ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA (ESCWA)

UNPACKING THE DYNAMICS OF COMMUNAL TENSIONS:

A FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTIONS AMONG YOUTH IN LEBANON

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Preface

Unpacking the Dynamics of Communal Tensions: A Focus Group Analysis of Perceptions among Youth in Lebanon is a pilot study on a prevailing trend in Western Asia, namely communal tensions. The study aims to dismantle the dynamics of communal tensions through a focus group analysis that targets the largest segment of the Arab population: youth between the ages of 18 and 25. Lebanon is used as a case study to steer the debate and increase the understanding of the factors fermenting communal tensions that are the root causes of conflict.

The study assesses the perceptions of youth concerning the theme of intercommunal relations, intercommunal special dynamics and the nature of the political system.

The study reveals the alarming trend of social and territorial enclaves among youth and the distrust and resentment powered by intercommunal stereotyping. The study concludes with a number of recommendations that have been construed to mitigate the ever-growing scourge of communal tensions. They revolve around curtailing the incessant regeneration of the exclusive and politicized communal identity; de-compartmentalizing intercommunal social relations; addressing the challenges of exclusionary spaces of social relations, and other vital themes that serve to promote social cohesiveness, and peaceful co-existence. Recommendations for future research have also been made.

CONTENTS

Executive summary

Historically, the strong influence of communal affiliation on political, economic and social dynamics in the Arab region is not a novel phenomenon. Nevertheless, a series of developments over the last decades have re-triggered this potentially detrimental trend, which has increasingly re-asserted itself in several countries in Western Asia. If left unchecked, communal tensions will become a formidable and potentially unstoppable force of fragmentation and disintegration across the ESCWA region and beyond. Such tensions will thus undermine reform efforts, marginalize human rights and religious values, and ignite disorder and civil discord.

The study, which adopts a purely qualitative approach based on the analysis of focus group discussions with youth between the ages of 18 and 25, aims at examining the dynamics of communal tension, animosity and conflict and uses Lebanon as a case study.

Moreover, the study contends that, at the macrolevel, communal tensions are compounded through the interplay of social and economic factors, State-structural and political factors, cultural factors, and external factors. At the microlevel, the study isolates four building blocks as part and parcel of the root causes of existing communal tensions, namely: the reproduction of communal identity; the compartmentalization of intercommunal social relations; the exclusionary spaces of social relations; and the clientelistic nature of the political system.

While hyphenated collective identities are the norm in almost all societies, the communal dimension among the young Lebanese appears to carry a larger weight compared to other "identities", such as that of belonging to a family or to a region.

Focus group discussions revealed the paradox of social relations in such multicommunal societies as Lebanon. Participants socialized and interacted with members of different communities, yet not to a degree that eradicated concerns towards the communities to which they did not belong.

The compartmentalized nature of intercommunal social relations is also translated at the spatial level. The focus group discussions showed that young men and women make a clear distinction between different types of spaces depending on their utilization. For example, some spaces were "public" spaces, which allowed for social mixing. However, when it came to choosing a place of residence, living in communally mixed neighbourhoods was uncommon for the participants, because their overriding concern was to be secure.

Although an awareness of territorial and social enclaves was observed in the discussions, and disenchantment with the State and the political system were clear among youth, the general inclination was against any rupture. On the contrary, focus group participants across the communal divide voiced their aspirations for a united Lebanon as one nation. Moreover, almost all participants saw the multicultural aspect of Lebanon as a societal asset. All focus groups revealed that young Lebanese aspire for a just polity where they would all live in equality.

The study concludes with a number of recommendations put forth to concerned State institutions, multilateral organizations, civil society and donors to work towards promoting civic values within the education system, as well as to promote good governance practices within the public sector. In addition, these recommendations will be able to help in enhancing the capacity for development, social cohesiveness and peaceful coexistence.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. A FORCE OF FRAGMENTATION AND A ROOT CAUSE OF CONFLICT: COMMUNAL TENSIONS

