing non-state armed actors as rational actors entail? Shapiro (2013: 20) specifies that there are three factors which highlight the rationality of non-state armed actors. First, non-state armed organisations “match means to ends [...] Second, they examine a limited number of options, choosing the one that yields the highest expected gain”. Third, in strategic interactions, they “typically consider the impact of their actions in a fairly nuanced way” (Shapiro, 2013: 20). Thus, non-state armed organisations' behaviour can be considered rational if they adopt a means-to-ends approach; choose from the number of options known to them the one expected to provide them with the highest expected gain; and evaluate the expected outcome of their actions and act accordingly. In other words, non-state militant organisations are what Shapiro calls "intendedly rational" in that they "match means to ends by explicitly comparing the value of different actions given limited information about the world" (Shapiro, 2013: 21).

## Organisations matter

This study focuses on organisational motivations and decision-making. Many existing publications on female political violence are characterised by a strong individual-bias. However, for a comprehensive analysis of female political violence, a multi-level analysis – taking into account individual, organisational and contextual factors, is key, as it is not possible to fully grasp the issue of female political violence without considering all factors that can potentially play a role in women’s involvement.

As part of such a multi-level analysis, this study includes a focus on the group level. In previous years, there has been some controversy over the role of organisations amongst scholars of non-state armed violence. The debate between Bruce Hoffmann and Marc Sageman – two leading terrorism scholars – on the role of organisations in non-state political violence, is illustrative of this disagreement. While Hoffmann (2008) contended that hierarchical organisations continued to play a key role and in fact, constituted one of the main threats, Sageman (2008, see also Hoffman and Sageman, 2008) argued that the influence of hierarchical organisations was on the decrease and that there was instead a trend towards loosely organised cells and individual actors playing a much more important role.

While Hoffmann’s and Sageman’s debate focuses on Islamist-inspired

organisations, the argument can be extended to other non-state armed actors. In fact, in the debate, Sageman explicitly referred to debates on right-wing extremist actors when applying the term 'leaderless resistance' to the study of Islamist groups.

Contributing to the debate between Hoffmann and Sageman, other scholars stress that the two positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Acharya and Marwah, 2010: 2), as even loosely organised cells of perpetrators of political violence are not devoid of any organisation, hierarchy and leadership. Thus, organisations continue to matter. Most individuals carrying out political violence rely on an organisational network providing them with moral, financial and logistical support. Individual motivations are crucial because except for cases of conscription (which did not play a role in Lebanon, as will be discussed in Chapter Four), without individuals willing to take up arms, there will not be any combatants. However, without an organisation which agrees to include the individual in its ranks, train, equip, finance and support them in their endeavour, the impact an individual without direct links to a group can have will remain limited. Individual motivation is a necessary but not sufficient condition to carry out high-impact attacks or implement a long-term strategy. As pointed out by Acharya and Marwah, "to produce successful and high impact attacks, terrorists do need some form of organization" (Acharya and Marwah, 2010:

2). This holds true for both men and women planning to join a non-state violent organisation. Thus, examining organisational motivations and decision-making is crucial in explaining (female) political violence.

#### A multi-level approach to the study of organisational decision-making

In order to fully understand non-state political violence, it is essential to adopt a multi-level approach, taking into account individual, organisational and contextual factors. As discussed above, one of the limitations of existing literature on non-state political violence is the strong individual-bias of many studies attempting to explain why and how political violence occurs. Organisational theory approaches to the study of non-state armed organisations can prove helpful when studying decision-making processes on involvement in non-state political violence.

Despite the current focus on individual motivations in much of the literature, precedents of multi-level approaches have a relatively long history in the study of non-state armed violence. Summarising possible approaches to the study of non-state armed groups' behaviour in 1987, Martha Crenshaw – one of the founders of the discipline of terrorism studies, presented two competing explanations. Whilst she focuses on terrorist groups, the largely undefined and often blurry lines between 'terrorist' and other non-state

armed groups with a political agenda, makes her findings relevant to other types of non-state armed political organisations as well.

It is possible to think in terms of two basic explanations for how the conspiratorial organizations that practice terrorism behave. [...] The first explanation is based on the assumption that the act of terrorism is a deliberate choice by a political actor. [...] Terrorism is interpreted as a response to external stimuli, particularly government actions (Crenshaw, 1987: 13).

Thus, according to this first explanation, non-state armed organisations' behaviour is a reaction to contextual pressures created by the actions (or lack thereof) of other actors in the socio-political environment the armed organisation finds itself in. According to the second explanation discussed by Crenshaw, it is rather intra-group dynamics which have a direct impact on armed organisations' decision-making and behaviour – or as Crenshaw puts it, it “focuses on the internal politics of the organization” and non-state armed groups’ “behavior represents the outcome of the internal dynamics of the organization rather than strategic action” (Crenshaw, 1987: 19).

This categorisation into contextual and organisational motivations has been applied and developed by a number of scholars working on non-state political violence. McCormick, for example, acknowledges the existence of the two categories Crenshaw describes, calling them *strategic* and

*organisational* explanations. He adds a third category, that of psychological theories which explain non-state political violence through the framework of individual psychology (McCormick, 2003) – very similar to the theories described in the section on psychological explanations of involvement in political violence discussed above.

Another explanation of non-state armed groups' behaviour can be found in Shapiro's study on the decision-making of non-state armed groups. His detailed typology of terrorist decision-making (Shapiro, 2012: 7-13), includes strategic and non-strategic explanations. Strategic theories comprise: (1) tactical choices and the strategic environment (taking into account the group's reactions to other relevant actors, such as its opponents and supporters), (2) resource constraints (including external and popular support), and (3) organisational constraints (such as ideology, size and control over territory). Non-strategic challenges, according to Shapiro, consist of technological constraints and internal agency problems, such as intra-group managerial challenges. Thus, while Shapiro further refines previous approaches (such as the ones developed by Crenshaw and McCormick), by adding resource constraints to the contextual pressures described in previous literature, the individual level is still missing from his analysis. This is why, for the purpose of this study, a combination of Crenshaw's, McCormick's and Shapiro's typologies will be used, focusing my

analysis on individual, organisational and contextual pressures. Mirroring existing literature on female political violence and for the sake of clarity, contextual pressures will be divided into security-related factors and societal aspects. I will discuss this further in the following section on existing literature on non-state female political violence.

### Summary

The theoretical framework of this study is based on existing theories of: (1) involvement in non-state political violence and (2) organisational decision-making in non-state armed groups. The rational, process-based and context-focused explanations in particular are useful in this context, as they allow for non-state armed actors to be viewed as similar to other individuals and groups, and as guided by elements of rationalist thinking. Moreover, this set of theories encourages the researcher of political violence to take into account the role of the context in involvement in non-state armed groups and to view involvement as a process.

One major limitation of existing theories of involvement in political violence, is their strong focus on the individual level. This is why, for the purpose of this study, theories on how and why individuals and groups get involved in non-state political violence will be combined with theories on organisational

decision-making. These theories draw on insights from economic and political organisational theory and have been adapted to the study of non-state armed groups by a number of conflict and terrorism studies scholars. They have the advantage of allowing us to view non-state armed groups as the complex organisations which they tend to be. Both sets of theories – those on involvement in political violence and those on organisational decision-making – complement each other as they are based on very similar assumptions, including the belief that perpetrators of non-state political violence are intendedly rational actors and that non-state armed actors' behaviour can only be understood through a multi-level analysis.

After this discussion of the theories underpinning this study, the following section of this chapter will provide an overview of existing literature on motivations for the inclusion of female fighters in non-state armed groups.

## Part II | Existing literature on female non-state political violence

As foregrounded in the introduction to this work, in most publications on non-state political violence, the roles and experiences of women tend to be omitted (Cunningham, 2003, Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015, Henshaw, 2016). In studies that include the roles and experiences of women, the focus is often

on women's roles as victims of political violence or possible actors for peaceful change, whilst their support of and participation in political violence tends to be neglected (Eggert, 2015). In recent years, a number of studies focusing on female perpetrators of political violence were published (as will be discussed below). However, many of these focus on individual motivations and often do not systematically include other levels of analysis, such as organisational and contextual factors. The literature on the Lebanese civil war is no exception in this regard. Since the civil war, a sound number of publications on the war have been published (including, but not limited to, Winslow, 1996, Fisk, 2001, Johnson, 2001, El-Solh, 2004, Mackey, 2006, Hirst, 2011, Traboulsi, 2012, Hanf, 2014). However, none of the major works on the war include a systematic analysis of the roles of women. Only a handful of publications focus on female militia members or fighters (Peteet, 1991, Sayigh, 1993, Karamé, 1995, Shehadeh, 1999, André-Dessornes, 2013, Parkinson, 2013). However, none of these systematically compare the inclusion of women in the various militias. Karamé's study focuses on women in the Christian militias, while Peteet, Sayigh and Parkinson analyse the roles of women in Palestinian militias operating in Lebanon. Shehadeh does take a comparative approach; however, she only included Kataeb, Hezbollah and Amal in her analysis, thus excluding some of the key militias involved in the war. Moreover, Parkinson and Peteet both only focus on one

stage of the war – with Parkinson looking at the period from 1982 to 1988, and Peteet analysing the pre-1982 situation. André-Dessornes (2013) only examines female suicide attackers, which were mostly deployed by the SSNP. As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, for LNM-associated militias, 1982 constituted a major conjuncture point during the war, with increased security pressures. If understanding the impact of contextual factors on female involvement in the militias is an aim, an analysis of female participation in the war would thus benefit considerably by including the entire period of the war.

While the literature on women's involvement during the war in Lebanon is limited, more publications are available on the inclusion of women in other contexts. In what follows, I will discuss possible explanations for the involvement of female combatants that can be found in existing literature, looking at individual motivations, organisational characteristics, security-related aspects and societal factors.

### 2.3 | Organisational motivations for the inclusion of female fighters

Studies that acknowledge the roles of female combatants in non-state armed groups are still the exception in the existing literature on non-state

political violence. Nonetheless, there is a growing body of literature on female fighters in non-state armed organisations – both from a conflict/war and from a terrorism studies perspective (Reif, 1986, Weinberg and Eubank, 1987, Burgess, 1989, Vázquez, 1997, Shikola, 1998, Shayne, 1999, Bernal, 2000, West, 2000, Alison, 2003, Cunningham, 2003, Victor, 2003, Sajjad, 2004, Ness, 2005, Bernal, 2006, Viterna, 2006, Berko and Erez, 2007a, Berko and Erez, 2007b, Hamilton, 2007, McKay, 2007, Schweitzer, 2007, Von Knop, 2007, Coulter, 2008, Cunningham, 2008, Eager, 2008, Gonzalez-Perez, 2008, Jacques and Taylor, 2008, Sixta, 2008, Speckhard, 2008, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008, Zedalis, 2008, Alison, 2009, Cunningham, 2009, Gayer, 2009, Parashar, 2009, Cunningham, 2010, Bloom, 2011, Dalton and Asal, 2011, Arjona and Kalyvas, 2012, Bloom et al., 2012, Ortega, 2012, Roy, 2012, Shekhawat, 2012, Van Hauwermeiren, 2012, Cohen, 2013, Katto, 2014, Parashar, 2014, Eggert, 2015, Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015, Magadla, 2015, Veneracion-Rallonza, 2015, Henshaw, 2016, Davis, 2017). Despite both disciplines being concerned with the study of political violence (and often even studying the same conflicts and groups), the literature on female members of armed groups tends to be very segregated. Existing studies on female political violence include a range of different epistemological and methodological approaches, as will be discussed in Chapter Three. Analysing previous publications on female political violence, four different categories

of explanations of organisational motivations for the inclusion of female combatants can be identified; namely, individual motivations, security-related aspects, societal factors and organisational characteristics.

### Individual motivations

Most publications on female political violence focus on individual motivations. This is the case both for conflict studies and terrorism studies. Publications that also systematically take into account organisational motivations for the inclusion of female fighters and militants are the exception. Notable examples include Cunningham, 2003, Ness, 2005, Cunningham, 2008, Zedalis, 2008, Eager, 2008, Cunningham, 2010, Dearing, 2010, Dalton and Asal, 2011, Henshaw, 2015, Davis, 2017. .

In the existing literature on women's motivations to join non-state armed groups, several major themes can be identified. Many publications discuss the question of coercion or choice, or the extent to which forced conscription plays a role in women's involvement in non-state armed groups (Eager, 2008, Henshaw, 2016). Claims of conscription are particularly prevalent in the terrorism studies literature and some conflict studies publication, notably those focusing on political violence in Africa and, to a lesser degree, Asia and South America (Eager, 2008: 128, Alison, 2009-141,

Katto, 2014: 544, Parashar, 2014: 137). Other studies stress that coercion cannot explain all cases of female participation in non-state armed groups and that indeed, the majority of women worldwide join voluntarily (Speckhard, 2008: 1018, Henshaw, 2015: 3). Some have argued that a process-based approach is essential to fully understand coercion and choice in this context, claiming that women might be forced to join, but then decide to stay (see also Coulter, 2008: 55, Henshaw, 2015: 14). Another frequently discussed question is the claim that differences between men's and women's motivations to join exist and that women join for "personal" while men join for "political" reasons (Victor, 2003, Pedahzur, 2005, Berko and Erez, 2007b, Jacques and Taylor, 2008: 231, O'Rourke, 2009: 707-710, Bloom, 2011: 145-146, 163, 235-237). This distinction between "personal" and "political" reasons has been criticised by some as artificial and misleading (Eager, 2008: 4). While some differences between terrorism and conflict studies exist (as will be discussed in detail in Chapter Four), most scholars now argue that overall, men and women share the same motivations (Schweitzer, 2007: 143, Ness, 2008b: 6-7, Speckhard, 2008: 1002, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008: 106, Zedalis, 2008: 50, O'Rourke, 2009: 684, Cohen, 2013: 368). Nevertheless, some gender-specific motivations are claimed to exist. The two most oft-cited differences in men's and women's motivation are fear of rape and feminist aspirations, such as

the wish to free themselves and fight against constraining societal norms and expectations (Sajjad, 2004: 6, Bloom, 2005: 163-164, 234, Berko and Erez, 2007b: 504-505, McKay, 2007: 171, Schweitzer, 2007, Von Knop, 2007: 399-400, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008, Eager, 2008: 209, Alison, 2009: 137, O'Rourke, 2009: 707, Ortega, 2012: 95). Most of the scholars making this claim work within a terrorism studies framework.

### Security context

The second-most analysed aspect on reasons for female involvement in political violence is the security context – which the majority of studies on the topic see as one of the main reasons shaping non-state armed groups' decision-making (Cunningham, 2003, Cunningham, 2008, Cunningham, 2010, Dearing, 2010, Eggert, 2015). According to this explanation, militant groups resort to the inclusion of female combatants when under extreme stress due to the security situation (Cunningham, 2008: 97).<sup>11</sup> This has led some to conclude that female employment in combat is often a sign of weakness or "desperation", or an indicator that the organisation perceives

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<sup>11</sup> Cunningham (2008: 88) also points to the affect the security context potentially has on society which, due to an escalated (or stagnating) conflict situation, can become more willing to accept the inclusion of female combatants. This highlights the complexity of the issue and the need to not only consider the role the different levels of analysis play but also in what ways they impact each other.

more conventional approaches to have failed to produce the desired outcome (Dalton and Asal, 2011). The ways in which the security context affects organisational decision-making according to the existing literature, can be summarised into four categories: female operatives are used to make up for a lack of male fighters, to avoid detection, to seek attention or to assert their position.

According to the first explanation, a lack of male manpower leads non-state armed groups to include female fighters (Ali, 2005, Bloom, 2005: 6, Von Knop, 2007: 401, Cunningham, 2008: 88, Ness, 2008b: 16, Parashar, 2014: 308). According to this approach, female combatants are employed if the body of fighters of a group has been considerably decimated due to an increased number of eliminations or incarcerations. Linked to this is the assumption that female combatants are more expendable than their male counterparts during combat – when they are often used on suicide missions (Ali, 2005, Speckhard, 2008: 998), but also after the end of the armed struggle, when many former female fighters are pushed back into more traditional gender roles and excluded from peace negotiations, institutional building and other crucial political and societal processes (Porter, 2003, Porter, 2007, UN Women, 2012). Yet another aspect of the lack of manpower argument is the claim that women are often used to shame men outside of the organisation into joining the armed struggle, again by utilising

prevailing gender norms and expectations (Bloom, 2005: 6, Ness, 2008b: 19). The second explanation focuses on the inclusion of female fighters in order to avoid detection. According to this explanation, if the military forces an armed organisation is confronted with are so successful that it becomes difficult, if not impossible, for the male members of the armed group to move freely within their area of operation (and thus carry out their mission), the inclusion of women becomes more likely (Cunningham, 2003, Cunningham, 2007, Ness, 2008b, Speckhard, 2008, Dearing, 2010). The group utilises notions of women's alleged aversion to violence, and the fact that cultural norms often prevent thorough searches of women at checkpoints (which tend to be mostly staffed by male militaries) (Cunningham, 2007: 118, Ness, 2008b: 18).

Third, the inclusion of women in non-state armed groups has been explained with the organisations' attempt to attract the attention of potential sympathisers and supporters via the media (Ali, 2005, Von Knop, 2007: 400-401, Speckhard, 2008, Zedalis, 2008: 50, 57, 62). This is linked to the claim that female fighters supposedly "receive eight times the media coverage" their male counterparts do (Bloom, 2005: 7), which creates a so-called "CNN factor" (Ali, 2005).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, media coverage of violent attacks can also contribute to keep operations of militants, who are aware that their activities are being monitored by the media and the public, in check (Cunningham, 2003, 2008, Bloom, 2011). For example,

Fourth, the inclusion of female fighters by non-state armed groups can potentially be explained by the group's need to assert their position in a field of competing groups (Crenshaw, 1987: 24, Oots, 1989: 148, McCormick, 2003: 481-482, Bloom, 2005: 94-97, Hafez, 2007, Alison, 2009). This could mean that they decide to include female fighters to stress their determination, or that they refrain from including women in order to stress their moral superiority or affluence of conventional fighters.

### Societal factors

If most of the existing literature stresses the importance of the security context in non-state violent organisations' decision-making regarding the involvement of female fighters, a considerable number of studies also highlight the role of societal factors (Cunningham, 2003, Eager, 2008, Ness, 2008b, Speckhard, 2008, Dearing, 2010). According to this approach, an armed organisation's decision-making on the inclusion of female fighters can be explained by how hard it is to overcome societal barriers. It emphasises the fact that the women are not just members of an organisation, but also belong to a family and a community, whose "social approval and cultural

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this could be the case, because they are aware that the public is not in favour of certain types of actions such as the inclusion of unconventional actors, the targeting of certain groups and individuals or the use of excessive violence.

legitimacy are required“ (Dearing, 2010: 1083). According to this explanation, an armed group is more likely to include women in combat if, in the society they operate or are based in, restrictive gender norms are comparatively less wide-spread and women occupy a range of different roles in public life.

The salience of societal barriers has been explained by two factors. First, non-state armed organisations rely on the society they operate in and the physical, logistic, moral or tacit support of the community. Many non-state armed groups do not want to risk losing this support by alienating local populations (Dearing, 2010: 1083, 1086). Some groups in Iraq, for example, have tried to overcome these barriers by recruiting female fighters from abroad (such as, for example, Muriel Degauque – the first Western woman to have carried out a suicide attack in Iraq), who have no or limited links to the society the militant organisation operates in. Second, the lack of encouraging narratives and role models for potential female fighters often renders recruitment difficult as there are few examples of pathways into and within female political violence.

There is evidence that contextual pressures related to the security context can have an effect on societal norms, particularly in the case of protracted conflicts or struggles for national self-determination where, often, questions of identity and, thus societal norms, are at stake. For example, Cunningham

(2003: 174) argues that domestic or international enforcement and social dislocation can impact the social and cultural control conservative societies tend to hold over women. If these structures get loosened as a consequence of the conflict, a window of opportunity for women to join non-state armed movements opens.

While the majority of publications on female political violence mention societal norms as a barrier, and contend that the more involved in political and military decision-making women in a society are, the more likely they are to join violent organisations as combatants, Dalton and Asal claim the exact opposite: "Where women are more socially empowered and autonomous, they are less likely to be involved in terrorism [sic], or, from the groups' view, terrorist organizations are less likely to turn to recruiting women as front-line attackers" (2011: 810). However, Dalton and Asal's study is based on a quantitative approach, and their findings have not been tested by more qualitative analyses. It remains to be seen whether the different methodological approach Dalton and Asal adopted had an impact on the different conclusion they came to, and whether their findings can help elucidate female involvement during the civil war in Lebanon.

## Organisational characteristics

In the existing literature on the inclusion of female fighters in non-state armed groups, organisational characteristics are discussed less frequently than the security context or societal factors. Nevertheless, most studies agree that group-related factors play a role in organisational decision-making on female participation in combat activities. Notably, many existing publications suggest that organisations adhering to a conservative, right-wing or religious ideology are less likely to include women than secular and leftist groups – as the former tend to uphold more restrictive gender images (Cunningham, 2003, Ness 2008, Bloom 2011). However, others such as Gonzalez-Perez (2008) and Dalton and Asal (2011), contend that deducing the likelihood of female participation from a group's ideological orientation can be misleading. While Dalton and Asal (2011) state that an organisation's ideological background is not decisive at all, Gonzalez-Perez (2008: 125) claim that groups with a domestic agenda often demonstrate higher female participation than internationally oriented groups.

In their exploratory comparative study on organisational motivations for the involvement of female combatants, Dalton and Asal (2011) find organisational size and age rather than ideology to be significant. They claim that the bigger and the older an organisation is, the higher their willingness

to include female combatants. Dalton and Asal hypothesise this may be due to “staffing needs in larger organizations or [...] their greater capability to adapt to or adopt new strategic activity sets” (2011: 810). With regards to a group's age, they present two possible interpretations:

First, from a broader societal perspective, it is possible that organizational age may be related to prolonged ethno-religious-nationalist struggles that have far-reaching mobilizing imputes for both men and women. [...] This finding could also be interpreted to indicate a tactical evolution overtime toward incorporating women as low-cost and high-impact attacking apparatus as an organizational response to stagnation in performance and an escalation in frustration resulting from setbacks (Dalton and Asal, 2011: 810).

Another group-related factor mentioned in some parts of the literature include external relations with other groups, which form a network of competing, cooperating or simply coexisting armed organisations. Bloom (2005: 77-78, 94-97) and Ness (2008: 26), for example, point to dynamics between different actors in the field. The extent to which inter-group rivalry can indeed explain non-state armed organisations' decision-making, is disputed in the literature on political violence (Gupta and Mundra, 2005, Hafez, 2007: 216-217, Brym and Araj, 2008, Hassan, 2011: 47-49). Intra-group structure, dynamics and discord are also often not taken into account in the literature on female political violence, even though including them in

the analysis of organisational decision-making is crucial as it helps avoid treating armed groups as monolithic units and, instead, highlights the complex nature of the decision-making process.

As is the case with societal aspects, there is evidence that internal and inter-group factors can be affected by a deteriorating or stagnating conflict situation (Davis, 2013: 284).

### Summary

Most scholars of female political violence contend that contextual pressures related to the security context and societal aspects are central in affecting non-state armed groups' decision-making on the inclusion of female fighters. Whether more emphasis is placed on the security context or societal factors varies from publication to publication, even though overall, references to the security context tend to be more widespread in the literature.

Some authors have pointed out that security-related pressures can impact societal norms, especially in long-duration or identity-related conflicts (Cunningham, 2003, Dearing, 2010). However, while the majority of scholars on female political violence seem to agree that societal factors are salient in the decision-making on female combatants' participation in combat, there

are also critical voices questioning this assumption (such as Dalton and Asal, 2011).

There is evidence that societal factors are respected by non-state armed groups as long as they do not hinder their strategic success in a given security context. This is claimed to be the case for both armed groups which adhere to leftist or secular and to conservative, religious or right-wing ideological norms. It is noteworthy that in times of extreme stress due to external, security-related pressures, even conservative, religious or right-wing groups operating in gender-restrictive societies are said to be willing to override societal expectations if it allows them to gain strategic advantages. This claim is evidenced by a number of contemporary cases, including for example, Hamas, the LTTE or ETA (Cunningham, 2003, Ness, 2005, Cunningham, 2008, Eager, 2008, Henshaw, 2016). Lastly, existing literature claims that organisational size and age play a role in the group's decision-making process on whether or not to include female combatants. Larger and older organisations are said to be more willing to include women in combat activities.

If existing literature identifies a number of variables which can potentially explain why non-state armed groups include women in non-state political violence, there is a lack of comparative studies which systematically consider the claims made in the literature, and trace the process of how decision-

making on the inclusion of female fighters takes shape.

## 2.4 | Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an overview and discussion of the existing theoretical and empirical literature that this research project draws upon. In the first two sections, I have discussed the theoretical framework adopted in this study, which combines insights from previous literature on involvement in political violence and on organisational decision-making and behaviour. Guided by this framework, I consider female involvement in political violence to be a rational process in which the context plays an essential role. As far as the debates on greed vs. grievances and structure vs. agency are concerned, it remains to be seen which factors were decisive in the decision-making on the inclusion of female fighters during the Lebanese civil war. Based on the framework outlined, I view non-state armed actors as rational actors not essentially and inherently different from other, non-violent individuals and groups. I therefore believe that they will: (1) take a means-to-ends approach to their actions, (2) choose from a number of possible options the one they expect to provide them with the highest expected gain and (3) make predictions of the expected outcome of their actions and act accordingly. On the group-level, I view non-state armed

organisations as complex units which are subject to change.

Believing that context matters, I adopt a multi-level approach to the study of female political violence, taking into account: (1) individual motivations, (2) organisational characteristics, (3) the security context and (4) societal factors. This is how the remainder of the thesis is structured.

The original contribution to knowledge which this thesis makes is the analysis of the organisational decision-making of the militias involved in the Lebanese civil war. It adds a group of cases to the universe of studies of female political violence that has not been studied in as much detail before. Moreover, beyond studying reasons for the inclusion of female perpetrators of political violence during the Lebanese civil war, I consider existing theories on women's involvement in political violence by applying them to a new group of cases.

In the next chapter, I will provide an overview of the epistemological and methodological assumptions made in this study, and a discussion of the research strategy and challenges I encountered whilst collecting and analysing data for the purpose of this research project.

# Chapter 3 | Conducting field research on non-state political violence

Reflections on one's epistemological and methodological approach are an essential part of any academic study. This is of particular importance when studying a topic such as non-state political violence, where scholars are "often accused of employing weak research methods" (Singh, 2013: 141), and critical evaluations on the state of the field are rare (Dolnik, 2013b: 1).

To test hypotheses, this research adopts a small-n comparative study of all of the key non-state armed groups involved in the civil war I was able to gain access to. It includes organisations associated with the two main camps at the beginning of the war; namely, the pro-reform and pro-Palestinian Lebanese National Movement (LNM) on the one hand, and the pro-status quo Christian-dominated Lebanese Front (LFr) on the other. As part of this study, accounts of former members of eleven militias were analysed. These were: the LCP, Communist Action Organisation (CAO), PFLP, Fatah, PSP, Amal, Kataeb, Lebanese Forces (LF), Guardians of the Cedar, Tanzim and Tigers militia. However, the focus of this study lies on seven organisations; namely, the LCP, PFLP, Fatah, PSP (all LNM), Kataeb, LF (both LFr) and Amal

(not formerly associated with any of the two camps, but close to the LNM). Of these, the LCP, PFLP, Fatah, Kataeb and LF included female fighters; Amal started deploying female fighters from 1978 and the PSP refrained from employing women in combat roles.

The study's aim is to explain this variation and to highlight organisational motivations for female inclusion in combat in the different organisations. Existing literature focuses on four explanations for female participation in combat: individual motivations, organisational characteristics, societal norms and the security context. In turn, this study focuses on what role (1) individual motivations, (2) organisational characteristics, (3) the security context and (4) societal factors, played in the decision-making of the respective groups. Variation over time, in different parts of the country as well as within and between various organisations will be considered.

The first question on individual motivations was added during the field work phase, as although I started with the aim of focusing on the group's decision-making, I realised later that women's motivations to join the fight played an equally important role. Omitting the individual perspective from the analysis would thus not have allowed me to fully explain the phenomenon.

Researching political violence is often linked to a number of problems – both theoretical and practical. In what follows, I will explain and critically reflect on expected and actual issues that I encountered during the research

process. The aim of this chapter is to “describ[e] in precise, step-by-step detail *how* [I] engaged in fieldwork” (Kenney, 2013: 27) and the research process as a whole, in the hope that this transparency – this opening of my academic tool box and documentation of how I used the items inside – will contribute to the validity and reliability of my findings (Silverman, 2014: 84). In the following sections of this chapter, I will first give an overview of the epistemological and methodological frameworks I have chosen to work with. I outline both advantages and limitations, and the ways in which I attempted to mitigate the latter. Section Two then looks at data collection, and Section Three looks at data management and analysis. The last section examines questions related to research ethics and researcher reflexivity.

The chapter demonstrates how combining a positivist framework with qualitative methods can help to overcome some of the limitations of purely positivist, quantitative studies. It illustrates the usefulness of aiming for variety when selecting interviewees which, in this case, meant that both men and women, former militia members and individuals not associated with any of the militias, as well as former members of various militias, were interviewed. Lastly, it shows that access to former militia members proved to be easier than suggested in some existing publications on armed groups – which can be explained with the specific post-war context in Lebanon.

### 3.1 | Epistemology and methodology

As far as the epistemology is concerned, my approach in the context of this research is mostly influenced by a positivist stance. However, while in the context of this research project, I am more interested in answering a why-question than focusing on meaning and experiences, I do refer to and rely on work conducted by scholars studying female political violence within an interpretivist framework. I believe there are "facts" - objective things that can be observed and measured - but I am also of the opinion that some phenomena need to be interpreted. Context and the meaning of actions are important, as everything cannot be measured in strict quantitative terms. I am also aware that there is no such thing as an "objective" researcher, and that we all bring our personal assumptions into the work we do, which is why it is important to maintain a high level of researcher reflexivity throughout the research process. In other words, while I am working within a positivist epistemological framework, I believe the nature of my research requires a pragmatic and reflexive approach.

The research is situated in the field of conflict studies, but also relies on findings from the field of terrorism studies. Traditionally, many terrorism scholars have worked within a positivist but qualitative approach, including researchers working on female terrorism (Cunningham, 2003, Ness, 2005,

Berko and Erez, 2007a, Berko and Erez, 2007b, Schweitzer, 2007, Cunningham, 2008, Gonzalez-Perez, 2008, Speckhard, 2008, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008, Zedalis, 2008, Cunningham, 2010, Dearing, 2010, Bloom, 2011, Bloom et al., 2012, Eggert, 2015). Most conflict studies scholars on the other hand, take an interpretivist and qualitative approach (Vázquez, 1997, Shayne, 1999, Bernal, 2000, West, 2000, Alison, 2003, Sajjad, 2004, Bernal, 2006, Hamilton, 2007, Alison, 2009, Gayer, 2009, Parashar, 2009, Ortega, 2012, Shekhawat, 2012, Katto, 2014, Parashar, 2014, Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015, Magadla, 2015, Veneracion-Rallonza, 2015). In recent years, there have been repeated calls for more quantitative studies (Dalton and Asal, 2011), and the trend – especially in the US – leans towards using mixed methods within a positivist framework (Viterna, 2006, Dalton and Asal, 2011, Bloom et al., 2012, Davis, 2013, Shapiro, 2013, Henshaw, 2016, Davis, 2017). At the same time, some researchers have criticised this tendency of overstating the importance of quantitative work, whilst neglecting qualitative approaches (Kenney, 2013: 28). Ultimately, there is no right or wrong approach. Each comes with its own set of merits and trade-offs. Indeed, sharp distinctions between positivist and quantitative approaches on the one hand, and interpretivist and qualitative approaches on the other hand, are misleading and unhelpful. In the words of Holliday:

[I]t is often argued that a major binding feature of qualitative research is its opposition to positivism [...] There needs however to be note of caution with regard to these distinctions [...] Social research is a complex area, and attempts to divide it into hard categories will always suffer from oversimplification. Qualitative research will always involve quantitative elements and vice versa (Holliday, 2007: 2, see also Silverman, 1993: 20-22).

In the case of my research, my decision to work within a positivist framework was guided by the research question and aim; namely, to identify the causal factors of female involvement within non-state armed groups during the war in Lebanon. My decision to opt for qualitative methods was based on three reasons: qualitative methods allow me to gain a deeper understanding of complex social phenomenon, generate new original data and verify information.

#### Gaining a deeper understanding of complex social processes

Whilst quantitative approaches are not without merit, in the case of this study, they would not have been particularly useful in helping to generate answers to the research question. This is because the qualitative approach I have chosen provides us with a “deeper understanding of social phenomena” (Silverman, 2010: 123) and allows us to delve “in depth into complexities and processes” (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 90-91), instead

of simply identifying themes in a set of data. Cerwyn Moore, for example, criticises that:

[N]umerous studies have focused on definitions and concepts while academic work on terrorism more generally has been quantitative in style and form. Despite being interesting, when examined in a little more detail it becomes clear that some branches of this work are not really about the study of terrorism, but are rather, about extrapolating general themes from databases (Moore, 2013: 125).

The aim of my study is to explain the involvement of female fighters. In order to achieve this, qualitative fieldwork allowing for an in-depth understanding of both the social processes studied, as well as the context in which they occurred, are essential (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 91, Dolnik, 2013b: 5, Moore, 2013: 131, Singh, 2013: 142, 150). This intimacy with the subject of one's research also helps to avoid making false analytical assumptions with regards to correlation and causation (Silverman, 1993: 149-150). Adopting qualitative methods with a positivist framework can help to overcome some of the limitations of positivist approaches, which are often criticised for "imposing [a] limited worldview on the subjects" by "coding the social world according to preordained operational variables" (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 91). By combining qualitative methods with a positivist framework, one can test pre-defined operational variables, while leaving space for new

themes and categories to emerge from the data. The ability to deeply understand a handful of cases might come at the expense of limitedness in scope (Silverman, 2010: 104), but this is a trade-off that seems acceptable in the context of my research, especially given the current scarcity of data on female fighters during the civil war in Lebanon.

### Overcoming lack of data

One of the weaknesses of studies in political violence is the relative lack of empirical data. There is a tendency amongst scholars working in the field to quote each other's findings, with little new data being generated. In the words of Dolnik: "the same limited set of anecdotes and examples tend to be used and reused by researchers over and over again" (Dolnik, 2013b: 4, Ranstorp, 2013: 51). In terrorism studies specifically, many publications focus on the same small group of cases without exploring other, understudied conflicts or organisations. This lack of empirical work and new data is one of the main problems pointed out by critical terrorism studies scholars, although "the relative lack of field research has long been recognized from *within* the terrorism studies discipline as well" (Dolnik, 2013b: 2, see also Horgan, 2013: 187-188, Kenney, 2013: 27, 42). There are very few publications on the militias that operated during the Lebanese civil

war or the role of female fighters in the war. Thus, in order to explain the phenomenon, data must first be collected. This approach is not contested by quantitative scholars who agree that qualitative methods are important for studies on topics where data is lacking and/or that are still at the exploratory stage of research (Silverman, 2010: 110, Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 90-91). Horgan, for example, contends:

Given that so relatively few interviews are available for interpretation, inferential statistical analysis here is either inappropriate or misleading. Greater engagement with interview methods would produce substantively new data and knowledge, and help accumulate the body of empirical data to promote conceptual development in the study of terrorism more broadly and eventually give rise to the kind of modelling of relationships to which interdisciplinary collaboration aspires" (Horgan, 2013: 190-191).

### Verifying information

Qualitative fieldwork is essential when it comes to verifying pre-existing information and correcting false or biased data (Dolnik, 2013b: 2-4, Singh, 2013: 142), especially in cases of conflict where bias and misrepresentation are often deliberately produced by the parties involved. Relying on official figures, numbers or accounts published by actors in the field or abroad without the ability to contextualise them, can cause significant issues with the validity of any data used. This is of particular importance in situations in

which the authors of such accounts are directly involved in the conflict themselves or have considerable interests at stake. This is why detailed knowledge about local particularities and realities on the ground is key. As Ranstorp has argued, “[f]ield research is essential in verifying ‘circular’ truth, debunking myths and information, and unlocking new perspectives into the specific research issue” (2013: 48). This is particularly important when sensitive topics are being studied (Jipson and Litton, 2000: 149). In the case of the Lebanese civil war, this is critical as many competing and often conflicting narratives on the war exist in contemporary Lebanese society (Traboulsi, 2012), which renders cross-group comparison particularly important.

### Case selection

This study compares a set of non-state armed groups involved in the Lebanese civil war. The conflict context of the Lebanese civil war was chosen as it provides a universe of different non-state armed organisations, most of which remain relatively under-studied – especially when it comes to the question of female fighters. I had originally planned to compare two Sri Lankan militias; however, this plan had to be abandoned for a number of reasons, as will be discussed below. The cases included in this thesis were

selected with the help of theoretical sampling, including deviant cases (Mason 1996, Becker 1998, cit. in Silverman, 2010: 144-146). Case selection was informed by a most similar, different outcome/most different, similar outcome (MSDO/MDSO) approach (Mill, 1893). Cases were selected with regards to their expected relevance to the chosen research question and theory (Mason, 1996: 93-94, cit. in Silverman, 2010: 144), but without excluding cases expected to contradict the expected outcome. The novelty of the cases studied also played a role – which is of particular importance in the field of conflict (and terrorism) studies, where a small group of cases have been considerably over-studied in the past decades, whilst others have gained much less attention. Additional considerations included accessibility as well as safety of researchers and research participants during the fieldwork. The first choice of cases – two former Sri Lankan militias, had to be abandoned since these two requirements would not have been fulfilled. The thesis compares seven different cases; five with similar outcome but variation in degree (LCP and PFLP vs. Kataeb/FT and Fatah), one with different outcome (the PSP) and one with similar outcome which occurred at a later time (Amal), while also taking into account variation over time and location. Trade-offs between complexity and generalisability are inherent to every social sciences study. In this case, the decision to focus on militias operating during the Lebanese civil war without including a cross-country

comparison was based on two considerations. First, the novelty of the cases studied and the relative lack of data and pre-existing studies required that complexity be valued over generalisability. Second, the diversity of different militias involved in the Lebanese civil war provided ample opportunity for comparison – even within only one national conflict context. Including additional, cross-national cases would have been difficult in the limited space and time available.

## 3.2 | Data collection

### General research context

An overlap in the phases of data collection, management and analysis formed an essential part of my research strategy. Data was collected during four separate fieldwork trips in July/August 2015 (six weeks), December 2015/January 2016 (four weeks), the summer of 2016 (six weeks) and autumn 2016 (one week). The fieldwork was conducted over four separate visits for practical reasons, as it needed to coincide with my daughter's school holidays. What at first felt like a disadvantage, soon proved to be advantageous. I worked very efficiently during my field trips, throughout which I conducted up to nine interviews a week – sometimes carrying out

four interviews per day. The memories of what other interviewees had said were still fresh and if something had not worked very well during an interview, I could adapt quickly. It was also very motivating to see how many interviews I could do and how much data I could collect in a relatively short period of time. Another advantage was that I felt under less pressure in situations when it was difficult to reach potential interviewees, as I knew I would be back in a few months' time. Spreading out my field trips also allowed me to go back to the literature during the 'home' phases in between the different trips, read up on issues that had come up during the last field visit and review my sampling and interviewing strategy accordingly. It also helped with gaining gatekeepers' and interviewees' trust, as it showed that I was interested enough in the topic to come back to Lebanon several times – an effect which other scholars working on political violence have also highlighted (Dolnik, 2013c: 242).

Most importantly, after six weeks of field work in a rather challenging environment, I was glad to be able to go back home and take a break from the very intense few weeks. The environment in which I undertook my research was not always easy to cope with. I had chosen Lebanon for my field work upon realising after a first scoping visit to Sri Lanka, that in the current political climate, carrying out field research on political violence would prove very difficult. The Lebanese civil war offered a number of very

interesting cases, and I was more familiar with the region, culture and language. I had never been to Lebanon before, but had studied the region, its history, politics, culture and language for around 15 years prior to starting my field work in the summer of 2015. The fact that I had worked in Palestine for 3.5 months in 2006, and that I had family from Syria, also helped me to understand the research environment. Also, it was not the first time I was living in a (post)conflict country. In addition to my stay in Palestine, I have worked in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Yemen and Pakistan, and have undertaken study visits to Macedonia and Serbia. However, having to cope with the climate, poor infrastructure, and high levels of inequality and corruption still proved to be a considerable challenge.

### Research methods

The main source of data this study is based on is semi-structured interviews with former combatants, party members, civil society representatives, researchers and journalists. In addition to this, I also analysed (auto)biographies of four former female fighters (Bechara, 2003, Sneifer, 2006, El Murr, 2014, Duplan and Raulin, 2015). I chose to conduct semi-structured face-to-face interviews, as they offer flexibility, have a relatively high response rate, allowed me to probe further during the interview and

gave me more control over the data collection process than other approaches (Silke, 2004). Meeting interviewees in person also helped to build trust and rapport. In the case of my research, these strengths outweighed the weaknesses; namely, time and resource intensity, the risk of interviewer bias, and problems relating to sampling (Silke, 2004).