Historically, the strong influence of communal affiliation on political, economic and social dynamics is not a novel phenomenon. In this study, the term communal refers to groups of people who share a sense of common collective identity, subjectivity and destiny, expressed through and manifested, among others, by shared cultural traditions, values, language, religion, and narratives of origin. Depending on the given "mix" and relative weight of these identity markers, these groups (and their conflicts) may be referred to as ethnic, national, racial, religious or, as is the case in this study, sectarian. However, the study considers the term communal neutral enough to avoid the implicit value judgments and frequent misconceptions implied by some of the other words used. The term communal is also sufficiently general to emphasize the commonalities between the different types of group formation and the processual logic governing them, rather than those approaches that see categorical differences between them. Nevertheless, a series of developments over the last decades have retriggered this potentially detrimental trend. Debates on the most ideal type of national economic and political systems have been unleashed, in particular since the end of the post-cold war era, which reshaped the global security and the economic and political system.

The post-cold war era also had its ramifications on the Arab regional political and security system. Old conflicts and their spillover effects remain, most salient of which is the continued occupation of Arab land by the State of Israel, whether it be in Palestine, the Syrian Arab Republic or Lebanon. Various political actors have increased their use of an ethnic and sectarian discourse for political, economic and strategic ends. This is primarily due to the numerous crises in the Arab world, especially in Iraq, and the subsequent polarization and power politics usually associated with a shift in the regional political system and the emergence of new regional powers.

The fault lines in which local, regional and global power politics either intentionally or unintentionally utilize a communal-based discourse include Lebanon and Iraq. Other member countries in the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) region also suffer the scourge of communal tensions, or their utilization in the political discourse. However, any attempts to address communal tensions without understanding the fertile ground that is already present in various countries in the ESCWA region would be futile. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Arab Human Development Report 2009[1] points out that "empirical observation confirms that, in the Arab countries, ethnic, religious, sectarian, and linguistic differences can be associated with persistent group struggles, especially in countries where the population is not homogenous. In countries such as Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia, and Sudan, ethnic, religious and tribal loyalties have become the axis along which communities have been mobilized to press for inclusion or separation […]. Tragically, these types of conflicts have caused the largest volume of human casualties in the Arab countries, a number exceeding those resulting from foreign occupation."

If left unchecked, communal tensions may become a formidable and potentially unstoppable force of fragmentation and disintegration across the ESCWA region and beyond, undermining reform efforts, marginalizing human rights and religious values, and inflaming disorder and civil discord. Communal tensions are also an impediment to the emergence of an inclusive, active civil society and polity throughout the region, one that celebrates inclusive civic duties and rights over narrow exclusive identities.

Without the amelioration of the root causes of communal tensions and prejudices, peacebuilding efforts will be made useless in conflict-afflicted countries suffering from civil strife. Such countries face the unfortunate predicament of cyclically slipping back into

[1] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2009a. *The Arab Human Development Report 2009: Challenges to Human Security in the Arab Countries*. New York and Geneva: UNDP. P. 56.

conflict after political accommodations are challenged with new realities dictated by socio-economic and political dynamics and interests. Thus, the region would remain trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty, radicalization, the weakening of State institutions and exposure to foreign intervention.

B. Objective and methodology of the study

1. *Objective*

This pilot study aims at shedding light on the causes of and challenges posed by communal tensions, assesses their patterns of evolvement, and highlights the factors that exacerbate this trend. Through the exposition and analysis of the perceptions of youth on the issues related to communal tensions and conflict, the study attempts to initiate a debate among researchers and policymakers on its findings and its suggested policy recommendations. It also hopes that the proposed recommendations will not only be restricted towards initiating a debate on new research models and themes, but will also serve policymakers and peacebuilding specialists to extrapolate operational strategies or programmes.

The study adopts a purely qualitative approach based on the analysis of 15 focus group discussions that were conducted with 113 Lebanese youth – 55 men and 58 women – between December 2008 and January 2009. The participants were suitably selected from various universities in Lebanon. The study follows a well-established tradition in peace and conflict studies that examines the perception of university students regarding communal and cultural differences and intercommunal relations. For many young adults, university life offers the first opportunity to interact and communicate with people from different communal and cultural backgrounds. It is there and then when the foundations of each individual's political orientation and belief systems are formed and consolidated, and traditional wisdom is either challenged or affirmed. Thus, the selection of university students offers the chance to untangle the perception of the young towards members of other communities and towards their life in a multicommunal society. It also offers a glimpse into the political future of society, once such individuals become part of the social, intellectual and professional elite of their day.

A number of studies exist in Lebanon that explore the perception of students about the dynamics of living in a multicommunal society and polity. This study, however, complements recent quantitative work by qualitatively looking into these dynamics. The utilization of focus groups is one of the novel attempts to understand the perception of young adults on such matters as communal identity, the dynamics of living in multicommunal societies and their view of the Lebanese political system.

In addition, the study benefits from secondary literature as well as the numerous local and regional consultations that ESCWA led between 2006 and 2009.

2. *Lebanon as a case study*

The study focuses on Lebanon because the country offers a suitable case for investigating the process of communal tension as well as the dynamics of coexistence. Landmark events in Lebanon have always been at the forefront of global and regional attention, whether by political actors or in the media. The June 2009 parliamentary elections received special attention, from the country's immediate neighbours, the whole Middle East and the international community.[2]

The history of the civil war, the multicommunal nature of the Lebanese society as well as its policy of consociation and the relative freedom of expression all offer a suitable case for the study of the factors that lead to communal tensions and their root causes. Communalism is the foundation of the Lebanese political and administrative system, where political and institutional control is divided proportionally among the different communities. According to the Lebanon 2008-2009 National Human Development Report: Toward a Citizen's State, "sectarian communities have been tasked with mediating the relationship between the state and 'its' citizens (…) Institution building has also

[2] International Crisis Group (ICG). 2009. Lebanon's Elections: Avoiding a New Cycle of Confrontation. *Middle East Report No. 87*. 4 June. Beirut/Brussels: ICG.

suffered tremendous setbacks as political/sectarian conflicts materialize in political deadlock."[3]

Currently, representatives of different communities dominate the political discussion and "the public good is defined primarily as the maintenance of peace between the projected interests of the different communities without regard for efficiency, long term sustainability or development imperatives".[4] The "Lebanonization" model, "in which culture is pitted against culture, people against people, tribe against tribe",[5] has become a case in point in the area of conflict studies. Significantly, the present study is also an attempt to pilot the qualitative approach and the focus group method. These methodologies could be adapted later in other contexts of the ESCWA region. Communal animosity is on the rise in many Arab countries. From Beirut to Baghdad and from Manama to Minya (Egypt), stories of the hostility between communities and the relapse into violence on several occasions occupy the media as well as the blogosphere. Despite denial and denunciation of this phenomenon as part of the "divide and rule" strategies, it has emerged, at present, as a harsh and undeniable reality in a number of Arab countries and a major source of destabilization. It has also emerged as a leading factor for regional instability where internal conflict in a given State may prompt regional or international actors, many of whom have stakes in the conflict and can thus intervene and become entangled in it.

3. *The focus on youth*

The focus on youth stems from the fact that the Arab region has undergone an unprecedented surge in the number of young people. The Arab Human Development Report 2009 highlights the youth bulge as one of the most pressing challenges to the demographic profile of the Arab region. The report stresses the fact that some 60 per cent of the population is under 25, and the median age is 22 years, compared to the global average of 28 years.[6]

Youth unemployment figures differ greatly in the Arab world. Youth unemployment rates are estimated to be between 46 per cent in Algeria and 6.3 per cent in the United Arab Emirates. High-income, middle and low-income Arab countries also suffer from double-digit youth unemployment figures. The Arab Human Development Report lists three leading causes for high youth unemployment, most important among them being the quality and type of education.[7] Because of high levels of unemployment and restricted access to education in many countries, combined with the youth bulge, youth in the region is particularly vulnerable to communal prejudices.

Most importantly, it is the young who shape the future of any society. It is during adolescence that an individual forms and reforms their cultural, social and political identity.[8] It is during this period in the life of a person where crises of identity may occur, as the person tends to evaluate "the relationship between the individual's image of himself and his image of the life outside that self".[9]

Consequently, it is important for people to understand how their identities are constructed and how their awareness of becoming members of a collective has developed. Such understanding is crucial towards analysing the dynamics of both coexistence and animosity in a multicommunal society, in particular, exposing the way in which youth perceive their position in the social and political milieus of a multicommunal society. Understanding individual and group interactions in the context of a divided society is a central aspect towards comprehending the success or failure of peace and coexistence.