On the spectrum of academic interviews, ranging from the “informal, conversational interview” to “the standardized, close-ended interview”, my interviews, during which I followed the “interview guide or topical approach”, lie in the middle (Patton, 2002, cit. in Marshall and Rossman, 2011). Like many other qualitative researchers, I felt that using semi-structured interviews following an interview guide offered the advantage of reconciling the best of the two other approaches (Fife, 2005: 94).

While “[t]he reliability of interview schedules is a central question in quantitative methods textbooks [according to which] it is very important that each respondent understands the questions in the same way” (Silverman, 1993: 148), attaining formal objectivity was neither an explicit aim of this study nor do I believe it is possible (or necessary), to design questions which each respondent will understand in the same way. Instead, I focus on transparency, researcher reflexivity and triangulation (Rekawek, 2013: 179).

It has been claimed that “[a]n interview should entail a non-reciprocal relationship: most interviews consist of the interviewer’s questions, and the interviewee’s answers” (Horgan, 2013: 191). While I conducted some interviews in this way, others took the shape of a conversation between two relatively equal participants – with both asking and answering questions. This kind of interview has been described by Kvale and Brinkman as “literally an *inter view*, an inter change of views between two persons” (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009: 2, cit. in Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 145; see also Fife, 2005: 95). Despite this degree of flexibility in how interviews were conducted, my interviews remained semi-structured. I did not conduct completely open-ended interviews where “the person being interviewed has the ‘right’ to interpret the question and take it any place he or she pleases” (Fife, 2005: 93).

The epistemological framework I worked with, in combination with my methodology, also informed the approach I took to the questions included in my interview guide, which contained both fact-finding (descriptive) questions as well as those aiming at generating contextual information.

At the beginning of each interview, I briefly introduced myself and the research project. In some cases, my interview partners started responding immediately, while at other times, more probing was needed. In order to avoid questions that could be perceived as leading or biased (Clutterbuck

and Warnes, 2013: 18), I started with more open questions which, towards the end, became more specific.

My interview guide consisted of four sections.<sup>13</sup> The first contained questions on facts of women's involvements, such as numbers, times and locations of involvement. As the interview guide in the appendix shows, the following sections contained questions pertaining to the four strands of explanation I was testing as part of my research; namely, individual motivations, organisational characteristics, the security context, and societal aspects.

Either at the very beginning or the end of each interview, I also asked questions about the interviewee's personal background – unless I was already aware of it (as was the case with some more high-profile interviewees). Methodological flexibility and improvisation were an integral part of the research process (Moore, 2013: 129-130, Taarnby, 2013: 213), and with time my interview guide developed as I included questions on topics that had emerged in earlier interviews. This helped to decrease the risk of bias and selective memory and to increase the reliability of my findings through cross-checking (Clutterbuck and Warnes, 2013: 19; Rekawek, 2013: 179).

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<sup>13</sup> A copy of the interview guide is included in the appendix.

In total, I carried out 64 interviews with 69 interviewees.<sup>14</sup> 21 persons were interviewed during the first field trip in the summer of 2015, 21 during the second trip in winter 2015/2016, 29 in the summer of 2016 and 3 in autumn 2016. 34 of the interviewees were former combatants (28 men, 6 women); 26 (former) party members (11 men, 15 women); 4 civil society representatives (2 men, 2 women), 3 journalists (2 men, 1 woman) and 2 researchers (both men). 11 interviewees were formerly associated with the LCP, 11 with Kataeb/the LF, 11 with Amal, 5 with Fatah, 5 with the PSP, 4 with the CAO, 4 with the PFLP, 3 with different Palestinian and LNM-affiliated militias, 2 with the NLP, 2 with the SSNP and 1 with Tanzim.

The vast majority of interviewees were Lebanese, with 5 being Palestinians (from Lebanon), 1 half Lebanese, half Palestinian and 2 being Europeans working in Lebanon. Most interviews were conducted in a public space such as a café or at the interviewee's work place or house. 48 individuals were interviewed in Beirut, 15 in the South, 5 in Jounieh and the region, and 1 in the mountains to the south east of Beirut. I interviewed both members of the (current) elite and individuals who would not be classified as belonging to the elite as well as former leaders and regular members of the different organisations, which helped me avoid elite bias (Marshall and Rossman: 2011, 155-156). Since my study focused on organisational decision-making,

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<sup>14</sup> A table with an overview of all interviews is included in the appendix.

it was important to interview both male and female former militia members, unlike some other studies on female political violence, which focus on the women's perspectives only (see, for example, Alison, 2009, Bloom, 2011).

The aim of my data collection was to reach theoretical saturation, or, as it has been suggested by some, "theoretical sufficiency, whereby we have categories well described by and fitting with our data" (Dey, 1999: 257, cit. in Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 220). Moreover, I tried to interview a similar number of people associated with each of the different organisations. Speaking with members of as wide a range of different organisations as possible, as well as with individuals who were not associated with any of the parties or militias during the war, allowed me to cross-check information gathered and to minimise the risk of bias and selective memory, which is of particular importance when researching controversial topics – especially if these refer to past events (Rekawek 2013: 179; see also Clutterbuck and Warnes, 2013: 19).

The extent to which interpretation (from one language to another) will have an impact on the interview is contested. On the one hand, it has been claimed that "[...] in many cases the interpretation process constitutes the single greatest obstacle to a successful interview" (Dolnik, 2013c: 243-244). Difficulties are mostly said to be related to establishing rapport and building trust. On the other hand, some have also suggested that a lack of language

skills can be an advantage, for example, because the researcher and the foreign language they speak are perceived as more neutral and less laden with conflict and emotions (Moore, 2013: 131). In fact, speaking the language of one's interview partner can create a barrier, if it is, for example, the "wrong" language (e.g. the language of a perceived oppressor or political opponent) or accent (Dolnik, 2013c: 241-242, Rasmussen, 2013: 73). Lastly, one cannot deny that "all social research involves translation, if only from the 'language of the streets' into formal academic prose" (Singal and Jeffery, 2008, sec. 2, cit. in Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 164). Thus, what matters most in this context is awareness of potential issues and transparency with regards to the chosen procedure (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 165-167). In the case of my research, I did not feel that conducting the interviews in English, French or with the help of an interpreter (in the case of those interview partners who could not or did not feel confident enough to speak English or French) created any major barrier. In retrospect, my ability to speak French helped me to gain access to many French-educated interviewees, which is something I did not expect to be of such great importance.

For the interviews that were carried out in Arabic, my research assistant who interpreted for me from Arabic to English was present. 57 interviews were also attended by my daughter. In some cases, the interviewer's children

and/or colleagues were also in the same room. I left the decision to the interviewee, trusting that they knew better than me about the degree of privacy they required. Most of the time, I felt the fact that my daughter was reading, writing or doing homework in the same room as us did not make any difference to interviewees. Indeed, in some situations, I got the impression that it contributed positively to the interview, in that it helped gain interviewees' trust and establish rapport (Eggert, 2017).

It is common practice for many social scientists to audio-record their interviews (Silverman, 2010: 199-200). At the same time, some scholars working on sensitive issues such as political violence describe the potentially intimidating effect a recording device can have on interviewees who might fear repercussions (Schweitzer, 2013: 81). Moreover, the often problematic nature of transcribing indicates that perhaps the belief that recorded interviews are inevitably more reliable than non-recorded ones might be an illusion (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 164-165). Several potential interview partners I spoke with on the phone prior to conducting the interview were reassured by the fact that I was not planning to record the interview. Moreover, many of my interviews were conducted in busy cafés, sometimes near main roads, where because of high levels of background noise, it would have been difficult to record. Instead, I took detailed notes during the interview – clearly marking direct quotes, in order to be able to distinguish

them from summaries of what had been said. It is not unusual for researchers working on political violence in the Middle East to not record their interviews (Parkinson, 2013).

### Sampling and access issues

In principle, social researchers can choose between probability and non-probability sampling strategies, with the latter including purposive, convenience and snowball sampling (Kenney, 2013: 31-36). Probability sampling requires a list of the entire population studied, which is not possible to acquire if many members of a group are not known to the researcher, as is often the case when studying sensitive or controversial topics (Kenney, 2013: 31). Thus, for the purpose of my research, I used a combination of purposive and snowballing sampling. One main issue of non-probability sampling methods, including purposive and snowballing approaches, is the limited representativeness of the data collected. This limitation is inherent to many qualitative approaches. One suggested strategy to overcome this problem is to be “more transparent with respect to research methods and openly acknowledging their limitations as qualifiers for one’s findings” (Dolnik, 2013c: 245). In this context, Horgan (2013: 200) warns about “misunderstandings of what case studies and

exploratory research are all about” and “unrealistic expectations about generalizability.” He stresses that:

Understanding the value of data driven by rigorous data collection and making the effort to sample systematically may lessen the efficacy of arguments about sample size. [...] Researchers’ resistance to generalizability, however, should not be frowned upon when we consider the preponderance of political science models that are rarely empirically derived at all (Horgan, 2013: 200).

In other words, the trade-off of generating non-representative data is that findings cannot be generalised. However, collecting non-generalisable data is preferable to not generating any empirical data at all.

Gaining access to research participants can prove to be difficult. It is often particularly challenging in (post)conflict countries, especially when the issues that the researcher focuses on are considered to be of a sensitive or controversial nature (Hermann, 2001: 84-85, Smyth, 2001: 9, Kenney, 2013: 29). Having said that, gaining access to violent political groups can be easier than expected (Bokhari, 2013: 95, 97, Dolnik, 2013c: 238, Horgan, 2013: 195-196). Reasons for this surprisingly easy access can be due to a cultural nature (Radsch, 2009: 94-95) or be related to the wish of an individual or an organisation to have their story told (Abuza, 2013: 158). In any case, trust-

building is essential in gaining access and collecting meaningful data in such contexts (Norman, 2009: 71, 73, Ranstorp, 2013: 55).

Before my first trip to Lebanon, I relied on several methods of gaining access to potential interview partners. Firstly, I made use of personal contacts and secondly, I contacted a number of non-government organisations and cultural institutions working in Lebanon. A third way of gaining access was through personal, unplanned encounters during my stay in Lebanon, for example, through networking at conferences or through family members of friends. I also asked every person I interviewed at the end of our conversation, if they could think of anyone else who might be willing to speak to me as well. This strategy worked extremely well. In fact, one of the biggest advantages of snowballing sampling is that a trusted gatekeeper vouches for the researcher, which tends to increase the willingness of potential interviewees to participate (Kenney, 2013: 34). During my research, I was surprised how willing people were to speak to me about their views and experiences and to refer me to others who they thought could be of help.

While snowballing can be very useful, it also entails a number of potential issues. Firstly, “the snowballing method can create problems within the network if sensitive links between individuals are acknowledged [...], or if the researcher, usually in attempts to enhance validity, shares information or

opinions from one respondent with another” (Norman, 2009: 79). This problem can be overcome relatively easily by respecting principles of confidentiality. A second issue is related to over-sampling of interviewees with homogenous views (Kenney, 2013: 35). In order to tackle this methodological issue, I attempted to diversify the ways in which I secured my interviews and ensured that access was gained through multiple entry points.

In the case of my research, I realised how important these multiple entry points were during my first field trip, when I reflected on how comfortable many of the interviewees were with sharing their experiences and views with a complete stranger, on such a sensitive topic. I realised that this was partly due to the fact that many of them had either been members or sympathisers of the political groups and movements I was studying for decades. They were thus accustomed to engaging in discussions about social and political topics. However, having thought about it for longer, I realised that many of my interviewees were members of a local NGO founded by former fighters during the Lebanese civil war, who were now campaigning for non-violent conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence. Speaking publicly to strangers about their experiences during the war was one of the backbones of their activities, with some of them giving up to three interviews per week. Realising this, I appreciated having gained access

(through said multiple entry points) to other former fighters who had been much less in the spotlight (or not at all). Speaking to people who were now public figures, as well as to more low-profile individuals, also helped me to minimise the risk of practice effect (Heiman, 2002), even though I felt all the former combatants I spoke with shared their genuine views and experiences. In this context, triangulation and cross-checking – especially through interviewing individuals who have never been involved with any political or armed organisation, proved to be very helpful.

In addition to my sampling method, the use of multiple entry points and a general openness to new contacts, I also found that my status as a European female researcher helped me to gain access. The fact that I spoke French was also particularly helpful, especially when contacting French-educated potential interviewees. That being said, even the most auspicious research design and sampling methods cannot overcome all issues related to trust. In the context of my research, I had initially planned to also interview (former) Hezbollah members; however, it proved to be impossible to gain access through the official party channels, and individuals who were willing to share their experience without the party's approval could not be identified.

In line with my research aims, my criteria for inclusion in the pool of possible interviewees was knowledge of and/or experience with: (1) non-state violent political organisations operating during the Lebanese civil war, (2)

the role and status of women in Lebanon during the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, and (3) the general context of the war. These criteria are rather inclusive, which is due to reasons pertaining to my methodological approach and to the fact that I sought to collect data that both described facts and provided an understanding of the groups, as well as the general context. Interestingly, some scholars working on political violence found interviewing former combatants “not [...] rewarding” as they “provided little or no additional information” (Moore, 2013: 129; see also Speckhard, 2009, cit. in Horgan 2013: 194-195). My experience was that interviewing former combatants can be incredibly useful, especially if they are disengaged and feel safe enough at the time of the interview to share their experience and impressions without fear of repercussions.

### 3.3 | Data management and analysis

Data analysis, the “process of making sense of the data and discovering what it has to say” (Holliday, 2007: 89), is an essential part of every social research study. It has been claimed that there are “nearly as many analysis strategies [...] as qualitative researchers” (Crabtree and Miller, 1992: 17, cit. in Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 208). In the continuum of analysis strategies ranging from very standardised to non-standardised forms of analysis (Crabtree and

Miller, 1992, cit. in Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 208), my strategy was closer to more standardised approaches. This is linked to the main aim of my research, which was to test explanations drawn from existing literature. As I was attempting to analyse the role individual motivations, organisational characteristics, the security context and societal factors played in the organisational decision-making with regards to the inclusion of female fighters, both my data management and data analysis strategies were guided by these four pre-existing categories. At the same time however, data collection and analysis were inspired by grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1997), in that I remained open to new explanations emerging from the data collected (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 206). The rationale behind this was to “minimise the risk of prematurely closing the door to new explanations that might come up during data collection” (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 208). Also, this approach was an additional way to help reconcile my epistemological perspective with the qualitative approach I was taking. Positivist approaches are often criticised for “imposing limited worldview on the subjects” by “coding the social world according to preordained operational variables” (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 91). Combining the testing of hypotheses with an openness to new categories emerging from the data, allowed me to test pre-defined operational variables, while leaving space for new emerging themes. It has been claimed

that data analysis is “by no means a strictly linear process as each stage influences all the others” (Holliday, 2007: 90). This did apply to my research project whereby data analysis was an interactive process of collecting and analysing data, coding, identifying themes, going back to the field, and applying constant comparison (Silverman, 2010: 279-280). Data analysis at each stage fed into successive data collection, and informed triangulation over the research period. This allowed me to “check and compare [research participants’] responses with all the available participants in the research project, in order to confirm their stories or find any discrepancies between various versions” (Schweitzer, 2013: 89). It also allowed for the content of publications looking back on the time of the Lebanese civil war to be compared with the oral narrations of my interview partners. In this way, interviews became “part of a larger body of work” (Moore, 2013: 131).

Data analysis consisted of three stages (which were then repeated for the newly collected data during and after subsequent field trips). First, I applied codes to the collected data, then I identified themes/categories and then I looked for linkages across categories (Fife, 2005: 125). In practice, this meant that during and after every field trip, notes taken during interviews were typed up and then coded. I coded the biographies of former fighters in the same way as my interview scripts. It was at this stage that the interviews were anonymised (except for a few, which had already been anonymised

during the interviews whilst note-taking). The codes were linked to the four explanatory approaches I was testing, i.e. CUL = societal norms, SEC = security context, ORG = organisational characteristics and IND = individual backgrounds and motivations. In addition to that, I applied the code FACT for facts regarding the involvement of female combatants in the respective groups (such as their numbers, times and locations of involvement), and OTH for aspects to be mentioned in the introduction or conclusion of the final thesis (which were not central to the research question but still related to the topic). After that, themes and thematic headings were created whilst going through the coded scripts (Holliday, 2007: 91). While coming up with themes, I looked for continuity and change over time and in different locations. I also compared groups with organisations from the opposing camp as well as with other groups from within the same alliance, reports on/by female combatants with their male equivalents, statements on/by leaders with those on/by regular fighters, claims by non-party/military members with those by individuals who used to be part of the movement, and so on. Lastly, active searching for deviant cases was also part of the data analysis process (Silverman, 2014: 97-100). Looking for negative instances of identified patterns helped to support the validity of identified themes (Marshall and Rossmann, 2011: 220). As called for in the literature,

inconsistent or contradictory evidence was not simply ignored, but included in the analysis (Fife, 2005: 133-134).

### 3.4 | Research ethics and researcher reflexivity

#### Research ethics

Research does not take place in a socio-economic, cultural or political vacuum. It has the potential to affect those involved – both in a negative and positive way. In recent years, there has been an increased awareness of the negative impact research can potentially have, with the importance of ethical standards whilst conducting research increasingly highlighted (Fife, 2005: 11). Harm can be caused to the researcher, research participants or to the wider community (Jipson and Litton, 2000: 160-162). Potential threats can be of physical, emotional, ethical and professional nature (Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, 2000d: 23).

There is relatively little literature on ethical issues in research on (post)conflict countries or political violence (Feenan, 2002). Apart from more general publications on conducting research on “sensitive” (Lee, 1993, Renzetti and Lee, 1993) or “dangerous” issues (Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, 2000a), only a handful of books have been published on research in or on

violent contexts (Nordstrom and Robben, 1995, Smyth and Robinson, 2001, Sriram, 2009, Dolnik, 2013a). This gap in the literature is significant as research in or on violent contexts often requires special precautions to be taken.

In the case of my research, the initial plan to conduct research in Sri Lanka was abandoned as the political and security climate at the time would have rendered research on political violence in the country extremely difficult and even dangerous – both for research participants as well as the local institutions on whose support I would have depended. Even though Lebanon has also lived through a lengthy and brutal civil war, most of the practical ethical and legal dilemmas created by researching armed groups identified in existing literature (Smyth, 2001: 6) could be avoided by the time factor, a post-war political amnesty and a relatively open society. Nevertheless, a detailed risk assessment was conducted before I left for the first field trip and it was updated before every subsequent research trip to Lebanon.<sup>15</sup>

In most cases, perceptions of threat depend on who is undertaking the research (Jamieson, 2000: 63, see also Bokhari, 2013: 93, Singh, 2013: 143). Thus, experience and training can help to mitigate potential harm (Dolnik, 2013c: 234). Prior to starting my fieldwork, I had both. In addition to several

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<sup>15</sup> For detailed instructions on how to write a risk and vulnerability assessment see, for example, Mertus 2009: 169-173.

years of experience working in a number of countries afflicted by violent conflict, I had been formally trained to cope with dangerous situations in (post)conflict countries by attending three workshops conducted by a French-Middle Eastern NGO, an international organisation and the doctoral training centre of a British university. Researchers in the field, especially when their fieldwork is conducted abroad or in (sub)cultures they are not very familiar with, tend to be more likely to cause harm to themselves or others if they lack the cultural background knowledge necessary to identify and defuse potentially dangerous situations (Linkogle, 2002: 132). I had not lived in Lebanon before, but had worked in another country of the region – Palestine, which in terms of mentality, lifestyle and culture, shares many commonalities with Lebanon. I had also studied the region for about 15 years before leaving for the field, was fluent in both English and French and spoke basic Arabic. While I was aware that “it is not always possible to eliminate threat from either everyday life or social research” (Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, 2000c: 200), I was confident about my skills and abilities to handle difficult situations. In the following two sub-sections I will look more closely at how research participants’ and my own safety were ensured during fieldwork.

## Research participants' safety

Debates on ethical issues in the social sciences have traditionally focused on potential harm to research participants (Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, 2000b: 1). The principle of “do no harm”, which originally was a medical injunction and has gone on to become a guideline for development workers and peace activists, is also invoked by many conflict researchers. Symth, for example, states that researchers should at least aim not to do harm to anyone involved in their research activities and that ideally the research should have a “beneficial effect for those participating” (2001: 5). Some have even gone as far as claiming that research on sensitive issues is only justified if it *explicitly* benefits the research participants (Turton, 1996: 96). As a researcher coming from abroad with the ability to easily leave again (unlike most of the research participants), I was very aware of my responsibility towards the participants of my research.

Contrary to earlier expectations, the risk to research participants was relatively low, which was mostly due to the time factor and the political amnesty mentioned above. Moreover, several of my interviewees were actively involved in peace activism in Lebanon and spoke regularly at public events about their involvement during the war. Similar experiences have been reported by researchers working on other conflicts where a post-

conflict agreement entailed rehabilitation of former militants (Rekawek, 2013: 172). In the case of my research, it was mostly former members of those groups that fought Israel during the civil war who were more reluctant to have their identity exposed, as the conflict with Israel has not yet ended and revealing involvement in the fight against Israel can still have drastic consequences. In order to protect research participants' safety, all names were anonymised, even those of participants who consented to being named.

In most ethical research guidelines, informed consent of research participants constitutes one of the key principles of an ethical research strategy. It is essential that "[e]ach individual involved in the project [...] should be aware of the basic reason for the study and how it is being carried out" (Fife, 2005: 12). However, the way in which informed consent is gained tends to be culturally specific and may need to be adapted depending on the specific context of the research project (Kovats-Bernat, 2002: 214-215, Fife, 2005: 12, Hemming, 2009: 34, Norman, 2009: 73, Dolnik, 2013c: 226-230, Ranstorp, 2013: 54). In the context of this research study, informed consent was gained by providing information about the research project, researcher and their background at the beginning of each interview. All research participants were also handed a card with the researcher's contact details. Before my first trip to Lebanon, I updated my university website with details

about both the project and me. Moreover, the fact that access to most interviewees was gained through a third person (often a former interviewee themselves) also ensured that participants could obtain more information about the project through a trusted source.

Whilst I was prepared to pause or terminate an interview if the participant's behaviour gave any indication of them feeling uncomfortable or at risk of being affected by reliving a traumatic incident (Norman, 2009: 83-84, Ross, 2009: 181-183, see also Dolnik, 2013c: 227), such a situation did not occur.

### Researcher's safety

Historically, research participants' safety has often been prioritised over the safety and wellbeing of researchers (Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, 2000b: 1). This was not the case at my university where equal importance was placed on the researcher's safety. The initial risk assessment conducted before the first field trip included precautions with the safety of both researcher and participants in mind.

On the high risk ethnography scale quoted by Taarnby, the environment I undertook my fieldwork in would have been categorised as a level I or II context, which allows for qualitative research to be undertaken safely (Taarnby, 2013: 210-211). Overall, the situational risk of violence was very

low, with the risk of targeted violence being even lower.<sup>16</sup> Threats were highly localised and limited in space. In practice, this meant, for example, that when violent clashes between protesters and the police broke out during my first fieldtrip in the summer of 2015 (Ensor, 2015), I did not feel threatened because the violence was targeted, localised and easily avoided. Apart from the political situation, another major concern prior to arriving in Beirut was how to ensure my safety while meeting strangers for interviews. The original plan had been to always keep a trusted friend or family member informed about whom I was meeting when and where. I followed this rule for the first few interviews but eventually reached a point where I did not feel it was necessary anymore as we were meeting in public spaces. Similar to the experience Rekawek made while researching political violence in Northern Ireland, none of the individuals I spoke to remained involved in political violence (Rekawek, 2013: 172). Instead, they were working in civil society, research or other roles. They were an “integral part of [...] society, and the danger which emanate[d] from them [was] negligible” (Rekawek, 2013: 172). In addition, my sampling strategy helped make both researcher and research participants feel safe, as I had been referred to nearly every person I met through a trusted contact or previous interviewee.

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<sup>16</sup> For an overview of the different types of violence, see Knights 2013: 105-106.

Interviewing former combatants and individuals who have lived through a brutal civil war has the potential to emotionally impact those involved in the research (Smyth, 2001: 10). During my research, my experience in this context was not as extreme as the experience reported by other researchers (Rasmussen, 2013: 65). Nevertheless, I could feel that at points, my wellbeing was affected while in the field. Triggers included some of the topics I discussed with my research participants in the interviews, things I had read about in the literature on the civil war or simply time spent walking through neighbourhoods which I knew had been the sites of large-scale massacres and violence decades ago. This had not been my first stay in a (post)conflict country so I was prepared for these emotions and aware of coping strategies. Emotional stress in the field can be exacerbated by the fact that “doing research can be a very isolating experience” (Brown, 2009: 219). In this context, the fact that I was staying in Beirut with my daughter proved to be of advantage, as it forced me to also plan recreational activities (Eggert, 2017). Support by peers and through informal networks also proved to be very helpful (see also Lee-Treweek and Linkogle, 2000c: 202).

Lastly, one should not forget that limited risk-taking is often “part of the job” for any researcher working on political violence. The aim cannot be to completely avoid all risk at all times, as that would practically prevent any research on sensitive issues to take place. Instead, the aim should be to

decide “what risks are necessary and how worthwhile it is to take them” (Linkogle, 2002: 132), whilst keeping in mind that often there is a considerable difference between actual and perceived risk – especially when assessing the situation from abroad.

### Researcher reflexivity

Probably more so than in quantitative research, the researcher herself constitutes a research instrument in qualitative research. Her presence is a vital part of the research process (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 112). My main method of data collection were interviews, in which I interacted with one (or more) interview partners. It would be naïve to believe that my (perceived) identity did not have any impact on the interview situation. Indeed, “[r]esearch participants use researchers’ physical appearance, accent, mannerisms and multilingual abilities to identify them with certain ethnic, regional and even political groups” (Paluck, 2009: 45). Other identity markers such as gender, race, origin, religion or age can also play a role (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: 158-159). In extreme cases, the researcher’s (perceived) identity “can [...] make them more or less likely to be perceived by participants as biased, foreign, or unfriendly, which would harper their

ability to work [...] and in some cases put the researchers in danger” (Paluck, 2009: 46).

The fact that a qualitative researcher is an essential part of her research project does not have to be a disadvantage. If seen favourably, it can facilitate access and trust-building (Smyth, 2001: 9), as well as frankness and candour during the interview (Paluck, 2009: 46). In some cases, one might be able to strategically use some identifiers (Radsch, 2009: 97). Thus “rather than engaging in futile attempts to elimination of the effects of the researcher, we should set about understanding them” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 6, cit. in Holliday, 2007: 138). Transparency is essential in this context.

In turn, a false “inferiority complex” vis-à-vis quantitative methods, which are often claimed to be more objective than qualitative approaches, is uncalled for. Quantitative analyses can also be affected by bias, particularly in the areas of sampling, case selection, data collection and interpretation of findings. Ultimately, “[b]eyond the chimera of *objective* and *value-free* research, each researcher carries personal ideas, feelings and stereotypes into the field” (Armakolas, 2001: 174).

It has been claimed that especially “with regard to the study of violent conflicts, both the positivistic demand for objectivity and the hermeneutic requirement for honest reflexivity are extremely difficult to meet”

(Hermann, 2001: 79, see also Smyth and Darby, 2001: 20). During my fieldwork, I did not feel my objectivity or capacity for reflection, self-reflexivity or impartiality was affected. Similar to Armakolas's experience in the Balkans (2001: 167), I realised quite early on that the conflict in Lebanon had been far too complex for an outsider to simply side with one of the conflict parties. The fact that almost all the organisations involved in the fighting committed war crimes and were responsible for human rights violations stressed that point.

Many publications on researcher reflexivity stress the need to critically reflect the power relation between researcher and research participants (Lee, 1993: 110-111). While some contend that the researcher's power is limited, for example, by the etiquette of the interview (Lee, 1993: 111), others question the researcher's presumed power over her research participants altogether. Hemming, for example, criticises the "assumption of 'power over'" as being "intellectually bereft" in a situation where the researcher enters her research participants' social space (Hemming, 2009: 30). Her point is indeed quite compelling, especially when it is members of non-state armed organisations who are being researched (Dolnik, 2013c: 228). That being said, "[a]lthough power dynamics between researcher and researched are often balanced in research involving repellent [sic] populations, researchers still maintain the upper hand in one important area

– the power of representation” (Gallaher, 2009: 140). Different researchers have suggested different strategies to overcome the associated risk and to protect their research participants from harm. Giving them a say in the research process (identified as good practice by some), is not always an option, especially not in the case of research on armed groups. To give an admittedly rather extreme example, which nonetheless illustrates an important point in this context, “[m]ost people, for example, would balk at giving a neo-Nazi group the right to veto a researcher’s conclusions” (Gallaher, 2009: 136). Instead, Gallagher contends the importance of being “fair to a group’s self-presentation” (2009: 136). I did not feel more powerful than most of my research participants. They had the advantage of being insiders, while I was a foreigner who was new to the country and the topic of the Lebanese civil war. The fact that I only speak basic Arabic and was considerably younger than most of my interviewees also played a role in this context. This effect was amplified by the fact that several of my interviewees were elites, and successful, well-known and accomplished members of Lebanese society.

During my research in Lebanon, for the most part, I felt and was considered to be an outsider or rather, an “involved outsider” – someone who, despite her status as someone coming from outside of the community, is still involved in events which are of relevance to the in-group (Hermann, 2001:

79). It has often been claimed that it is easier for insiders to gain access and to gather data (if only for the lack of a language barrier) (Hermann, 2001: 82-90). However, “[s]ometimes being a foreign researcher [...] makes an opening possible” (Abuza, 2013: 168). Experience also shows that *what kind* of outsider one is can make a difference. For instance, perceptions of the researcher’s country of origin or citizenship can differ in different context. For example, while Norman experienced issues of access and trust in Palestine due to her being an American and the fact that she had links with Israel (Norman, 2009: 76), during his fieldwork in Serbia, Amakolas (2001) benefitted from the fact that he was Greek and from a nation considered to be a friend and ally by many Serbs. At the same time, it has been claimed that outsiders are more likely to remain more objective, and that because of the presumed distance to their research subject, it was easier for them to analyse and disseminate data (Hermann, 2001: 82-90). This claim, however, is contradicted by the phenomenon of some qualitative researchers “going native” or over-identifying with their research participants. Whilst many researchers describe the “dilemmas” and “constant fights” they experienced in their attempt to situate themselves as a researcher in the insider/outsider nexus (Bokhari, 2013: 97), others have fewer difficulties to report and instead use the ambiguity strategically (Radsch, 2009: 97).

I felt that during my fieldwork in Lebanon, gaining access and building trust was facilitated by the fact that I was a European researcher. Some of my local friends even expressed the opinion that this made me “more interesting” for someone to share their experiences with. I also felt that my identity as a researcher (as opposed to a journalist), facilitated my research. This was affirmed by my being asked several times to confirm that I was an academic and not someone working for the media. The fact that I spoke French fluently also proved to be of advantage, especially when speaking to French-educated research participants.

The relativity of insider/outsider identities and their constructed nature was evident to me through my experience as a Muslim researcher. Before my first field trip to Lebanon, I was anxious about the extent to which my visible identity as a Muslim researcher would impact the relation with some of my interviewees – especially in a country with a relatively high conflict potential, where inter-community rifts are sometimes presented as existing along sectarian or ‘secular vs. religious’ lines. However, while in the field, I found that on the whole my Muslim identity was not detrimental to gaining access or building trust. I believe this is in part, due to my being a Western foreigner, an academic and a French-speaker (which are all identifiers that tend to be considered as positive and desirable by many Lebanese – especially amongst the political and educated elite). The fact that I was a

guest and for most of my interviewees, someone who had been introduced to them by a personal contact, also helped. It was also certainly linked to the fact that many of my interview partners were educated and eloquent individuals who, in principle, were in favour of tolerance and co-existence. Nevertheless, there were a few incidents in which I sensed anti-Muslim sentiments from some of the interviewees. In these cases however, I may have positively benefitted from some of the research participants' distinguishing between "good because educated, secular and tolerant" Muslims on the one hand, and "bad because overly religious, uneducated and intolerant" Muslims on the other hand.<sup>17</sup> My social class, education, linguistic abilities and European origin seemed to have held more importance to the interviewees than my religion. Also, interestingly, my Muslim identity led many locals to assume that either my father or husband were Lebanese. I am not sure how many interviewees assumed this as very few asked me personal questions directly and therefore, I was unable to correct this presumption. Nevertheless, this exemplifies how one's status as an insider or outsider is indeed often constructed and highly dependent on perception.

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<sup>17</sup> The construction of very similar categories of "good and bad Catholics" in Northern Ireland has been described by Brewer and Magee 1991: 25, cit. in Finlay 2001: 60.

Lastly, several other identifiers also worked in my favour during the research process. These included: my relatively young age (I could have been the daughter of many of the interviewees, and I did get the sense that some of the interviewees felt a sense of responsibility to help me with my research); my gender (it has been claimed that men in particular, find it more “interesting” to talk to a woman and that female researchers are perceived to be less threatening and more in need of help) (Bokhari, 2013: 97 – 98); and the fact that I was a mother (which often forms a connection, particularly with other parents, and especially so in a relatively child-friendly country such as Lebanon) (Eggert, 2017).

### 3.5 | Conclusion

This chapter has discussed epistemological and methodological issues pertaining to my research on armed political groups’ decision-making on the inclusion of female fighters. A discussion of the epistemology as well as the methodological approach was followed by sections on data collection, management and analysis. I discussed advantages and limitations of combining a positivist framework with qualitative methods and emphasised the importance of including interviewees from a variety of different backgrounds. The final sections of the chapter were dedicated to issues

around research ethics and researcher reflexivity. I illustrated how, due to the specific post-war environment in Lebanon, gaining access to former members of most of the militias involved in the civil war was much easier than suggested in some of the literature on other armed groups and civil wars. In each sub-section of the chapter, expected and actual problems were discussed and ways to overcome these were discussed. As with any research study, this project contains a number of limitations which were highlighted throughout the chapter. Overall, none of the identified issues were impossible to mitigate. However, it is essential to bear these methodological limitations in mind during the analysis of the findings of this study, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

## Chapter 4 | Individual motivations

The majority of existing publications on female involvement in non-state political violence focus on individual aspects. In the case of women's participation during the Lebanese civil war, individual motivations were indeed crucial. Without the women's insistence for their inclusion, it is highly unlikely that there would have been any female fighters in any of the militias operating during the Lebanese civil war. In this chapter, I illustrate the importance of women's individual motivations to join the non-state armed groups. In Section One, I firstly look at debates surrounding the question of whether or not women's participation is as a result of a self-determined and voluntary decision. I show that in the case of female fighters in the Lebanese civil war, coercion did not play a role. On the contrary, the women were highly motivated, and were it not for their insistence to be included in combat roles, the organisations would probably not have made the decision to let them participate. Secondly, I look at the backgrounds of the women (and men) who got involved in the various militias. Who are the women who decided to join the war? What are their backgrounds and what is it that made them want to actively participate in the civil war? Are there any differences between the different militia members' motivations and were any of the motivations gender-specific? I examine these questions in Part

Two and Three of this chapter. In previous literature on individual motivations in other violent conflicts, most authors stress the highly complex nature of the individual decision-making process and that it is difficult, if not impossible, to single out singular causes (Bloom, 2005: 162, 234-235, Berko and Erez, 2007b: 503, McKay, 2007: 171, Schweitzer, 2007: 143, Eager, 2008: 23, Alison, 2009: 128, Jacques and Taylor, 2009: 507, Shekhawat, 2012: 132). This is further complicated by the fact that motivations can of course, change over time (Bloom, 2005: 234-235). In the context of my research, most women (and men) identified political reasons as motivational factors for their involvement. However, as this chapter shows, other factors such as previous non-violent activism, age, marital status and personal links to militias, also played a role. Another factor worth mentioning in this context is that, whilst many individuals share the same experiences or attitudes, all of them do not get involved in political violence (Eager, 2008: 31). This is why “[e]xactly how individuals become terrorists [or involved in political violence more generally] can only usefully be appreciated on a case-by-case basis” (Galvin, 1983: 23, cit. in Eager, 2008: 4). It is also the reason why in this chapter, I not only discuss the motivations of women who decided to join as fighters, but also the reasons why other women in the same militias decided to contribute in non-combat roles instead. The focus on the individual level in the majority of existing conflict

and terrorism studies literature does sometimes come at the price of more comprehensive approaches being shunned (Haen Marshall et al., 1986: 22, cit. in Hamilton, 2007: 133, see also O'Rourke, 2009: 683). Particularly in the field of terrorism studies, there is a history of analysing individual features with attempts to identify common “terrorist profiles” – as though other, non-individual, factors do not play a role in processes of involvement in political violence. In order to avoid this pitfall, I integrate the role of the security context, organisational aspects and societal factors into this chapter, by examining in Sections Four, Five and Six how each of these factors influenced women’s motivations.

#### 4.1 | Choice or coercion?

Is female involvement with non-state armed groups a choice women make or is it more accurate to speak of coercion? Claims of coercion can often be found in conflict studies literature focusing on Africa, and to a lesser degree, Asia and South America (Eager, 2008: 128, Alison, 2009: 139-141, Parashar, 2009: 137, Katto, 2014: 544). According to some scholars, in some conflict contexts, the majority of female fighters were either abducted or born to an abducted mother (McKay, 2007: 171, see also Coulter, 2008: 55). On the other hand, it has been contended that the majority of women joining armed

groups worldwide volunteer (Speckhard, 2008: 1018, Henshaw, 2015: 3). Henshaw in particular, criticises the focus on the use of force as a tool for recruitment and retention for women. She notes the “difficulty that many observers have reconciling women as willing participants in violent activity”, and criticises what she calls the “dichotomous notion of agency that oversimplifies the realities of conflict”, by pointing to the cases of women who are coerced to join and then decide to stay (Henshaw, 2015: 14, see also Coulter, 2008: 55). Others have questioned the degree to which a decision made by a forced member of a violent group can be considered voluntary and self-determined, which is why Coulter, for example, speaks of “choiceless decisions” in this context (Coulter, 2008: 61). She contends that this is a situation both men and women find themselves in, but adds that women’s struggle is often harder as they tend to face more barriers (Coulter, 2008: 68). The situation is further complicated by the fact that the distinction between coercion and choice “is not always clear-cut and shades of grey proliferate. The spectrum of coercion includes everything from subtle community pressure to brute force” (Bloom, 2005: 234). However, in the case of militias operating during the Lebanese civil war, direct coercion did not play a role. Whenever the role of the militias in the recruitment process came up, it was stressed that “the choice is with the woman” (interviewee 57; see also interviewees 22, 27, 52).

A lesser form of the coercion argument is the belief that organisations lure women in by making false promises, or by hiding the true nature of the group's or its members' motives and activities. The women, in this explanation, are naïve, vulnerable, indoctrinated, mentally disturbed or do not fully grasp what they are doing. Their agency is reduced to a minimum. This explanation can mostly be found in terrorism studies (Bloom, 2005: 234-235, Berko and Erez, 2007b: 505-506, Speckhard, 2008: 1018, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008: 106, 115). In these publications, it is often assumed that women are lured in by men (Berko and Erez, 2007b: 503), which reproduces problematic gender stereotypes of men as active perpetrators and women as passive victims. Moreover, the focus on women being the subject of manipulation is striking. It stands in contrast to the findings of a number of scholars working on the topic, who have pointed out that it is both men and women who are being used and exploited by military groups (Schweitzer, 2007: 143).

Attempts to explain female participation in combat through either coercion or by being lured in by men have been strongly contested by a number of researchers, who instead point to the women's high motivation to join as fighters (Hamilton, 2007: 145). Some have questioned the conceptualisation of "recruitment as a top-down process in which recruiters identify susceptible potentials and coerce them into joining their organization"

(Jacques and Taylor, 2008: 308). Instead, they stress the crucial role women pushing for their inclusion plays, and describe recruitment as a reactive process (Jacques and Taylor, 2008: 308). This mirrors the findings of this research study. Several interviewees stressed that recruitment of female fighters was a bottom-up process. This was emphasised by a former fighter with leftist and Palestinian groups who stated: “No, it wasn’t that they [the Christian militias] hired women, the women came to them. It was the same for us [members of the Lebanese National Movement]. This is a very important point” (interviewee 14). A former female fighter with the LCP, described a similar process looking back on her experience: “When the war started I was ready. The war started, I was a friend of the Communist Party, so I went there and said I wanted to enrol” (interviewee 31). Almost all interviewees stressed the high motivation of female combatants to join the fight (interviewees 1, 2, 6, 8, 11, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 44, 53, 55, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 64, 65, 66; see also Bechara, 2003, Sneifer, 2006, Duplan and Raulin, 2012, El-Murr, 2014). Women joining the fight were described as having a “clear vision” of what they wanted (interviewee 27), as being “very committed” (interviewee 56) and “serious about joining” (interviewee 54). One former military commander commented that “when the young women came to us, it was not to sit on the phone” but to fight (interviewee 60). Another described how in the war, you could see women

fighting who “couldn’t even handle a gun” properly, but who were so determined to contribute to the fight that they wanted to participate anyway (interviewee 32).