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[3] UNDP. 2009b. *The National Human Development Report 2008-2009: Toward a Citizen's State.* New York and Geneva: UNDP. Pp. 38 and 40.

[4] Ibid., p. 71.

[5] Barber, B. 1992. Jihad vs. McWorld. *The Atlantic Online*. March. P. 1.

[6] UNDP, 2009a, p. 3.

[7] Ibid., pp. 10-11.

[8] Erikson, E. 1959. Identity and the Life Cycle: Selected Papers by Erik H. Erikson. *Psychological Issues Monograph 1*. New York: International University Press.

[9] Sennett, R. 1970. *The Uses of Disorder*: *Personality, Identity and City Life*. New York: Norton. P. 17.

Significantly, as a group, the young are highly susceptible to political tensions, conflict and violence. Wars leave long-lasting scars on young people's mental health and aspirations,[10] not to mention the extent to which they undermine their ability to make informed decisions. Political tensions in Lebanon, the tendency to avoid sensitive issues particularly within the formal education system, and disagreements on a national history, have depicted the young as open to manipulation and reinterpretations based on varied ideologies and different political agendas. All these factors have undermined the development of skills among the young to discuss, analyse and develop informed opinions about different issues or groups, thus reinforcing "existing divisions among different Lebanese communities".[11]

Warring factions in communal conflicts have also utilized youth. The reliance on young militants in civil wars has been repeatedly analysed and noted by many studies, showing how young people are an active source for recruitment by militant groups.[12] For example, in the Lebanese May 2008 clashes, most of the militants in the streets of Beirut were drawn from youth. In Iraq, the Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1770 (July 2008)[13] and the Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (December 2007)[14] detail the utilization of children in communal violence in Iraq.

Conversely, young people have been central players in advocating for peaceful solutions. In Lebanon, they have been at the forefront of peaceful demonstrations and sit-ins. Non-partisan youth movements have been initiated advocating for peace and coexistence since the mid-1990s and especially after 2005. examples are the Khalas (Enough) campaign and the Nahwa al-Muwatiniyya (Towards Citizenship).

4. *Methodology*

The population of this study includes 113 young Lebanese men and women between the ages of 18 and 25. Recruited from all over Lebanon, the chosen participants came from low- to middle-income socio-economic backgrounds and represented all communities. They participated in focus group discussions moderated by trained facilitators from the Focus Group Research Centre at the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies (LCPS).

A total of 15 focus groups were formed and meetings took place between December 2008 and January 2009 in various districts across Lebanon. Five groups discussed the nature of clientelism and the political system, while four debated the dynamics of intercommunal relations and animosity. The focus groups also included in-depth discussions with people who had extensive empirical experience in communal tensions and conflict resolution. Two focus groups were conducted with (i) mayors and municipal members of Shiyah and Ain El Remmaneh, identified as hot zones in civil conflicts and (ii) civil society activists who work on related projects.

Six groups discussed both themes in two subsequent sessions. Participants selected were from the four main communities in Lebanon: Sunnis, Christians, Shiites, and Druzes. Participants in the focus groups were chosen from all parts of the country, aiming at fair urban-rural representation. The covered urban areas were Beirut, the eastern and southern suburbs of Beirut and Tripoli. The rural areas covered were Chouf, Zgharta, Baalbek, and Akkar. Focus groups hosted seven to ten participants per session. The focus group facilitators and moderators checked the profiles of the participants to make sure that each met the required criteria mentioned above. For a glance at the composition of the focus groups, see the summary table below:

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[10] Bryce, J. and Armenian, H. (eds.) 1986. *In Wartime: The State of Children in Lebanon.* Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations. Beirut: American University of Beirut.

[11] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). 2008. *Education and Citizenship, Concepts, Attitudes, Skills and Actions: Analysis of Survey Results of 9th Grade Students in Lebanon*. Beirut: UNDP. P. 15.

[12] Castells, M. 2004. *The Power of Identity: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture, Vol. II.* Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell.

[13] United Nations. 2008. *Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 6 of resolution 1770*, S/2008/495. 28 July. New York: United Nations.

[14] United Nations. 2007. *Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict*, A/62/609–S/2007/757. 21 December. New York: United Nations.

SUMMARY TABLE

Profile		Number of focus groups
Sex	Male: 55	-
	Female: 58	-
Communities	Sunni	4
	Shiite	4
	Maronites	3
	Druze	2
	Mixed Christians	2
Income Level	Middle	9
	Low	6
Region	Mount Lebanon	3
	North	5
	Bekaa	2
	Beirut and Suburbs	5

Significantly, homogeneous youth groups conducted the discussions. The selection of the members of each group was deliberate, that is, each participant was selected from a single community in order to avoid such biases as social complacency or political correctness that might emerge from mixing the groups. Putting together homogeneous groups helped the participants feel comfortable in discussing views and perceptions of their own community and of other communities.

Questions in the focus groups and the discussion guides were prepared under two main themes: dynamics of intercommunal relations and animosity; and the nature of clientelism and the political system. The questions raised issues of perception of other communities, spatial dynamics together with mobility, and everyday practices. Other issues raised included the perceptions of the participants on the political system, political practices and leaders. In this regard, the study does not attempt to address all aspects of the root causes of communal tension. Instead, it focuses on the perception of youth on the issues of reproduction of identity, intercommunal relations and the political system.

5. *Why the focus groups method?*

Focus groups are small, targeted discussions led by skilled moderators who seek to create a comfortable environment for all participants selected based on their common demographic characteristics or experience, such as educational background, age group, gender or other factors. Focus groups are typically comprised of five to nine people, large enough to exchange ideas and opinions, but small enough for everyone to participate in the discussion.[15] The moderator uses a series of open-ended questions in a logical sequence and addresses topics related to the research purpose. This open-ended format allows participants to respond in their own words, and lets researchers explore attitudes and opinions in a more in-depth manner.

Focus groups help in measuring the depth of emotions and feelings around issues, such as understanding why some things are more important to people, hearing how citizens discuss issues and the language they employ, and gaining insights into the reasons why people feel and behave the way they do.[16]

Focus groups reveal not just what people think or feel on certain issues but also why they think and feel that particular way, how they form opinions and how strong these opinions are. This provides insights into why people feel and act the way they do. The organized discussions allowed participants to stimulate each other in an exchange of ideas that may not have emerged during in-depth interviews or quantitative surveys, and were especially helpful in understanding the language

[15] Canavor, V. 2006. *From Proposal to Presentation: The Focus Group Process at NDI*. Internal National Democratic Institute (NDI) document.

[16] Ibid.

people use when discussing particular ideas and concepts. This type of research can help in assessing concepts, policies and messages, and can contribute positively to the decision-making process in any country.

The focus group method has a long history in social, market and health research. The greatest value of focus groups comes from the insights they provide into the social dynamics that drive people's attitudes and behaviour. The discussion among participants in a focus group models the word-of-mouth communication that occurs in people's daily lives. Concepts, words and phrases that people use to explain their views in the focus group provide material for message development. Thus, discussion and even disagreement are encouraged to elicit distinctions among people's perceptions and to push participants into articulating their views. Drawing on best practices from consumer market research and public opinion studies, the design of these focus groups was chosen to explore motivations beyond the rational, intellectual level and to uncover motivations at the social and emotional levels, as well as the aspirations that drive most human behaviour. Through organized discussions with selected participants, the focus group method offers insights into the social dynamics and experiences and knowledge of people beyond mere statistics and figures. It encourages the exchange of anecdotes; and people tend to comment on each other's stories. Such interaction is one of the benefits of focus groups and is often unattainable in one-to-one interviews or in surveys. Moreover, it provides the points of view of participants in their own words and not in the language of the researcher where through studying the various narratives utilized within the focus group, the researcher can detect common knowledge.[17]

[17] See Kitzinger, J. 1995. Qualitative Research: Introducing focus groups. *British Medical Journal*. 311: 299-302.