In existing literature, it has been claimed that even in cases where the leadership of an organisation was initially reluctant to include female fighters in combat, women were “eventually accepted through their own persistence” (Bloom, 2005: 130, 244, Bernal, 2006: 133, Alison, 2009: 124-125). Examples of violent political groups, in which women’s insistence on being fully included was at least partially decisive in women’s later involvement, include organisations as diverse as the Sri Lankan LTTE (Alison, 2009: 124-125), Eritrean EPLF (Bernal, 2000: 63), different armed Palestinian groups (Bloom, 2005: 130, Berko and Erez, 2007b: 504), Irish Republican groups (Bloom, 2005: 244), the Mozambican FRELIMO (Katto, 2014: 542-543), Namibian PLAN (Shikola, 1998: 139) and the Western Somali Liberation Front (Van Hauwermeiren, 2012: 22). This was also the case during the Lebanese civil war where the door for female fighters was opened after women’s insistence to be included. Several interviewees described this as the women “pushing” for their inclusion (interviewee 11), and “imposing” themselves (interviewees 7, 11, 65). Moreover, many interviewees stressed that it was the women demanding to be given a more active role in the fight (interviewees 7, 11, 14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 29, 30, 31, 32, 44, 45,

47, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 60, 63, 65, 66, 68, 69; see also Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 54-55). In some cases, this determination went so far that the women participated against the explicit wish of their families (interviewees 57, 64, Duplan and Raulin 2015: 62). However, some of the interviewees also recalled accepting the non-combat roles they were allocated – which they considered to be of equal importance, rather than insisting to be included as actual fighters (interviewees 30, 52). Amongst the women wanting to fight, some were so motivated that they found ways to become combatants even if the organisation denied them entry as fighters (as was the case with the PSP) (interviewees 9, 10, 51). Their strategy was not getting married to a male fighter (as in the Khalistani armed groups Laurent Gayer analysed) (Gayer, 2009: 7), but instead, they formed their own independent combat unit in the Matn – a district in the mountains near Beirut (interviewees 9, 10, 51).

Rather than coercion, it was the women's high motivations and their insistence on being included that constituted the first step towards their participation in combat during the Lebanese civil war. But who were these women and how can their extremely high motivations be explained? Did their personal backgrounds have an impact on their motivations? This will be explored in the following sections.

## 4.2 | Individual backgrounds

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, there is a multitude of reasons for why women (and men) become involved in political violence. Women's individual backgrounds are equally as diverse – as a number of conflict and terrorism scholars have pointed out (Vázquez, 1997: 140, Bernal, 2000: 66, Von Knop, 2007: 399, Eager, 2008: 84, Zedalis, 2008: 50). Despite this diversity, which makes it difficult to come up with one profile of the “typical” female militia member, it is often possible to identify some commonalities the majority of female fighters in a given context share. Interestingly, the demographic variables and personal backgrounds of men and women joining armed groups often seem to be very similar (Hamilton, 2007: 135, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008: 106, Zedalis, 2008: 50). This claim, which can be found in existing literature, is supported by the interviews I conducted with men and women involved with the different militias during the Lebanese civil war. Men and women largely shared the same personal characteristics. Major gender-specific differences in men's and women's personal backgrounds could not be found. When analysing existing literature on the topic, there are three characteristics that most fighters (and militia members in general) within non-state armed groups are said to share: (1) their young age; (2) family ties and other existing networks that link them to

armed groups, and (3) previous involvement in civic society or political movements for the cause. The role of (4) educational background and (5) socio-economic situation are more contested. Below, I will discuss these with regards to the militias operating during the Lebanese civil war.

The majority of the fighters (and militia members in general) during the Lebanese civil war were young. While some of interview partners claimed that women (and men) of all ages were involved (interviewees 26, 30, 44), the majority agreed that many, if not most, fighters and militants were between their mid-teens and mid-twenties (interviewees 11, 18, 25, 29, 30, 32, 37, 44, 45, 48, 52, 53, 55, 62, 66, 68; Sneifer, 2006: 23, 59, 81, Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 9, 14, 53, 79). This confirms findings by most conflict and terrorism scholars who state that young age is a characteristic shared by most women involved in non-state political violence (Weinberg and Eubank, 1987: 254, Berko and Erez, 2007a: 152, Berko and Erez, 2007b: 498, Eager, 2008: 108-109, 176, Speckhard, 2008: 106, Zedalis, 2008: 50, Alison, 2009: 123, 143-144, Bloom et al., 2012: 66). The claim that this is true for both men and women in general (Hamilton, 2007: 143), with only minimal differences (Weinberg and Eubank, 1987: 256, Bloom et al., 2012: 66), is supported by my research on the militias operating during the Lebanese civil war. Most of the interviewees and their comrades were of the same age as their female peers in the militias (interviewees 8, 9, 10, 23, 27, 28, 29, 41, 46, 48, 49, 51,

55, 58, 59, 60, 61, 64, 68, see also Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 134). Existing literature highlights that in some cases, the young age of militants means that even children (under the age of 18) are involved (Shayne, 1999: 94, West, 2000: 183, Berko and Erez, 2007b: 498, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008: 106, Alison, 2009: 123, Magadla, 2015: 394). Indeed, many of the interviewees (or their comrades) in my study were under the age of 18 when they were fighting during the war – both men (interviewees 1, 8, 23, 27, 28, 29, 48, 49, 55, 59, 64, 68, see also Sneifer, 2006: 87) and women (interviewees 1, 22, 23, 29, 30, 55, 62, 66, see also Duplan and Raulin 2015: 14, 53, 79). A male interviewee started to fight when he was 12 (interviewee 14), and one woman I spoke with received training, but did not fight, at the age of 13 (interviewee 47). Previous studies have shown that many militants, especially those from an urban background, are students (Weinberg and Eubank, 1987: 254, Vázquez, 1997: 140). This finding, too, is supported by the analysis of the accounts of both female (interviewees 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 32, 44, 45, 53, 55, 56, 61, 63) and male (interviewees 23, 28, 45, 48, 55, see also Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 126) militia members during the Lebanese civil war – many of whom were either pupils or students at the time of their involvement with the militias. Specifically, but by no means exclusively, women who were with the Christian militias seemed to have been students. Many militia members (including frontline fighters), maintained a double-

life in that they continued their studies whilst fighting in the war (interviewees 19, 23 25, 45, Sneifer, 2006, Duplan and Raulin, 2012). This was possible because of the nature of the war whereby, in many parts of the country, several rounds of fighting followed with relatively calm periods in-between. As described in existing literature on female fighters in other conflicts (Viterna, 2006: 8, 18-19, 35-36, Eager, 2008: 109, 162, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008: 106-107, Bloom et al., 2012: 67), the majority of female combatants in Lebanon were not married – even though a minority had husbands and some also had children (interviewees 44, 45, 53, 68).

Another characteristic that is mentioned frequently in other conflict contexts is family ties or other personal networks that link women to individuals who are already involved in political violence (Della Porta, 1992: 273, cit. in Eager, 2008: 32, West, 2000: 186, Bloom, 2005: 235, Eager, 2008: 109, 111, 122, 148, 163-164, 184, 204, Gayer, 2009: 4). Eager reaches the conclusion that “most of the women involved in [...] various types of political violence and terrorism [...] were recruited or became active through personal relational networks” (Eager, 2008: 213). This was also the case for many women and men involved in the different militias operating during the Lebanese civil war. Many mentioned a sibling – or siblings – (male in most cases) (interviewees 13, 22, 27, 29, 47, 55, 66, see also Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 30-31, 37), a parent (interviewees 18, 25, 41, see also Bechara 2003:

11, El-Murr, 2014: 10-11), spouse (interviewees 2, 14, 15), cousins (interviewees 11, see also Duplan and Raulin, 2015) or uncle (Bechara 2003: 14), who were involved in militancy before they joined themselves. Several interviewees recounted growing up in political families where political debate and the preparation of political action used to take place regularly (interviewees 2, 14, 23, 30, 46, 49, 57, 64, see also Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 28-31, 35, 58). This supports earlier findings by Peteet (1991) and Parkinson (2013), who worked on female participation in Palestinian militias during the Lebanese civil war. Family and neighbourhood networks played a particularly important role for women involved with the Christian militias at the beginning of the war, when many families and friends came together to defend their neighbourhoods (interviewees 2, 11, 19, 25, 41, 44, 45, 55, 56, 57, 59, 60, 66). Previous non-violent participation in political student groups, trade unions or neighbourhood initiatives also played an essential role, as will be discussed in more detail below. The importance of personal networks has been linked with the secretive nature of many non-state armed organisations, who rely on their members loyalty and confidentiality (Eager, 2008: 32). Moreover, personal networks offer points of contact with a group and its organisational culture and political positioning, as described by Ortega (2012: 92-93) in the context of Latin American organisations.

Some researchers studying personal networks go as far as denying female militants their agency and question their commitment to the cause (Weinberg and Eubank, 1987: 255, Morgan 2001, cit. in Hamilton, 2007: 137-138; Reinares, 2001, cit. in Hamilton, 2007: 138). This is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, mobilisation via personal networks does not necessarily equate to a lack of commitment on the part of the woman (Eager, 2008: 148, Alison, 2009: 160, Gayer, 2009: 7, Roy, 2012: 126). This was definitely not the case for the individuals I interviewed – all of whom stressed their high individual motivations to join the fight. The second problem linked to this is the fact that the role of personal networks in an individual's mobilisation are often emphasised for women but not men – even though they play an important role in the process of involvement of members of both genders (Hamilton, 2007: 143-144, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008: 112, Ortega, 2012: 92-93). In the context of my research, both men and women claimed to have been influenced by family members. Often these role models were indeed male; however, a few of the interviewees also stressed how their mother's (interviewee 18; see also El-Murr, 2014: 10) or sister's (interviewee 27) militancy was a key motivating and facilitating factor in their own involvement in political action (see also Bechara, 2003: 14). And lastly, we must not overlook the fact that, whilst some women (and men) may be drawn into a violent group through personal

contacts, personal ties to militia members are not always a pathway into participation – neither in the Lebanese context (Sneifer, 2006), nor in other conflicts worldwide (Blee, 2002: 9-10, cit. in Eager, 2008: 88, Viterna, 2006: 18-19, Berko and Erez, 2007b: 507, Hamilton, 2007: 144, Alison, 2009: 145). Previous participation in political organisations or civil society initiatives such as trade unions, political parties, student organisations or neighbourhood initiatives, is another factor which has often been cited as a pathway to military roles for women in non-state armed groups worldwide (Weinberg and Eubank, 1987: 254-255, Vázquez, 1997: 140, Shayne, 1999: 93, Bloom, 2005: 147, Hamilton, 2007: 142-143, Eager, 2008: 27-32, Alison, 2009: 142, Gayer, 2009: 17, Magadla, 2015: 394. For example, comparing loyalist and republican groups in Northern Ireland, Alison comes to the conclusion that one of the reasons for the low numbers of female fighters in loyalist groups is their comparatively lower involvement in community resistance and political activity (Alison, 2009: 142). Indeed, many of the women (and men) I spoke with in Lebanon had been involved in non-violent political action with political groups, before they joined the armed fight, and described this as a common pathway for many other fighters (interviewees 2, 14, 19, 22, 23, 28, 29, 31, 44, 48, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66; see also Bechara 2003, Sneifer 2006, El Murr 2014, Duplan and Raulin, 2015). Some students and pupils spent their weekends and holidays

getting trained in military camps (interviewee 48; Duplan and Raulin 2015: 39, 52). It has been pointed out by some that previous non-violent political participation is not a necessary stepping stone for all women (Viterna, 2006: 18-19). However, most of the women I interviewed had started their engagement in non-violent political roles. In many conflicts, involvement in non-violent activism tends to be a pathway into political violence for both men and women (Weinberg and Eubank, 1987: 255-256, Hamilton, 2007: 143), and indeed as referenced above, this was the case for many men involved in the militias I examined during this study.

In terms of educational background, most scholars agree that female fighters are either better than or as educated as their peers outside the group (Bloom, 2005: 165, Berko and Erez, 2007b: 498, Von Knop, 2007: 399, Eager, 2008: 32, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008: 108). In general, this seems to be a characteristic shared by men and women (Bloom, 2005: 237). Notable exceptions include women who got involved with the LTTE and PKK – who often seemed to be less educated (Bloom, 2005: 165, Alison, 2009). Other researchers depict a more complex picture, describing groups with both highly educated and poorly educated female members (Vázquez, 1997: 140), whereby, educated and urban women get involved first and then recruit other women – including those from rural areas (Bernal, 2000: 63). In their study of female suicide attackers in Chechnya, Speckhard and

Akhmedova came to the conclusion that many of the women are highly educated but without opportunities in the job market – often due to the conflict context (Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008). Overall, it seems that the educational background of militia members is context-specific. In the case of the Lebanese civil war, as mentioned above, many of the militia members – especially at the beginning of the war, were students or even pupils. According to some interviewees (in Beirut in particular), many militants were educated, especially in the communist (interviewees 22, 32, 54) and Christian parties (interviewees 2, 19, 25, 41), whereas the number of educated fighters in other parts of the country were lower (interviewee 54). Some interviewees contended that many fighters were from poor or working class backgrounds but had got the opportunity to go to university (interviewees 7, 18, 48). There do not seem to have been any significant differences between women’s and men’s educational backgrounds. The very long duration of the war meant that some militia members, especially those who got involved as children and went on to hold positions of responsibility, did not get any formal education beyond the level they had reached at the beginning of their involvement with the militia. On the other hand, many of the militants I spoke to continued their education even whilst being involved with the militia, which was rendered possible by the nature of the war which, in many parts of the country, was characterised by times of intense fighting

followed by calmer periods (interviewee 25, Sneifer, 2006: 93). The fact that several interviewees left the militia at later stages of the war, either to complete their studies or upon completion (interviewees 19, 22, 23, 61), could be an indicator that at the beginning of the war, more educated people were with the militias than during the war's later stages. In fact, some interviewees mentioned this in the course of the research project (interviewees 2, 22). This fact could be linked to the changed composition and aims of the militias, as well as the development of the security context, which I will look at in more detail in the chapters on organisational characteristics and the security context.

As to the role of women's socio-economic status, both in the terrorism and conflict studies literature, claims can be found that women (and men) are from poor or working class backgrounds (Shayne, 1999: 93, Eager, 2008: 162, 176, Ortega, 2012: 94). Many interviewees stated that while there was a certain degree of diversity (interviewees 1, 2, 48, 55), most of the fighters in Lebanon, men and women, had a working-class background (interviewees 18, 31, 44) and/or came from disadvantaged regions (interviewees 1, 2, 11, 22, 24, 31, 32, 54, 62). Some had recently migrated to Beirut and were poor but educated (interviewees 7, 18, 48, 65, see also Bechara, 2003, Traboulsi 2012). This is not to say, however, that the leftist militias (just like the Christian organisations, (interviewees 2, 11, 56, see also Duplan and Raulin

2015: 18-19, Sneifer, 2006: 25-27), did not also have strong support from *petit bourgeois* members of society (interviewees 7, 18, 48). These findings are similar to claims made in the existing literature, according to which female militants usually come from working class or middle-class backgrounds (Weinberg and Eubank, 1987: 254, Sajjad, 2004: 6, Eager, 2008: 34, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008: 108-109). As to the question of whether more female than male fighters come from a middle-class background as discussed in existing literature on other political conflicts (Reif, 1986: 151-153, Lobao, 1990: 188-189, cit. in Shayne, 1999: 86, Sajjad, 2004: 6), based on the data available to me, I cannot come to a definitive conclusion. It is not clear what was more salient – the fact that many working-class women were less affected by social constraints and gendered barriers as they had already been working alongside men on, for example, the tobacco fields in the South or the factories of Beirut, or the fact that many middle-class women tended to be more educated about and aware of political processes.

### 4.3 | Gender-specific motivations?

A central question in the debate on individual motivations is the question of whether men and women share the same motivations, or if gender-specific

motivations can be identified. In general, the claim that women's motivations differ substantially from men's motivations is more widespread in the terrorism literature than it is amongst conflict studies researchers, and can often be found in psychological research on terrorism (see, for example, Silke, 2008, cit. in Bloom et al., 2012: 63). However, most researchers agree that men and women widely share the same motivations (Schweitzer, 2007: 143, Ness, 2008b: 6-7, Speckhard, 2008: 1002, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008: 106, Zedalis, 2008: 50, O'Rourke, 2009: 684, Cohen, 2013: 368, Eggert, 2015, Davis, 2017). My research on non-state armed groups during the Lebanese civil war supports the findings of those scholars who stress that in general, men and women share the same motivations. The fact that women and men largely got involved for the same reasons was stressed in interviews with former members and supporters from all the different militias I looked at as part of this study (interviewees 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 11, 14, 17, 19, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 41, 44, 46, 47, 48, 52, 55, 57, 60, 62, 63, 65, 66). At the same time, as also pointed out in existing conflict studies literature (Alison, 2003, Alison, 2009: 128, Ortega, 2012: 92), in the case of the militias operating during the war in Lebanon, gender-specific motivations existed, too, as we will see below.

One persistent stereotype of female political violence is that men are motivated by political, and women by personal, reasons. This claim can

mostly be found in the terrorism studies literature (Victor, 2003, Bloom, 2005: 145-146, 163, 235-237, Pedahzur, 2005, Berko and Erez, 2007b, Jacques and Taylor, 2008: 321, O'Rourke, 2009: 707-710), even though some terrorism scholars have criticised it strongly (Schweitzer, 2007: 133-135, 143, Eager, 2008: 187). The fact that “the so-called ‘personal reasons’ consume so much of the public’s and media’s fascination” (Eager, 2008: 4), probably says more about biases and stereotypes of those observing the phenomenon of female fighters than it does about the women themselves. Despite this problematic view on female participation, the majority of scholars in conflict studies, as well as some terrorism researchers, contend that women’s mobilisation is as much motivated by political factors as men’s (Eager, 2008: 163, Shekhawat, 2012: 132, Veneracion-Rallonza, 2015: 48). The findings of this research supports this. The vast majority of interviewees stressed that both men and women joined the war for political reasons. In the case of militias aligned with the LNM, it was the fight for Palestinians’ rights and a new political and societal order that motivated both men and women to participate (interviewees 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 41, 46, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 54, 59, 61, 62, 64, 65, 67, 68, 69). Most members of the Christian militias got involved in order to fight for the survival of the Christian community and the political status-quo (interviewees 2, 7, 11, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 25, 26, 41, 44,

45, 55, 56, 57, 59, 60, 65, 66; see also Sneifer, 2006, 34-38, 41, 44, 49, 52-56, 81-83; El-Murr, 2014, 16-17, 23, 25). The main motivation of female fighters with Amal was to defend their community against the Israeli invasion (interviewees 12, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 50, 58, 63). Similar to claims in existing literature according to which women are supposedly more idealistic and have stronger belief than men in the political ideals and values which the armed group they join (claims to) stand(s) for (Galvin, 1983, cit. in Eager, 2008: 4, Jaber, 2003, cit. in Sixta, 2008: 268, Alison, 2009: 145), some interviewees also contended that women were even more motivated than men (interviewees 57, 66). Only two interviewees mentioned personal factors such as the wish to take revenge for a relative who was killed or to make up for a tarnished reputation after being sexually assaulted by a family member (interviewees 49, 69).

That being said, it is imperative to stress in this context that dividing an individual's motivations into personal and political factors is not unproblematic from an analytical point of view. For example, defending one's community (which was one of the main motivations mentioned by most interviewees formerly associated with one of the Christian militias), has both a personal (fighting to defend oneself, one's family, neighbours and friends) and a political dimension (the fight for the Christian community as a whole and for the preservation of the Christian-dominated pre-war political

order). Indeed in existing literature, some have criticised the attempt to divide personal from political motivations, as if the two were not intimately intertwined (Eager, 2008: 194). Overall, the majority of scholars working on female political violence believe that both men and women are motivated by a mix of personal and political motivations (Sajjad, 2004: 6-7, Parvati, 2005: 5235, Berko and Erez, 2007b: 511, Von Knop, 2007: 399, Ness, 2008b: 5-6, Alison, 2009: 145, Gayer, 2009: 16, O'Rourke, 2009: 684, Roy, 2012: 126, Shekhawat, 2012: 133, Parashar, 2014: 128). This view is supported by the data I collected (interviewees 1, 8, 11, 14 41, 44, 48, 64). In this context, especially when studying women's motivations, it is important not to fall into the trap of seeing the existence of personal grievances as delegitimising women's participation – as both men and women tend to be motivated by personal and political factors (Eager, 2008: 4).

Apart from personal and political factors, a few interviewees also mentioned more pragmatic reasons for joining the war, such as seeking protection (interviewees 23, 48, 64) or opportunities (interviewees 28 32, 48). However, this aspect was only mentioned by 6 out of 69 interviewees. In existing literature on female involvement in armed groups, pragmatic reasons for joining are rarely discussed; exceptions include Shikola (1998: 139), Shayne (1999: 93), Viterna (2006: 8), McKay (2007: 171), Eager (2008: 208), Ortega (2012: 93), Van Hauwermeiren (2012: 23) and Parashar (2014:

127). This stands in contrast to the general literature on rebel mobilisation and its focus on the question of whether insurgents are motivated by greed (seeking opportunities) or grievances (addressing socio-political issues) (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004, Gurr, 2012). In the case of the Lebanese civil war, the fact that seeking protection does not seem to have been one of the main motivational factors for women to join one of the militias is most likely linked to the nature of the war. In most of the country, the war consisted of several rounds with longer relatively calm periods in between, so individual safety could, in many cases, be relatively easily achieved and was not necessarily improved by joining a militia. More research on the topic would be needed to determine whether this was also the case in other conflicts or if we are instead dealing with a bias in existing literature based on the assumption that women are less affected by greed than men.

While most interviewees agreed that men and women widely shared the same motivations for joining the war, a number of gender-specific reasons were also mentioned. This reflects findings of existing literature, which stresses that while men and women join for the same reasons overall, some gender-specific motivations also exist. In existing literature, the two most frequently cited gender-specific reasons are: (1) personal experience or fear of sexual violence (Bloom, 2005: 163-164, Von Knop, 2007: 400, Alison, 2009: 136-137) and (2) participation as a strategy to escape a predestined

life with few prospects for equality and self-determination. As to the role of sexual violence in motivating individuals to join armed groups, it has been claimed that it depends on the context and that it does not seem to be of equal importance in all conflicts (O'Rourke, 2009: 712-714). My research supports this insofar as only one interviewee who participated in this research project saw sexual violence as a motivating factor for women to join the war (interviewee 69). On the contrary, the fear of sexual violence led to the exclusion of women from combat roles, as will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on the role of societal factors.

A more widespread motivational factor seems to have been women's aspirations to free themselves from societal constraints and restricting gender norms and expectations in a relatively conservative society. Several interviewees mentioned women's liberation as an important motivational factor (interviewees 3, 15, 27, 31, 32, 53, 69). It has been pointed out that liberation can be a motivational factor for men, too (Speckhard, 2008: 1013), even if, in many societies, women's options to find meaning and carve out space for themselves tends to be more limited than men's. However, none of the men I interviewed seemed to have joined the war in order to escape a traditional society and its restricting gender norms and expectations. With regards to women's motivations, the notion of 'proving oneself' in particular, came up repeatedly in the interviews and several interviewees

stressed that women joined in order to prove to other militia members or the wider community that, as women, they were able to join the war, even as fighters (interviewees 23, 31, 53). However, women's emancipation was not mentioned as often as political reasons, which the vast majority of interviewees agreed was the most important reason for both men and women to join. This finding is particularly interesting considering the relatively strong focus on female participation as an act of liberation or feminism in the existing literature (Sajjad, 2004: 6, Bloom, 2005: 145-146, 234, Berko and Erez, 2007b: 504-505, McKay, 2007: 171, Von Knop, 2007: 399, Eager, 2008: 109, Alison, 2009: 137, O'Rourke, 2009: 707, Ortega, 2012: 95). It supports the claims of those scholars who deny the centrality of feminism and liberation as a motivational factor and rather see it trumped by political motivations, such as nationalism (Bloom, 2005: 245, Speckhard, 2008: 1003, Alison, 2009, Bloom et al., 2012: 72). Thus, my findings could be an indicator that this focus of much of the literature on female participation as an act of feminism is less guided by the motivations of the women joining the war and more by biases amongst the scholars studying the topic. In fact, Gayer came to a similar conclusion in his research on Sikh Khalistani insurgents (Gayer, 2009: 2).

Sometimes, a sense of adventure can also be a motivational factor for joining (Berko and Erez, 2007a: 160, Berko and Erez, 2007b: 507, McKay, 2007: 171).

This factor was mentioned by several interviewees (interviewees 30, 41, 48, 58, see also Sneifer, 2006: 89, 92, Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 53, 46). One former militia member recalled the happiness, excitement and pride she felt when she saw a real weapon for the first time (interviewee 30). Others believed that for some women, carrying a weapon was a form of showing off and making oneself look important (interviewee 52). In this context, the time of involvement is also interesting, as many young women and men joined training camps or the actual fight during the summer holidays when they were off from school or university. Military activities it seemed to some was a way of dealing with the boredom during the school holidays (interviewee 48; Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 53).

If emancipation was a motivational factor for some, it is noteworthy that, as I will show in more detail in the chapter on organisational characteristics, men and women were not treated as full equals in any of the groups fighting during the Lebanese civil war. Moreover, once the fighting stopped, women were largely pushed back into the domestic sphere. This contradiction has been pointed out by several scholars working on other conflicts (Bloom, 2005: 164-165, Ness, 2008b: 4), and the Lebanese civil war was no exception in this regard.

## 4.4 | The influence of the security context and perceived injustice on individual motivations

One main argument of this study is that the different factors which played a role in the decision-making of non-state armed groups during the Lebanese civil war were not significant in themselves only, but also in how they influenced each other. In order to highlight this interplay of different factors, in the second part of this chapter, I look at how women's individual motivations to join were influenced by the remaining three factors: the security context, societal aspects and organisational characteristics.

The main push factor for women to join was the changing security context and perceived injustice. I will demonstrate in the chapter on the security context, how extreme external pressures caused by the changing security situation, left the organisations with the impression that everyone (including the women), needed to be involved in combat. This perception facilitated women's inclusion in combat, even in groups that had hitherto been reluctant to allow women within their ranks, such as the Amal Movement. A similar dynamic can be observed on the level of individual motivations. The main motivational factor for women to join non-state armed groups during the Lebanese civil war was their wish to help defend the interests of their community or to support the fight against perceived injustice. This supports

findings of previous literature on other violent conflicts (Bloom, 2005: 154, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008: 110, Alison, 2009: 145, 147, 155).

As foregrounded earlier in this chapter, in the case of the Christian militias in Lebanon, women were fighting for the survival of their community which they saw at stake in the conflict, for the preservation of the pre-war political status-quo<sup>18</sup>, and against the growing influence of the Palestinian militias and their Lebanese and international allies. The vast majority<sup>19</sup> of interviewees who used to be involved with one of the Christian militias saw their involvement in the war as a last resort and legitimate self-defence: “Our parents hadn’t raised us to go to war. It was the war that made us that way. It was the environment. We were obliged [to go to war]” (interviewee 56; see also interviewees 11, 25, 55). This supports claims found in previous literature on female fighters in other conflicts (Bloom, 2005: 147, Eager, 2008: 132, Alison, 2009: 133, Cunningham, 2009: 567-568, Cunningham, 2010: 205, Magadla, 2015: 394-395).

As discussed above, for women involved with the leftist and Palestinian groups, it was less the survival of their community that they were fighting for (even though that did play a role for some – see interviewee 47), but

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<sup>18</sup> This was the situation at the beginning of the war. Later, many Christian militia members also fought for an independent Christian homeland (Sneifer, 2006: 129).

<sup>19</sup> Only one described the mobilisation at the time as influenced by propaganda (interviewee 59).

more the fight against perceived injustice for a new socio-political order, and for the rights of Palestinians in Lebanon and the region. To them, and according to the ideology they believed in, the fight in Lebanon at the beginning of the war was “the Revolution” against the order in place – or as a former male PSP fighter put it: “All we thought about was that we wanted to damage the regime and make the leadership social and progressive” (interviewee 51). In a revolution, the support of all members of society is needed, hence the high motivation of many women to also do their part. This finding regarding the role of perceived injustice supports previous claims in existing literature on other conflicts (Bloom, 2005: 159-160, Berko and Erez, 2007b: 504, 506, Eager, 2008: 132, 204, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008: 112-113, Alison, 2009: 131, 157, Cunningham, 2009: 568, Magadla, 2015: 395). Personal or collective, direct or indirect experiences of injustice affected men and women during the war in Lebanon in very similar ways, as they do in other conflicts (Ortega, 2012: 93, see also Burgess, 1989: 128-129, Alison, 2009: 128).

In this context, including times and locations of involvement into the analysis is particularly illuminating, as it clearly shows that women’s involvement did not remain constant throughout the different phases and locations of the war. Whilst this was not entirely due to women’s motivations, individual motivations and women’s wish to be included (or not) did play a role in the

change in numbers, and the former were at least in part influenced by external pressures due to the security context and perceived injustice. For example, this explains why the number of female fighters in the leftist and Palestinian groups (excluding the PSP) went up both at the beginning of the war (when individuals felt that they were contributing to “the Revolution”, until the security context defused considerably after the first round of the war ended with the arrival of the Syrian army in Lebanon), and in 1982, when the security context intensified again with the invasion of large parts of the country by the Israeli army. Another example would be the relatively higher numbers of women fighters in (and from) south Lebanon and the southern suburbs of Beirut (interviewees 1, 2, 24, 28). Both areas were particularly deprived at the time of the war and in the case of the South, also disproportionately subject to attacks by the Israeli army and its local allies (interviewees 1, 8, 18, 29, 30, 24, 28, 31). In the case of the Christian militias, a similar observation can be made; most women were fighting in those parts of East Beirut where the conflict started and was most intense (interviewees 7, 45, 66). Amal women, did not start fighting in military roles until the conflict escalated due to the Israeli invasion of the south (interviewees 50, 63). The female members of Amal I spoke to (both fighters and non-fighters), all cited the Israeli occupation as the reason for their involvement (interviewees 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 63). Again, this supports findings of

existing literature on other conflicts (Eager, 2008: 126, Alison, 2009: 124-125).

However, it is important to consider that the security context and experiences of injustice can only partially explain a person's decision to join an armed group. Many individuals live in a similar context, or share similar experiences, but do not become involved in political violence (Bloom, 2005: 237, Eager, 2008: 31, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008: 114). We have already looked at the role individual factors such as someone's personal background and relational networks, play in the first part of this chapter. The next two sub-sections will examine how organisational characteristics and societal factors influenced women's individual motivations.

#### 4.5 | The influence of organisational characteristics on individual motivations

As far as the influence of organisational characteristics on individual motivations is concerned, claims that a group's ideology can function as an important pull factor in the mobilisation of women looking to join an armed organisation can be found in both conflict and terrorism studies. In conflict studies in particular, it has been claimed that women are "attracted by those organisations that have programmes for childcare, health care, literacy,

social welfare and/or feminist agenda” (Reif, 1986: 162-163), as they see their interests and the interests of their families and communities best represented by these groups. Related to this argument is Margaret Gonzalez-Perez’s claim that whether or not an armed group has international (as opposed to domestic) aims has an impact on the inclusion of female fighters:

[H]igh levels of female terrorist activity appear predominantly in domestic terrorist organizations because the characteristics of these groups are more conducive to the rejection of traditional gender roles and the acceptance of active female participation, thereby encouraging the mobilization and participation of women. Conversely, international terrorist organizations that focus on external opponents do not attempt to transform the conventional behaviour patterns of the sexes within, or outside, the terrorist group or state. Accordingly, women choose to be far less active in international terrorist groups (Gonzalez-Perez, 2008: 2).

Gonzalez-Perez specifies that her argument is not that organisations with a domestic agenda are indeed more receptive to issues concerning women, but that women perceive these groups to be more open to their own aims and aspirations (Gonzalez-Perez, 2008: 1). She contends that “[t]he more opportunity for improvement that they perceive, the more likely women are to mobilize and seek higher positions within the hierarchy of the domestic terrorist group” (Gonzalez-Perez, 2008: 122).

In the case of the Lebanese civil war, the relatively high numbers of female fighters in the leftist groups, and the LCP in particular, who explicitly invoked women's rights and gender equality, seem to confirm this theory. However, women insisted to be included even in Kataeb and other Christian groups, in which the position of the party and its members on women and their role in the organisation as well as society as a whole was much more ambiguous. Another counter-example would be Amal. The female members of Amal I spoke to were highly motivated to fight for the organisation's aims and seemed to stand firmly behind its ideal of gender segregation and division of labour between the sexes – even if that meant that their opportunities in the group and wider community were restricted. Furthermore, the claim that women are more likely to join organisations that (claim to) fight for women's rights is intrinsically linked to the assumption that women prioritise women's rights and gender equality over the political cause that is at the heart of their organisation's discourse. However, we have already seen in the first part of this chapter that most of the participants in this research study believed that the majority of women (and men) joined the fight for political reasons, namely the defence of their communities and the fight against injustice.

In fact, organisational aims seem to have played a role in women's decision-making, albeit in a different way than Gonzalez-Perez claims. This could be

seen very clearly in the later stages of the civil war in Lebanon when the aims of many of the organisations involved in it changed and opportunistic goals started to supersede more idealistic aims. Existing literature has pointed out that in other conflicts, the change from a (relatively) idealistic struggle to a movement dominated by individuals looking for financial benefit or an opportunity to settle personal scores tends to discourage women from starting (or continuing) their involvement (Alison, 2009, Shekhawat, 2012: 138-139). This seems to have been the case in the Lebanese civil war as well. Several interviewees mentioned that they or their fellow combatants quit their military roles when the intra-sectarian fighting started and in many militias, the struggle over assets became a priority (interviewees 15, 19, 22, 66). The fact that the Mourabitoun, a relatively small predominantly Beirut-based organisation with many members whose participation – according to several of interviewees – was mostly motivated by economic gains (it was described as “a gang” by some) did not have any female members could be another factor supporting this argument (interviewees 15, 31).

Organisational structure also seems to have influenced women’s individual decision-making. In the case of Christian militias in particular, in the first two years of the war, female participation in combat activities took place mostly in the women’s neighbourhoods where groups of peers or whole families took up arms to defend their local area and community (interviewees 11, 16,

19, 25, 41, 44, 45, 55, 56, 57, 59, 60, 66). This facilitated women's inclusion as they were fighting alongside their friends or family members. Previous involvement of women in the respective political parties before the war seems to also have had an impact on women's individual motivations and might have played a role in attracting more women to the militia. In this context, it is telling that both the LCP and Kataeb – two parties who had had women's units or unions for a long time before the war started, were joined by female fighters whereas Amal and PSP, whose women's units were not founded until much later (interviewees 50, 53, 63), were not. Not all the women I interviewed who were fighters during the war had been involved in the women's units of their parties before joining the war. However, the very existence of these groups signalled that women had a place in the party and were part of the struggle. The same can be said about role-models; women who joined the militia and inspired others to join the fight. It is interesting in this context that role-models seem to have played a much bigger role in the leftist and Palestinian groups. Many of the interviewees from these groups mentioned the names of women such as Leila Khalid, Soha Bechara, Lola Aboud and Dalal Moughrabi, who fought with Lebanese or Palestinian groups and inspired both men and women to take up arms, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven.

## 4.6 | The influence of societal aspects on individual motivations

The norms and expectations prevailing in the society that an armed group is based, or operating in, can have a considerable impact on the group's decision-making, as we will see in the chapter on societal aspects. The same is true for individual motivations, which can also be heavily influenced by the positions of the society or community an individual comes from (Bloom, 2005: 244, Ness, 2008b: 4, Alison, 2009: 153). In the case of the prevailing societal norms and expectations that a society is shaped by, these can either produce a general atmosphere that is supportive of women joining the fight, or which disapproves of women's inclusion. I will discuss these different factors in detail in the chapter on societal aspects (as the impact societal norms and expectations had on individual motivations was largely the same they had on organisational decision-making), but will provide a brief overview here.

Lebanon in the 1960s and 1970s was a society undergoing considerable social change (Abisaab, 2010, Traboulsi, 2012). New spaces and opportunities were slowly opening up for women in public life, especially in Beirut, and to a certain degree also in other bigger cities and even some more rural areas. Female participation in public life, as part of the working force but also in political organisations and initiatives, became more

widespread and accepted (Abisaab, 2010, Traboulsi, 2012). This had an encouraging and empowering effect on many women and opened up the possibility of their later military involvement to be seen as an “extension of their involvement with public organizations such as neighborhood committees” and similar initiatives (Cunningham, 2008: 88). This effect has been described by existing research focusing on other conflict contexts where “women have participated fully in the early stages of the political resistance at all levels”, which facilitated their inclusion in the armed struggle (Bloom, 2005: 147, see also Eager, 2008: 186, Alison, 2009: 142). Several interviewees mentioned that this recent change in Lebanese society made people more receptive to the idea of women being involved in military roles and that this, in turn, encouraged women personally to join the fight (interviewees 1, 7, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 52, 54, 64, 65).

If women who have joined the fight are praised as heroes within the community, this can encourage other women to follow suit (Bloom, 2005: 159). As shown above in the section on organisational characteristics influencing individual motivations, this might be one of the reasons why the numbers of female fighters with the leftist and Palestinian militias (who had many well-known iconic female members), were considerably higher than those with the Christian organisations. A similar observation can be made with regards to the conflict in Northern Ireland where “[r]epublicanism has

promoted active images of women as ‘freedom fighters’ and female paramilitary members have been celebrated in a number of republican street murals in nationalist areas” (Alison, 2009: 142), whereas the Protestant community, which has produced very few female fighters, has not actively promoted images of women in military roles (Alison, 2009: 153). It is important in this context to bear in mind that societal attitudes to women’s involvement are neither static nor monolithic. They do change over time, and often there is considerable variation in different parts of a country and different sections of society. This is why variation in time and location needs to be borne in mind. In this context, it is telling that the number of female fighters during the Lebanese civil war was higher in the relatively open and cosmopolitan city of Beirut than it was in more conservative cities such as Saida or in the Mountains, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven. The fact that, as foregrounded above, most fighters were based in Beirut, but originally came from the south and other relatively deprived parts of the country, is also noteworthy. On the one hand, due to their precarious socio-economic position, these women had more to fight for, less to lose and more to gain (interviewee 32). On the other, living away from their extended families, who had stayed in their home regions, meant that they were subject to less societal control (interviewee 2). Evidence from other conflict contexts worldwide indicates

that class also plays a role in this context insofar as a woman's socio-economic background can have an impact on how receptive society is to her inclusion as a fighter (Reif, 1986: 151-153, Lobao, 1990: 188-189, cit. in Shayne, 1999: 86, Sajjad, 2004: 6). In the context of this research project, I could not come to a categorical conclusion in this regard. Some interviewees mentioned that women from middle class families enjoyed more freedoms because they and their families were more politically aware and believed that personal sacrifices had to be made for the sake of society's advancement (interviewee 3). Others believed that the participation of working class women was less frowned upon as they had already been working in traditionally male positions, alongside the men, on the fields or in the factories for decades (interviewees 1, 2, 7, 12, 18, 29, 30). Lastly, there is often a tendency amongst communities that have experienced prolonged and protracted conflict and who see their very existence as under threat, to allow female participation as part of a general mobilisation, in all sectors of society (Cunningham, 2003, Dearing, 2010). I will show how this played out during the Lebanese civil war in Chapter Seven.

Lebanese society was influenced by slowly changing gender norms and expectations in the 1960s and 1970s. This process was amplified by the war when security considerations trumped some socio-cultural norms. However, Lebanon remained a relatively gender-conservative country. In most areas

of life, gender expectations remained clearly defined. This was the main reason why the overall numbers of female fighters during the war in Lebanon remained relatively low. The majority of society disapproved of female inclusion in military operations. Most women, as members of this society, either agreed with this view or were discouraged to join by society's disapproval (interviewees 28, 31, 32, 45). There were, of course, exceptions. Some women were so motivated they placed less value on the wider community's approval and joined the armed struggle regardless. One interviewee, for example, claimed that "whether they [the family] accept it or not, when a young woman decides to go [to war], she will not ask her parents" (interviewee 59). Another former fighter contended that "the main issue [in deciding whether or not a woman will join] is not the community but it's her" (interviewee 23). However, society's disapproval did discourage other women who might have otherwise been interested in joining a non-state armed organisation (interviewees 23, 28, 32, 59).