6. *Organization of the study*

Following the introduction, the paper begins by reviewing the most significant documents of the United Nations' – including its charter, resolutions and declarations – that address communal tensions. It then sets the scene by outlining prevailing discussions on the root causes of communal conflict, proposing a matrix of causes that comprises the social-economic, cultural, State-related, and external factors. It follows with an analysis of the findings of the focus group discussions pursuing four main themes: (i) the construction of collective identity; (ii) the nature of social relations; (iii) the use and perception of space; and (iv) the view of the State and political system. The paper then concludes with a wrap-up of the results of the focus groups. Towards the end, the paper offers some recommendations on the ways and methods of fostering better intercommunal relations among youth as well as the role of the State in leading peacebuilding and propagating peaceful coexistence.

II. COMMUNAL TENSIONS: MULTILATERAL AND REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

A. THROUGH THE LENS OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations has always focused on fostering peace and mitigating conflict and has paid particular attention to communal strife. The latter has been on the increase since the early 1990s and even more so in recent years, as incidences of civil and internal conflict intensify. Such internal conflicts have had devastating and overflowing effects in neighbouring countries, in particular within the ESCWA region.

The foundation of the United Nations normative approach to the issue of communal tensions is based on two pillars, both of which lead to increasing consideration of the crucial importance in mitigating conflicts deriving from ethnic and sectarian division. The ultimate aim of the United Nations to reducing communal tensions is to bring about peace, equality and the improvement of socio-economic conditions of the people.

In 1993, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.[18] This declaration is the only United Nations instrument that exclusively addresses the special rights of minorities. In its introductory statement, the General Assembly considered that "the promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities contribute to the political and social stability of States in which they live".[19] Parallel to the focus of the United Nations on communal tensions as a human rights issue, it increasingly placed attention on the root causes of conflict and identified communal divisions as one of these issues.

After a landmark report by the Secretary-General entitled Agenda for Peace, the United Nations General Assembly designated 1995 as the Year of Tolerance. The report recognized that in recent years, "fierce new assertions of nationalism and sovereignty spring up, and the cohesion of States is threatened by brutal ethnic, religious, social, cultural or linguistic strife. Social peace is challenged on the one hand by new assertions of discrimination and exclusion and, on the other, by acts of terrorism seeking to undermine evolution and change through democratic means."[20]

In 2000, The United Nations Secretary-General noted in his Millennium Report that "every step taken towards reducing poverty and achieving broad based economic growth is a step toward conflict prevention. In many cases of internal conflict, poverty is coupled with sharp ethnic or religious cleavages, in which minority rights are insufficiently respected and the institutions of government are insufficiently inclusive (…). Every group needs to become convinced that the state belongs to all people."[21]

Following the Millennium Report and within the scope of the renewed focus of the United Nations on communal tensions, it declared 2001 as the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. The report of the Secretary-General on the outcome of the Dialogue stated that "this initiative and its outcomes have shown that the United Nations remains the natural home of dialogue among civilizations; the forum where such dialogue can flourish and bear fruit in every field of human endeavour. Without this dialogue taking place every day among all nations – within and between civilization, cultures and groups – no peace can be lasting and no prosperity can be secure."[22]

The Report of the Secretary-General on the Prevention of armed conflict published in June 2001 stated that "for early prevention to be effective, the multidimensional root causes of conflict need to be identified and addressed. The

[18] United Nations. 1993. General Assembly (UNGA) Resolution 47/135. *Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities*, A/RES/47/135. 3 February. New York: United Nations. P. 1.

[19] Ibid., p. 5.

[20] United Nations. 1992. Report of the Secretary-General. *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping*, A/47/277-S/24111. 17 June. New York: United Nations. P. 3.

[21] United Nations, 2000, Millennium Report of the Secretary-General. *We the Peoples: The role of the United Nations in the 21st century*. New York: United Nations. P. 5.