## 4.7 | Conclusion

The women who joined non-state armed organisations during the Lebanese civil war did so out of their own will. Unlike in some other conflicts, forced conscription or abductions with a view to force women to join the war did

not take place. On the contrary, the women who joined were highly motivated to participate in the armed fight and participated out of their own choice. In fact, their motivation extended so far that they convinced the organisations to include them or, in the words of several of the interviewees, they “imposed themselves”. While the women came from a wide range of different backgrounds, some common characteristics can be identified. Most of the women were relatively young (in their mid-teens to mid-twenties). Many of them were previously involved in political organisations, initiatives or linked to such groups through a family member or friend who had already joined. These findings support claims made in the existing literature on female fighters in non-state armed groups. The theory that women join for personal reasons whereas men are motivated by political factors (which can be found in some terrorism studies publications), is not supported by this study. According to the findings of my research, for both men and women, political considerations were the most important motivational factor. Both men and women claimed to have made the decision to fight in order to defend their country or community and/or in order to counter perceived injustices. For some women, their rights and gender equality also played a role. However, only some of the women I spoke to mentioned this as being a motivational factor. Women decided to join both organisations that officially upheld progressive gender norms as

well as those where traditional gender expectations remained part of the party's practice and discourse. This contradicts claims in existing literature that women are more likely to join armed organisations that (claim to) fight for women's rights and gender equality. The findings of my research suggest that in this case, the fight for the militia's cause trumped feminist motivations. As to the societal context and its impact on individual motivations, overall, the women living in Lebanon at the time of the civil war were facing a relatively conservative society with clearly defined gender norms influenced by traditional ideas of men's and women's roles. This remained the case despite a slow opening (especially in Beirut and other bigger cities) in the years leading to the war – a process which was amplified by the violent conflict. However, societal barriers to women's involvement in the armed struggle remained high. Some individuals did not let this stop them from pursuing their aim to join a militia as a fighter. However, the majority of women in Lebanon refrained from joining for this reason, which explains the overall low numbers of female participation in military roles during the civil war in Lebanon.

Individual motivations explain why those women (and men) who joined the militias during the civil war did so. However, it does not help us understand why there were women fighters in some of the militias and not in others. In this chapter, I showed that women were so motivated, they insisted to be

included in the war. Their demand for inclusion was successful in some militias – such as the LCP and Kataeb, but not in others – namely the PSP and Amal (until 1978). In the next chapter, I will show that once the women insisted on their inclusion, it was organisational characteristics that caused the women to gain immediate access to fighting positions in some militias but not in others.

## Chapter 5 | Organisational characteristics

Women's insistence to be included as fighters was a crucial factor leading to female participation in combat activities during the civil war. However, whilst women were fighting in most leftist, Christian and Palestinian organisations (such as the LCP, CAO, PFLP, Fatah and Kataeb) from the beginning of the war, there were not any female fighters in the PSP, and female members of Amal only started fighting from 1978 onwards. The percentage of female fighters in the LCP, CAO and PFLP were considerably higher than in Kataeb (and later, the LF) and Amal. This variation can be explained by organisational characteristics and varying evaluations the different groups made of the security context. The role of the security context will be examined in the following chapter. In this chapter, I will analyse the extent to which a group's ideology (Section One), internal structure and dynamics (Section Two), external relations (Section Three), aims (Section Four), and age and size (Section Five) were decisive in the decision-making on whether or not to include female fighters. I will show that organisational gender ideology and group structure and internal dynamics played a major role in the militias' decision-making. Other organisational characteristics, such as a group's aims, age, size and external

relations, only have limited explanatory power.

The role of organisational characteristics in the decision-making on female participation in combat features in most analyses of female inclusion in non-state armed groups. The role of ideology in particular is often discussed (Cunningham, 2003, Ness, 2005, Cunningham, 2010). Some publications on female participation briefly address other organisational factors. A number of scholars take a more analytical approach to the issue and systematically discuss the explanatory capacity of different organisational factors (including Crenshaw, 1985, Crenshaw, 1987, Shapiro, 2007, Asal and Rethemeyer, 2008, Jackson, 2009, Dearing, 2010, Dalton and Asal, 2011, Asal, Ackermann and Rethemeyer, 2012, Davis, 2013, 2017).

Traditionally, two competing approaches in studies of non-state political violence co-exist, with both trying to explain non-state armed organisations' decision-making and behaviour. According to the first, non-state armed groups are strategic actors whose actions are guided by informed, directed and purposeful actions, whereas the second sees insurgents and terrorists as constrained by organisational characteristics, which impede the group's strategic room to manoeuvre (Crenshaw, 1987). Thus, while according to the first explanation, the groups in question are active, in control, and able, in the view of the second approach, they are constrained and restricted by the organisation's own characteristics. I will show in this chapter that during the

civil war in Lebanon, organisational characteristics did indeed play a considerable role in the decision-making of individual groups. A pertinent example of this is the internal struggles over gender ideology as stipulated in gender norms and expectations. These internal struggles over the inclusion of female fighters took place in many of the militias involved in Lebanon during the civil war. In the case of the LCP and, to a lesser extent, the PFLP, those in favour of female participation were in the majority and managed to override the (very) few voices expressing disagreement. In Kataeb and Fatah, on the other hand, women's participation was rendered possible due to the divided stand of their leadership which created a window of opportunity for women to participate. Thus, referring to Crenshaw's model again, to argue that the militias involved in the civil war did not have any strategic room to manoeuvre would be too far-fetched. However, organisational constraints did play a significant role during the Lebanese civil war. The most important factors in this context were organisational gender ideology and internal dynamics and discord.

In this context, it is worth reiterating that, when studying non-state armed organisations, it is crucial not to view these groups as static entities. An organisation's ideology, aims, size, external relations and internal structure and functioning can change over time – either as a result of an informed decision by the group's members or of external pressure beyond the control

of the organisation (Jackson, 2009: 215). Moreover, different organisational factors can impact and influence each other (Crenshaw, 1985: 483, Crenshaw, 1987: 21, Oots, 1989: 149, Jackson, 2009: 215, Dalton and Asal, 2011: 808). Moreover, non-state armed groups are not monolithic organisations either. In most cases, various and sometimes conflicting views exist in these groups. I will look at this in more detail in Section Two of this chapter, after discussing the role of ideology.

## 5.1 | Ideology

The majority of publications that try to explain female involvement in combat activities stress the salience of ideology. According to this view, left-wing and secular groups are generally more open to female combatants whereas right-wing, religious or conservative groups tend to be more reluctant to allow female participation in combat (see, for example, Cunningham, 2003, Ness, 2008 and Dalton and Asal, 2011). However, not everyone I spoke to throughout the course of my research thought ideology was decisive. Some specifically stated that ideology was either not very important or not the most important factor for many fighters (interviewees 14, 15), while others thought that, due to the perceived threat to their respective groups and the communities they did (claim to) fight for, many

organisations “took anyone who came” (interviewee 53, see also interviewees 52, 54). These claims will be looked at in more detail in the chapters on the role of the security context and societal factors. While some contended that ideology was not a major factor, many interviewees claimed that the party’s official ideology was essential in deciding whether women were included as fighters in the militia (interviewees 3, 4, 12, 18, 20, 21, 22, 31, 42, 51, 65, 67, 68, 69). Moreover, the fact that the highest numbers of female fighters could be found in the leftist LCP (and OAC as well as PFLP) seems to support this line of argument. However, it does not explain the fact that in the PSP, for example, (which, according to its name and strategic alliance, was a leftist group as well), had no official female fighters.

Moreover, despite the prevalence of the claim that left-wing and secular groups tend to be more accepting of female combatants (whereas right-wing, religious and conservative groups are not), a clear definition of what a left-wing, right-wing, religious or conservative organisation is lacks in most studies. In fact, this might explain why Gonzalez-Perez (2008), in her comparison of different non-state armed groups, comes to the conclusion that because many left-wing non-state armed groups recruited no or very few female members, organisational ideology (in the broader sense of the term) in itself is not sufficient to explain female involvement in combat (Gonzalez-Perez, 2008: 1-2). Apart from the fact that it is hardly ever just one

factor that leads to a certain outcome in social phenomena, the problem also lies in the conceptual vagueness of what is meant by terms such as 'right-wing' or 'left-wing'. Whether or not a group can be considered to be right-wing, left-wing, secular or religious is often not entirely agreed upon by all<sup>20</sup> and it does not always tell us what the group's position on gender norms is, as a group's general ideology is not always automatically linked to their position on gender norms.

Instead of referring to the rather broad terms of right-wing, left-wing or conservative organisations, an alternative might thus be to focus on a group's position on gender norms and relations. According to this approach, it is not just ideology in general, but more specifically the gender images and norms a group upholds (regardless of other parts of their ideology), which define the roles an organisation deems acceptable for their female members.

In this vein, this chapter argues that, in the case of most of the militias operating during the Lebanese civil war, the groups' gender ideology was one of the key factors (albeit not the only one) explaining whether or not

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<sup>20</sup> In the case of the militias involved in the Lebanese civil war, for example, leftist parties such as LCP, COA were described as 'totalitarian parties' by some of their opponents (see interviewee 60), whereas for their followers, they were 'fighting for freedom and justice' (interviewee 1). Similarly, the Christian-dominated Kataeb party was described as an 'extreme right', even 'fascist' party by some of its opponents (interviewees 14, 18), whereas its members would describe it as 'centre-right', 'traditional', 'progressive' or 'social-democrat' (interviewees 16, 19, 41).

the organisation decided to include female fighters.

After women started insisting on their inclusion in combat roles, it was mostly leftist groups such as the LCP, the OAC and the PFLP which included them – unsurprisingly, because in their case, there were no ideological barriers; the left-wing parties' gender ideology was characterised by a belief in gender equality (interviewees 8, 14, 18, 22, 24, 27, 29, 31, 67). Their aim was to “promote a new society” (interviewee 18), in which female participation was “an accepted idea” (“*une idée admise*”, interviewee 18). The left was the most radical in their demands for gender equality at the time (interviewees 15, 27, 29, 31). The LCP, in particular, had a “pioneering role in leading women’s rights even before the civil war” (interviewee 27, see also interviewee 29, 31). During the war, the LCP made a “point of including them [the women], to reflect a progressive image” (interviewee 7). One former female fighter and military commander with the LCP described her former party’s position on the inclusion of women as follows:

They [the women] are half of society, so they should participate in everything. They [the party] tried in the Communist Party to encourage the women to study, to go and attend universities, to help the men more, to have political, economic and social knowledge. That helped them [the women] to have a role and to rise up in society. They [the party] believe in gender equality, to have an equal role; this is the base [of the party’s ideology] (interviewee 29).

This position is very similar to the one of the PFLP, as described by a former male PFLP fighter:

Our [the PFLP's] ideology was Marxist-Leninist, so the role of women was equal to that of men. She was a main constituent of the political movement. There was no discrimination between women and men... For us as Communists, as Marxists, a woman is not a woman, a man is not a man, but an individual, a productive part of society... Distinguishing between men and women is a neo-liberal idea that made women a commodity. They are the same and suffer from the same problems in society... The rise of the women's movement in the West started to see women as different; this is not true, men and women are the same. Many societies differentiate between men and women but they suffer from the same problems... There was no split between genders. [The inclusion of women] was something we did not plan for, it was part of our ideology (interviewee 8).

Many interviewees saw the leftist parties' secular identity as an important factor in this context. Religion did not play a role in these parties – at least not officially,<sup>21</sup> and this reduced some of the barriers women encountered in other parties which were influenced more by religious and/or right-wing thinking, such as the Kataeb, Hezbollah, Amal or Fatah (interviewees 12, 18, 29, 31, 42, 51).

While the fight for gender equality and women's rights was, at least in

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<sup>21</sup> For example, one former male LCP fighter (and commander) I interviewed claimed that to this day he had friends he fought with during the war whose religion he did not know, as they never asked and it was “not part of [the] vocabulary” (interviewee 1).

theory, central for the ideology of leftist parties such as the LCP, OAC, PFLP or DFLP, the situation was more ambiguous in the case of those groups which were both influenced by secular and religious thinking, such as the Christian parties (notably Kataeb), some Palestinian groups (such as Fatah), and Amal. Comparing the PFLP and Fatah, most interviewees stated that Fatah had fewer female fighters and that this was due to Fatah being more influenced by religious thinking than the PFLP or DFLP (interviewees 3, 13, 18, 21, 24 27, 52, 61, 64, 67, 68, 69). One interviewee, a former (male) fighter with the Fatah Student Brigades, described the Fatah ideology at the time as a “theoretical and intellectual syncretism” of Maoist, Marxist, social-democrat, Arab Nationalist and Islamist influences (interviewee 18), which had an influence on how the role of women within the party was conceived. Despite the fact that Fatah and Kataeb were opposing each other during the war, Kataeb’s gender ideology was in fact quite similar to the one of Fatah. It was influenced by religious thinking (interviewees 2, 12, 16, 18), as well as a number of other ideological factors, which were often so closely intertwined it was difficult to separate. This is illustrated by this statement of a former high-ranking (male) member of Kataeb (and later the LF):

We were defending Lebanon. I mixed the Christian Lebanon with the occidental Lebanon with the French. Were we fighting for the church? At some point perhaps yes, but not

generally. 'The cause' was a slightly vague idea. I mixed everything, I think it was a bit the same for many others [within Kataeb and the Lebanese Forces] as well (interviewee 2).

Another former fighter I interviewed (who used to be a member of the Fatah Student Brigades) shared this viewpoint and described the Kataeb's party discourse as extremely contradictory, presenting themselves as the "avant-garde of modernity" on the one hand, whilst defending highly conservative (gender) values on the other (interviewee 18).

To sum up, those parties in which a strong leftist influence dominated had the highest numbers of female fighters, because women's inclusion was in line with the party's gender ideology. On an ideological level, there was no reason for these organisations not to include the women once they had demanded to be included. Those groups where the organisation's gender ideology was more ambiguous (as was the case with Kataeb and Fatah) deployed some female fighters (because of the women's insistence to be included), albeit at a lower percentage (as discussed in Chapter Four).

While Kataeb, the LF and Fatah were influenced by both gender-progressive and gender-conservative thinking, they were considerably less gender-conservative than Amal (interviewee 1). Amal was influenced by both secular and Islamist thinking but regardless of the party's ideology, the group also represented one of the most gender-conservative communities in the

country (interviewees 1, 4). I will look at this in more detail in the chapter on societal factors. The women of Amal did not actively participate in the inner-Arab fighting during the Lebanese civil war. This ban was linked to the party's gender ideology which was dominated by the party's interpretation of Islamic rules on gender roles and relations. When I asked him why women did not participate in the fighting between different Lebanese and Palestinian groups during the civil war, one former (male) Amal fighter explained the ban referring to Islam:

Because in Islam, for girls it is forbidden to fight. For women in Islam, there is no need to fight as long as men fight [...] Because in the bylaws of Amal, women don't fight [...] In Amal as an Islamic organisation, they have to follow Islamic guidelines. So for the fighters, they cannot overcome Islamic things [...] The fighter has to pray, must not torture or kill captures [...] There are military instructions but they are respecting Islamic rules [...] They were all committed to the rules, because if they break them, they will be punished by an Amal court [...] They [the fighters] were not allowed to mix [with the opposite gender], it was not appropriate. Imagine a group of 20, 30 guy and a lady in front of them – it's not possible. There is a rule in Islam, if men are there, the woman is not allowed to fight (interviewee 58).

Women were eventually allowed to participate in the fight against Israel (after 1978), as Amal's spiritual leader Musa Sadr advocated resistance against Israel by all possible means (interviewees 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 50, 63). As I will show in the chapter on the security context, when faced

with an external invader considered “the absolute Evil” (interviewees 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 50, 58, 63), the perceived security threat trumped conventional gender norms. Amal’s fight against Israel was presented by the militia as “Islamic and patriotic” (interviewee 33). Women’s participation was framed as a religious right, “an honour” that cannot be taken away from them (interviewee 50).

Similar to Amal, the PSP had a “traditional vision for women” (interviewee 62). During the war, the PSP had no officially endorsed female fighters. This might seem surprising at first, as officially and by name the PSP – the “Progressive Socialist Party” – stood for progress and socialism. Looking more closely however, the PSP reveals itself as a pertinent example of how a party’s official party ideology is not necessarily linked to its de-facto gender policies. As one interviewee, a researcher, put it: “You can be socialist and progressive, but it depends on the mentality (whether or not you include female combatants)” (interviewee 7). In the case of the PSP, it was described by some as “more Druze than Socialist” (interviewee 1), and indeed, the sectarian character of the party trumped its officially adopted ideology. The Druze are often described as one of the most gender-conservative communities in Lebanon (interviewees 7, 9, 10), which is the main reason why women were not included as fighters in the PSP. Most interviewees believed that the party’s stance on female fighters was due to the reluctance

of wide parts of the community to allow women to fight in the war, despite their espoused commitment to a left-wing ideology (see, for example, interviewee 43). I will explore this further in Chapter Seven.

If a party's official ideology does not always match the gender policy the organisation implements, a similar discrepancy can, sometimes, be observed "between the professed ideology of a group and the actual beliefs of individual members" (Drake, 1998: 16). In other words, organisations tend to be more complex than they sometimes seem. They rarely constitute monolithic blocs and often change over time, which is why it is important to not just analyse the role of a group's ideology but also its internal structure, dynamics and discord. I will now look at this in the next section.

## 5.2 | Internal structure, dynamics and discord

Alongside a group's gender ideology, internal group structure, dynamics and discord can also impact organisational decision-making. Gaining access to data about non-state armed groups in general can be difficult, and collecting data on their internal structure and functioning tends to be particularly challenging (Silke 2004, cit. in Jackson, 2009: 213). However, despite these difficulties, the retrieval of such data is crucial, as focusing on these enables us to view armed organisations as the complex, multi-layered, often-

changing organisms they tend to be, rather than treating them as static, monolithic and homogeneous units.

This importance of considering not just a group's ideology, but also internal processes between different members of an organisation, has been stressed in the existing literature. Crenshaw, for example, contends that inner-organisational processes need to be taken into account (1987). She maintains that "(o)rganizational activity will vary according to internal pressures and external competitiveness" (Crenshaw, 1987: 24).<sup>22</sup> In this context, McCormick stresses the importance of looking beyond official political objectives or ideologies:

In contrast to the rational choice model, which argues that terrorism [or political violence in general] represents a calculated and instrumental attempt to achieve an external set of political objectives, the organizational model suggests that much of what terrorists do on the outside can only be understood by looking inside the group itself. A terrorist organization is not a black box but a living system [...] (McCormick, 2003: 486).

Thus, whilst, in public, political (and partly also in academic) discourses on armed political actors, it is often assumed that the actions of non-state armed groups are driven by their ideology, values and aims, proponents of

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<sup>22</sup> I will focus on inner-organisational aspects in this section. The role external relations play will be discussed in the following section.

the organisational process approach maintain that it is also more mundane aspects that can explain the decision-making and behaviour of non-state armed groups:

Although groups take action to advance their goals, it is also true that they take actions for reasons that might be viewed as 'entirely their own': to address internal organizational needs that may or may not directly relate to the ideological or other agenda the group supposedly exists to pursue" (Crenshaw 2001, cit. in Jackson, 2009: 227).

In the case of the militias operating during the Lebanese civil war, group structure, internal dynamics and discord played a role in facilitating the inclusion of female fighters.

Firstly, as far as group structure is concerned, the very nature of the militias operating during the war played a central role. While societal norms and expectations were never completely overcome, for many of its members, the militias became their new community. Looking back on her involvement with the LCP during the war, one of the former female fighters I spoke to described this as follows:

In the war, communities change. Before the war, my community was my village, my region. In [the] war, my community became the party. If I think about who you could speak to [for the purpose of your research project], they are all from the Communist Party. This helps fundamentalism in a

way, because you don't know others, you don't see others [outside of your party] (interviewee 31, see also Sneifer, 2006: 98, 123).

This phenomenon was first described in the literature on foreign policy as 'groupthink', before the concept was subsequently applied to non-state armed groups, too (Drake, 1998: 169). Often, as a response to growing external pressure, many groups gradually distance themselves from other societal subgroups to the point where, in extreme cases, most links to mainstream society are severed. In a lesser form, this distancing from mainstream society takes place at a beliefs and attitudinal level, with the group's members "constructing images that are increasingly remote from both their 'dominant' culture and their own subculture" (Della Porta, 1992: 19, cit. in McCormick, 2003: 487). As a result, interpersonal bonds within the group are strengthened (McCormick, 2003: 490), and the importance of group solidarity augments (McCormick, 2003: 489). Groupthink can lead to growing homogenisation, where internal dissent is suppressed and the group's decision-making is homogenised (McCormick, 2003: 489). A second possible effect of groupthink on a clandestine group's decision-making is a tendency towards action bias and risk-taking (Crenshaw, 1985, Drake, 1998, McCormick, 2003, Jackson, 2009). In practice, this means that group members are more likely to "push to act rather than wait or reflect on

individual decisions” (Jackson, 2009: 228). In the context of including female militia members, this can play an important role in overcoming societal barriers, such as the taboo to employ women in combat roles. Indeed, some interviewees described the militias as extremely self-dependent organisations, which were unfazed by external evaluations of their actions (interviewees 14, 23, 28, 48, 50).

As far as the internal structure of the militias is concerned, previous research shows that “organizational structure affects a group’s violent output” (Heger et al., n.d.: 763). In the case of the militias operating during the war in Lebanon, it is telling that nearly all of the organisations which employed female combatants had had a long tradition of engaging women in separate women’s units. This gave women a platform to organise and develop political confidence, and it helped to normalise women’s presence and participation in political activities organised by the party.

In 1920, members of the Lebanese left founded the Lebanese Women Union (Stephan, 2014). Women of the left were also involved in trade union activism and workers’ protests (interviewee 7, see also Abisaab 2010, Traboulsi, 2012), at times spearheading the strikes and demonstrations. Their activism reached its peak in the 1960s and 1970s (Abisaab, 2010, Traboulsi, 2012). Several interviewees stressed the importance of women’s involvement in these pre-war groups with regards to their later involvement

in the militias of the LCP and other leftist groups, which included the highest percentage of female fighters during the war (interviewees 6, 27, 31, 32).

The second-oldest Lebanese women's group was founded in 1947 by Christian women (Stephan, 2014). On the party level, a women's unit was founded within Kataeb in the 1940s, which facilitated women's involvement during the war (interviewee 2, 11, 41, 44, 57). In the case of the Palestinian militias, the first women's groups in Palestine were established in the 1920s (Sayigh, 1993). Thus, despite the fact that the PLO's General Union of Palestinian Women was not founded until 1965, there was a long tradition of Palestinian women being involved in political activism, dating back to the 1920s (Sayigh, 1993).

The PSP and Amal on the other hand, both of whom did not include any female fighters at the beginning of the war did not have separate women's units until the 1970s (interviewees 51, 52, 53, 58, 67). Despite this, both in Amal and the PSP, women had had a role in the party (interviewees 7, 9, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 58, 63). However, the relatively late foundation of a separate women's unit provided the women of the PSP and Amal with a lot less time to organise, gain political experience and get their voices heard.

I will discuss the role of women in the political parties in more detail in the chapter on societal factors (as women's presence in the parties had a similar

effect both on the organisations as well as on the wider society). For now, it suffices to bear in mind the link between the existence of separate women's groups or unions before the war and the inclusion of female fighters during the conflict.

In the case of the Christian militias in general, and Kataeb in particular, another structural factor facilitated the inclusion of female fighters; namely, the lack of organised combat units at the beginning of the war. In this context, it is telling that it was during the first round of the war, when the groups fighting on behalf of Kataeb mostly consisted of loosely organised neighbourhood collectives, that the percentage of female fighters in the organisation was the highest. The lack of organisation and formalisation of the militias, which was due to the security context, opened a window of opportunity for women to participate in the war in non-traditional roles. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter Six.

With regards to internal group dynamics and discord, several scholars working on political violence point to the dynamics between leaders and ordinary members (Crenshaw, 1987, Oots, 1989, Drake, 1998, Shapiro, 2013). Often, differences arise because many lower-ranking members "join an organization for reasons other than ideological commitment" (Crenshaw, 1987: 15), whereas "it can be assumed that the original leadership of a group will be made up of ideologically committed actors" (Oots, 1989: 141; see also

Crenshaw, 1987: 21). Indeed, this factor was stressed by several interviewees (interviewees 12, 14, 15; see also Bechara, 2003: 84). At the same time, the leadership of many non-state armed organisations does not constitute one united front either (Oots, 1989: 142, Shapiro, 2007: 58). Differences between and amongst the leadership and regular members can lead to considerable “management challenges” and present the leadership with the difficulty of reconciling conflicting views and opinions (Shapiro and Siegel, 2012: 47). In this context, it is essential to bear in mind that the relations between leaders and lower-ranking members of a violent group are highly dynamic and subject to change. External pressure, for example, can lead to previous positions of the group being revisited and possibly adapted (Crenshaw, 1987: 22).

In the case of the organisations fighting in the civil war in Lebanon, there was some disagreement within most of the militias on the question of whether female fighters should be included in combat roles. The least opposition could be found in the groups on the far left – such as the LCP, CAO and PFLP, where both the leadership and the majority of the regular fighters and other members of the groups agreed with the participation of women in combat roles and, overall, treated women as equals (interviewees 1, 6, 13, 14, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 27, 30, 54). However, this does not mean that there was no debate or that women did not face any difficulties

(interviewees 14, 31, 62). Some interviewees recounted how women tended to be given easier tasks than men and that men felt protective of them (interviewees 1, 8, 9, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 48, 49, 57, 59, 60, 69). One former female LCP fighter believed that it was the men's socialisation in a relatively gender-conservative society, which made it harder at times for them to overcome traditional patterns of behaviour:

In the party, it was ok. But the men are also from this society, so sometimes they forget [to fully include the women]. They were very nice to women but sometimes ... they forget and are very sorry and apologise [*she laughs*]. If you believe in something, you cannot live directly like that, as you thought [about it in theory] (interviewee 31).

However, even where full implementation of gender equality was not achieved, in principle, women's participation was accepted in leftist organisations such as the LCP, CAO and PFLP. Thus, it is not surprising that the percentage of female fighters was the highest in these leftist groups.

The cases of Kataeb and Fatah, on the other hand, illustrate that when the leadership was divided on the inclusion of female fighters, the lack of unity regarding female participation helped facilitate the involvement of women in combat, especially when the group was facing extreme external pressure. In Kataeb, for example, on the level of leaders, Pierre Gemayel, the founder of the Kataeb party, fundamentally opposed the inclusion of female fighters.

One former female Kataeb fighter recalls:

As far as mentalities were concerned, it was a very traditional party. Pierre Gemayel saw me two or three times from afar in a training camp, and he asked, 'is this a girl or a boy?!' It disturbed him. He was very happy when we changed that [and women's contribution started to mostly shift towards non-combat roles] – he called me three times [to express his joy and approval]! The president of the women's office of Kataeb was also very reluctant vis-à-vis our role as combatants. One time, during a meeting, she told me, 'you are not the kind of female model that we want to promote to future generations' (interviewee 19).

While Gemayel's reluctance was mirrored by other leaders and ordinary members of Kataeb (and later the Lebanese Forces) (interviewees 7, 16, 19, 44, see also Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 78), other party members such as William Hawi (the leader of the Kataeb militia at the beginning of the war) were in favour of the inclusion of women in military roles (interviewees 2, 16, 41, 55, 56, see also Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 9). The party and its militia were divided in their position on the issue of female fighters (interviewees 16, 19, 57, 59). When the war broke out and women insisted to be included, this lack of unity prevented the party from stopping the inclusion of women fighters (interviewee 19).

The situation was similar in those groups on the left that were not only influenced by communist and socialist ideas, but also by right-wing and

Islamist thinking (such as Fatah and later Amal). For example, one former fighter with the Student Brigades of Fatah told me of heated discussions he used to have with other members of the group on the inclusion of female fighters, because he feared that including women in combat roles would alienate more traditional members of their group and the wider community (interviewee 20). However, other Fatah members were in favour of including women (interviewee 14, 27, 52, 61, 64), and this lack of a united stand on the issue created a window of opportunity for those women wishing to join. Lastly, when most of the leadership is united in its opposition to the inclusion of female fighters – as it was the case with the PSP and Amal (before their change of position after the invasion of Israel), it is highly unlikely that female fighters will be employed. This is the case even if a proportion of the regular fighters would not object to the inclusion of women in combat roles – as it was the case in the PSP, for example (interviewees 9, 51). The case of the PSP shows that those women, who are so motivated to participate in combat that they are unwilling to accept their exclusion by the militia leadership, might instead resort to getting training outside of the group and form their own separate combat units, as was the case in Lebanon during the war (interviewees 10, 20).

### 5.3 | External influence and support

Of all organisational factors, group gender ideology and internal structure, dynamics and discord played the most important role in decision-making on whether or not to include female fighters in the organisations examined in this study. External relations and influences were the second most important factor. They played a particularly important role in the Lebanese leftist groups, such as the LCP and CAO, but excluding the PSP where, as we have seen above, the group's de facto gender ideology and internal structure and dynamics trumped other factors. Both LCP and CAO were heavily influenced, and indeed inspired, by the role of women in the Palestinian revolution. In the case of the Christian groups in general, and Kataeb in particular, external influence also played a role – though to a lesser degree than in the case of the Lebanese leftist groups.

The presence of Palestinian armed militias on Lebanese soil was one of the triggering events of the Lebanese civil war (Traboulsi, 2012). As highlighted in Chapter Four, the fight for Palestinians' rights continued to be a key motivational factor for LNM militias during the war. On the organisational level, all Lebanese leftist parties maintained close external relations with Palestinian organisations. Particularly after the PLO's expulsion from Jordan in 1970, when Lebanon became the new base for the Palestinian leadership,

most Palestinian parties also had a Lebanese branch (interviewee 8). Most Arab Nationalist parties also had a presence both in the majority of all Arab countries and Lebanon. The individual branches of this network of political parties often cooperated closely across national borders (interviewees 1, 8, 21). In the area of military training, cooperation between Lebanese and Palestinian organisations was prominent. Most leftist groups received training, money and weapons from Palestinian groups (interviewees 1, 18, 22, 24, 32), and the Palestinian revolution was idealised and revered by many Lebanese leftist organisations (interviewees 18, 22).

Alongside with this cooperation on the organisational level, many individual members of the Lebanese leftist groups operating during the civil war were also heavily influenced by the Palestinian struggle for an independent homeland (interviewees 18, 22, 27). This included militia members, like the former fighter with the LCP with whom I spoke, who recounted how as a teenager, he saw a Palestinian child in Beirut shooting at an Israeli aeroplane. He stressed how witnessing this scene had a strong impact on him and encouraged him to also join the war (interviewee 23). Three other former fighters I interviewed also stated a major source of inspiration for their fight was the Palestinian resistance (interviewees 18, 22, 31).

When the Lebanese civil war broke out in 1975, the Palestinian revolution had been ongoing for decades. Palestinian women had been involved in the

fight for an independent Palestinian homeland since the 1960s, especially in the more leftist-oriented groups (Peteet, 1991, Sayigh, 1993, Traboulsi, 2012). Whilst women's involvement in combat activities was not on a par with men's participation, their role had become increasingly public (Peteet, 1991, Sayigh, 1993, Traboulsi, 2012). The 1960s and 1970s in particular saw a number of highly mediatised attacks in which Palestinian women played a central role (Peteet, 1991, Sayigh, 1993, Traboulsi, 2012). The importance of role-models in encouraging women to join the fight has been stressed in previous literature (Alison, 2009, Dearing, 2010). Indeed, many interviewees stressed how they or their female comrades were inspired by the role of women in the Palestinian revolution (interviewees 7, 8, 14, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24, 27, 31, 32, 46, 48). Several interviewees mentioned the names of famous Palestinian female fighters, such as Leila Khaled, Dalal Mughrabi and Fatima Bernawi, as inspirations to join the fight. Leila Khalid, in particular, became extremely popular in the late 1960s and 1970s after her role in high-profile aeroplane hijackings (Peteet, 1991, Sayigh, 1993, Traboulsi, 2012). The potential influence of these women on Lebanese militants was particularly high considering that both Leila Khaled and Dalal Mughrabi had grown up in Lebanon as Palestinian refugees (Peteet, 1991, Sayigh, 1993, Traboulsi, 2012). One former female fighter with the LCP, who was a military commander during the war, recounted how as children, they used to climb

pine trees in their village to watch Palestinian women being trained in the backyard of one of the houses. As a teenager of 13 or 14 years of age, this had a profound impact on her and she remembered how she imagined herself to be a Palestinian woman (interviewee 31). Palestinian women were considered by many former leftist militants to be particularly determined and to have a clear vision of what they were fighting for (interviewees 27, 28).

Not all interviewees thought the Palestinian influence was essential in inspiring and encouraging Lebanese leftist militias to also include female fighters (7, 14, 17, 21, 31, 52). Some saw the Palestinian revolution as one of many factors, such as, for example, the recent change in social values (interviewee 6). Others thought that the very visible presence of women in many Palestinian groups amplified a development within Lebanese political parties that had already started much earlier (interviewee 31, see also interviewee 8). Two interviewees were of the opinion that it was, in fact, Lebanese women who were more liberated and involved than their Palestinian counterparts (interviewees 14, 21). However, the vast majority of interview partners were convinced that the role Palestinian women played in the fight for a free Palestine played a considerable role in encouraging and facilitating the participation of Lebanese women in the Lebanese civil war.

The struggle for Palestine was, of course, not the only source of inspiration for many Lebanese leftists at that time. The Lebanese civil war took place in the 1970s and 80s, when anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements were still relatively strong. Several interviewees named the states of Russia, China and Cuba, resistance movements in Vietnam and Latin America, and communist groups in Europe as inspirations (interviewee 1, 18, 31, 32). Russia, China and Cuba all supported the Palestinian revolution and provided training to both male and female Palestinian (and later, also Lebanese) fighters (interviewees 1, 32). This led one interviewee to claim that as a Lebanese female militia member, she did not learn from the Palestinians but “from those who taught the Palestinians – the Soviets” (interviewee 32).

As far as the Christian-dominated LFr is concerned, external relations and influence played a less prominent role in influencing the group’s decision-making on the inclusion of female fighters. The Christian groups did not take the Palestinian revolution as an example to strive towards. As one former female fighter put it, “we didn’t support the Palestinians, we didn’t want to follow anything that came from them... We didn’t take into consideration what they did at all. We wanted to forget about them” (interviewee 11, see also interviewee 19). In fact, one former LFs member, who trained to be an officer, said she was not aware of what exactly Leila Khaled’s role had been until she read about it years after the end of the civil war in the early 2010s

(interviewee 16). When former members of the Christian militias said they were influenced or inspired by external groups (they claimed this to be the case a lot less often than their leftist counterparts did), they either spoke of examples from the French context – such as Jeanne d’Arc (interviewee 45) (which is not surprising given the traditional Francophilia of many Lebanese Christians), or the 1968 movement for social change and women’s rights (Eggert, forthcoming, 2018). “The Christians were very influenced by what was happening in the West, in terms of socio-cultural structures and thoughts. They thought it was part of modernity,” one former fighter and military commander with Kataeb and the Lebanese Forces explained (interviewee 19). However, these two influences (examples from French history or the 1968 women’s movement) were not exclusive to former Christian militia members, as they were put forward by both former members of the Christian and leftist militias – especially by those with an intellectual background and / or living in Beirut (interviewees 7, 12, 18, 19, 22, 23, 65). As one former male CAO commander put it, in the first half of the 1970s, “the mood was an explosion of freedom and very liberal relations between men and women [...] women were breaking many societal rules [...] even in the PSP, that was the word” (interviewee 65). While Lebanese militias were trained and joined by Palestinian fighters, the Christian militias were also joined by right-wing militants from France and Italy who came to

fight with Kataeb, for example (interviewees 2, 18). However, these were much lower in numbers and, except for Jocelyne Khoueiry, the most prominent female Christian militia fighter during the war, there were no influential female figures that could have served as role-models for women with the Christian militias as was the case with the Palestinian organisations inspiring Lebanese women. Another external actor with strong relations to the Christian militias was the state of Israel which trained, equipped and funded the Christian organisations (Hirst, 2011, Traboulsi, 2012). Even though the Israeli army is now known for its obligatory military service for both men and women and the fact that women were involved in combat roles in 1948/49, women were barred from assuming combat roles after the 1948 war (Lomsky-Feder and Sasson-Levy, 2017). The fact that the overall numbers of female fighters in Kataeb was much lower than the LCP figures is thus not surprising.

## 5.4 | Age and size

As discussed above, most publications on female political violence attempt to explain women's inclusion in non-state armed organisations by referring to ideology. A lot less attention is paid to group age and size. One notable exception is a study by Dalton and Asal (2011), in which the authors test

possible group- and country-related reasons for women's participation in non-state military activities. Dalton and Asal frame the inclusion of female combatants by a group which previously did not allow women to participate in the fighting as *organisation change*, thus drawing on a term used in organisational theory and behaviour studies and applying it to research on armed political groups. They argue that “[o]rganization change, defined as 'shifts in an organization’s activity sets or strategic domain,' may be influenced by organizational factors such as organizational size” or age (Dalton and Asal, 2011: 807). Using a data set of 395 non-state armed organisations, Dalton and Asal run a logistic regression including 12 variables and come to the conclusion that “larger organizations are more likely to recruit and deploy women” (Dalton and Asal, 2011: 810). They hypothesise this may be due to the greater need for a higher number of new recruits or an indicator for larger organisation's increased capability for organisational change, as claimed in the organisational theory research drawn upon by the authors.

The findings of this thesis do not support Dalton and Asal’s claim, as the organisations deploying female fighters in the Lebanese civil war included both big and small organisations.<sup>23</sup> With 3000 to 6000 fighters, the LCP was

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<sup>23</sup> Most of the militias operating in Lebanon at the time of the war were, as one interviewee called it, “politico-military organisations” (interviewee 18), which consisted of

one of the biggest militias in terms of the numbers of fighters they commanded, including the highest percentage of female fighters (interviewees 1, 2, 7).<sup>24</sup> It was also one of the biggest parties at the beginning of the war (interviewees 1, 2, 7, 22, 29, 30, 32, Badran, 2008). The CAO was one of the smallest organisations and had considerably fewer fighters (no more than a few hundred in fact), but employed a similar percentage of female fighters. This contradicts Dalton's and Asal's hypothesis, according to which one would expect the LCP to have proportionally more female fighters than the CAO. With several thousand fighters at the beginning of the war, Fatah was also one of the biggest organisations, with the PFLP as one of the smaller ones (it had only a few hundred professional fighters when the war started) (interviewees 67, 68 69, Badran, 2008). According to Dalton and Asal's findings, one would expect Fatah to have a higher percentage of female fighters than the PFLP, yet the percentage was actually higher in the (relatively) small PFLP – this contradicts Dalton's and Asal's theory. The PSP contained very few fighters at the beginning of the war, and many more at a later stage, yet women were barred from combat roles regardless of the organisation's respective size. Dalton and Asal's theory also does not explain

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both a military and a political wing. Numbers for both the general membership of the political party as well as their military wings are given further down in this chapter.

<sup>24</sup> For a detailed overview of how many male and female fighters each organisation included, see the section on numbers in Chapter One.

why the percentage of female fighters in the relatively big Kataeb (4000 to 6000 fighters, and even more party members, at the beginning of the war) was considerably lower than in the LCP (interviewees 1, 2, 7, 55, 57, Badran, 2008). The only organisation where one could suspect that size played a role is Amal, which was a relatively small organisation when it was first founded in 1976 and later continued to grow into one of the war's biggest politico-military organisations. Amal started to deploy female fighters as it grew older and bigger. However, in this case, it seems that the employment of female fighters was mostly linked to security-related concerns, as I will show in the next chapter on the role of the security context.

Dalton and Asal also outline claims rooted in organisational theory and behavioural sciences, according to which an organisation's age is an indicator for its ability and willingness to change and adopt new strategies. The idea behind this is that “young organizations are burdened with the 'liability of newness'”, and that older organisations have a strategic advantage due to their “organizational reliability, accountability and capability in terms of the development of internal structure and personnel, resource obtention, and performance through processes of organizational learning” (Dalton and Asal, 2011: 808). Dalton and Asal thus come to the conclusion that “[t]he factor having by far the largest impact [...] is the age of terrorist groups” (2011: 810).

As is the case with group size, organisational age, too, has only limited explanatory capacity with regards to the inclusion of female fighters during the civil war in Lebanon. The LCP was founded in 1924, Kataeb in 1936 and PSP in 1949 (Traboulsi, 2012). Those three organisations were thus some of the oldest parties in Lebanon, yet only the LCP and Kataeb included female fighters, whereas the PSP did not. Even though the LCP, which had the highest percentage of female fighters, was indeed the oldest party of the three, and PSP, which did not include any official female fighters, the youngest, at the time of the outbreak of the war, all three parties were established parties. Moreover, there were younger parties, such as the PFLP, Fatah and CAO, which included female fighters. If one was to consider the beginning of military activities, rather than the date of party establishment, of the LCP, PSP and Kataeb, all three parties started to provide military training to members of their organisation in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Traboulsi, 2012), and so the difference in age between the military wings of the respective parties was minimal. As far as middle-aged organisations are concerned, Fatah started as a political movement in the late 1950s and was founded as a party in 1965 – around the same time when the PFLP was founded in 1967 (Peteet, 1991, Sayigh, 1993). Both parties were involved in military activities from the outset, and both included female fighters during the war. Amongst the youngest organisations include the CAO, which was

founded in 1970, and Amal, which did not come into existence until after the beginning of the war in 1975 (Norton, 1987, Traboulsi, 2012). One of them, the CAO included female fighters, whereas Amal did not – until the security context changed considerably. It is thus mostly the PSP (one of the “old” parties which did not include female fighters) and the CAO (one of the younger organisations, female fighters) which contradict Dalton’s and Asal’s theory on the relevance of group age. Thus, given the relative inconclusiveness of the data in this case, it is more likely that it was ideological factors (which I have discussed in the beginning of this chapter) and security-related aspects (which we will look at in the next chapter), rather than age and size that decided whether female fighters were included in the militias operating during the Lebanese civil war or not.

## 5.5 | Aims

While most scholars working on female political violence mention a group's *ideological orientation* as one of the decisive factors in organisational decision-making on the inclusion of female combatants (as discussed in section one of this chapter), some also point to an organisation's *strategic aims*. For example, Gonzalez-Perez argued that organisational aims are central in determining the degree to which women are involved in non-state

armed groups (Gonzalez-Perez, 2008). As highlighted earlier in this chapter, she rejects the claim that ideology is salient in female participation in non-state violent political groups. Instead, she contends that group aims are decisive in this context – or more specifically, whether an organisation fights for change at the domestic or international level. She claims that “women are more active and participate at much higher levels in terrorist groups that espouse domestic objectives and act against a state government, than women in terrorist organizations with an international agenda that targets globalization, imperialism, or foreign influence” (Gonzalez-Perez, 2008: 1). The rationale behind this argument is that groups fighting for change on a national level are supposedly considered to be more likely to tackle issues relevant to women, which makes them more attractive to potential female recruits. Other scholars, such as Alison, have made similar claims:

Organizations or movements aimed at upholding an oppressive status quo or containing those revolutionary movements that desire to disrupt this are, in most cases, likely to be more conservative than their opposition and to have correspondingly more conservative views on the appropriate roles of women (Alison, 2009: 229).

Other researchers also uphold the idea that organisations working for revolutionary change are more prone to including women in a wide range of different roles including combat positions (Moghadam, 1993: 71-72, Yuval-

Davis, 1997).

The claim that it is not a group's political orientation, or ideology, but its strategic aims that are decisive in its decision-making on female participation in combat might seem convincing at first. However, Gonzalez-Perez' analysis of the topic has not been exempt from criticisms. Narozhna, for example, pointed to the fact that “the overwhelming majority of domestic terrorist groups in her analysis are left-wing” (Narozhna, 2009: 644), thus implying that political orientation might play a role after all. Narozhna also criticised Gonzalez-Perez's categorisation of cases as either international or domestic. As Gonzalez-Perez' entire argument relies on the distinction between domestic and international groups, this criticism is to be taken seriously.

Indeed, when comparing Gonzalez's claim to the case of militias operating during the Lebanese civil war, her hypothesis does not hold up for too long. Kataeb's aims, for example, were, for the most, domestic. The group did not have strong international aims and was mostly focused on the internal situation in Lebanon. According to Gonzalez's theory, the number of female fighters in Kataeb should have been particularly high. This was not the case however. The organisational aims of the LCP, PSP and Amal all had an international element to them. The LCP and PSP were both linked to international networks including other leftist organisations. They were, at

least in theory, fighting for the unity of the pan-Arab nation as well as Palestinians' rights – both in Lebanon and the region. As to Amal, one of the group's main aims was the fight against Israel. However, all of these three groups also had domestic aims, as they were fighting for socio-political change in Lebanon. This supports the criticisms put forward by Narozhna that Gonzalez's categorisation suffers from conceptual ambiguity. Regardless of this weakness of Gonzalez's explanatory framework, if one was to categorise LCP, PSP and Amal as international groups, according to Gonzalez, one would expect them to have very few, if any, female fighters. If the three militias were considered to be domestic groups, according to Gonzalez, they would be more likely to have higher numbers of female combatants. Comparing the percentages of female fighters in the three groups (the LCP being the group with the highest percentage of female fighters during the Lebanese civil war, Amal with very few and the PSP with no women combatants), it becomes obvious that regardless of which categorisation of these three groups one decides to undertake, Gonzalez's framework lacks explanatory power.

In this regard, framing the argument as done by Alison is less problematic as conceptual ambiguity is more likely to be avoided when speaking of "anti-state" or "revolutionary" movements, as Alison does, instead of "domestic" versus "international" groups (2009). In fact, Alison's distinction between

different kinds of nationalist aims of non-state armed groups is particularly helpful in this context. According to Alison, in the case of nationalist projects, the kind of nation a movement seeks to construct is also of importance, as it can have a range of different implications on gender roles (Alison, 2009: 223). Alison uses Yuval Davis's categorisation of *Volknation* (or “nation based on genealogical and biological notions of origin”) with “women as biological reproducers”; *Kulturnation* (or “nation based on notions of shared culture and symbolic heritage”) with “women as social and cultural reproducers”; and *Staatnation* (or nation based on relatively inclusive notions of citizenship) (Yuval-Davis, 1997). According to Alison:

[I]n nationalist movements with a strong *Volknation* element women are usually likely to be strongly dissuaded from participating as combatants. In movements emphasizing the *Kulturnation* dimension [...] how acceptable female combatants are will depend on the specific cultural traditions that are celebrated by the movement. Finally, nationalist movements emphasizing the *Staatnation* element may be more accommodating of women as combatants but this is by no means assured (Alison, 2009: 223).

This framework fits the militias operating during the Lebanese civil war particularly well. According to the framework, the PSP would, de facto, aim to establish a *Volknation*, whereas Amal would be fighting for a *Kulturnation*, Kataeb for a hybrid of *Volk-/Kulturnation*, Fatah for a hybrid of *Volk-/Kultur-*

*and Staatnation*, and the LCP, CAO and PFLP for a *Staatnation*. Comparing percentages of female fighters with the different categories of nationalist aims, the validity of this framework is supported by my findings on the militias operating during the Lebanese civil war: the PSP (*Volknation*) did not include any official female fighters, because, as one former PSP fighter I interviewed stated, the PSP in the Mountain was “not fighting for ideological reasons, the slogan of the war in the Mountain was more ‘defending the land and the family’, so you can’t go and let [the female members of] your family fight” (interviewee 9). In turn, the numbers of female fighters in Kataeb and Fatah – two organisations which both largely viewed the nation state they were fighting for as based on biological and cultural factors and are thus examples for *Volk-/Kulturnations* – were relatively low. In the LCP and the PFLP, who were fighting for a *Staatnation*, the percentage of female fighters was relatively high. In this case, the numbers thus support Alison’s claim. Lastly, when speaking about organisational aims, one must not omit that while a group may have an overall aim that provides it with a strategic direction, group aims are by no means monolithic or static, can often be multi-layered and subject to change. This was the case for most of the militias operating during the Lebanese civil war (interviewees 3, 5, 28, 63) and it did affect female involvement. The first round of the war (from the outbreak of the war in early 1975 until the Syrian invasion in 1976) in

particular was considered by many to be influenced more by legitimate political aims, whereas the later stages of the conflict were often described as a time during which criminal activities of the different militias and (inner)sectarian fighting dominated (interviewees 1, 7, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 41). In the words of one interviewee who used to fight in the ranks of the LCP, after the first two years, the “situation changed, the fighting had no [political] meaning any more” (interviewee 1). Another interviewee, a Lebanese fighter with the PFLP, described the change as the civil war turning “from a war of ideas into a war of chaos”, without any rules or political rationale behind it (interviewee 8). Yet another former LCP fighter described the transition from the first round of war to the later stages vividly:

In the beginning, it was very idealistic [...] Later, Amal came, things changed, the Sharia followers arrived. At the early stage of the war, there was a case for the cause of the war. Intellectuals were attracted. Just before the war, the political situation was very strong, at universities, schools, clubs. That's why all those students and intellectuals got involved. After two years into the war, they realized that war is ugly. There were robberies, vandalism. The Syrian army came to Lebanon and changed the balance. It started shifting the political organisation. As a consequence, some went out, some in and some came closer to them [the militias]. People realized they were going nowhere and that they achieved nothing [fighting in this war]. Some moved abroad or withdrew. After two years, a new generation came who started stealing and corrupting the country. They controlled the country and bad people ran the streets. Because of this, the image became that this is a dirty war and that political

parties are not good, it's an insult [to be involved with a political party]. Students withdrew, and because of this, good elements were not attracted any more to join – the majority of them were students. The girls who used to come with their friends didn't show up any more. It was not intellectual or sophisticated any more but a dirty war. In the early stages of the war, in 1975, they would call her "militant", after two years, she was a "dirty, a bad girl". After two years, women practically didn't exist [in the militias]. There were no new women fighters, only previous ones. A new atmosphere was created, with new political ideas and a new arena with a different ideology. The leftwing parties took a step back and the new movement sectarianised. It was Christians in the Lebanese Forces vs. Muslims vs. Druze in the PSP vs. Amal (interviewee 22).

This analysis was shared by many of interviewees who were of the opinion that this directional change in the aims of most militias operating during the war, their increasing sectarianisation and criminalisation in the years after the first round of the war put off many militia members – and especially the women. Interestingly, in the leftist groups, in 1982 when the Israeli army invaded, the numbers of female fighters increased again, while the Mountain war in 1982/83 had a similar effect (albeit to a lesser degree) for the Lebanese Forces. I will discuss this in more detail in the next chapter on the role of the security context in the organisational decision-making on the inclusion of female fighters in the various militias.

## 5.6 | Conclusion

Organisational characteristics played an important role in the decision-making on women's participation in combat during the Lebanese civil war. Ideological factors, internal structure, dynamics and discord played the biggest role in the inclusion of female fighters. External relations were also of importance, even though this was more the case for the leftist organisations, which were heavily influenced by Palestinian organisations – and less so for the Christian militias. Group aims can also help explain the inclusion of female fighters, if what we look at is the particular type of nation the different groups were fighting for. Group age and size were not decisive. In the case of the leftist groups, such as the LCP, CAO and PFLP, organisational characteristics facilitated the inclusion of female fighters. To a lesser degree, this was also the case for those organisations where conditions, in terms of group ideology, internal structure, dynamics and discord, were less clearly in favour of the inclusion of female fighters, such as Kataeb and Fatah.

The reason women were fighting in both Kataeb and Fatah during the war (despite conditions from an organisational point of view not being completely in favour of female participation in combat) was that the security context created additional pressure on the organisations. In the case of

Amal, it even led a group that was categorically against the participation of female fighters to eventually include them – not in the inner-Lebanese fighting, but in the war against Israel. The PSP did not find itself under comparable levels of external pressure due to the security context, which is why women continued to be excluded throughout the entirety of the war. I will discuss exactly what role the security context played in this case in the following chapter.

## Chapter 6 | Security context

The most important factor leading to women's inclusion as fighters in the militias operating during the Lebanese civil war was women's insistence on being included. After women started requesting to participate as fighters, they were included in those militias whose organisational characteristics were conducive to female involvement. In those militias that were initially reluctant to include women as fighters, the intensifying security context during the war made the militias change their mind. This was the case because non-state armed groups do not exist in a vacuum. They operate in a strategic environment that is shaped by the security context and the societal circumstances of the society and/or community that the group is part of and interacts with. I will look at the societal context and the extent to which it impacted upon the militias' decision-making during the Lebanese civil war in Chapter Seven. In this chapter, the focus is on the ways in which the militias took into account security-related aspects of the strategic environment in their decision-making on the inclusion of female fighters. I will show how the militias examined in this study responded to the specific security situation they found themselves in. During the Lebanese civil war, the militias' perception of security measures implemented by their opponents limited the group's opportunities in their strategic security

context. This led to a reassessment of the exclusion of female fighters in those militias that were divided about women's involvement in combat roles. In the militias of the far-left, who were open to female participation in combat from the outset, it further facilitated the participation of female combatants. Faced with more conventional strategies and options being curtailed, in those militias that perceived their groups to be under extreme external pressure, the barriers to women's participation were softened – at least for as long as the exceptional situation lasted. Tactical considerations were prioritised over other factors. In order to ensure group survival and success, new tactical options (even if considered controversial in the group and/or wider community) were adopted.

The changing security situation affected the militias operating in Lebanon during the civil war in a number of different ways. Threat perception played an essential role. Security pressures made the non-state armed groups involved in the fighting perceive themselves and their communities to be under extreme (even existential) pressure that in turn led them to consider the inclusion of female fighters. Exactly how this played out differed from group to group. Whereas the organisations of the left saw their fight as a leftist revolution against the status quo, the Christian groups perceived their involvement in the war largely as a struggle for survival and as a fight for their continued dominance in the socio-political system of the country.

While in the groups of the far-left the ideological barriers to women's inclusion as fighters were relatively low to begin with, in the case of the Christian militias, these barriers were initially higher. However, the extreme situation made the inclusion of female fighters possible even in those groups. In the case of the Amal Movement, it was the fight against the external invader Israel, which helped to justify women's participation in combat in the eyes of the militia leaders. The PSP, on the other hand, did not find itself under such extreme pressures, which is one of the reasons why female fighters were not included in the group. This may have changed during the Mountain war; however, as discussed in the previous chapter, the inclusion of female fighters at that stage would have contradicted the official slogan of "family and the land" under which the PSP fought this phase of the war (interviewee 9).

It is often assumed that because an extreme security situation inhibits non-state armed groups' options, their employment of female fighters is a sign of weakness (Cunningham, 2008: 93; Bloom, 2011: 215). On the other hand, it has also been argued that, rather than a desperate action, the inclusion of women fighters is an informed choice – a "clever tactical adaptation" (Bloom, 2011: 214) by "highly adaptive" non-state armed actors who respond to "high levels of external pressure" by expanding their operational range (Cunningham, 2003: 172-173). The two are not mutually exclusive, as non-

state armed actors can make informed choices even when under extreme stress. Thus, if the external pressure that comes with an extreme security situation curtails some options for non-state armed actors, it facilitates other possibilities for them, such as, for example, the inclusion of non-traditional fighters. During the Lebanese civil war, this was the case in those militias in which organisational characteristics were not as clearly conducive to women's involvement in combat as was the case for the groups of the far-left.

The security context is mentioned as one reason for the inclusion of women as combatants in most publications on female non-state political violence (Cunningham, 2003, Eager, 2008, Dearing, 2010, Henshaw, 2016). Some authors point to both the security context and societal factors as being decisive and stress their interdependence (Cunningham, 2003, Dearing, 2010). Indeed, a critical security situation can not only motivate an individual to engage in political violence (and a group to include said individual), but it can also lead a relatively conservative and gender-restrictive society to embrace the prospect of female participation in combat activities (Cunningham, 2008: 88). This was certainly the case in Lebanon during the civil war, where an extreme security context led the militias, the women themselves, and the wider community, to reconsider traditional conventions regarding the role of the women in non-state armed groups. Existing

literature states that societal norms, such as the tendency not to involve women in combat roles, tend to be respected as long as the armed group believes it will provide them with a tactical advantage (Cunningham, 2003: 185, Speckhard, 2008: 998). If societal norms and expectations are considered to counter the armed group's goals and aims, the group will be willing to transgress the limits imposed by society, either by shunning them completely or by reinterpreting and adapting them to the current security situation. The findings of this research support this line of argumentation. Exactly how the security context impacted societal factors and how the militias managed their relations with the communities will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on societal factors.

The remainder of this chapter consists of four parts and the conclusion. Each section looks at one of the four security-related factors which played a role in the militias' decision-making on the inclusion of female fighters during the Lebanese civil war; namely, threat perception, attention-seeking, asserting of the group's position, and avoidance of detection.

## 6.1 | Threat perception

As discussed in the chapter on individual motivations, the most important motivational factor for both men and women to get involved with the

different militias was their motivation to counter a perceived threat. On the level of the group, this was also one of the main reasons that led to the inclusion of female fighters in the militias (or the lack thereof). What form this threat took varied from group to group and at times also from region to region. Moreover, the perception of threat was not static, but evolved over time, with the civil war taking different turns over the years. In this context, it is insightful to look at how the numbers of female fighters in some of the groups changed over time. This will be done below. The evolving security context also influenced a number of other factors. I have already shown in Chapter Five how it affected the organisational structure of some of the groups involved in the fighting. In addition to that, it also had an impact on the communities, loosening some of the socio-cultural barriers to female participation, which will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

The vast majority of interviewees contended that, from a military point of view, the inclusion of female fighters was not a necessity (interviewees 2, 4, 7, 9, 12, 22, 23, 25, 27, 30, 31, 39, 45, 50, 55), except possibly for the Christian groups at the beginning of the war (interviewees 4, 7, 18, 22, 44). Only two individuals believed that the inclusion of female fighters was a military necessity for other groups, namely in leftist and Palestinian militias at the beginning of the war (interviewee 14) and in the Palestinian militias after 1982 (interviewee 12). Only one of those two interviewees was actually

a militia member during the war and had thus had an insider's perspective. Nevertheless, despite the fact that female participation was not considered a military necessity by the vast majority of interviewees, during the war the threat was perceived as being so imminent that it still facilitated the inclusion of female fighters. It is important to bear in mind that these perceptions were subjective estimations by individuals who not only had limited knowledge of the overall context, but who also often had a political agenda. However, for the purpose of this study, whether or not the threat perceptions at the time were indeed an accurate reflection of reality is irrelevant, as the groups were nevertheless guided by them.

In Chapter Four, I showed that the women (and men) involved with the militias of the pro-reform LNM saw their fight as a struggle for a new socio-political system and for the rights of Palestinians and other marginalised groups in Lebanon. Later, the fight against Israel also became a priority. As will be discussed below, the situation in the South – a region that was occupied by Israel from 1978 – was different, as the Israeli army posed a continuous threat to those opposing Israel in the South. The fight against a socio-political system perceived as unjust and oppressive (and later against Israel) were also major *organisational* motivations. In line with their leftist ideology, the organisations associated with the LNM saw their fight from 1975 as a revolution, which would allow them to implement a new societal

system in Lebanon (interviewees 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 42, 43, 46, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 54, 61, 64, 65, 67, 68, 69). This fight warranted the inclusion of women, as all segments of society needed to be involved for a revolution. Similarly, the invasion by Israel in 1982 was perceived as an extreme security pressure, which called for the inclusion of all available fighters. In line with this argument, most interviewees agreed that the numbers of female fighters were highest during the first round of the war (from 1975 to 1977), after which they decreased, to rise again in 1982 until the Israeli occupation of (most of) the country ended in 1985 (interviewees 1, 7, 8, 14, 18, 48, 22, 23, 28). Indeed, only three interviewees (one former male CAO fighter, one former female LCP fighter and one former male LCP/Fatah fighter) thought that the numbers of women were lower in the beginning of the war. However, they also agreed that their involvement rose sharply after the Israeli invasion in 1982 (interviewees 6, 21, 31). In fact, a woman was involved in the first two attacks against the Israeli army in Beirut in September 1982 in the Kantari and Zokak al-Blat neighbourhoods, which were carried out by a four-member cell (interviewee 22). One interviewee recounted how: “[a]gainst Israel, it was a different thing. When Israel came to Beirut, it became a national combat – like in 1975, but even more” (interviewee 22).

When looking at threat perception, it is important to take into account regional differences. One illustrative example in this context is the constant increase of female fighters in militias of the Lebanese and Palestinian left in the South. I have shown above that most interviewees stated that the number of female fighters was relatively high during the first round of the war, how it declined after the invasion by Syria, and rose again when Israel invaded Lebanon in the summer of 1982. According to several interviewees, this was not the case in the South however, where threat perception was shaped by different dynamics (interviewees 1, 30, 31, 32). Israel invaded large parts of the South in 1978 and moved as far as Beirut in 1982 (Hirst, 2011, Traboulsi, 2012). As a consequence, women's participation in the South did not increase in 1975 and decrease after 1976/77, but continued to rise throughout the entire war. In the words of one interviewee (a former fighter and military commander with the LCP), "in the South they have a different case; there was always the danger of Israelis" (interviewee 1). Moreover, unlike the rest of the country, the Syrian army in 1976 did not reach the area south of Saida, as they were asked by the Israeli army to stop their advancement (interviewee 1). Thus, in addition to still facing the threat posed by Lebanon's southern neighbour Israel, the most-southern part of Lebanon was not occupied by the Syrian army in 1976 – an occupation that had curtailed militia operations in other parts of the country (interviewee 1).

As a consequence, the numbers of female (and male) militants in the South did not decrease until the mid-1980s when a new actor emerged in the conflict arena in Lebanon – the Shia-Islamist Hezbollah, which attracted many former (Shia) LCP members (interviewee 32).

While for most members of the LNM, their involvement in the civil war was seen as a fight for a new socio-political order and for the rights of Palestinians and other marginalised groups, the Christian militias perceived their fight as a response to an existential threat (interviewees 2, 7, 11, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 25, 41, 44, 45, 55, 56, 57, 59, 60, 65, 66, see also Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 53-54). A family member of one of the senior leaders of Kataeb at the beginning of the war stressed that the organisation and its constituency felt threatened by both internal and external actors: “We felt threatened, that’s why we founded the militias. There was no country in the direct neighbourhood of Lebanon that was not problematic to us” (interviewee 41). The fact that several interviewees criticised this perception and instead stressed that the Christian community was never at risk of extinction, and that this narrative was used by political leaders in order to mobilise the community (interviewees 1, 28, 56, 59), does not make a difference in this context, as it is the subjective threat perception which affected the militias’ decision-making. Unlike in the case of the militias associated with the LNM, the Christian militias were not experiencing any

major junctures that would have had a similar effect on the involvement of female fighters in the way the Israeli invasion did for the LNM militias; except for perhaps the Mountain War, when (according to some interviewees) the number of female fighters rose again (interviewees 7, 19). As a result, the involvement of women in the Christian militias did not follow a cycle similar to the one described above with regards to the LNM militias, but rather the number of female members continued to increase (interviewees 11, 44, 55). That being said, women's involvement *as fighters* reached a peak during the first round of the war from 1975 to 1977 (interviewees 14, 18, 25, 44, 57, 60, see also Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 110, 112, 115). In addition to the organisational reasons discussed in Chapter Five, this decrease in female fighters in the Christina militias after 1976/77 can be explained by an effect that the security context had on the organisational structure. When outbreak of the war caused a sudden imminent threat, it triggered the formation of loosely organised armed cells – often comprising of family members, neighbours and classmates who had participated in protests and other political activities together before the war (interviewees 2, 22, 25, 41, 44, 45, 56, 59, 66; see also Sneifer, 2006, El Murr, 2014, Duplan and Raulin, 2015). This situation in the often chaotic and unpredictable first days and months of the war opened a window of opportunity for women to get involved as fighters (interviewees 2, 18, 19, 26, 31, 41, 44, 54). Later, an

increased organisation and formalisation of the militias caused the numbers of female fighters to decrease (interviewees 2, 15, 44, 55, 56, 57, 65). When I asked a member of Kataeb why Kataeb leaders – not all of whom were in favour of including female fighters (as discussed in Chapter Five) – agreed with the involvement of female fighters during these first months of the war, she stated:

Because they were women of Kataeb. It was not a decision of the leaders, but coming from the grassroots. They joined their families, in the neighbourhoods. [...] The militia was not an organised troop (interviewee 44).

In the case of Amal, it was the invasion of southern Lebanon by the Israeli army which paved the way for the inclusion of female fighters. Women had not been involved in combat roles during previous stages of the war. They had not been included as fighters against any of the Lebanese and Palestinian militias fighting in Lebanon, but were first employed against Israel after its army invaded Lebanon in 1978 (interviewees 50, 63). Those interviewees who were associated with Amal made a clear distinction between the civil war (which for them included all inner-Lebanese and -Palestinian fighting) and the fight against Israel, which they saw as a separate struggle – one which, in principle, is still ongoing today (interviewees 50, 63). While large parts of the civil war were perceived as a struggle over interests

between different communities, the fight against Israel was seen as a fight against an “outside attacker who wanted to kill us, take our territory” (interviewee 50). One Amal member described the difference as follows:

[In the fight against other Lebanese and Palestinian militias, t]here was no need for that (the inclusion of female fighters), we had our military, we had our guys. Most fights, we were winning, so we don’t need more people [...] It was not like against Israel where we made [let] all people, child, woman, old people fight [...] Until now, all people know that if they have to fight, they will fight. The population of Amal has mentioned that they have to resist. So if they are attacked, they will resist. Musa Sadr was against the Lebanese civil war, but he said resist against Israel by all means, even if only with boiling oil (interviewee 50).

In other words, fighting an external occupier warranted special measures, especially since this occupier was seen as “the absolute Evil” and the resistance was framed in religious terms and advocated for by Musa Sadr, the organisation’s spiritual leader (interviewees 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 50, 58, 63). The inclusion of female fighters was perceived as providing the organisation with a tactical advantage since, at least at the beginning of the hostilities, Israel did not expect women to be involved in combat (interviewee 50).

Lastly, the case of the PSP illustrates how without the perceived need to counter an imminent threat to the organisation and its constituency, the

inclusion of women was not considered necessary by the militia. I have shown in Chapter Four that, at the beginning of the war, similarly to other members of the LNM, members of the PSP fought for a new socio-political order and the interests of marginalised communities in Lebanon (interviewee 42, 51, 53). Later, especially in the Mountain War, the fight turned very much into a struggle for “country, family and also religion” (interviewee 42, see also interviewee 7, 8). In such a fight, there was no place for female fighters, as it is hard to argue that you are fighting for your family when you are not actually protecting them, as one interviewee put it (interviewee 8). As far as threat perception is concerned, the PSP’s militias were not under extreme pressure for much of the war, as the bulk of the frontline fighting to protect the community was carried out by the PSP’s Palestinian allies (interviewee 65, see also Traboulsi, 2012). Several interviewees stressed the difference between different regions in this context. For example, in the Shouf (an area that was only afflicted by open fighting for a few years from the summer of 1982), women’s participation in the PSP’s militias was more limited than in the Matn region (where constant fighting took place for most of the war) (interviewees 7, 9, 10). It is telling that it was in the Matn that several women close to the PSP formed their own fighting unit (interviewees 7, 9, 10), as this was where the perceived threat was the highest. Similarly, in many villages surrounded by the

Lebanese Forces / Kataeb and the Israeli army during the Mountain War, women contributed to the fight, as recounted by this interviewee, a former male fighter with the PSP:

An incident happened in August 1983. The Israelis got into the village to look for some guys to arrest them. The women clashed with the Israelis and didn't let the men out. This was much more powerful as the Israelis can't attack them [the women]. The Israelis injured some of the women, but they [the women] prevented them from taking the men. One of the women took her AK47 and shot the Israelis. The Israelis were embarrassed and withdrew. Those women were not fighters or trained, but their sons were fighters with PSP or other militias (interviewee 9).

These examples illustrate that even in the PSP where women were not formally allowed to join the militia as fighters, individual involvement in combat activities occurred when the perceived threat demanded it.

## 6.2 | Seeking attention

In an extreme security environment with high external pressure, garnering attention can be crucial to non-state armed groups' survival and success (Bloom, 2005). Indeed, political violence (especially when directed against civilians or highly symbolic targets) is often as much about making a statement as it is about inflicting physical damage (Drake, 1998). The

intended targets of such a statement (or message) can include current or potential sympathisers and supporters, opponents and (potential) victims as well as rival groups. They can either be targeted on a local level (in the area where the conflict takes place) or on a national, regional or international level, which is when the media and other transnational networks takes significance. To many non-state armed groups, public attention to their cause is important at all times. However, this need for attention often increases during times of extreme security circumstances, when a non-state armed group's tactical options are curtailed (Bloom, 2005). For example, if a bigger campaign of violence cannot be conducted due to limited mobility of male operatives or lack of other resources, it might be an option to spread fear via different media outlets instead. A rise in public sympathies can help to raise funding or garner other forms of external support (Bloom, 2005). The use of unconventional or symbolically loaded targets or perpetrators is then often a logical step in the attempt to attract the attention of the media, public and other groups (Drake, 1998, Bloom, 2005).

The claim that one of the reasons why non-state armed actors decide to employ women in combat is the increased attention that female fighters garner is made in many publications on female political violence (Ali, 2005, Bloom, 2005: 144, Knop, 2007: 400-401, Speckhard, 2008, Zedalis 2008: 50, 57). For example, Bloom (2007: 7) claims that female non-state combatants

“receive eight times the media coverage” than their male counterparts – a phenomenon described elsewhere as the “CNN factor” (Ali 2005).

The extent to which attempts to gain attention played a role in the militias’ decision-making on the inclusion of female fighters during the Lebanese civil war was discussed controversially by the participants in this study. Notably, there was a clear contrast between how (former) members of the Christian militias perceived the inclusion of women in their groups and how their (former) opponents viewed this issue. Many members of the Christian groups denied that their organisations had strategically used female fighters for the advancement of their groups’ aims (interviewees 11, 16, 19, 22, 23, 44). However, many former militia members associated with the LNM disagreed and reproached the Christian militias for the disproportional media attention their female members garnered (interviewees 6, 7, 18, 46, 48, 54). Describing the media attention the female fighters in the Christian militias had amassed (and particularly those in Kataeb), several interviewees formerly affiliated with LNM groups even spoke of “a spectacle”, “a show”, a “mise-en-scène” (interviewees 6, 18, 46). Jocelyne Khoueiry (a particularly popular female fighter and commander with Kataeb, and later the LF) was at the centre of much of this attention, and pictures of her holding a weapon were reprinted in magazines and newspapers worldwide (interviewees 6, 7, 11, 18). This was criticised by several formerly LNM-affiliated interviewees,

who claimed that the depiction of Christian female fighters in the press was disproportional to their actual involvement in the fight, especially when compared with the militias of the far-left (interviewees 6, 7, 18, 46, 48). Several interviewees formerly associated with Christian militias stressed that – contrary to claims made by their former opponents – they did not have the time to develop media strategies to garner the public’s attention as they were fighting for their survival (interviewees 11, 16, 19). Two former members of Kataeb and the LF pointed to the role of the media, claiming it was them rather than the party or militia who put the spotlight on female fighters (interviewees 11, 19). It is likely that this was indeed the case and that the media attention garnered by female fighters in the Christian groups was not necessarily planned by the militias as a whole. Nevertheless, the militias benefitted from the attention garnered by their female fighters, as they supported the image of Kataeb which some leaders, such as Bashir Gemayel, tried to convey. There is some evidence supporting the claim that Bashir Gemayel in particular deliberately used the image of female Kataeb members in order to promote a progressive and determined image of the party, as will be discussed below.

While female fighters in some of the Palestinian groups operating in Lebanon also garnered some media attention (Leila Khaled is a notorious example), the focus on women in Kataeb (and later the LF) was unparalleled.

Female fighters in Amal were not featured in the media as, their participation was kept secret by the militia for security reasons (interviewee 63). Therefore, the following analysis will mostly focus on how Kataeb and the LF benefitted from the media's and public's attention on the role of female fighters in the militia.

Regardless of whether or not the images and stories of female fighters were deliberately spread by Kataeb in order to garner media attention, de facto an increased interest in the women fighting in the war (and especially in the Christian militias) was the outcome. Intended or not, this helped make and promote three statements about Kataeb (and later, the Lebanese Forces): (1) "we are modern", (2) "we are determined", and (3) "we are vulnerable". Moreover, the participation of female fighters was used to (4) encourage men to join the fight. This last factor played a role in all militias, and not just the Christian organisations. I will discuss these four messages below.

The most important message sent by the inclusion of female fighters in Kataeb (and later the LF) was the Christian community's alleged modernity and progressiveness, which was evidenced by the inclusion of women. As discussed in the previous chapter on organisational characteristics, the ideology of Kataeb was influenced by both traditional and more progressive ideals, which were reflected in how the role of women in the party and the community was perceived. As one interviewee stressed, Kataeb upheld an

“extremely contradictory discourse”. On the one hand, they presented themselves as the “avant-garde of modernity”, whilst on the other, they promoted a “very conservative society” and were “very hierarchical” (interviewee 18). Including female fighters was a way to demonstrate unequivocally how modern and progressive Christians in Lebanon were, and how liberated their women supposedly were (interviewees 6, 7, 18, 46). These images were directed at the Christian militias, their supporters and opponents, but also at the wider public, including international audiences. According to one interviewee, highlighting the role of women in the militia was a way to show potential supporters in the West that “we are similar to you, our women are equal” (interviewee 18). It was also a way to stress the supposed difference between them and other groups: “Christians wanted to use women to show that they were more progressive than the Muslims” (interviewee 7). Attempts to change the image of Kataeb in order to “convey a progressive image to the West” (and possibly also local audiences) seem to have been ordered from above when Bashir Gemayel started steering the party in that direction after the end of the first round of fighting in 1978 (interviewee 7).

The second most important message sent by the inclusion of female fighters was the group’s determination. This is an aspect that has been widely described in the existing literature (Ali 2005, Knop, 2007: 401, Speckhard,

2008, Zedalis, 2008: 62). By using women, the group stresses its determination and its lack of fear to break societal taboos. It shows that it is willing to sacrifice all that it has, and to do all that it takes to defeat the enemy. By including women – members of society who are traditionally considered peaceful and non-violent, nurturing and life-giving (Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015), the group demonstrates that a new level of determination, and with it a new level of danger, has been reached. The message is that danger comes from everywhere – even those parts of society you would least expect it from. The aim (and outcome) of this strategy is to demonstrate to the group’s opponents that violence “has moved beyond a fringe phenomenon and insurgents are all around you” (Bloom, 2005: 144). Including female fighters in their militias was a way for the Christian community to show their strength (interviewee 46). It was a way of saying “yes, we can” and a way to stress that the militia “can mobilise another fifty percent of the population” (interviewee 7). In this context, how Lebanese Christians were perceived by some of their Lebanese and Palestinian opponents played a major role. One interviewee explained how, in Lebanon at the time, “Muslims looked down on Christians as mushy-gushy. Bashir Gemayel wanted them to be ferocious, he wanted to show that even the women kill” (interviewee 7, see also interviewee 15 and Sneifer, 2006, 45-46).

The third most important message when including female fighters is targeted at male sympathisers, supporters and members of the armed group. Several existing publications describe how female fighters' participation is used by armed groups in order to motivate men to join (Cunningham, 2003: 183, Bloom, 2005: 144-145; Bloom, 2011: 210). The message to the men is that a woman had to take up arms because the men who were supposed to fight in her stead did not deliver. During the civil war in Lebanon, this aspect played a role in most of the militias involved in the fighting. Women's participation in combat motivated both existing male fighters as well as potential members of the groups. As a former male member of Kataeb (and later the Lebanese Forces) explained:

The presence of women helped to alleviate the bad atmosphere when only boys are around. They gave a good example. They were good fighters and motivated the men to be as good as them or even better. They were a push for the morale (interviewee 2, see also interviewees 11, 45, 55).

The same was reported by members of other groups, including the LCP, Fatah, PFLP and the SSNP, and by interviewees not associated with any of the militias. Women's participation as fighters encouraged men to join, either out of guilt or because they enjoyed the women's company (interviewees 12, 17, 22, 24, 54, 64).

A fourth message sent by the inclusion of female fighters focuses on the severity of the situation and the high threat the group is faced with. While this message is linked to the previous one, its emphasis lies on the vulnerability of the non-state armed group. By including women, the group stresses how much pressure it is under, in order to convince (potential) sympathisers and supporters to stand with the group and its cause. Similar to the previous message, it is the stark contrast between traditional gender norms and expectations on the one hand and the role women assume as members of the non-state armed group on the other that is intended to garner increased attention. Bloom describes this in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where she claims Palestinian armed groups benefit from the attractiveness of many of their female suicide bombers. The idea behind this is that pictures of these attractive women will prompt outsiders to ask, "What could make such a pretty girl do that? There must be something seriously wrong" (Bloom, 2011: 218). Thus, by confronting the observer with the unexpected and by demonstrating that in this conflict even the women are taking up arms, the group highlights the severity of the conflict, the pressure the society these individuals stem from are subjected to, and the cruelty of the opponent, which lead even the (supposedly) most innocent and peace-loving members of society to commit violence. This factor was not evoked by most interviewees; however, one former male fighter

contended that the fact that women (and children) were present was used when they were bombed by opponent groups (interviewee 48).

Lastly, it is important to note that as vital as media attention can be to non-state armed groups and their causes, reporting on a group's attitudes and activities does not always have the intended effects of garnering support and spreading fear. Particularly when implementing unconventional measures, the reaction from outside the core group can also be sceptical or even hostile. For example, when a non-state armed group includes female fighters due to an extreme security environment, this is does sometimes receive severe criticism and clear disapproval by the host community. This aspect will be looked at in more detail in Chapter Seven.

### 6.3 | Asserting a position

In many conflicts involving non-state armed actors, more than one non-state organisation conducts violent activities targeting the same opponent. It has been argued that this constellation of competing or rival players in a given security context also affects the decision-making of non-state violent actors:

One important feature of this approach is the assumption that the various players in the game coexist in a reciprocal operational relationship (Schelling, 1978). A competitor's best

move, in this case, is a function of the prior and anticipated moves of his opponents and allies, and it varies accordingly. What this implies, for our purposes, is that a terrorist [sic] group's decision to act (or not act) – a decision that includes its choice of targets, tactics, and timing—is influenced by the decisions of its opponents, of its political constituency, and of any other actors that influence its strategic environment” (McCormick, 2003: 481-482).

There is a substantial body of literature on intergroup competition and cooperation, which specifically looks at non-state armed organisations. Horowitz and Potter (2014) for example, claim that intergroup cooperation can increase group capacity and notably a group's ability to carry out more lethal attacks. Others, such as Drake (1998: 76) and Cunningham (2003: 172) stress that non-state violent groups learn from each other – either indirectly by observing and imitating, or directly through training. In the previous chapters, I discussed the extent to which the militias involved in the Lebanese civil war learned from one another regarding the involvement of female fighters. I showed that external influence and support by other armed actors played a considerable role – mostly for the Lebanese militias of the left who were inspired by the role of the woman in the Palestinian revolution.

Where intergroup competition is concerned, non-state armed groups are said to strive to distinguish themselves from competing organisations, in order to assert their position in a field of competing players (Crenshaw,

1987: 24, Oots 1989: 148). This is important for group survival and success, as groups strive to prevent defection of their members to rival groups and attempt to gain, and maintain, the support of (potential) sympathisers, allies and supporters (Crenshaw, 1987: 24, Oots, 1989: 148). Non-state armed groups always depend on (some level of) outside support, but this need tends to increase in situations of group competition (Oots, 1989: 148). In this context, several scholars point to the dynamics between different groups trying to outbid each other, by “build[ing] support and advertis[ing] against domestic rivals” (Findley and Young, 2012: 706). According to outbidding theory, non-state armed groups may be incited to opt for higher levels and more drastic forms of violence in situations of group competition or rivalry (Bloom, 2005: 94; see also McCormick, 2003: 488). The outbidding theory is particularly prevalent in the literature on suicide terrorism (see, for example, Bloom, 2004: 94-97, Hafez, 2007). Others suggest that outbidding is a general strategy of all non-state armed groups (Young and Dugan, 2014). When applied to the inclusion of female fighters in the context of a conflict involving multiple competing non-state armed actors, according to outbidding theory, the competing groups would mutually incite one another to employ women in combat.

However, this was not the case during the civil war in Lebanon with regards to recruitment of female fighters. Outbidding between rival groups did not

lead to an increased inclusion of female members in general nor to the inclusion of female fighters in particular. Instead, women were included in the groups of the far-left because it was part of their gender ideology, and in the Christian and some Palestinian groups (such as Fatah) because there was a window of opportunity due to the security pressures discussed in the first section of this chapter, which motivated women to assume combat roles. This finding supports criticisms of outbidding theory in existing literature on non-state political violence. For example, in an extensive analysis of global terrorism between 1970 and 2004, Findley and Young conclude that the outbidding theory is not supported by their empirical findings:

The logic [of the outbidding theory] suggests that in multi-party conflicts, each group needs to differentiate itself from others in order to attract supporters. Accordingly, where more insurgent groups engage in armed conflict with the state, we should expect more suicide terrorism and perhaps more terrorism. [... However, w]e find scant support for the idea that the number of insurgent groups increases the likelihood of suicide terror and no support for the notion that outbidding increases terrorism generally (Findley and Young, 2012: 707).

Findley and Young stress that outbidding theory was partially developed from studying the conflict between Israel and Palestinian groups, and conclude that it might be specific to that case. They argue that “Israel is

unique for many reasons, such as heavy third-party involvement in the region by major powers that may make the dynamics in Israel quite different from other cases” (Findley and Young, 2012: 720). In fact, others have questioned the validity of the outbidding theories even for the case of Israel/Palestine. Brym and Araj in particular criticised the theory as overly simplifying, generalising and too focused on single causes (Brym and Araj, 2008: 499-500). Instead, they call for “multivariate models that account for variation over time and place” (Brym and Araj, 2008: 500).

The militias involved in the Lebanese civil war did not include female fighters to distinguish themselves from competing groups. Women’s participation as fighters was used by the various militias to assert their position, yet on a different level. The militias used female involvement in combat to stress their ideological stance as opposed to the (alleged) position of their enemies. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Christian militias were accused by members of the leftist groups of including women to prove their alleged modernity and progressiveness in relation to their (mostly) Muslim opponents. For the leftist groups that employed female fighters, the inclusion of women in combat roles was a way to stress their belief in secularism and gender equality. In the case of Amal and the PSP, the exclusion of women from combat roles provided them with an opportunity to stress how highly valued women were to them – so highly valued in fact

that they would protect them from any direct involvement in combat activities whenever possible. This latter approach was described in existing literature. Alison (2009) claims that in a situation of group competition with varying degrees of female inclusion in the various organisations, female involvement in some groups can lead to female participation being shunned by the group's rivals or opponents. She explains this dynamic in the case of the conflict in Northern Ireland:

It is possible that part of the loyalist resistance to women's full participation in paramilitaries was due to the fact that women were known to be fully active in republican paramilitaries. As in any nationalist conflict, the opposing groups in Northern Ireland construct themselves in opposition to the other. Thus women's involvement as combatants may have been seen by loyalists as being too radical, too revolutionary, too much against the grain of prevailing gender relations, too feminist – and too republican (Alison, 2009: 228).

Whilst it is not entirely impossible that this played a role in the militias' decision-making on whether or not to include female fighters during the Lebanese civil war, it was certainly not one of the main reasons. Threat perception, as discussed above, clearly seems to have been a much more important motivational factor.

## 6.4 | Avoiding detection

Lastly, one of the most commonly found explanations for the inclusion of female fighters in non-state armed groups is that it allows illegal organisations to avoid detection. The deployment of female operatives in order to avoid detection in an extreme security environment has been documented with reference to a number of conflict contexts, including (but not limited to) Israel/Palestine (Cunningham, 2003: 184-185; Bloom, 2005: 143-144; Bloom, 2011: 129), Northern Ireland (Bloom, 2011: 88-89), and Sri Lanka (Bloom, 2011: 141).

Avoiding detection can be crucial in a situation in which the security context causes extreme external pressure to non-state armed actors. In many violent conflicts, such a situation arises when the non-state group's opponents have far-reaching control over the territory, in which the conflict is taking place, and successfully implement strategies countering their military adversaries. Such a security environment often severely restricts the mobility of male operatives in non-state armed groups. The employment of female fighters, in turn, can provide non-state armed organisations with a decisive tactical advantage. As Bloom argued, "[t]he use of the least-likely suspect is the most-likely tactical adaption for a terrorist group under scrutiny" (Bloom,

2005: 144).<sup>25</sup> In such a context, when male mobility is either highly limited by checkpoints and security controls or even completely curtailed, female operatives can often move more freely and avoid detection. This can be explained by two reasons: prevailing gender stereotypes and cultural sensitivities.

Traditionally, in most societies, women are considered to be more prone to peace and non-violence and to be less likely to engage in violent (let alone combat) activities than men (Cunningham, 2003, Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015, Henshaw, 2016). Even in societies, which are relatively gender-open, where both men and women assume active roles in public and political life, women still often tend to be seen as the weaker, more gentle and less violent gender (Gentry and Sjoberg, 2015). In situations of violent conflict and war, women are often perceived to be victims of violence, while their role as perpetrators or inciters of violent activities is largely overlooked (Cunningham, 2003: 172). When employing female combatants, many non-state armed organisations capitalise on these notions of assumed female non-violence. The groups exploit “gender expectations that revolve around the idea that females by nature are averse to committing violence” (Ness, 2008a: 18). In some cases, women pretend to be pregnant while hiding weapons under

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25 This is why for many non-state violent groups who employ women, the next step is to use very old or young women, in some cases even children, to achieve the same effect (Bloom, 2011: 214).

concealing clothes (Cunningham, 2003: 172). Using these gender stereotypes to a non-state armed group's advantage tends to be even more effective in situations in which the women in question belong to a religious or ethnic minority, which is perceived to be "oppressed", as these women tend to be seen as having even less agency (Cunningham, 2003: 172). In such situations, it is both gender-related and ethno-religious stereotypes that are exploited by the armed group.

The second reason female fighters are often more likely to avoid detection than men is cultural sensitivities around gender and women prevailing in many societies (Cunningham, 2003: 172). In many countries, it is not acceptable for male security members to body-search women. However, female staff at checkpoints in conflict-afflicted zones continue to be the exception rather than the norm. This leaves female fighters with a distinct tactical advantage, which has been described with regards to a number of violent conflicts worldwide. Bloom, for example, describes how during the 2003 Iraq war, cultural sensitivities provided female operatives of non-state armed groups with clear tactical advantages (2011: 210).

Interestingly, even though avoidance of detection is mentioned as one of the main reasons for the inclusion of female fighters in existing literature, this factor was not seen as a key aspect in women's participation as fighters by most interviewees in Lebanon. Some categorically denied that it played any

role (interviewees 6, 8, 18, 19, 21). This was most likely due to geopolitical factors and the nature of the conflict. For most of the war, especially in Beirut (but also in other parts of the country), the opposing camps were clearly separated. “There wasn’t the other camp that one had to penetrate”, a former female military commander in one of the groups of the far-left contended, “you’d divide up a region, there were demarcation lines” (interviewee 6). A former female commander in Kataeb was of the same view. She described their fight as classical combat between two camps divided by clear lines and stressed that most of the time they were wearing uniforms during combat duty (interviewee 19). This division along demarcation lines brought with it the advantage of having a safe space to retreat to. The lack of such a sanctuary has been described as one of the main reasons why non-state armed groups replace male operatives with female fighters. Geographical factors have been described as being of particular relevance in this context, as avoiding detection becomes more difficult in certain types of terrain. Inaccessible mountain areas or barely penetrable rainforests, for example, can serve as particularly effective sanctuaries for non-state groups operating in the area. Such safe spaces can be hard to access and navigate by opposing groups, especially if their members are not familiar with the area. If non-state armed actors have access to a safe space, it has been argued, the employment of non-

traditional operatives (such as women) is less likely, as the tactical advantage their inclusion would provide is peripheral (Dearing, 2010: 1084).

Dearing illustrates this claim by comparing the dynamics between US and international forces and non-state armed organisations operating in Afghanistan and Iraq (2010: 1085). In Afghanistan, international forces were much less successful in countering non-state armed actors than in Iraq. Dearing explains this with a lack of military resources and a focus on provincial centres in Afghanistan, which allowed non-state military actions outside these centres to go widely undetected (2010: 1085). In Afghanistan, the tactical disadvantage of the international forces (due to the lack of control over the territory) was exacerbated by geographical characteristics of the region. The extremely long, highly permeable and difficult-to-control Afghani-Pakistani border, for example, provided the insurgents with a considerable advantage. Neighbouring Pakistan served as a secure refuge, from which logistical, financial and moral support was provided. Moreover, vast parts of the inner-Afghani landscape were also in favour of the militants:

Many [...] routes into, outside and around the country are uncharted territory to outside observers, yet have been in use for hundreds, if not thousands of years. The leverage is on the insurgent's side as he can easily maneuver around counterinsurgents, conduct smallscale ambushes, snipe from higher terrain, or leave improvised explosive devices in areas difficult to detect (Dearing, 2010: 1084).

Thus, since the mobility of male fighters remained largely unrestricted, resorting to non-traditional, female, combatants was not considered a necessity. Meanwhile, non-state armed organisations in Iraq did not enjoy the same operational advantage. The desert landscape of much of the country made it much easier for the international forces fighting local insurgents to gain control over the territory. This hugely restricted the mobility of male operatives of non-state armed organisations. In an attempt to balance out this tactical disadvantage, non-state armed groups in Iraq resorted to a type of fighter more likely to avoid detection than the groups' male operatives: women.

In Lebanon, due to the nature of the conflict and the fact that, in large parts of the country, the non-state armed groups involved in the war were soon divided by demarcation lines, involving female fighters in order to avoid detection was not as high on the agenda as was in Iraq, for example. While avoiding detection was not a major reason for the deployment of female fighters, it did play a role in the inclusion of women in non-combat roles in the non-state armed groups operating in Lebanon during the war. This was stressed by many interviewees (interviewees 6, 7, 14, 19, 22, 37, 38, 39, 54, 58; see also Bechara, 2003: 47). Women were involved in intelligence and information gathering (interviewees 6, 7, 19), they drove cars (interviewee

6; Bechara, 2003: 47), helped move weapons (interviewees 22, 58), and conveyed messages (interviewee 14). By using women to smuggle weapons, the militias exploited both cultural sensitivities and dominant gender stereotypes. A former male fighter with far-left and Palestinian groups explained his groups' tactics as follows:

During the Israeli invasion in Lebanon, for most of our messages to contact fighters et cetera, I used to send women. Because sometimes it is hard for the Israelis to stop a woman. The community will be against them and if it's a woman, nobody will suspect anything (interviewee 14).

A former male fighter who used to fight with the LCP and Fatah confirmed that, “[m]ost of the roles that were given to women were in intelligence, because their movement was much easier. They could pass through checkpoints much easier without raising suspicion” (interviewee 17; see also Bechara, 2003: 47). Women were also involved in hiding and moving weapons. One interviewee described how female members of Amal would hide weapons under their abayahs (interviewee 58). This tactic was also described by a former (male) LCP leader from the South who recounted how “women were used as tools against the Israelis, because she was not searched and could smuggle stuff like explosives” (interviewee 54). Stereotypes around motherhood were also employed to mislead opponents,

as a former CAO fighter, who remembered how he and his wife hid weapons under his new-born baby's clothes in 1991, recounted (interviewee 22). On the other hand, several of the members of Amal I interviewed stated that the tactical advantage provided by including female operatives against the Israeli army diminished in the later stages of the conflict with Israel, as the Israeli soldiers realised that women, too, were part of the resistance (interviewees 37, 38, 39). As a consequence, hundreds of Lebanese women in the South were captured, imprisoned and tortured in prisons run by the Israelis and their local allies (interviewees 37, 38).

Lastly, the case of Soha Bechara, a female member of the LCP emerged in many of the discussions I had on this question of avoiding detention in Lebanon. Soha Bechara infiltrated the house of Antoine Lahad (the leader of the Southern Lebanon Army, a right-wing Christian militia in the South) and tried to assassinate him (Bechara, 2003). However, several interviewees stressed that Soha Bechara not only had the tactical advantage of being a woman, but she was also Christian, which, in the view of several interviewees, contributed Antoine Lahad and his entourage's perception that she was less dangerous by (interviewees 6, 17). This points to the importance of a multi-factor multi-level analysis, which takes into account not just gender, but also other factors intersecting with it, such as religion, ethnicity, race, age and others.

## 6.5 | Conclusion

When war broke out in Lebanon in 1975, women's insistence to be included was the most important factor leading to female participation as fighters. Organisational factors then decided which militias immediately included women as combatants and which did not. In the case of those militias whose organisational characteristics were not conducive to the inclusion of female fighters, women's participation was nevertheless made possible if the security context was perceived as extreme enough by the militias to justify the involvement of women.

In Chapter Four, it was argued that the security context was the main reason for individuals to decide to join the war. Security pressures had a similar effect on organisations. They motivated individuals to join and created an opportunity for the women who wanted to get involved in the organisations beyond roles traditionally assumed by women. Exactly how the perception of these security pressures or threats were perceived differed from organisation to organisation. Whether these perceptions were an accurate reflection of the situation on the ground is not the issue, as perceptions were sufficient to motivate group decision-making. The groups of the far-left, such as the LCP, CAO and PFLP, and others, such as Fatah and PSP, saw their fight as a revolution. By definition, in a revolution, members of all parts of society

need to be involved – including those not usually directly involved in combat. The Christian militias, on the other hand, saw their struggle as a fight for survival. A numerical minority (both in Lebanon and in the wider region), they saw their communities and their interests threatened by the presence and activities of Palestinians on Lebanese soil, and by calls for a new socio-political order made by Lebanese and Palestinian organisations operating in Lebanon. The relatively sudden outbreak of the war and the unpreparedness of the Christian militias especially created a window of opportunity for women to join their family members, friends and neighbours in the fight in their neighbourhoods. As for Amal, women were initially not included, for inner-group and ideological reasons. This changed when the security context changed considerably after the invasion of large parts of the south of Lebanon by the Israeli army in 1978. The fight against the external invader Israel, who was considered “the absolute Evil” by Amal founder Musa Sadr, led to Amal overcoming organisational barriers to the inclusion of female fighters. Women started to assume combat roles. In the case of the PSP, the threat perception was not sufficiently high to overcome organisational barriers to the inclusion of female fighters, as much of the fighting was delegated to Palestinian groups allied with the PSP.

The need to take into account the evolving nature of the security context is highlighted by the varying numbers of involvement of female fighters over

time and in different locations. The increase of female fighters in the militias of the LNM in 1975, followed by a decrease after the Syrian invasion in 1976 and a second increase in 1982, shows clearly how security pressures affected involvement figures. In contrast, numbers of female *militants* in Kataeb continued to rise as the group (and its constituency) did not experience a similar security juncture during the war – except perhaps for a short time, when pressures on the group were rising during the Mountain war. The number of female *fighters* in Kataeb did, nevertheless, decrease after the first round of fighting in 1976/77, when the temporary pause of fighting gave the militia an opportunity to reorganise. This reorganisation was followed by an increased exclusion of female fighters from frontline position. In Amal and in those LNM-affiliated groups operating in the South, numbers of female fighters were not subject to the same cycle of involvement as experienced by LNM groups operating in other parts of the country. This can be explained by the fact that due to the continuous presence of the Israeli army in the South of Lebanon, for those groups operating in the South, security pressures largely remained the same or even increased over time, and were not subject to as much change as they were in other parts of the country.

According to the vast majority of interviewees, the inclusion of female fighters was not a necessity in military terms. Instead, in addition to

individual and organisational factors described in the two previous chapters, the militias who included women during the war did so for the following *security-related* factors: to seek the attention of current or potential members and supporters and to assert a position in the civil war. Avoiding detection and outbidding competitors (which are two factors emphasised in existing literature) did not play a major role in the inclusion of female fighters during the civil war. This was mostly due to the nature of the war and the fact that, very early on, large parts of the country were divided into territories under the control of one militia, with demarcation lines clearly separating it from areas under the control of their opponents. However, women were employed in non-combat roles, such as weapon smuggling or intelligence gathering, in order to avoid detection. While the outbidding theory was criticised by existing literature, the claim that female fighters are included in order to avoid detection remains widespread in most publications on female political violence. The findings of this thesis question the assumption that avoiding detection is a crucial factor in all conflict contexts in which female fighters are employed. Instead, the findings of this study highlight the need to take into account the specificity of each particular conflict context.

Having examined the role that individual motivations, organisational characteristics and security-related factors played in organisational decision-

making on the inclusion of female fighters during the Lebanese civil war, I will discuss the extent to which societal aspects influenced the militias' decision-making during the war in the following chapter.

## Chapter 7 | Societal factors

Non-state armed groups are not isolated actors. Even the most clandestine organisations operate in a strategic environment which influences and shapes their decision-making. As described in Chapter Six, one key aspect of this strategic context is the security situation an armed group operates in. Another is societal factors, and more specifically, attitudes within the community that the armed group perceives to be their constituency. This is critical since most non-state armed groups depend on the direct, indirect or (at the very least) tacit support of the community outside their organisation, and must therefore take common attitudes into account. As Drake notes:

To a greater or lesser extent, a terrorist [sic] group depends upon the support of people who are not core members of their group, but who operate on its fringes or merely give it tacit support by withholding assistance from the group's opponents. [...T]he world outside the terrorist group can prove to be very important to the terrorists (1998: 144).

Social approval and cultural legitimacy “cannot be understated because these groups must have support to operate and survive” (Poloni-Staudinger and Ortals, 2013: 89). In the long run, no non-state armed group can exist without at least minimal support by their constituency. The relationship between non-state armed groups and the community is thus of a reciprocal

nature, as stated by Drake in the case of terrorist groups (which applies in the same way to other non-state armed political organisations): “Whilst a terrorist group may wish to affect society, society can in turn affect the terrorist group” (Drake, 1998: 144).

In practice, this relationship between the armed group and the community can take at least two forms (Drake, 1998: 148). If the community is in favour and supportive of certain forms of violence, their support can encourage the armed group to continue using or even escalate a certain strategy. If, on the other hand, the community disapproves of the violence, this can make the armed organisation reconsider it (Bloom, 2011: 25).

This does not mean that non-state armed groups entirely respect all societal or communal attitudes, norms and expectations, but rather that there are very few organisations that can fully ignore such norms and attitudes. Non-state armed groups usually override some societal norms, but respect or attempt to reframe others. The extent to which a non-state armed group follows public opinion has been claimed to depend on the degree to which the organisation relies on society’s moral (and financial) support (Drake, 1998: 153).

In consonance with this line of argumentation, existing literature on female political violence tends to assume that societal and communal factors are essential in the decision-making of non-state armed groups on the inclusion

of female fighters. This is believed to be the case because “[j]ust as women are members of the organization, they also belong to a family and social sphere” (Dearing, 2010: 1083). Communities often have specific expectations of women’s roles and activities and may be rebuked if the group’s activities diverge too much from these norms and expectations. In the existing literature on female participation in non-state armed groups, there is much focus on the ways in which societal factors constitute barriers to the inclusion of women in armed organisations. Some scholars claim that very gender-conservative societies, such as Afghanistan during the Taliban regime (where female participation in public life was limited to a minimum) tend to be more reluctant to allow female participation (Dearing, 2010). On the other hand, societal support is claimed to facilitate the inclusion of female fighters, even in otherwise relatively gender-conservative societies (Cunningham, 2003: 183-184, Bloom, 2005: 150, Ness, 2005: 365). Some contend that female participation in combat is encouraged in gender-conservative societies, which see women as less valuable members of the community (Berko and Erez, 2007a, Berko and Erez, 2007b).

In this chapter, I show how, during the civil war, many members of Lebanese society accepted female participation in combat roles, as the communities felt under pressure by the changing security context. Security pressures affected individual and organisational motivations, as discussed in Chapters

Four and Five. They also had a similar effect on societal and communal attitudes towards female participation in the war. A change in attitudes towards women's roles in public life (which had started in the 1960s and was amplified by the war) further facilitated women's inclusion in the militias, including in combat roles. However, despite these changes, Lebanon remained a relatively gender-conservative society. This impacted individual motivations; while some women were highly motivated to join the militias, others refrained from participating as female participation continued to be considered undesirable by large parts of society. It also had an impact on the militias who were trying to manoeuvre this situation by reframing female participation, and by transgressing some norms but respecting others. These findings largely support claims in the existing literature. However, they also stress that the specificity of each particular context needs to be taken into account, as it (1) influences which specific factors influence communal attitudes and (2) shapes exactly how non-state armed actors manage their relations with local communities.

Societal and communal norms and expectations are, of course, neither monolithic nor static, but tend to be multi-layered and change over time. Local and generational differences often exist, and socio-economic factors such as class, education or religion may also play a role. Moreover, during the civil war, many Lebanese identified with a community (often defined in

sectarian and/or political terms) rather than the country as a whole. This sentiment was of notable significance to the Palestinian residents of Lebanon, for whom international alliances often were of particular importance. This complexity is the reason why in this chapter, I look at both communal and societal factors (which overlap at times and differ at others). Together with the security situation, societal factors shape the strategic context in which non-state armed organisations operate and make decisions. For reasons of clarity, I analyse the security environment and societal factors in two separate chapters. However, this is not to imply that the two are not often closely intertwined and overlapping.<sup>26</sup>

The remaining part of this chapter consists of four sections. The first section looks at societal factors that facilitated the inclusion of female fighters in the militias operating during the Lebanese civil war. The second section looks at the ways in which societal factors inhibited female participation. In the third section, I discuss inter- and intra-community differences, and in the fourth section, I analyse the ways in which militias managed societal gender expectations. I show that society's reluctance to fully embrace female participation in combat roles was one of the main reasons why the numbers of women in the militias (both in combat and supportive roles) was

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<sup>26</sup> For examples of how others have decided to present the multi-layered nature of the strategic context in which non-state armed groups' decision-making on the inclusion of female fighters is shaped, see for example Dearing 2010: 1081 and Cunningham, 2003: 172.

considerably lower in the Lebanese civil war than in other armed conflicts described in the literature.

## 7.1 | Facilitating factors

### Societal approval

Many interviewees reported high levels of support in their communities (interviewees 6, 7, 11, 14, 23, 24, 25, 41, 45, 55, 59, 64, 66). One former female fighter in one of the smaller Christian militias recounted:

[P]eople were proud to see the girls. At the checkpoints, on the barricades, the girls changed everything. They were more polite, they were more gentle, they talked to people differently. That's why after a while we put the girls at the checkpoints (interviewee 11).

A leader of another small Christian militia remembered how a father brought his two daughters – who were 18 and 19 years old – to the militia so that they could fight with them (interviewee 60). Several other interviewees also stated that whole families were fighting together, especially in the Christian militias during the first round of the war when much of the fighting was very community-based (interviewees 2, 11, 14, 19, 25, 41, 44, 45, 55, 56, 57, 60, 66, see also Sneifer, 2006, El Murr, 2014, Duplan and Raulin, 2015). The fact

that family members often fought together in the first round of the war made it easier for some parts of the communities to accept female participation in the militias, as they felt reassured that fighting with their fathers, brothers and male cousins, their daughters and sisters were chaperoned (interviewees 19, 41). A male member of Kataeb explained how, the fact that the women were known to the community, facilitated their acceptance by the community. He remembered that in the beginning it was difficult for the community to accept female participation and that people would ask what these women were doing in the militias. However, once they recognised them as the daughter or sister of a member of the community, it was easier for them to accept the women's involvement (interviewee 56). The same interviewee also believed that a major barrier was overcome when the Christian bourgeoisie decided to allow their women to participate in the fighting. "That was it, it was not just the common people any more, but the bourgeoisie", he said, stressing how the acceptance of the middle and upper middle class was decisive in the overall acceptance of female involvement in the fighting (interviewee 56).

Just like many interviewees formerly affiliated with one of the Christian militias, several former LNM militants also described high levels of support for the women fighting during the war (interviewees 14, 23, 29, 48). One female LCP militant who was trained, but did not fight, remembered how

the training took place at their house. A cousin and his friends trained her and a group of other girls including her sister (interviewee 47). Similarly, a former journalist who worked in Beirut during the war (where she claimed to have “met a lot of Palestinian female fighters”) stated that to her, “they seemed like esteemed, respected members of society” (interviewee 26). A former fighter with the PSP remembered how in his village, to this day, the contribution of the eleven women who got injured fighting the Israeli troops is commemorated every year (interviewee 9).

However, several interviewees claimed that attitudes in the community regarding the inclusion of female fighters were divided (interviewees 6, 7, 16, 19, 46). I will look at this in more detail in Section Three of this chapter.

### Societal changes

In the 1960s and 1970s, Lebanon was a society undergoing considerable change, especially (though not exclusively) in the urban centres of the country (Abisaab, 2010, Traboulsi, 2012). Women were increasingly joining the work force (Abisaab, 2010, Traboulsi, 2012). Working class women worked on the tobacco fields in the South and in factories, notably in Dahiye and Tell-el-Zatar in Beirut (interviewees 1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 18, 21, 29, 30, see also Abisaab, 2010). They had also started to come to the cities from the villages,

to find work as helpers in better-off urban households (interviewee 21). Women were involved in strikes and other protest and gradually started to enter the political sphere (interviewees 12, 21, see also Abisaab, 2010). They were involved in charities and increasingly in political parties (interviewee 32, 65). The leftist parties in particular (who were campaigning for socio-economic change) were on the rise (interviewee 8, 22, 28, 32, 65). As one former female military commander in the LCP recalled, “people started to realise they have rights and can make demands, so everyone did [join], workers et cetera, and women started, too. Women [were] in all parties...” (interviewee 32). One interviewee remembered the strike in the Ghandour factory in 1972 (which was one of the biggest strikes at the time) and stressed that one of the killed strikers (Fatima Hawajja, an LCP member) was a woman (interviewee 21, see also Traboulsi, 2012). Middle class women, on the other hand, increasingly attended university and got a formal education (interviewees 9, 41). Many worked in administrative positions (interviewee 2, 9, 25) or were involved in political working groups in schools or at universities (interviewee 41).

As in other parts of the world, women’s entry into the work force and political sphere had consequences for gender norms and relations. As one former military commander in the CAO recalled:

The mood was an explosion of freedom and very liberal relations between men and women and [of] women breaking many societal rules [...] From 1970 to '75, there was a very active social movement and women's movement and a very active participation of women in the labour forces [...] Society, by that time, had been shedding lots of traditions (interviewee 65).

Several interviewees stressed how, they believed that, at the time, Lebanon was less culturally conservative than some parts of society are now (interviewee 22, 28, 41).

To a certain extent, these changes in the 1960s and 1970s were as a response to a wider movement that had started in Europe after 1968 (Eggert, forthcoming, 2018). Several interviewees mentioned the influence ideas and concepts reaching Lebanon from Europe and Northern America had at the time (interviewees 3, 11, 15, 19, 23, 31, 48). These cultural influences impacted both members of the Christian and leftist parties (interviewees 1, 3, 11, 19, 20, 41). However, for the leftist parties, regional developments and the 1967 defeat of the Arab armies in the fight against Israel, also played an important role. The failure of the army and the state in bringing about change was seen by some as a reinforcement of the notion that all parts of society, including women, had to get involved in the fight for change (interviewee 14).

As one interviewee described it, these societal changes in Lebanon in the

1960s and 1970s were the “introduction, the precursor to the woman’s role in the civil war” (interviewee 21). This confirms claims in publications on other conflicts, which stress the link between women’s participation in public life and their likelihood to be included as fighters in non-state armed groups (Cunningham, 2003, Speckhard, 2008: 998-999, Dearing, 2010: 1081, 1087-1089).

### Female participation in political parties

One area in which women’s increasing participation in society manifested itself in Lebanon in the 1960s and 1970s was in political parties (Abisaab, 2010, Traboulsi, 2012). Women’s presence in the parties had at least three effects on women’s involvement in the militias during the war. First, it cleared the path for women to gain first-hand political experience in political activism which, as shown in Chapter Four, was an entry point for many women to the militias once the war broke out. Second, as discussed in Chapter Five, the existence of women’s units (which were a part of or closely associated with existing political parties) provided women with a further opportunity to gain experience in political campaigning and organisation. Third, female participation in the parties also helped to inform societal attitudes, as it further normalised women’s participation in political roles in

the eyes of the public. The shift from women's involvement in non-violent political roles to their participation in violent political activities (though still a considerable shift) was not as enormous as it would have been had women not been involved in non-violent political activity prior to the war. As discussed in Chapter Four, female participation in non-violent political roles was described, both in existing literature on other conflict contexts and by research participants interviewed as part of this study, as a facilitating factor for women's involvement in combat roles during war. In this context, women's involvement in the party and societal attitudes towards their participation in political roles reinforce one another: the more women join political parties, the more their participation is normalised in the community. This, in turn, further decreases societal barriers for women's involvement in the party.

Women were involved in all parties before the war, but their percentage may have been the highest in the parties of the far left – such as the LCP, PFLP and CAO (interviewees 1, 22, 31, 32, 62). The LCP, in particular, had a pioneering role in the fight for women's rights and gender equality prior to the war (interviewees 1, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32). Though the situation of women in the LCP was certainly not perfect (interviewees 6, 31) and women were underrepresented in leadership roles (interviewees 1, 31, 32), female militants were involved at all levels (interviewees 1, 18, 31, 32). One

interviewee recalled how in some of the pre-war political groups and committees in schools and at universities that were associated with the LCP, the number of women was higher than the number of men (interviewee 22). In the Christian parties in general, and Kataeb in particular, women were also involved in relatively high numbers in the party before the war (interviewees 2, 11, 41, 44). Like in the parties of the far-left, this helped normalise female participation in political roles. In the case of Kataeb, this involvement of women in non-violent political positions played an important role in facilitating their later involvement as fighters. This was because the party was much more divided when it came to the role women were to have in the party (and in society more generally) as discussed in Chapter Five. The situation seems to have been similar in the Palestinian Fatah (interviewees 20, 52).

As far as Amal is concerned, women were involved both in the Movement of the Disadvantaged (the predecessor of the Amal Movement) and, later, in the party where they worked as doctors, teachers, scout instructors and other non-violent roles, before they started to participate in combat in 1978 (interviewees 50, 58, 63).

In the PSP, women were involved in the party (interviewees 7, 20, 42, 43, 51, 53). However, both security-related and communal factors prevented a more far-reaching involvement of PSP women in the war.

## Loosening of gender norms amplified by war

The loosening of gender norms that had started in Lebanon in the 1960s and 1970s was further amplified by the war (interviewee 65). This is a phenomenon which is widely described in existing literature on other conflict contexts (Cunningham, 2003: 185, 187, Speckhard, 2008: 1017; Bloom, 2011: 208). In the case of the Lebanese civil war, the loosening of gender norms was cited by members of all of the militias covered in this study. The only militia in which it played a lesser role was in Amal, where the involvement of female fighters in the group was largely kept secret by the militia (interviewee 63).

A former fighter with the LCP and Fatah described how war changed societal attitudes:

War creates its own atmosphere, social relations, values, stories. Things that were refused before the war, for a woman to come home late, where does she sleep – in war [they] become changed. [...W]ar changes social values (interviewee 17; see also interviewees 31, 45, 60, 64).

The same interviewee claimed that war had the potential to change social norms because “people think about the battle”, as she put it, rather than societal conventions (interviewee 17, see also interviewee 31). The cause the group was fighting for helped temporarily overcome societal barriers

(interviewee 52). Society might still not be in favour of women participating in combat; however, they will temporarily accept it, as it is considered a necessity (interviewee 57, see also 20, 31, 48).

In long protracted conflicts where the parties involved feel their identity or survival is at stake, female participation in combat often becomes particularly likely (Cunningham, 2003, Dearing, 2010). As discussed in Chapters Four and Six, security pressures caused both individuals and the non-state armed groups involved in the Lebanese civil war to consider the stakes to be too high to not mobilise as many members of society as possible. The same mechanism took place on the societal level, as the perception of an extremely high, imminent threat softened existing societal barriers. In the words of a former female Kataeb member, “we understood the price of the fight” (interviewee 25, see also interviewee 14). This is also the reason why in the LNM militias, societal acceptance was particularly high during the Israeli invasion – a fight which was perceived as much more existential than most inner-Arab battles during the war (interviewees 1, 18, 22, 24, 27, 29, 30, 31, 47, 52). Once women had joined the armed struggle, their presence opened space for others. This was mentioned by several interviewees. For example, in the case of Kataeb, Jocelyne Khoueiry was seen by many as “the woman who started it” (interviewees 16, 57). Over the years, other women in the party “proved themselves” and “earned their

respect” after fighting for their inclusion in the militia (interviewee 16, see also interviewee 7).

Lastly, if this process of loosening of traditional gender norms and expectations was amplified by the war (which opened a temporary window of opportunity for women wishing to join the militias as fighters), this process was halted again after the end of the war. In the words of one former fighter:

During battles, this negative atmosphere against women [in the form of restrictive gender norms and expectations] becomes less, because people think about the battle. When things calm down [after the end of the hostilities], they [society] start again [to restrict women’s options for participation] (interviewee 6).

Another former fighter and military commander remarked (almost cynically) that “female fighters don’t affect [patriarchal] structures” (interviewee 6). This supports claims in the existing literature which stress that one reason why women are accepted in combat roles is because they can easily be pushed back into non-military roles after the war (Cunningham, 2003: 185).

## 7.2 | Inhibiting factors

While changes in dominant gender norms and expectations in the 1960s and

1970s (which were amplified by the breakout of the war) facilitated female participation in the militias, other society-level factors inhibited women's full inclusion into these various groups. Despite societal changes, Lebanon remained a relatively gender-conservative society. Women had been included in most political parties; however, their roles in the parties remained limited (International Alert, 2011). While the escalating security situation facilitated women's participation in the militias, the war also contributed to limiting women's involvement in public roles, notably out of fear of sexual violence and rape. These different factors will be discussed below, while the role of socio-religious norms (which constituted another inhibiting factor) will be discussed in Section Four.

#### Conservative gender norms and expectations

The majority of interviewees believed that more women did not join the militias because of societal opposition to female involvement. This supports claims made in the existing literature on other conflicts, which highlights how societal opposition to female employment often prevents non-state armed groups from including more women (see, for example, Cunningham, 2003: 174).

Even though traditional gender norms had been increasingly challenged in

Lebanon in the 1960s and 1970s, many interviewees (regardless of their affiliation with a militia) contended that the country remained a gender-conservative society opposed to women's involvement in the militias, let alone in combat roles (interviewees 1, 6, 22, 26, 27, 28, 53, 54, 60, 62, 67, 68, 69; see also Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 47). Several interviewees stressed how, despite the fact that Lebanon was often considered to be a more gender-progressive society than many other Arab countries, patriarchal traditions were deeply entrenched (interviewees 8, 22, 28, 31, 54). Societal reluctance to allow female participation in the war affected the decision-making of both the militias and the women who may have otherwise considered joining (interviewee 28). Several interviewees stressed that this affected even the members of the secular groups, whose ideological beliefs did not erase their previous socialisation in a relatively gender-conservative society (interviewees 31, 54, 62). This is not to imply that differences between various locations, communities or even families did not exist (I will look at these in more detail in the following section of this chapter), but rather that very few members of Lebanese society at the time were not affected by commonly-held attitudes and beliefs on gender norms and relations.

In Lebanese society prior to and during the war, men's and women's roles were often clearly defined and divided by gender. Interviewees recounted

that, in many families, women tended to be expected to place value on their outward appearance and occupy themselves with domestic chores such as cooking and looking after their family (interviewees 20, 41, 53, 57, 62; see also Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 21, 25, 47, 54). Several interviewees claimed that the belief that a woman's priority should be her family was the dominant narrative until today (interviewees 6, 20, 41, 62). The idea of a female fighter directly challenged these gender expectations. Indeed, several former militia members recounted that female fighters had difficulties finding a potential spouse from outside the militia, as "people would be afraid to marry her" (interviewees 14, 22, 58). The same effect has been described by researchers working on other conflicts (see, for example, Alison, 2009). As far as gender roles in the family were concerned, one interviewee described dominant cultural narratives, according to which the husband or father was considered the leader of the household and who (at least in theory) had the right to veto decisions made by his daughters or wife (interviewee 28, see also Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 33, 54). This role of the father (and the family more generally) had the potential of limiting the options of both men and women. Indeed, one journalist who used to cover the war remembered that the reason he did not get involved as a fighter was his family opposing his participation in violence (interviewee 24). However, he was the only interviewee (out of 69) who recounted such an experience,

which indicates that women were much more affected by familial opposition to their involvement in the militias than men.

The belief that women belong in the domestic sphere (rather than in public life and politics) posed considerable challenges to those in favour of female involvement. A former male fighter with the LCP contended that “the patriarchal society plays a very big role in Lebanese politics” (interviewee 27). One interviewee, a male militant with the PSP, explained that “it took us a lot of time to change this attitude slightly” (interviewee 43). A former female CAO militant spoke of her frustration with regards to these attitudes:

“The war of woman is more [considered to be] in the private space, not in the other [public] space. [This is due to] our culture, our values, the division between role of men and women. Many people believe women belong in the private space, the house. [...] [Until n]ow, all political party and all militias prefer women inside the party, in the private space, not in elected committees. [This is] because in the political party there is masculine domination and we have no democracy in the party. Society? They don't like it... Our family and the committee, they were against [women's participation in the militias] (interviewee 62).

### Women's non-violent roles in the militias and political parties

One of the factors facilitating female involvement in the militias during the war was their previous participation in non-violent roles in the party or militia. However, women's roles in the parties remained limited. For

example, women reaching leadership positions remained the exception (interviewees 1, 2, 16, 18, 31, 32). This is one of the reasons why female participation in the militias did not reach higher levels. It also explains why, compared with the Christian militias, for example, the levels of female participation were considerably higher in the militias of the far-left. This will be discussed below.

In Kataeb (and later the LF), the number of women in leadership positions was particularly low. Asked if he remembered any female leaders in Kataeb or the LF, a former male party member first responded that he did not. After thinking for a moment, he named Madees Aswad – the sister of Amin Gemayel – who was responsible for a socio-political foundation, in a non-military role (interviewee 2). Another interviewee (a former member of the LF, who received military training but did not fight) gave a similar answer stating that she did not remember any female leaders except for Jocelyne Khoueiry, the head of the political unit for women in the Kataeb, and “two or three women in the headquarter, but not at a very high level” (interviewee 2).

In the leftist organisations, and the groups of the far-left in particular, the situation was different – with more women assuming leadership roles (interviewees 9, 18, 48, 52). In fact, three of the women of the far-left I interviewed assumed regional leadership positions during the war

(interviewees 6, 31, 32). Moreover, the number of middle-ranged female leaders and women in charge of military operations was also higher in the militias of the left (interviewee 18). Nevertheless, the percentage of women in leadership roles (even in the militias of the left) remained limited (interviewee 1, 6, 62). In the parties, female leaders were often the sister or wife of a respected member of the party (interviewees 2, 48) – a phenomenon which can still be observed in post-war Lebanon (International Alert, 2011). In many cases, women did not participate in training abroad (often due to her husband or father being reluctant to let her travel abroad on her own) which further minimised their chances of gaining leadership positions in the party or militia (interviewees 1, 27).

Existing literature on other conflict contexts notes that if women hold leadership positions in non-state armed groups, this facilitates the inclusion of more female militants (Gonzalez-Perez, 2008). The fact that this was not the case in Lebanon during the war supports these claims in previous publications on female political violence.

### Fear of rape

In the existing literature, experiences of sexual violence or fear of rape are often described as a mobilising factor for women during times of violent

conflict or war (Alison, 2009, Bloom, 2011).

On the other hand, fear of rape is also described as an inhibiting factor of female involvement. Cunningham (2003), for example, contends that in some societies, societal reluctance to accept women partaking in combat activities is less related to an ideal of women being confined to the private space than to fears of sexual abuse and rape. She highlights the example of Sikh combatants in India in this context:

Among Sikh militants, women have participated in an array of roles including armed combat. Importantly, Sikhism does not distinguish between male and female equality forming a religio-societal grounding that neither precludes female combat nor categorizes that role as uniquely masculine (or “unfeminine”). Rather, societal resistance to female combat roles is fostered by well-founded fears of sexual abuse, rape, and sexual torture of women if captured (Cunningham, 2003: 180).

If, at first sight, this reasoning does not seem to be related to gender norms and expectations as much as fears for the women’s well-being, it is also essentially based on normative gender structures. As a matter of fact, both men and women can be raped. Thus, if a society is more reluctant to allow female participation in combat than male involvement despite both genders being subject to the same threat in principle, this indicates that men and women are treated differently based on gender norms and expectations.

In the case of Lebanon during the civil war, fear of rape constituted an inhibiting factor for female involvement in the militias. It was mostly mentioned by interviewees referring to the Shia community. For example, one interviewee (whom I had asked if fear of rape of captured female fighters was one of the reasons Hezbollah and Amal were hesitant to employ women in combat) contended:

It's fine with them if you are killed – but not raped. “Don't leave us with a bad reputation” – that's how they think, the community, the society. It has all to do with inequality, that's why they use women indirectly [in non-combat roles] (interviewee 4).

A former male fighter with Amal also referred to the fear of rape as a major inhibiting factor, both because of the harm it could cause for the women and their families, but also because of its inherent potential to cause the conflict to escalate:

Because in Islam, we have some restrictions for girls. Maybe their father, brother or husband are against [their female family members' participation in combat]. That's why we couldn't allow them to fight, because society was against it. Because what would happen to her if she was caught? She would get raped and then tortured... And if she was raped, the relatives would take revenge, kill someone – the problems get worse. That's what happened by Israel and [Antoine] Lahoud in [the notorious Israeli prison] Khiam [in the South of Lebanon], they would threaten for women to get raped, rip

off part of their clothes (interviewee 58).

Fear of rape was mentioned less often by members of other communities (in addition to the two previously quoted examples, only one former female fighter with the LCP invoked it – namely interviewee 31). However, the status of women as members of society who need to be protected was mentioned by several interviewees from a variety of different backgrounds (interviewees 1, 8, 9, 23, 25, 26, 48, 49, 52, 55, 57, 59, 60). Many interviewees stressed that regardless of individual backgrounds, social traditions were often shared by different members of Lebanese society, an aspect I will look at in more detail in the following section on local differences. With regards to sexual violence in particular, one interviewee (a male civil society representative) contended that “[b]oth Muslims and Christians in Lebanon come from the same social tradition. Rape is very difficult [to deal with for members of all communities]” (interviewee 12).

### 7.3 | Inter-community and intra-community variation

Societal and communal attitudes, on any given topic, are rarely uniform. This is why, when assessing the role of societal and communal factors that affected organisational decision-making during the Lebanese civil war, it is

essential to take into account variation between and within different communities. In this section, I discuss the extent to which communal attitudes towards the inclusion of female fighters during the Lebanese civil war differed in various parts of the country. In addition to examining spatial variation, I consider the role religious, educational and class-related differences played in the attitudes of communities towards the inclusion of female fighters. The fact that there was a wide spectrum of societal attitudes towards female participation in the militias was stressed by several interviewees (interviewees 1, 2, 7, 16, 18, 19, 20, 22, 26, 46, 51, 64). One former male PSP fighter contended that this was due to the highly complex social fabric on which Lebanese society, which is made up of an extraordinarily diverse combination of “different groups, different parties, different religions”, was based (interviewee 51). He specified that “involving a woman in the war is not the same in each group, each religion” (interviewee 51). Another interviewee (a male former LCP fighter) recounted how, at times, this diversity of norms and values, manifested itself differently in two families living in the same building. He recounted how one family had allowed their daughter to have a boyfriend, whilst her (female) neighbour was not even allowed to leave the house after seven o’clock in the evening (interviewee 22).

## Local differences

The importance of taking into account local variation when studying societal gender norms and expectations has been stressed in the existing literature (Dearing, 2010: 1088, 1101, footnote 96). Indeed, most individuals interviewed as part of this study saw considerable local variation with regards to societal attitudes towards female participation during the war. Most interviewees agreed that attitudes in the Mountain were more gender-conservative than in any other part of the country. While one interviewee contended that the absence of female fighters in the Mountain was linked to harsher conditions (interviewee 21), most explained it by communal resistance to the inclusion of female combatants (interviewee 9, 18, 20). Some thought this was the result of higher levels of social conservatism amongst the Druze communities in the Mountain (interviewees 18, 20), but this notion was rejected by two former PSP fighters I spoke with (interviewees 8, 9). One of them explained:

[It was] because of the communities, the conservative communities. It's not a characteristic of Druze women not to fight, but of women of the Mountain. There were Druze women who fought in other militias, in Beirut for example (interviewee 9).

A former comrade of the same fighter stressed that even within the Mountain, there were local differences. He explained that he was from the Matn, which was different in culture to the Shouf region, as it was “closer to the city [of Beirut]” and “people used to emigrate from the Matn to the city earlier, so it was closer to the city culture” (interviewee 10). He went on to contend that the “social component of the Druze community in the Matn created a margin for women to participate more” (interviewee 10, see also interviewee 18).

In addition to describing the Mountain as one of the most socially conservative areas of Lebanon, many interviewees also described a more general rural/urban divide in communal attitudes towards female participation. Many interviewees remembered that female participation in the militias was more visible in the cities and that women’s involvement was more accepted in urban areas (interviewees 1, 2, 8, 9, 17, 18, 20, 48, 54). Beirut, in particular, was often given as an example of a place with higher levels of acceptance of female militancy (interviewees 9, 18, 20).

On the other hand, a (small) number of interviewees believed that levels of communal resistance to female participation in the militias were higher in the cities (interviewee 1, 49, 54). Interviewees believed this to be the case due to higher levels of religiosity (interviewee 49) and business interests of the merchants in cities such as Beirut, Tripoli, Saida and Jounieh, who, other

than the farmers in rural areas, had more to lose and were thus generally opposed to the fighting (interviewees 1, 32).

This apparent contradiction (between those stating that cities were a more hostile environment for female participation and those believing that this was in fact the case in rural areas) can probably be explained by two factors. First, most fighters in the cities originally came from rural backgrounds (interviewees 1, 2, 18, 48). Far from their communities back home, they enjoyed more freedom to transgress traditional gender norms (interviewee 48). For a lot of these women, it was easier to join a militia in the bigger cities than it would have been in their rural home communities. Second, levels of social conservatism were not the same in all cities. Saida, for example, was described by many as being particularly socially conservative (interviewees 1, 12, 29, 32). Thus, while the Mountain was one of the most socially conservative regions of Lebanon at the time (with the Shouf being much more conservative than the Matn), Saida was similarly conservative. However, most other big cities in the country were more open to female participation – especially if the fighters were from other parts of the country. The region most open to female involvement during the war were Beirut and villages in the South.

Female participation in the South (outside of Saida) is likely to have been more accepted by local communities for three reasons. First, women in the

villages had been working with men for decades, notably on the tobacco fields (interviewees 12, 32) – which would support the argument laid down in the second section of this chapter, per which involvement in public roles facilitates female war-time participation. Second, levels of religious education and practice tended to be lower in the villages and, as farmers and workers, many villagers were more receptive to leftist ideology than inhabitants of the cities, many of whom were merchants (interviewees 1, 12, 29, 32). Third, the close proximity to the border with Israel meant that the villages of the South were much more exposed to the effects of the war with Lebanon's southern neighbour. This, in turn, made communities in the South more open to female participation in the war, as described in Chapter Six (interviewees 24, 29, 30).

### Religious differences

Interviewees often saw religion as being a major inhibiting factor for the involvement of female fighters (interviewees 1, 27, 29, 32, 42, 49, 51, 53, 54, 58, 61, 69). Some interviewees contended that religion became more important as a reference point for communities (as well as individuals and organisations) after the initial stages of the war when the conflict started to be increasingly seen as being of sectarian nature (interviewees 18, 22, 26,

29). They argued that with the growing importance of religion in public discourses and the emergence of new actors (who increasingly framed their participation in religious terms) at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, women were pushed back into more traditional roles (interviewees 18, 26, 29).

However, not all interviewees saw religion as being of equal importance in all of the different communities. In the words of one interviewee, “Lebanese society is a combination of different groups, different parties, different religions” and “[i]nvolving a woman in the war is not the same in each group, each religion” (interviewee 51).

The belief that Muslim communities were particularly gender-conservative was often expressed (interviewees 7, 12, 26, 28, 29, 45, 51, 62). Of those interviewees who differentiated between different Muslim groups, most interviewees thought that Sunni Muslims were more gender-conservative than Shia Muslims (interviewees 7, 31, 54, 51). Only one interviewee (a Shia Muslim himself) believed that Shia communities were more conservative when it came to the role of women in the community in general, and in the militias in particular (interviewee 58). This difference between attitudes in the Shia and Sunni communities is likely to be linked to differences in class and education. Compared to their Shia fellow countrymen, most Sunni Muslims in Lebanon tended to be from more privileged backgrounds

(interviewee 1, see also Traboulsi, 2012). I will discuss in more detail how this is likely to have affected communal attitudes towards female participation – in the following section on the role of class and education.

The Druze community was also seen to be very gender-conservative, including by Druze interviewees themselves (interviewees 7, 9, 62).

It was disputed amongst interviewees whether the Christian communities were more gender-progressive than their Muslim counterparts. Ten interviewees contended that Christians in Lebanon were more gender-progressive than Muslims (interviewees 2, 11, 12, 19, 22, 28, 45, 56, 57, 66).

The spectrum of their opinions ranged from “Christians were a little more open than Muslims” (interviewee 28) to “Christians have never been conservative” (interviewee 26) to “Christianism does not discriminate against women” (interviewee 11). These views stand in contrast with the statements of eleven interviewees who believed that social conservatism, especially in question of gender norms and expectations, was dominant in both Muslim and Christian communities (interviewees 6, 7, 12, 30, 28, 41, 48, 51, 56, 60, 62). The two positions are not necessarily mutually exclusive (if one foregoes the view that “Christians have never been gender-conservative”), as it is possible that levels of gender conservatism were generally high in all communities in Lebanon, with slightly lower levels amongst Christians.

However, it is noteworthy that eight of the ten interviewees who believed that Christians were more gender-progressive than Muslims were Christians themselves (interviewees 2, 11, 19, 26, 45, 56, 57, 66). Amongst those who stated that Christians were similarly gender-conservative than their Muslim fellow countrymen, only two (or three) out of eleven interviewees were Christians (interviewees 56, 60, 62). This indicates that the self-image of interviewees differed considerably from how their community was perceived by members of other sectarian groups.

Whilst religion was seen as an important factor in the shaping of communities' attitudes towards female participation during the war, several interviewees stressed that religion alone could not explain variation in societal reluctance with regards to female involvement (interviewees 1, 2, 7, 9, 26, 31, 42, 51, 54). Amongst the other factors which interviewees believed should be taken into account in order to understand inter- and intra-community variation, class and educational backgrounds were mentioned.

### [The role of class and education](#)

While many interviewees mentioned inter-community variation in societal attitudes towards the inclusion of female fighters (as discussed in the previous section), some also described differences that could be found

within the various communities. Class and education were the two most commonly cited factors. Secular education was described as a facilitating factor (especially in the case of recently educated members of the working class), whereas religious education was perceived as an inhibiting factor (in the case of Muslim communities). As far as class is concerned, it is not possible to come to a definitive conclusion on what role class played in shaping societal attitudes towards the inclusion of female fighters.

In the case of the Christian communities, a middle-class background was considered by some to be conducive to higher levels of acceptance of female fighters (interviewees 4, 62). Interviewees linked this to higher level of education and of political awareness:

“They [the Christian community] were more open-minded, more determined.... They had been sending their children to school. They had read more and were fully educated, [whereas] many people in Dahiye [a Shia-dominated working-class suburb of Beirut] had come to Beirut from the countryside. When you, as a human being, start thinking about freedom and revolution and what it takes to get this freedom [you are more determined] [...] The Christians knew the idea of freedom, maybe their fathers or brother had taught them about it (interviewee 4, see also interviewees 14, 25, 62).

One interviewee believed that once the Christian bourgeoisie had come to accept female participation, this further legitimised the involvement of women in the militias (interviewee 56).

On the other hand, in the case of the Muslim communities, higher levels of education, and religious education in particular, were perceived by some as factors contributing to communal hostility towards female participation (interviewees 12, 31). As far as all of the different communities are concerned, some interviewees contended that middle-class members of society were more reluctant to accept female involvement in the militias (interviewees 1, 32). They contended that the middle-class merchants were opposed to the fighting in general, and particularly so female participation. They believed that this was related to higher levels of social conservatism and the business interests of the old Lebanese middle-class (interviewees 1, 32). The view that many middle-class members of society tended to be more opposed to female involvement is supported by the fact that the majority of fighters had a rural background (interviewees 1, 7, 18, 48). One reason why Shia communities seem to have been more accepting of female fighters could be that they tended to be from less privileged class and educational backgrounds than many Lebanese Sunnis (interviewees 7).

Of course, societal attitudes were also not constant throughout the war and subject to change. In the case of the role class played in this context, the

statement of a former fighter with the LCP is noteworthy. He recounted how, during the first round of the war, more individuals from a middle-class background participated in the militias, whereas when the conflict started to become messier, when criminal elements started to infiltrate the militias, and sectarian interests started to dominate, many middle-class individuals in general, and women in particular, stopped joining the militias (interviewee 22). One factor influencing this process was probably that for the Lebanese middle-class, female participation in the war was more acceptable when the war was still perceived to be a legitimate conflict over political issues – which was much less the case during the later stages of the war.

## 7.4 | Managing societal expectations

As discussed in the previous sections of this chapter, in large parts of society, female participation in the war was not seen favourably by members of the communities. However, female militants were involved in all of the militias – with some of the groups allowing women to participate in combat. Managing the dichotomy between societal attitudes and female participation required the militias to employ a number of strategies in order to avoid alienating local communities.

## Risk-awareness

The degree to which the militias were aware of the risk of alienating society by the inclusion of female fighters and whether or not the organisations took this into account in their decision-making divided interviewees.

Some interviewees were of the opinion that societal attitudes were not taken into account at all by the militias during the war (interviewees 14, 23, 28, 48, 50). One former SSNP fighter contended that “during the war, there is only the word of the militias, and they did not care the least [about societal attitudes to their behaviour]” (interviewee 48; see also interviewee 31).

In contrast to that, several other interviewees believed that the militias’ decision-making was influenced by societal attitudes towards the roles of women in the militias (interviewees 1, 6, 18, 20, 22). One interviewee (who used to be a fighter and military leader in the LCP during the war) acknowledged that even though women were, in principle, treated as equals in his organisation, the group’s options were limited by the fact that they were still part of a relatively gender-conservative society (interviewee 1). A former fighter with the Student Brigades of Fatah recalled heated discussions with some of the women in his group who insisted on an increased involvement in the militia which he, and some other members of the organisation, opposed (interviewee 20). He disagreed with the women’s

agenda as he feared a backlash from society. In his mind, societal expectations needed to be respected on the short and mid-term in order to reach the organisations' long-term goals:

You have to decide whether you want to act as liberated women – or do you want to liberate the Palestinian women. The way you do things will not encourage ordinary fighters to include his sister, mother et cetera in [the] fight. They will not accept them smoking, mixing with men, [for there to be] no difference with men. [If you think like that, y]our problem is that you remain a minority, you don't add anything to [for] the women, on the contrary. We have to go backwards a few steps to get thousands of women to join the fight. [We have to] act more conservatively. [...] I prefer a thousand women developed only one step in the political area rather than seeing ten women act as ordinary fighters (interviewee 20, see also 18).

He argued that one of the weaknesses of Arab leftists at the time was that they were seeking to import what he saw as Western concepts to Lebanon, which large parts of the Lebanese society were not ready for (interviewee 20). One of his former comrades in arms stressed that, in this regard, Fatah was warier of societal gender norms and expectations than groups of the far-left such as the LCP (interviewee 18). Some interviewees also pointed to the fact that, regardless of political convictions, the members of all militias were socialised in Lebanon and a product of its relatively gender-conservative society (interviewees 18, 31).

In practice, most militias sought to find ways to reconcile societal norms and expectations with their organisations' aims, which often resulted in a compromise between the two. In the words of a former female military leader in the CAO:

Communal norms are very imposed in the Orient. It would have been completely stupid if we had not respected these norms, if we had tried to provoke. Of course, you don't respect them in their totality, but enough to get by (interviewee 6).

Her view was supported by a former fighter with Fatah who claimed that "few reclaimed a total rupture with [societal gender] traditions" (interviewee 18). This support claims by scholars working on other conflict contexts, who have shown that non-state armed groups have an interest in good relations with the communities they are operating in (Arjona, 2016: 4, 9-18).

### Practical steps

The aim of militia members who took into account societal gender norms and expectations was, in the words of a former male fighter with Fatah, to "establish a relation of confidence", while "defending some ideas that could be accepted [by the society] step by step" (interviewee 18). This balancing

act by non-state armed groups is described in existing literature on other conflict contexts (see, for example, Cunningham 2003, Eager, 2008, Dearing, 2010).

In practice, this situation caused the militias to encourage exemplary behaviour by the members of the militias (interviewees 6, 18, 22, 29, see also Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 54, 84). One former male LCP fighter from Beirut remembered that “the Communist Party used to do their best to please other communities, to set a good example, and to show that they fight for a good cause. [...] They didn’t steal, rob” (interviewee 22). Another former LCP fighter from the South recounts how complaints from members of the community about fighters standing on the balcony in their undershirts resulted in this behaviour being stopped (interviewee 31). In Fatah, male and female members of the group who liked each other were encouraged to get married to comply with societal norms and expectations (interviewee 18). In Kataeb, women who were found to take drugs were sent home in order not to give their opponents any pretext to stop the involvement of female fighters (Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 54, 84).

This was important as the reputation of militia members had an impact on how members of the community saw the involvement of female members of their families. In this context, one former LCP fighter recalled how the father of his future wife did not object to her being involved (in a non-

combat role) in the LCP, as he “saw that some of the leaders of the Communist Party had a very good reputation, so for him it [his daughter’s participation] was not a shame, it was good” (interviewee 29). A former female fighter recounted that one of her responsibilities in the LCP was to recruit women, as she was considered to be a respected member of the community and a woman that people respected and looked up to. She would befriend family members of potential recruits to reassure them that their girls would be safe with the LCP (interviewee 31, see also interviewee 32). This strategy also entailed that if the party knew that (due to local mores) they were more likely to be looked at benevolently if they sent a male (rather than a female) militia member to a certain village, they would do so (interviewee 31).

One major concern for many members of the communities was unchaperoned mixing of men and women in the military camps and on the frontline (interviewees 20, 41, 44, 58, see also Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 39). Female (and, to a certain extent, male) militia members were often accused of promiscuity (interviewees 6, 8, 20, 21, 45). This was a problem both Christian and LNM militias faced. One way of dealing with it was to ensure that sleeping arrangements were gender-segregated (interviewees 20, 41, 44, see also Duplan and Raulin, 2015: 39). One former CAO commander recalled how they showed members of the community around the camp, in

order to alleviate fears of unrestricted gender relations (interviewee 6).

Communal reluctance to accept unchaperoned mixing of the genders was also one of the reasons why some of the militias established women-only combat units – as described with regards to other conflict contexts (Alison, 2009). Female-only units existed in Kataeb (and later the Lebanese Forces) (interviewee 18, 19). In addition to that (a female-only unit, which was close but not formerly associated with the PSP) existed in the Mountain, in the Ibdiye area (interviewee 20).

In Amal, the risk of alienating the community by the inclusion of female fighters was less pronounced since, for security reasons and to avoid targeted attacks by Israel, the participation of women in combat was largely kept secret – even from fighters in other units of the militia (interviewee 63).

### [Narrative approaches](#)

When attempting to reconcile operational goals of non-state armed groups with societal norms and expectations, non-state military actors often resort to narratives that help frame and contextualise behaviour, which would otherwise be considered deviant (Dearing, 2010: 1081). These narratives are aimed at opening spaces for female involvement in combat (Dearing, 2010: 1081). By reframing female fighters' participation, the organisation seeks to

alleviate society's fears (Ness, 2005: 354-355). As Dearing noted, "a structured language, history, and collective memory devoted to explaining female" political violence is developed (2010: 1083). This reframing often constitutes a balancing act between highlighting socially accepted and deviant practices (Ness, 2005, Eager, 2008: 139).

A common strategy of reframing female political violence is to stress the severity of the conflict situation and to rhetorically prioritise the non-state armed group's operational goals (such as freedom or the fight for survival) over traditional gender roles. Female political violence is presented as being without alternatives. This strategy is often used in wars of national liberation (Eager, 2008: 131 – 132). It also proved to be successful during the Lebanese civil war. As discussed in Chapters Four, Five and Six, the perceived severity of the threat led individuals and organisations to see female participation as a valid option in an extreme situation. The same narratives helped convince communities to, at least temporarily, accept female participation in combat, by framing it as a necessary contribution to "the Revolution" (in the case of the militias of the left), the "fight for survival" (in the case of the Christian militias), or the fight against the "absolute Evil" (in the case of Amal).

References of collective memory or religious terminologies constitute an essential part of reframing practices. "Thus, what would otherwise be interpreted as aberrant behavior becomes contextualized in a history of

accepted ideas” (Ness, 2005: 362; see also Dearing, 2010: 1084). Religion was mostly used by the Christian organisations and Amal in order to legitimise the inclusion of female fighters in their respective militias, albeit in very different ways. Whilst the Christian groups mostly used religion to differentiate themselves from Lebanese Muslims and Palestinians who were presented and perceived as being more gender-conservative because of their religion (interviewees 2, 7, 9, 12, 16, 19, 22, 28, 45, 57, 62, see also previous section), members of Amal framed women’s participation in the fight against Israel as a religious right (interviewees 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 50, 58, 63). Female Amal members compared their involvement during the war to the role of women in Islamic history, such as Khadijah. Since Amal is a Shia group, Fatimah and Zaynab were cited even more frequently (interviewees 37, 39; see also Deeb, 2006: 204-205). One woman said she felt that if the Prophet needed the help of women, maybe she needed to contribute to the fight against Israel, too (interviewee 37). Religious sayings by the founder of their group, Musa Sadr, were repeatedly quoted by nearly all Amal interviewees (interviewees 38, 50, 63).

Another factor, which can be found in the existing literature on other conflict contexts, and that is often claimed to play a central role in reframing narratives on female political violence, is the idealisation of sacrifice, with women’s participation being presented as a selfless act for the community

(Cunningham, 2003: 180-181, Ness, 2005: 367, Bloom, 2005: 160, Alison, 2009). However, this notion emerged in only two of the interviews I conducted in Lebanon. One former female Kataeb party member described the female Christian fighters as women who had “understood the price of the combat” and who were “offering their life” (interviewee 25). Comparing levels of female involvement in the Shia groups Amal and Hezbollah with women’s participation in the Christian militias, a civil society representative made a connection between higher levels of education of many (Maronite) Christians and farther-reaching levels of participation in Kataeb. She contended that higher levels of education amongst many Maronite Christians meant that they were more familiar with philosophical and historical concepts of freedom and revolution, and thus more aware of the sacrifices that might be necessary in the fight for the interests of their community (interviewee 4). The concept of sacrifice thus does not seem to have played a very central role in the reframing of female participation during the Lebanese civil war. This can likely be explained by local gender ideals which do not place as much emphasis on sacrifice as some South Asian cultures, for example, do.

## Role-models

Another factor linked to the promotion of narratives encouraging female participation in war is the existence of role-models for potential future female fighters. Existing literature claims that in societies in which such role-models exist, the inclusion of female fighters is facilitated, as the participation of women in combat is embedded into historically accepted notions of female involvement. In addition to legitimising female involvement on the societal level, role-models can encourage individual participation (Alison, 2009: 222-223). In the civil war in Lebanon, role-models (such as Soha Bechara, Lola Aboud, Leila Khaled, Sana Mhaidli, Dalal Moughraiby and Yassar Mrouhi) seem to have been of more importance in LNM groups (interviewees 2, 7, 17, 22, 23, 27, 31; Bechara, 2003: 47-48). This is likely due to the fact that women's involvement in LNM-associated groups went much farther than in the other militias. While Jocelyne Khoueiry (one famous female fighter with Kataeb and later the LF) was seen as an icon by some Christians (interviewee 2, 7, 11, 16, 57), others claimed not to have had any specific role-models (interviewee 16, 25, 26). One former female Kataeb fighter said her role-models were the women who were involved in the fighting in 1958<sup>27</sup> (interviewee 19), whereas a male fighter with one of

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<sup>27</sup> In 1958, fighting broke out in parts of the country for about three months, until an intervention by the US Army ended the immediate crisis (Salibi, 1976).

the smaller Christian groups referred to Jeanne d’Arc (interviewee 45). Role-models drawn from religious contexts were, not surprisingly, mostly invoked by members of Amal, as foregrounded above, even though one nominally Muslim member of one of the leftist groups also referred to female warriors in the first years of Islam (interviewee 6). This highlights how even members of the formally secular groups were versant in religious narratives.

## 7.5 | Conclusion

Female participation during the Lebanese civil war was facilitated by pre-war changes in communal attitudes towards the inclusion of women in public and political roles. This shift in traditional gender norms and expectations was amplified by the war. It provided the militias with a societal context not entirely opposed to the inclusion of female fighters. Despite this slow loosening of traditional gender norms, and despite the fact that considerable differences existed between and within the different communities, Lebanon remained a society characterised by relatively high levels of gender-conservatism. The militias which employed female fighters adopted a variety of strategies to manage societal gender expectations. These included practical steps (to reassure the communities that all gender norms were not transgressed) and the narrative reframing of women’s participation in the

militias. While this helped lessen communal resistance to female participation, societal reluctance to allow female involvement in the militias remained relatively high. The nature of the war (which took place in several rounds with some parts of the country being relatively unaffected by the war for extended periods of time) played a considerable role in this context. It is not unlikely that societal acceptance of female involvement would have increased, if the war had intensified. Communal reluctance to accept female participation impacted individual motivations (of women who might have otherwise joined the militias) and organisational decision-making. It explains why the overall numbers of female fighters during the war were comparatively lower than in other conflicts – even in those organisations which would have otherwise been open to the involvement of female fighters. These findings largely support claims in existing literature, whilst also stressing the need for multivariate analyses – which do not simply take gender into account, but also consider the role of other factors such as class, education and differences between different communities and sub-groups of society.

## Chapter 8 | Conclusion

This thesis posed the question of why some of the non-state armed groups (or 'militias') operating during the Lebanese civil war employed female fighters whilst others did not. It argued that the main reason for female involvement as fighters was the women's insistence to actively participate in combat. It showed that organisational characteristics and the security context were the second and third most important factors, and that societal aspects prevented higher numbers of women joining the militias.

The analysis undertaken in this thesis was based on a comparison of Lebanese and Palestinian armed organisations involved in the war and included the LCP, PFLP, Fatah, PSP, Kataeb, the LF and Amal. It thus included both groups which involved female fighters during the civil war and groups which did not. Examining individual motivations, organisational characteristics, security-related factors and societal aspects, this study highlighted the factors which can explain the employment of female combatants (and lack thereof). The study was based on the analysis of semi-structured interviews with 69 former militia fighters, party members, civil society representatives, researchers and journalists, as well as three (auto)biographies of female former militants and other secondary source materials.

This final chapter of the thesis summarises the key findings of this study. It first traces the processes which led to the inclusion of female fighters in some of the militias but not in others. Then, in the second section, I will discuss the contribution made to existing literature on political violence in general, and female militants more specifically. The third section looks at the limitations of this study. In the fourth section, I will discuss new questions that arise from this study that further research could examine in more detail, before outlining implications for practitioners and policy-makers working in conflict transformation, peacebuilding and related fields in the fifth section. The sixth section of this chapter contains an epilogue. When presenting my research at conferences and workshops during the last four years, I was often asked about the roles and experiences of the female militants I interviewed after the end of the war. Unfortunately, a detailed discussion of the post-war experiences of the former militia members I spoke with during the course of this research project is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, some key themes related to the former militants' post-war lives, which emerged during a number of interviews, shall briefly be outlined in the epilogue.

## 8.1 | Organisational motivations for the inclusion of female fighters in the Lebanese civil war

### Individual motivations: women's insistence to be included

The most important factor leading the militias involved in the Lebanese civil war to include female fighters was the women's insistence to be included. There would not have been any female fighters in Lebanon during the war, if women had not insisted to be included. The involvement of women was a bottom-up process. Contrary to the findings of some terrorism and conflict scholars working on female participation in other contexts (McKay, 2007: 171, Coulter, 2008: 55, Eager, 2008: 128, Alison, 2009: 139-141, Parashar, 2009: 137, Katto, 2014: 544), coercion did not play a role. All interviewees (except for two) confirmed that they, or their female comrades, joined the militias out of conviction and because they believed in the cause the militia was fighting for. Men and women largely named the same motivations. The main reasons for both men's and women's involvement in the war were reasons related to the perceived injustice and the security context. In the case of the leftist militias, men and women saw their involvement as participation in "the Revolution," fighting for a new socio-economic order, against Christian Maronite dominance of the state, and for Palestinian rights in Lebanon. The Christian militias, on the other hand, were fighting to

maintain the socio-economic system, preserve Maronite privileges, and to limit the presence and activities of armed Palestinian groups on Lebanon. As a religious minority in the largely Muslim-dominated Middle East, they saw their participation in the civil war in Lebanon as a fight for survival. In the case of Amal, women (and men) were motivated to join the militia in order to fight the threat by an external invader who was considered “the absolute Evil,” namely Israel. In addition to these motivations that were shared by both men and women, some interviewees also named gender-specific reasons. For example, some women joined the militias because they saw their participation as an opportunity to free themselves from the restrictions society placed on them as women. However, only a small minority of interviewees mentioned women’s liberation as a motivational factor. As far as individual backgrounds are concerned, there were no major differences between the men and women who joined the militias. Both tended to be young and they often had family members or friends who had been involved in the militias or the political parties associated with them before their involvement. Many had also participated in non-violent political activism before joining the militias as fighters. Having lobbied and campaigned with their male friends or family members before the war, they did not see why they should not be involved in the fighting as well. Women joined organisations that included women’s rights and gender equality in their

agenda, as well as those upholding more gender-conservative values and traditions. As to the question of why more women did not volunteer to join the militias (especially as fighters), interviewees believed that societal attitudes hostile to women's involvement constituted the main reason for women's reluctance to join the war.

### Organisational characteristics

The second most important factor after women's motivations were organisational characteristics – and, most importantly, the militias' gender ideology. When the women insisted on being included as fighters, they were included in those organisations that formally subscribed to women's rights and gender equality. As a result of their very permissive gender ideology, the organisational barriers to women's inclusion were the lowest in the militias of the far-left (such as the LCP, PFLP and CAO). In those militias that had a more ambiguous position on women's roles as a result of both secular and religious influences (like Kataeb, Fatah and Amal), ideological barriers to female participation were considerably higher. Thus, the percentage of female fighters in these militias was lower than in the militias of the far-left. The main reason why women were not included as fighters in the militias of the PSP was the party's gender ideology. The case of the PSP stresses the importance of looking beyond official labels when assessing an

organisation's gender ideology. Officially, the PSP was a 'progressive socialist' party; however, de facto, the party was very influenced by traditional Druze gender norms and expectations. The fact that some Druze women formed a separate all-female unit on their own and that Druze women fought with other leftist militias during the war highlights how women were motivated to join but were not allowed to join as fighters in the PSP's own militias. Similarly, Amal did not allow women to join as fighters until 1978, as their gender ideology only allowed female participation in combat under very specific conditions (such as the fight against an external invader who was considered the "absolute Evil").

Internal structure and dynamics also played a role in facilitating (or inhibiting) female participation during the war. The militias involved in the Lebanese civil war were of course not monolithic organisations. Instead, they consisted of members from a range of different backgrounds. Even in the militias of the far-left, female participation in combat was contested to a certain degree. The role of the leadership was crucial in this context. In those militias in which the leadership was undivided in their opposition to female deployment, women did not participate in combat (namely in the PSP and in Amal before 1978). In the militias in which the leadership was divided (such as in Kataeb and Fatah), external security pressures and women's insistence to be included ultimately led to women's involvement.

Lastly, there is evidence that organisational structure was also decisive in the later inclusion of women as militants and fighters, in so far as nearly all the organisations, which employed female combatants, had had a long tradition of engaging women in separate women's units. Several interviewees saw the existence of these units as crucial in the later inclusion of female militants in general, and female fighters in particular. These units provided women with the space to organise and develop political confidence and they helped to normalise women's presence and participation in the parties, albeit in a separate, female-only unit.

External relations did not play the same role in all of the militias. While the Lebanese left was clearly inspired by the role of the women in the Palestinian revolution, female members of the Christian militias did not have similar role-models for female involvement. This might be one of the reasons why the percentage of female fighters in the Christian militias was considerably lower than in the militias of the far left. Lastly, organisational aims did not play an important role, as both organisations with domestic aims as well as those with an international agenda included female fighters. However, there is some evidence that once inner-fighting and criminal activities started to dominate the militias, many women were turned away from the militias for these reasons. Moreover, there is some indication that the type of project

the different militias had for the nation-state they were fighting for also had a positive impact on the inclusion of female fighters.

Lastly, organisational age and size did not play a significant role, as both older and younger organisations included female fighters. Of the two organisations that did not deploy female combatants, the PSP and Harakat Amal (before 1978), one was one of the oldest parties in Lebanon at the time (the PSP), whereas the other (Amal) had only just recently been founded.

### The security context

In those militias with organisational characteristics that were not conducive to the inclusion of female fighters, security pressures facilitated female participation – if the security pressures were perceived as serious enough to warrant the inclusion of female fighters. This was the case in Kataeb, Fatah and Amal. Kataeb and Fatah were (on an ideological level and as far as their leadership were considered) divided on the inclusion of female fighters. However, increasing security pressures at the beginning of the war led to ideological concerns to be overcome – at least temporarily. The same perceived injustice and security pressures that had led individuals to join the militias at the beginning of the war facilitated female involvement on the organisational level. The escalating security situation opened a window of opportunity for women to get increasingly involved in the militias.

In the case of Amal (an organisation whose leadership and ideology were both opposed to female participation), the invasion of large parts of the South in 1978 by Israel led the organisation to reconsider its resistance to female employment. This is the reason why in Amal, women were employed as fighters against Israel from 1978 onwards. Women continued to be excluded from combat positions in the PSP because at the beginning of the war, much of the intense fighting was undertaken by the PSP allies, such as different Palestinian groups. Security pressures were thus not directly felt by the militia itself as much, and the inclusion of female fighters did not seem necessary or justified. When the PSP felt under higher threat (during the Mountain war), the party's rationale for the war had shifted to a fight for "the land and the family" (interviewee 9). Due to this shift, including female fighters was not a possibility as this would have directly contradicted their slogan and the belief behind it.

When assessing the role of the security context in the decision-making of both individuals and the militias, it is essential to consider the levels of involvement in the different groups throughout the war. For example, in the groups of the left, female participation rose sharply at the outbreak of the war when security pressures were particularly high. Female involvement decreased again after the first round of the war when the Syrian army entered the country in 1976 (which calmed the situation down), until the

next round of fighting started. In 1982, with the invasion of the Israeli army, female participation increased again. In the case of Kataeb and the smaller Christian militias, numbers of female fighters were particularly high at the beginning of the war. High security pressures, the relative unpreparedness of the Christian militias and the resulting chaos at the beginning of the war facilitated the inclusion of female fighters. After the first round of the war (when the Christian militias had time to reorganise), this window of opportunity was closed and the percentage of female fighters in the Christian militias was never again as high as it used to be in the first years of the war.

### Societal factors

Female inclusion in combat positions during the war was rendered possible through a combination of individual, organisational and security-related factors. However, the percentage of female fighters (even in the militias of the far left) was considerably lower than in other violent conflicts (see for example Henshaw, 2016). This can be explained by high levels of societal opposition to female participation in the war. Female involvement in the militias was preceded by a slow shift towards a more gender-progressive society in the 1960s and 1970s. Women had increasingly started to join the workforce and political parties, and more and more women were involved

in non-violent political activism from the 1960s onwards. These changes went hand in hand with a slow shift in attitudes on women's roles in society. Following the outbreak of the war in 1975, these developments were amplified by increasing security pressures. The intensifying security context led not only individuals and militias, but also the communities, to consider female participation in the war a momentary necessity, and thus temporarily acceptable. However, due to the nature of the war (which, in many parts of the country, consisted of rounds of fighting with relatively calm periods in between), societal structures remained relatively intact in much of war-time Lebanon. Conservative gender norms and expectations remained widespread. As a result, opposition to female participation in combat roles remained relatively high.

The fact that women's roles in the political parties and militias involved in the war had remained limited also impacted their involvement in combat roles. The amount of female fighters never exceeded a few percent of the overall fighting force, even in the militias of the far left. In addition to conservative gender norms and expectations and the limited role women played in non-combat positions in the political parties and the militias, fear of rape was another important inhibiting factor. The social cost of a female fighter being raped would have been extremely high in the relatively gender-conservative society that Lebanon was at the time of the war.

Societal barriers to female participation existed throughout most of Lebanese society at the time. Nevertheless, local differences existed. In particular, the situation varied considerably between rural areas and the big cities, but also between different cities and communities. The extent to which areas had been affected by the conflict played a role in this context – as the case of the South of Lebanon illustrates. Also, the extent to which religion was an inhibiting factor was contested by interviewees. Some interviewees (especially those formerly associated with Christian militias) believed Muslim communities were more gender-conservative than their Christian fellow countrymen. Many Muslim interviewees, on the other hand, claimed that both Christians and Muslims were influenced by conservative gender norms and expectations during the time of the war. Moreover, class and education were also seen as factors shaping attitudes on female involvement in the militias.

Faced with the dilemma of women insisting to be included while large parts of the communities were opposing female participation in combat, the militias were aware of the risk of alienating communities by female involvement. Thus, those militias that included female fighters actively managed their relations with the communities, with a view of reassuring the communities whilst allowing the militias to continue to employ women. With that aim in mind, militias undertook practical steps (such as making

separate sleeping arrangements for male and female militia members) and developed narratives to reframe female participation. These steps helped the militias to successfully navigate gender expectations of the communities they were based in, and thus facilitated the inclusion of female fighters despite a relatively gender-conservative society.

## 8.2 | Contribution to existing literature

### Literature on the Lebanese civil war

As the first comprehensive study of organisational motivations for the involvement of female fighters during the Lebanese civil war, this research project filled an important gap in the literature on the civil war in Lebanon. Unlike most publications on the Lebanese civil war (Norton, 1987, Winslow, 1996, Johnson, 2001, Fisk, 2001, El-Solh, 2004, Mackey, 2006, Hirst, 2011, Traboulsi, 2012, Hanf, 2014), this study took into account the roles and experiences of female militants and fighters. By focusing on female militants and fighters, this study challenged wide-spread views (which continue to dominate in academic literature and cultural contributions to the debate about the war) (Cooke, 1987, Karamé, 1995, Shehadeh, 1999, Labaki, 2011), that women in Lebanon were not involved in the destruction caused by the war. With regards to the (very) limited literature on female militia members

and fighters during the Lebanese civil war, it questioned assumptions made in existing literature, according to which the highest numbers of female fighters could be found in the Christian militias (Karamé, 1995, Shehadeh, 1999). Unlike previous studies, which only focused on up to three different militias (Peteet, 1991, Sayigh, 1993, Karamé, 1995, Shehadeh, 1999, Parkinson, 2013), this research project discussed the participation of female militants in nearly all of the major militias involved in the war.

#### Theories on involvement in political violence and organisational decision-making

This study supported findings of previous literature, which stresses the inaccuracy of viewing non-state armed actors as inherently irrational and unpredictable (Horgan, 2005, Kalyvas, 2006, Wiktorowicz and Kaltenthaler, 2006, Sageman, 2008, Shapiro, 2012, Shapiro and Siegel, 2012, Arjona and Kalyvas, 2012, Shapiro, 2013, Staniland, 2014, Arjona et al., 2015). It showed that the militias operating in the war were, as Shapiro put it, “intendedly rational” (Shapiro, 2012). In other words, they adopted a means-to-ends approach, chose from the number of options known to them the one they expected to provide them with the highest expected gain, and evaluated the expected outcome of their actions and act accordingly (Shapiro, 2012). This study also supported the findings of those who stress that involvement in

political violence is, in most cases, a process (Horgan, 2005, Taylor and Horgan, 2006, Horgan, 2009). Indeed, for many (male and female) fighters interviewed as part of this study, the process of getting involved as combatants started with non-violent activism and engagement with the respective group's values and ideas. This study found that both structure and agency mattered in the Lebanese civil war. Moreover, this study showed that context matters in the study of political violence (as pointed out by previous studies) (Taylor and Horgan, 2006, Eager, 2008). Acknowledging the importance of context, this study highlighted the importance of tracing the different factors which shape the context, in which an individual, group or community operate. This is of utmost importance as the specific setting, which shapes individual, organisational and communal decision-making, can vary considerably – even within the same country, region, city, organisation or family. Thus, like previous studies (Horgan, 2009), the findings of this thesis challenged efforts to identify a “typical” militant profile or pathway into militancy. Instead, the findings of this study supported the claims of those scholars who call for multi-level approaches to the study of political violence and militancy in general, and female involvement in militant movements in particular (Cunningham, 2003, Horgan, 2005, Taylor and Horgan, 2006, Cunningham, 2008, Eager, 2008, Horgan, 2009, Cunningham, 2010, Dearing, 2010, Davis, 2013, Eggert, 2015, Davis, 2017).

## Individual motivations

As far as individual motivations are concerned, the findings of this study on female (and male) militants' backgrounds largely supported claims made in the existing literature on female fighters in Lebanon and other conflict contexts (Petee, 1991, Vázquez, 1997, Bernal, 2000, Cunningham, 2003, Hamilton, 2007, Von Knop, 2007, Eager, 2008, Zedalis, 2008, Parkinson, 2013, Henshaw, 2016). As described in existing publications (Weinberg and Eubank, 1987: 254, West, 2000: 186, Bloom, 2005: 235, Berko and Erez, 2007a: 152, Berko and Erez, 2007b: 498, Eager, 2008: 108-109, 111, 122, 148, 163-164, 176, 184, 204, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008: 106, Zedalis, 2008: 50, Alison, 2009: 123, 143-144, Gayer, 2009: 4, Bloom et al., 2012: 66), whilst individuals from a range of different backgrounds joined the militias, the majority were young and had personal links to the militias or the respective political movements. The findings of this study on women's motivations to join the war support claims made in conflict studies (Henshaw, 2016, Eager, 2008), which challenge conclusions some terrorism studies scholars have come to. In particular, the assertion that women join for "personal" reasons whilst men do so for "political" reasons, is not supported by findings of this study, despite continuing to dominate much of the literature on female political violence written from a terrorism studies perspective (Victor, 2003, Bloom, 2005: 145-146, 163, 235-237, Pedahzur,

2005, Berko and Erez, 2007b, Jacques and Taylor, 2008: 321, O'Rourke, 2009: 707-710). Moreover, in line with the criticisms voiced by a number of conflict studies scholars (Eager, 2008), the findings of this study question the usefulness of distinguishing between "personal" and "political" reasons. Since conflict and terrorism studies scholars often focus on the same conflicts and groups, this difference in findings is likely to be due to biases in the terrorism studies literature. This is because sometimes (unfortunately), terrorism studies literature is characterised by problematic perspectives on political violence, which essentialise and other non-Western cultures, peoples and individuals (see, for example, Speckhard and Akhmedova, 2008, Bloom, 2011, Margolin, 2016). Similarly, the question of whether feminism was a motivational factor for women to join the militias was found not to be nearly as important as the sometimes excessive focus on this question by some Western researchers may imply (Gayer, 2009). As far as the debate over the salience of greed and grievances is concerned (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004, Gurr, 2012), this study showed that for the women and men interviewed as part of this study, political grievances clearly trumped more materialistic aims. Indeed, several interviewees claimed they decided to quit the militias when intra-sect fighting over power and influence started.

As to the impact of organisational characteristics on individual decision-making to join the war, this study adds to the criticisms of the work of

Gonzalez-Perez (2008), who claims that groups with domestic aims are more likely to include female fighters. This study showed that women were neither deterred by international aims of organisations nor by gender-conservative ideologies of the groups they joined. This supports previous findings of other scholars working on armed groups with gender-restrictive policies (Cunningham, 2008). Moreover, the fact that perceived injustice and security pressures were seen as the main motivational factor to join supports the claims of those scholars who stress that the fight for a bigger cause (such as nationalism) often trumps women's aspirations for gender equality or women's rights (Alison, 2009).

Lastly, the findings of this study, which concluded that neither coercion nor the search for protection constituted motivational factors for women joining the militias during the Lebanese civil war, contradict claims on the role of coercion and protection made in many publications on female political violence in other contexts (Eager, 2008: 128, Alison, 2009: 139-141, Parashar, 2009: 137, Katto, 2014: 544,). This contradiction can likely be explained by the nature of the Lebanese civil war. Firstly, it took place in a very politicised environment (at least at the beginning of the conflict), so both men and women were mainly motivated by political arguments. Secondly, in large parts of the country, the war consisted of intensive rounds of fighting followed by intermittent peaceful periods. As a result, the war did

not reach the same levels of intensity as, for example, many conflicts in Africa (a region much of the coercion literature focuses on) (Eager, 2008, Katto, 2014). For most women living in Lebanon at the time, the relative short periods of intensive fighting in most parts of the country meant that joining a militia was not necessarily the most optimal strategy to seek protection. While personal experiences or fear of rape is a motivational factor in many other conflict contexts for women to join armed groups (Bloom, 2005: 163-164, Von Knop, 2007: 400, Alison, 2009: 136-137), the findings of this study support those who claim that the role fear of rape plays varies from context to context (O'Rourke, 2009: 712-714). In Lebanon during the civil war, fear of rape inhibited female participation. However, conflict-related rape was not widespread during the Lebanese civil war. It is thus likely that the reason fear of rape was an inhibiting (rather than encouraging motivational factor) is related to the relative lack of war-time sexual violence. This is an indicator that fear of rape would constitute a more important motivational factor for women to join militias in conflicts in which sexual violence is used as a systematic tactic of war.

### Organisational characteristics

As to the role that organisational characteristics play in group decision-making on female participation, this study supports findings of previous

literature on the importance of ideology (Cunningham, 2003, Ness, 2008, Dalton and Asal, 2011). However, unlike some other studies, this thesis argued that it is a group's gender ideology (rather than its general political orientation) that should be at the centre of focus. The case of the PSP, in particular, stressed the importance of looking beyond official labels and analysing de facto policies, rather than formal positions. Moreover, this study stressed the need for literature on non-state armed actors to view violent organisations as diverse and multifaceted groups. When studying decision-making processes for example, it is particularly important to take into account divergent views within organisations. Methodological issues are often one of the main reasons why non-state armed groups are not portrayed as the internally diverse organisations they tend to be. For example, gaining access to (former) fighters or internal documents can often be challenging, which is likely to be one of the main reasons why internal dynamics and structures are sometimes not given as much attention in existing literature as they should. Nevertheless, taking intra-organisational diversity into account, is essential in the study of armed groups.

Another factor, which is sometimes omitted in studies of armed political groups' decision-making, is external influences. This study highlighted how important the example of female participation in the Palestinian revolution was for the leftist groups operating in Lebanon. It also showed how the fact

that the Christian militias operating in Lebanon did not have a similar example of like-minded armed groups including female fighters is likely to be one of the reasons for the lower percentage of female combatants in the Christian organisations. As far as organisational aims are concerned, as discussed above, the findings of this study challenge Gonzalez-Perez's claims on the role of domestic vs. international aims of non-state armed groups (2008). The findings of this study support previous criticisms of Gonzalez-Perez's work (Narozhna, 2009). They are yet another indicator that Gonzalez-Perez's claims do indeed not withstand empirical testing. However, there is some evidence that the specific project the various militias had for the nation-state they were fighting for was decisive, as discussed by Yuval (1997) and Alison (2009).

### The security context

As far as the security context is concerned, this study showed that during the Lebanese civil war, security pressures was an important factor motivating individuals, groups and communities to support female participation in the war. This supports findings of previous literature on female political violence, which highlights the importance of security pressures (Cunningham, 2003, Cunningham, 2008, Eager, 2008, Dearing, 2010, Bloom, 2011). Security pressures were deemed so important that even those

groups, which would otherwise be reluctant to include female fighters, allowed women to join. By claiming security considerations have the potential to trump ideological positions (Cunningham, 2003, Cunningham, 2008, Eager, 2008, Dearing, 2010, Bloom, 2011), previous literature have reached similar conclusions.

This study stressed the importance of taking variation into account in how security threats are perceived over time when analysing security pressures. The findings of this research project support claims made in existing literature, according to which some non-state armed organisations include female fighters in order to seek the attention of (potential) supporters and recruits (Ali 2005, Bloom, 2005: 144, Von Knop, 2007: 400-401, Speckhard 2008, Zedalis, 2008: 50, 57), whereas others avoid employing women so as to stress their moral superiority (Alison, 2009). Most publications on female political violence claim that female fighters are included in order to avoid detection (Cunningham, 2003: 184-185, Bloom, 2005: 143-144, Bloom, 2011: 88-89, 129, 141). This claim is not supported by findings in this research project. This apparent contradiction between findings of this study and previous literature can be explained by the nature of the war in Lebanon. The frontlines between territories under control of the various militias were set early in the conflict and did not change considerably in large parts of the country. The use of unconventional, less suspicious operatives

was thus not as important as it can be in conflict zones where movement in enemy-controlled territory is an essential part of non-state armed groups' tactical repertoire.

The claim that adopting unconventional tactics (such as the inclusion of female fighters) can be a move to outbid competitors (Bloom, 2005) was not supported by the findings of this study either. This can be explained with the comparatively high levels of resistance to female involvement in combat roles, which remained dominant in Lebanon during the war. In such an environment, attempts to outbid competitors could have quickly backfired and caused considerable backlash by the communities, which would have outweighed any advantages gained in the competition with rival or competing organisations.

### Societal factors

Lastly, the findings of this study support some previous claims on the role societal factors play in organisational decision-making on the inclusion of female fighters. The question of whether gender-conservative societies inhibit female participation (because the communities oppose non-conventional female roles, see Cunningham 2003: 183-184, Bloom 2005: 150, Ness, 2005: 365), or encourage female involvement (because women's lives are not valued, see Berko and Erez 2007a, 2007b) is contested in the

existing literature. The findings of this study support the position in this debate which contends that societal resistance to female participation can be explained by communal opposition to women's inclusion in non-traditional, unconventional roles.

Moreover, the fact that women's involvement in the militias in Lebanon was facilitated by their previous participation in non-violent public roles supports the argument that a loosening of traditional gender norms can lead to increasing female participation at times of war and violent conflict (Cunningham 2003, Speckhard, 2008, Dearing, 2010). In this context, this study stressed the importance of undertaking nuanced analyses of female participation in public life and the role it plays in the decision-making on women's involvement in war. For example, it is essential not only to take women's numerical participation into account in such analyses, but also the level and nature of their involvement.

As this study showed, female participation in the war did not reach higher levels, because although female involvement in the militias in Lebanon was facilitated by women's previous participation in public life, female party leaders remained an exception. As far as the effects of security pressures on communal attitudes are concerned, this study provided further evidence that even gender-conservative communities can be persuaded of the temporary necessity of female participation in the war – if the overall

security context is perceived to warrant it. This effect has been described in the existing literature (Cunningham, 2003, Eager, 2008, Alison, 2009), the findings of which are supported by the conclusions of this study.

This study stressed the need to take local variation in societal attitudes on female militancy into account. In previous publications (especially in terrorism studies), societies are sometimes portrayed in highly simplistic ways and depicted as monolithic and uniform entities (Berko and Erez 2007a, 2007b, Speckhard, 2008, Bloom 2011, Margolin, 2016). By including inter-group and intra-group variation in communal attitudes and taking spatial and temporal differences into account (as well as factors such as class, education and religion), this study directly challenged such simplistic accounts of societal attitudes on female political violence.

Lastly, in the debate on the relation between non-state armed groups and their constituent communities, the findings of this study support the argument of those who claim that violent armed organisations have an interest in being on good terms with the society in which they are based or operating (Cunningham, 2003, Ness, 2005, Cunningham, 2008, Eager 2008, Dearing, 2010). The findings of this study challenge the views that non-state armed organisations do not take communal attitudes to their behaviour into account and that they act completely independently of their communities. Similar to previous publications on how non-state armed groups manage

community relations (Cunningham, 2003, Ness, 2005, Cunningham, 2008, Eager 2008, Dearing, 2010), this study showed that the militias operating during the Lebanese civil war employed a number of practical and narrative strategies in order to reassure and not alienate local communities.

### 8.3 | Limitations of this study

While this study makes a number of important contributions to existing literature on female political violence on the one hand, and the Lebanese civil war on the other, it has several limitations.

Firstly, the geographical and temporal focus of this study is the Lebanese civil war. It is one of the very few studies examining female participation in the militias during the Lebanese civil war – and the first taking the roles of women in nearly all of the major militias involved in the war into account. However, the extent to which the findings of this study can help to explain why non-state armed groups involved in other conflicts decide to employ female fighters remains to be seen. The unusual diversity of Lebanese society, the high number of different internal and external conflict parties, the extreme volatility of alliances during the war, as well as the overall regional and international context, made Lebanon during the civil war a very specific context. Moreover, especially in the beginning of the war, it was a

highly politicised conflict. This is likely to have affected the dynamics of the conflict in ways that might not have occurred in the same manner in other civil wars (especially those in which conflicting ideologies play a less important role). It is thus important to note that the main contribution of this study is an analysis of the factors influencing organisational decision-making on the inclusion of female fighters during the Lebanese civil war, rather than a theory of female political violence in general. Nevertheless, in many areas, this study reached similar conclusions to those of other studies of female political violence, which is an indicator that at least some of the arguments made in this thesis also apply to other conflict contexts beyond the singular case of the Lebanese civil war. At the very least, it provides further empirical support for several claims in existing literature – which is not to be underestimated in a field of study that is often characterised by its lack of empirical studies.

The second major limitation is related to the sample of this study. During sampling and interviewee recruitment, all efforts were made to take factors such as age, gender, position in the militia, educational and socio-economic backgrounds as well as origin within Lebanon, into account. Nevertheless, this study cannot claim to include a representative sample. This is a challenge many qualitative social sciences studies face, which was further complicated by the focus of this project, as the overall number and

characteristics of the population of former militia members in Lebanon is unknown. In fact, as discussed earlier in the thesis, some former fighters interviewed claimed to know (but were unwilling to share) numbers on, for example, the overall size of their militia's fighting force during the war. As pointed out in Chapter Three, sharing specific details (such as numbers or names of militants) was particularly sensitive in the case of the Palestinian militias and the Amal Movement. The passing of the Lebanese amnesty law of 1991 created a climate that is much more conducive to academic research on political violence than is the case in many other post-war contexts. This is because it gave interviewees the possibility to share details of their involvement in the war without fear of legal repercussions. However, the scope of this Lebanese law does, of course, not extend to external actors, which is why interviewees whose militias used to be (or still are) in a state of conflict with Israel were much more reluctant to speak about details of their (former) comrades' involvement. Rather than presenting a representative study of female political violence and organisational decision-making, this project thus offers an analysis of some of the key themes, as discussed by the interviewees I succeeded in gaining access to. Considering that this study is the first comprehensive analysis of female political violence in all militias involved in the Lebanese civil war, this caveat seems less problematic than

the alternative, which would have been to not conduct research on the topic at all.

Related to this is the fact that it was not possible to gain access to former members of all militias involved in the Lebanese civil war. As discussed in the methodology chapter, repeated attempts were made to secure an interview with Hezbollah officials, which in the end, turned out to be impossible. I suspect that, in many ways, the decision-making on the inclusion of female fighters in Hezbollah was affected by similar factors to the Amal Movement. However, without gaining access to (former) Hezbollah members, it is impossible to make any definitive statements on female participation in the organisation. Similarly, this study would have benefitted from the inclusion of the (mostly Beirut-based) militia Mourabitoun, as another example of a militia that did not include female fighters during the war. However, it was not possible to include this militia in this study either, as access could not be gained. I also regretted not being able to conduct more interviews with (former) members of the Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party (SSNP). I succeeded in securing interviews with two former SSNP fighters, but gaining wider access was not possible. Including the SSNP in a study of female political violence during the Lebanese civil war would be particularly interesting due to the party's very specific mix of left-wing and right-wing

ideological beliefs – which could potentially help shed light on the role of ideology in the inclusion of female fighters.

## 8.4 | New questions

While this research project has addressed several important questions, future studies of female perpetrators of violence could look at a number of other questions.

Notably, future research on the topic of female fighters in Lebanon could attempt to examine organisational motivations of some of the militias not included in this study, such as Hezbollah, Mourabitoun, SSNP or some of the Baathist and Nasserist groups involved in the Lebanese civil war. While it is likely that other researchers will encounter similar challenges when trying to contact former fighters from these groups, studies including an even broader set of armed organisations would be highly valuable. In the case of Hezbollah in particular, it is possible that a change in the overall political context in the region would increase the chances of external researchers gaining access to former fighters. Thus, even if it is currently not possible for external researchers to interview former Hezbollah fighters, there is a possibility that this will change in the future. Studies focusing on the role of women in groups where interviewing former militants is difficult at the

moment could instead collect data in other ways and resort to documentary analysis for example, in the case of those groups on which sufficient documents are available.

Second, considering that this study is based on interviews with 'only' 69 interviewees, future projects could try to include a bigger sample of research participants. This could, for example, be achieved by focusing on single groups and conducting in-depth single-n studies of some of the groups examined in this research project. This would be of particular value in the non-Christian and the non-Palestinian groups (such as the LCP, CAO or the PSP), as although a number of studies have focused on women in the Palestinian national movement (such as Peteet, 1991, Sayigh, 1993, Parkinson, 2013), and on women in the Christian militias during the civil war to a lesser degree (Karamé, 1995, Shehadeh, 1999), there are still very few publications on other armed groups operating in Lebanon, like the LCP, CAO and the PSP. The same is true for Amal. Whilst there is a substantial amount of literature available on Hezbollah (Jaber, 1997, Harik, 2005, Cordesman, 2006, Azani, 2011, Norton, 2014, Levitt, 2015), including some journalistic publications on women in Hezbollah, there is much less academic work published on Amal (one notable exception being Norton, 1987), let alone on the role of women in Amal. Nevertheless, even in the case of the Christian and Palestinian armed groups operating during the Lebanese civil war, more

in-depth studies of these organisations would be highly valuable to help us understand better why women were included as fighters during the war.

In addition to in-depth single-n studies of the militias involved in the Lebanese civil war, further research could approach the topic from a comparative perspective. Comparative studies could, for example, adopt a Most Similar, Different Outcome (MSDO) design and examine different Christian, Shia groups or Lebanese and Palestinian leftist organisations. Alternatively, it would be possible to undertake cross-alliance studies, comparing LNM-affiliated groups with organisations that were part of the LFr, or study how shifting alliances between different groups affected their inclusion of female militants. The relatively large numbers of different organisations involved in the Lebanese civil war provides manifold opportunities for comparative research on the role of female militants during the war.

Moreover, further insight could be gained by comparing single organisations or groups of organisations involved in the Lebanese civil war with non-state armed actors in other wars. For example, future studies could compare single leftist, right-wing, Shia or Palestinian militias involved in the Lebanese civil war with similar groups in the wider Middle East. Leftist and Palestinian groups, in particular, were very active in a number of countries in the region (and beyond), which provides ample opportunities for comparative studies

with the potential to help shed new insights on the inclusion of female militants in non-state armed groups. Beyond the region of the wider Middle East, Latin American groups constitute particularly interesting cases in these contexts, as many of these groups were also active in the 1970s and 1980s – sometimes with direct ideological links to some of the groups operating in Lebanon during the civil war. Moreover, comparative studies could be extended to include, for example, the leftist movements of Europe and the US of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

In terms of questions new research could examine, future studies could explore several of the issues highlighted in this project in more detail. For example, this study showed that the role of class and education in the inclusion of female militants (on the individual, organisational and societal level) would deserve to be studied in more detail. The same applies to the question of local differences in societal attitudes to female participation in the war. Future studies could explore in more detail how local differences on the levels of sectarian affiliation, religious practice, gender norms and expectations, and female participation in public life and politics impacted female involvement in the militias. Moreover, the question of how different militias learned from each other, and how various militias managed their relations with their constituent communities, could be explored in more detail. Also, existing literature claims that once women get involved in non-

state armed groups, the number of female militants in the groups rises (Gonzalez-Perez, 2008) – something this study briefly looked at. Future projects could examine this claim in more detail. Lastly, this study showed that material benefits seemed to be less of a motivational factor for women than for some men. This claim could be further considered in future studies. As far as methodological approaches are concerned, whilst this study undertook a qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews and written (auto)biographical accounts, authors of future studies could consider adopting different methods of data collection and analysis, including more quantitative approaches. As far as the difficulty of gaining access to some of the militias involved in the Lebanese civil war (such as Hezbollah and the SSNP) is concerned, this challenge could potentially be overcome (at least partially), by basing the analysis on audio, video and printed material from the time of the civil war. However, this would of course only apply to those militias whose archives were not destroyed in the course of the war or since its end.

Finally, future studies could include an analysis of the roles and experiences of former female fighters after the end of the civil war in Lebanon. They could examine whether male and female militants encountered similar challenges (if any), when reintegrating back into civilian life and if there are any differences in how men and women view their involvement in the war

retrospectively. Future studies could also explore the roles and experiences of male and female militants in the many subsequent violent conflicts Lebanon has experienced since 1990, notably the Lebanon war of 2006, the violent protests and clashes in the mid-2000s, and the series of bombings in the mid-2010s.

## 8.5 | Implications for practice and policy

The main aim of this study was to conduct an academic analysis of why non-state armed organisations decided to employ female fighters in the Lebanese civil war. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify implications for practice and policy. The findings of this study are of particular relevance to practitioners working on violence prevention, conflict transformation and post-war recovery.

First, this study showed that despite non-state armed organisations often being portrayed as irrational and unpredictable actors in academic – and even more so in political and media – discourses (Horgan, 2005, Taylor and Horgan, 2006, Wiktorowicz and Kaltenthaler, 2006, Sageman, 2008, Horgan, 2009), the militias operating in Lebanon during the civil war were, as Shapiro put it, “intendedly rational actors,” who made decisions based on the knowledge available to them (2012). The former militants interviewed as part of this project described their decision to join the militias during the war

as a deliberate choice. The portrayal of militias and their members as generally irrational and unpredictable actors is thus misleading. It can even be counterproductive, as denying militia members their agency can lead to channels of communication (which could otherwise be used to negotiate political solutions) being closed. Therefore, portraying non-state armed actors in simplistic ways should be avoided – especially if such portrayals involve denying the groups (and individuals) in question their agency. Rather than vilifying individuals and organisations as irrational, unpredictable actors, the aim should be to understand the factors that motivate them to engage in violence.

Moreover, recent research has stressed the importance of viewing involvement in political violence as a process, in which context matters (Horgan, 2005, Taylor and Horgan, 2006, Sageman, 2008, Horgan, 2009). These previous findings are supported by this study. For many of the individuals interviewed during this research project, involvement in the various non-state armed groups studied was a process, which often started with non-violent activism. Moreover, context mattered. The individuals and organisations examined in this study were part of their societies; they responded to developments in society and to how their behaviour was perceived by society. For practitioners and policy-makers, it is thus essential to be aware of the wider context in which political violence occurs. This

entails knowing and, if possible, engaging with key stakeholders, including community leaders, civil society representatives and members of wider society. Practitioners and policy-makers aiming to prevent, end or transform political violence would be well-advised to be aware of common trajectories into political violence. Whilst it is not possible to identify “profiles” of the “typical militant”, there are nevertheless characteristics many militants have in common. Knowing the grievances and motivations, which lead individuals, groups and communities to support violent movements or engage in political violence themselves, can help to prevent or counter violence by working on non-violent solutions to the issues in question instead.

This study showed that women were involved in all of the militias operating during the Lebanese civil war. In most of the major militias, women participated as fighters. If women are involved in perpetrating political violence, gender-specific prevention and reintegration programmes must be available. However, most prevention and reintegration programmes (including measures implemented by governmental agencies, international organisations and civil society groups) tend to overlook the needs and experiences of women in non-state armed groups (Eggert, forthcoming, 2017). If gender is taken into account at all, many of these programmes reflect and reproduce widespread gender stereotypes of women as either victims of political violence or actors for peaceful change (Eggert,

forthcoming, 2017). Simplistic portrayals of women's and men's roles at times of conflict continue to dominate public discourses on the civil war in Lebanon (Eggert, forthcoming, 2017). Instead, the needs, concerns and experiences of both men and women should be taken into account in programmes aimed at preventing and countering violence and facilitating former fighters' reintegration.

As far as individual motivations are concerned, this study showed that men and women were involved in the war for largely the same motivations. In post-war Lebanon, comprehensive locally rooted initiatives to deal with the past remain the exception. Activists and practitioners deplore this lack of programmes addressing the civil war, its legacy, and the numerous violent episodes post 1990 (Barak, 2007, Haugbølle, 2012, Launchbury et al., 2014). Considering the findings of this study, taking the experiences of both male and female militia members into account is essential in this context in order to fully understand the impact the war had on both men and women. Most interviewees mentioned perceived injustice and security threats as the main motivational factors for their involvement in political violence. These same grievances were also decisive in shaping organisational and communal decision-making. Were it not for these grievances, it is highly unlikely that the majority of militants would have joined the war. The decrease in numbers of female (and male) militants after the first round of the war

clearly illustrates this point. Thus, addressing grievances should be the main focus of any conflict prevention and transformation programmes – ideally before the conflict escalates and mobilisation for armed campaigns starts. The fact that such an approach has not been prioritised in post-war Lebanon (and in the region) is highly worrying in this context. In fact, the lack of comprehensive conflict transformation approaches in Lebanon is probably one of the main reasons why the country has been experiencing a series of high-intensity fighting – including one full-blown war, since 1990.

While most interviewees mentioned perceived injustice and security pressures as the main motivational factor, for some female militants, women's liberation was another reason to join. In order to help prevent female involvement in political violence, the fact that gender equality is rarely achieved in most non-state armed groups could be highlighted by practitioners working on conflict prevention. In this context, former militants could be involved in depicting a realistic image of what involvement in political violence entails. In order for such counter-narratives to reach the widest audience possible, it would be essential to include the experiences and perspectives of both men and women from a variety of different backgrounds.

As far as organisational characteristics are concerned, this study showed that women joined and supported nearly all of the militias involved in the

Lebanese civil war – regardless of the organisation’s position on gender equality and women’s rights. Moreover, relatively gender-conservative positions on the roles of men and women did not prevent these organisations from including female fighters when the group perceived the security situation to warrant it. Nevertheless, stereotypes according to which women do not join gender-conservative or religious armed groups as militants, let alone combatants, continue to be widespread. These misleading assumptions provide non-state armed groups with a tactical advantage, as they allow the organisations to employ operatives without their opponents perceiving them to be a threat. It is thus essential for practitioners working in conflict prevention and transformation to understand that possible organisational barriers to women’s involvement in non-state armed groups are often overcome. This includes organisations which external observers may perceive as upholding traditional gender norms and/or even contradicting women’s interests.

A second important organisational factor which must be taken into account by practitioners and policy-makers is the diverse membership of many non-state armed organisations. Non-state armed groups are rarely monolithic, uniform organisations. This was certainly not the case in the militias operating in the Lebanese civil war. This study showed that the inclusion of female fighters was debated – even in those militias in which organisational

barriers to their involvement were practically non-existent (such as the militias of the far-left). Understanding this diversity within non-state armed organisations can help practitioners and policy-makers tailor their responses to armed movements even more effectively.

Lastly, this study highlighted that in addition to individual and organisational motivations, it is essential to take into account communal attitudes in order to explain female political violence. This thesis showed that high levels of resistance within most communities were one of the main reasons the percentage of female fighters was much lower in Lebanon during the civil war than in many other conflict contexts. The militias were aware of the potential impact communal attitudes could have on their operational capability. All of the militias examined as part of this study took the communities' positions into account and managed their relations with the communities with a view to maintain good relations. If communities can help to prevent political violence or, at the very least, the inclusion of certain groups of society (such as women), programmes focusing on conflict prevention and transformation must take into account the role of the community. Whilst including communities is essential before and during active violent phases, it is particularly important after the violent stage of conflict has ended, as many former female militants report high levels of hostility from within their communities when they return to their pre-war

civilian lives (interviewees 58, see also Cunningham, 2003). Lastly, it is noteworthy that while the communities in Lebanon were largely against female involvement in political violence, this view changed when faced with extreme security pressures and perceived injustice, which, again, stresses the need to prioritise addressing perceived injustice and security threats as part of conflict prevention and transformation.

## 8.6 | Epilogue: post-war perspectives

After more than fifteen years of violent conflict, the signing of the Taif agreement marked the beginning of the end of a war that had devastated the lives of millions of people in Lebanon (Traboulsi, 2012). One year later, the fighting finally stopped when the Syrian army entered the country – and stayed as an occupying force for the next fifteen years (Hirst, 2011). In March 1991, the Lebanese parliament passed an amnesty law, which pardoned most political crimes committed during the war. Two months later, with the exception of Hezbollah (which ‘rebranded’ itself as a militia focused on the fight against Israel), all non-state armed groups were dissolved (Traboulsi, 2012). This time, it was not merely another relatively calm period of peace before yet another round of fighting would break out. This time, the war was indeed over. Or was it? The arguments of those who contend that the

fighting may have stopped, but the war never did, are compelling (interviewees 46, 49, 64, see also Traboulsi, 2012). More than forty years after the outbreak of the war, the majority of the grievances which caused it in the first place, remain unaddressed (Hirst, 2011, Traboulsi, 2012). Moreover, Lebanon has witnessed a number of violent conflicts, including a full-fledged war, in the twenty-seven years since the official end of the civil war (Hirst, 2011, Traboulsi, 2012).

Like all members of Lebanese society, the men and women who were fighting in the militias had to rebuild their lives after the war. A detailed discussion of their roles and experiences in post-war Lebanon is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, a brief overview of the interviewees' post-war experiences shall be included in this epilogue. What struck me most whilst speaking to the former militia members I interviewed for the purpose of this study was how disillusioned many of them were (interviewees 1, 2, 23, 31, 32, 46, 51, 59, 64, 66). During the war, they had fought for what they believed was the right thing. In fact, the sentiment that they had been fighting for a just cause and that the war had been forced on them by their opponents was a recurring theme in many interviews – regardless of the militia the interviewees were affiliated with during the war (interviewees 42, 43, 52, 53, 55, 58, 59, 62). In the words of one interviewee, “every party was going into this war believing they do the right thing” (interviewee 43). Now,

many interviewees see the use of violence against their fellow countrymen as a mistake, even if they still believed in the political positions they stood up for during the war (interviewees 1, 2, 31, 53, 55, 62). I was often left with the impression that interviewees' frustration at the turn that Lebanese society had taken after the end of the civil war was due to the very convictions that had made them join the war. Regardless of which side they had been fighting on, they had risked their lives for their vision of a better society. In many ways, post-war Lebanon disappointed in this regard. Most of the grievances remained unaddressed, violent clashes continued to break out regularly, and most communal groups saw themselves as losers in the war. Moreover, the extreme commercialisation of Lebanese society was criticised by several interviewees (interviewee 1, 66).

For many of the former fighters, the end of the war brought with it personal changes as well. Many of the marriages between former militia members ended, because as one former LCP fighter put it: "people change after the war" (interviewee 23, see also interviewee 31). Some moved abroad (interviewee 45, 66), others took their own lives (interviewee 1). Many felt betrayed by the politicians and former militia leaders (interviewees 1, 46, 66, 59, 64). In the words of one former LCP fighter:

The leaders of the militias are still in power. To make peace, you have to pay a price. They didn't. They have been in power

all the time for the last 26 years. Their own people, they throw them away [and tell them]: “find your way” (interviewee 1).

The former members of the leftist organisations also had to come to terms with the fact that the influence of their party diminished considerably after the collapse of the Soviet Union (which occurred at around the same time as the end of the war) (interviewee 22). While former members of the communist and socialist organisations had been fighting for a secular state in Lebanon, they were now faced with the rise of sectarian narratives and actors. “All those in the South who used to be with the Communist Party are now with Hezbollah,” one female former LCP commander deplored (interviewee 32).

We know from many other post-war societies that female involvement during war often fails to be followed by an increase in the quality or quantity of women’s participation in society after the end of the fighting (Alison, 2009: 222). In most cases, female participation in the war is accepted temporarily, before women are pressured back into more traditional gender roles (Gayer, 2009: 22). This was also the experience of many of the female fighters during the war. While many female fighters faced hostile reactions from members of their communities (as discussed in Chapter Seven), one interviewee believed that it was easier for women to re-integrate into

civilian life after the war, as they could focus on their domestic roles, look after their families and raise children (interviewee 31).

As far as the status of women in Lebanon more generally is concerned, several interviewees believed that the emergence of sectarian narratives in the 1980s in general, and the rise of Hezbollah and other Islamist parties, in particular, led to women in Lebanon facing increased challenges (interviewees 22, 28, 30, 31, 32, 41). As one former female fighter and military commander put it, “in the Seventies, there were no Hezbollah and other Islamic parties [who, when they emerged, largely side-lined women or allocated them gender-specific roles]” (interviewee 31). Another interviewee (a former male LCP fighter and military commander) did not see religion as the problem, but saw the issue as being rooted in societal mores, norms and expectations:

In general, Lebanese society has a very backward and traditional thinking. They look posh, but actually have a very backward thinking. Even if, within a party, they see a woman who is successful, they will throw stones at her. We need a few hundred years until we see women as more than just [objects] for men (interviewee 54).

I would like to finish the thesis with this quote, in the hope that it will take much less than “a few hundred years” for the many activists and civil society representatives I encountered during this research project to

democratically, peacefully and sustainably achieve the change they have been fighting for in Lebanon for decades.

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## Appendix

# Map of Lebanon and her neighbouring countries



Source: <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/lebanon.html> (last accessed 26 September 2017).

## Map of Lebanon and her districts and regions



Mount Lebanon is called the Mountain (al-Jabal) in Arabic, which is how I refer to it in this thesis.

Source: <http://www.cometolebanon.com/about-lebanon/governorates-of-lebanon> (last accessed 26 September 2017)

## List of major militias, parties and alliances

### Lebanese Front (LFr), later Lebanese Forces (LF)

English name	Arabic name	Abbreviation
Tigers of the Liberals	Numur al-Ahrar	Tigers / Numur
Guardians of the Cedar	Hurras al-Arz	(no abbreviation)
Lebanese Kataeb Party	Hizb al-Kata'ib al-Lubnaniya	Kataeb
Lebanese Forces	al-Quwwat al-Lubnaniya	LF
Lebanese Front	al-Jabha al-Lubnaniya	LFr
National Liberal Party	Hizb Al-Waṭaniyyin al-Ahrar	NLP / al-Ahrar
Tanzim	Tanzim	(no abbreviation)

### Lebanese National Movement (LNM) – Lebanese organisations

English name	Arabic name	Abbreviation
Communist Action Organisation	Munazzamah al-'Amal al-Shuyu'i	CAO
Lebanese Communist Party	al-Hizb ash-Shuyu'i al-Lubnani	LCP
Mourabitoun	Mourabitoun	(no abbreviation)
Progressive Socialist Party	al-Hizb al-Taḡadummi al-Ishtiraki	PSP
Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party	al-Hizb al-Suri al-Quwmi al-'Ijtima'i	SSNP

### Lebanese National Movement (LNM) – Palestinian organisations

English name	Arabic name	Abbreviation
Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine	al-Jabha al-Dimuqratiya li-Tahrir Filastin	DFLP
Palestinian Liberation Organisation	Munazzamat at-Tahrir al-Filastiniyya	PLO
Palestinian National Liberation Movement	Munazzamah al-'Amal al-Shuyu'i	Fatah

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine	al-Jabha al-Sha'biyyah li-Tahrir Filastin	PFLP
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### **Other (Shia) organisations**

<b>English name</b>	<b>Arabic name</b>	<b>Abbreviation</b>
Amal Movement	Harakat Amal	Amal
Hezbollah	Hezbollah	(no abbreviation)

# Interview guide

## Summer 2015

### Introduction

- me, (my daughter), (interpreter)
- context of research, publications
- anonymity, quotes

### Facts / individual motivations

- women in the party and militia
- how many? when? which roles? leadership positions? who? why?
- what about women's roles in other groups?
  
- interviewee's personal background and reasons for involvement (or in the end)

### Organisational characteristics

- ideology: left-wing/right-wing; gender image in group; official ideology vs. regular members
- aims: domestic vs. international change; Volk-, Kultur-, Staatnation
- age and size: medium-sized more likely to include? old more likely to include?
- internal dynamics: (dis)agreement?; leadership vs. regular fighters?

### Security environment

- avoid detection?
- seek attention? (media; shaming of men)
- assert a position?
- necessity?
- learned from Palestinians?

### Societal factors

- gender-permissive culture > female participation in society
- narratives of female violence
- interplay between culture and security
- 1958 vs. 1975?

### Resources

- allies

- funders
- diaspora

**End**

- Contact again if more questions?
- Other potential interviewees?

# Interview guide

## Winter 2015/16

### Introduction

- me, (my daughter), (interpreter)
- context of research, publications
- anonymity, quotes

### Facts / individual motivations

- numbers
- backgrounds
- motivations
- difference in location
- difference in time
- which roles?
- since when?
  
- interviewee's personal background and reasons for involvement (or in the end)

### Organisational characteristics

- ideology
- aims
- age and size
- internal dynamics
- leaders vs. base
- other groups? same camp, opponents

### Security environment

- necessity
- avoid detection
- media
- shame men
- assert position (better than others / more dedicated)
- messy war
- sisters of men

### Societal factors

- women in party, militia, community, society

- narratives, role-models
- culture <> security
- 1958
- learned from Palestinians / West?
- trustbuilding
- regional differences

**End**

- Contact again if more questions?
- Other potential interviewees?

## List of interviewees

Summer 2015

21 July – 31 August 2015 (42 days / 6 weeks)

21 interviewees (19 interviews)

No	Gender	Organisation	Role	Location interview	Language interview	Others present
1	Male	LCP	Former combatant (commander)	Public (café)	English	My daughter
2	Male	Kataeb / LF	Former party official	Private (work)	English, French	My daughter
3	Female	Civil society organisation	Civil society representative	Private (work)	English, German	Group interview
4	Female	Civil society organisation	Civil society representative	Private (work)	English	Group interview
5	Male	Media	Journalist	Private (work)	English	Gate-keeper
6	Female	CAO	Journalist / researcher / former commander	Semi-public (work)	French	N/A
7	Male	Civil society organisation	Researcher	Private (work)	English	My daughter

<b>8</b>	Male	PFLP	Former combatant	Semi-public (work)	Arabic-English	My daughter; interpreter
<b>9</b>	Male	PSP	Former combatant	Semi-public (work)	Arabic-English	Group interview; my daughter; interpreter
<b>10</b>	Male	PSP	Former combatant	Semi-public (work)	Arabic-English	Group interview; my daughter; interpreter
<b>11</b>	Female	Tanzim / LF	Former combatant	Private	French	My daughter
<b>12</b>	Male	Court	Judge	Semi-public (work)	English	My daughter; others
<b>13</b>	Male	Palestinian organisation(s), later Islamists	Former combatant	Private	Arabic-English	My daughter; gate-keeper / interpreter
<b>14</b>	Male	Different Lebanese and Palestinian LNM militias	Former combatant	Public (café)	English	My daughter
<b>15</b>	Male	Civil society organisation	Researcher	Private (work)	German	N/A
<b>16</b>	Female	LF	Former party official,	Public (café)	French / English	My daughter

			trained to be an officer			
17	Male	Fatah, CP	Former combatant	Public (café)	Arabic-English	My daughter; interpreter
18	Male	Fatah	Former combatant	Public (café)	English / French	My daughter
19	Female	Kataeb / LF	Former combatant (commander)	Private (work)	French	My daughter
20	Male	Fatah	Former combatant	Public (café)	French	My daughter
21	Male	CAO	Former combatant	Private (work)	Arabic-English	My daughter; interpreter

### Trip winter 2015/16

5 December – 3 January (30 days / 4 weeks)

21 interviewees (20 new interviewees; 13 interviews)

No.	Gender	Organisation	Role	Location interview	Language interview	Others present
22	Male	LCP	Former combatant	Public (café)	English, French, Arabic-English	My daughter; interviewee's friend (interpreter)

<b>23</b>	Male	LCP	Former combatant	Public (café)	English	N/A
<b>24</b>	Male	Media	Journalist	Public (café)	English	N/A
<b>25</b>	Female	Kataeb / LF	Former party member	Public (café)	French	My daughter
<b>26</b>	Female	Media	Journalist	Private	English	My daughter
<b>27</b>	Male	LCP	Former combatant	Public (café)	Arabic-English	My daughter; interpreter
<b>28</b>	Male	LCP	Former combatant	Public (café)	Arabic-English	My daughter; interpreter
<b>29</b>	Male	LCP	Former combatant	Semi-public (garden) / private	Arabic-English	Group interview; my daughter; gatekeeper and his family; interviewees' daughter
<b>30</b>	Female	LCP	Former party official	Semi-public (garden) / private	Arabic-English	Group interview; my daughter; gatekeeper and his family; interviewees' daughter
<b>31</b>	Female	LCP	Former	Private	English	My daughter

			combatant (commander)			
--- 18				Public (café)	French	My daughter
32	Female	LCP	Former party official and commander	Private	Arabic-English	My daughter; interpreter; at the end: interviewees' family
33	Male	Amal	Party member	Private (mosque)	Arabic-English	Group interview; gatekeeper (interpreter) and his wife
34	Male	Amal	Party member	Private (mosque)	Arabic-English	Group interview; gatekeeper (interpreter) and his wife
35	Female	Amal	Party member	Private (mosque)	Arabic-English	Group interview; gatekeeper (interpreter) and his wife
36	Female	Amal	Party member	Private (mosque)	Arabic-English	Group interview; gate-

						keeper (interpreter) and his wife
<b>37</b>	Female	Amal	Party member	Private (mosque)	Arabic-English	Group interview; gate-keeper (interpreter) and his wife
<b>38</b>	Female	Amal	Party member	Private (mosque)	Arabic-English	Group interview; gate-keeper (interpreter) and his wife
<b>39</b>	Female	Amal	Party member	Private (mosque)	Arabic-English	Group interview; gate-keeper (interpreter) and his wife
<b>40</b>	Female	Amal	Party member	Private (mosque)	Arabic-English	Group interview; gate-keeper (interpreter) and his wife
<b>41</b>	Female	Kataeb	Former party member	Private	French	My daughter

			/ re-searcher			
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**Trip summer 2016**

27 July – 3 September (38 days / 5.5 weeks)

29 interviewees (25 new interviewees; 29 interviews)

No	Gender	Organisation	Role	Location interview	Language interview	Others present
---1				Public (café)	English	My daughter
42	Male	PSP	Party member	Semi-public (work)	English	My daughter
43	Male	PSP	Party member	Semi-public (work)	English	My daughter
---7				Private (work)	English	My daughter
44	Female	LF	Party member	Private (work)	French	N/A
45	Male	NLP	Former combatant	Private	English	N/A
46	Male	Arts	Civil society representative	Public (café)	French	My daughter
47	Female	LCP	Former party official	Semi-public (work)	Arabic-English	My daughter; interpreter; at the end: interviewee's colleague

48	Male	SSNP	Former combatant	Public (café)	French	My daughter; interviewee's son
49	Male	SSNP	Former combatant	Public (café)	English	My daughter
50	Male	Amal	Party member	Private (work)	English, French	My daughter
---31	Female			Private	English	My daughter
51	Male	PSP	Former combatant	Public (café)	Arabic-English	My daughter; interpreter
52	Female	PFLP, PLO	Former party official	Private	Arabic-English	My daughter; interpreter
53	Female	PSP	Party member	Private (work)	English	My daughter
---2				Public (café)	English	My daughter
54	Male	LCP	Former combatant	Private	Arabic-English	Interviewee's wife; interpreter; my daughter
55	Male	Kataeb	Former combatant	Public (café)	Arabic-English, English	My daughter; his friend (interpreter)
56	Male	Kataeb	Former party official	Public (café)	French	My daughter
57	Male	Kataeb, LF	Former combatant	Private (work)	French	My daughter

			(com- mander)			
58	Male	Amal	Former com- batant	Private (work)	English- Arabic	My daughter; gate- keeper (inter- preter)
59	Male	Kataeb	Former com- batant	Public (café)	English	My daughter (in beginning)
60	Male	NLP, LF	Former com- mander	Private (work)	French	N/A
61	Male	Fatah	Former com- batant	Private (work)	English, Arabic	My daughter
62	Fe- male	CAO	Former party official	Public (café)	English	My daughter
63	Fe- male	Amal	Former com- batant	Private	French	My daughter
64	Male	Fatah	Former com- batant	Private (work)	English	My daughter
65	Male	CAO	Former com- mander, re- searcher	Private (work)	English	My daughter
66	Fe- male	Kataeb	Former com- batant	Semi- public (garden)	English	My daughter

**Trip autumn 2016**

21 – 30 October (9 days / 1.5 weeks)

3 interviewees (3 new interviewees; 3 interviews)

<b>No</b>	<b>Gen-der</b>	<b>Organi-sation</b>	<b>Role</b>	<b>Location inter-view</b>	<b>Lan-guage inter-view</b>	<b>Others present</b>
<b>67</b>	Male	PFLP	Former party Official	Private	English	My daughter
<b>68</b>	Male	Fatah	Former combatant	Semi-public (work)	English	My daughter; interpreter; his colleague
<b>69</b>	Male	PFLP	Former combatant (commander)	Private (work)	English-Arabic	My daughter; interpreter