[22] Ibid., p. 5.

proximate cause of conflict may be an outbreak of public disorder or a protest over a particular incident, but the root cause may be, for example, socio-economic inequities and inequalities, systematic ethnic discrimination, denial of human rights, disputes over political participation or long-standing grievances over land and other resource allocation."[23] The report also stresses that "conflict prevention and sustainable and equitable development are mutually reinforcing activities",[24] a principle which was reiterated at the World Summit in 2005. In this report, and of particular relevance to the ESCWA region, the Secretary-General called for "a more active involvement of the economic and social council in the prevention of armed conflict, particularly because of its critical role in addressing the root causes of conflicts in the areas that lie at the core of its mandate".[25]

The preventive approach of the United Nations pays special attention to post-conflict situations, since this is the crucial moment to break the cycle of violence. The Secretary-General, in his 2009 report on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict,[26] provides advice on how to support national efforts to secure sustainable peace more rapidly and effectively. When a country has been divided by communal conflict, national reconciliation becomes a priority. In that sense, the General Assembly declared 2009 the International Year of Reconciliation, recognizing that "reconciliation processes are particularly necessary and urgent in countries and regions of the world which have suffered or are suffering situations of conflict that have affected and divided societies in their various internal, national and international facets", and that these processes "are necessary to and a condition for the establishment of firm and lasting peace". [27]

Today, the focus of the United Nations on communal tensions, not only as a human rights issue but also as one of the root causes of conflict, is more important and relevant than ever. Indeed, tackling and mitigating the negative impact of communal tensions is ultimately a form of conflict prevention and a necessary ingredient of peacebuilding. Moreover, addressing and overcoming communal tensions remains vital for the advancement of human rights values and strengthening efforts that attempt to achieve local development.

B. THE REGIONAL PERSPECTIVE

While significant gaps exist in the literature on communal tensions and their impact on conflict in the ESCWA region, there have been attempts at studying the matter. In 1999, Binder edited a comprehensive publication on ethnic conflict and international politics in the Middle East,[28] covering a range of analyses of various conflicts in the region and their causes, focusing mainly on communal divisions.

Also published were such studies on individual countries as an analysis by Hanf on Lebanese opinions and attitudes on coexistence (the latter is examined further in this study).[29] The report of the Brookings Institute on communal divisions in Iraq provides astute analytical insight into the causes of communal tensions and conflict in that country, especially in the context of its project on International Displacement with the University of Bern.[30]

[23] United Nations. 2001. *Report of the Secretary-General on Prevention of armed conflict*, A/55/985-S/2001/574. 5 June. New York: United Nations. P. 7.

[24] Ibid., p. 2.

[25] Ibid., p. 13.

[26] United Nations. 2009. *Report of the Secretary-General on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict*, A/63/881-S/2009/304. 11 June. New York: United Nations.

[27] United Nations. 2007. General Assembly Resolution 61/17. *International Year of Reconciliation 2009*, A/RES/61/17. 23 January. New York: United Nations. P. 1.

[28] Binder, (ed.) L. 1999. *Ethnic Conflict and International Politics in the Middle East.* Florida Press University.

[29] Hanf, T. 2007. *E pluribus unum? Lebanese opinions and attitudes on coexistence*: *Letters from Byblos, No. 14.* Lebanon: UNESCO, International Centre for Human Sciences and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiffung.

[30] Al-Khalidi, A. and Tanner, V. 2006. Sectarian Violence: Radical Groups Drive Internal Displacement in Iraq. The Brookings Bern Project on Internal Displacement. *Brookings*. 3 December.

The UNDP Arab Human Development Report 2009 examined the current state of affairs in the Arab countries within the framework of human security. This was defined as "the liberation of human beings from those intense, extensive and prolonged, and comprehensive threats to which their lives and freedom are vulnerable".[31] In the third chapter entitled The Arab state and human security – performance and prospects, the report advocates that "the first step to managing diversity, which several Arab countries have begun to take, is to adopt and apply the concept of citizenship under the law and in practice".[32] The Arab Human Development Report addresses the question of citizenship not only in terms of the vertical relationship between the citizen and the State, but also the horizontal relationship between citizens: "To be a citizen is necessarily to be a co-citizen, with the responsibilities, interactions and accommodations that go with 'civil behaviour' [cooperation, coexistence and good neighbourliness]".[33] In addition, the report maintains that in settings in which there is civic consciousness, peaceful conflict resolution without State action is decidedly feasible. However, and according to the report – which cites Iraq, Lebanon, Somalia, and the Sudan – ethnic, religious, sectarian, and linguistic differences can be linked with unrelenting group struggles, where communities have been mobilized along ethnic, religious and tribal lines: "This mobilization has had destructive and destabilizing effects that undercut both human security and integrity of states."[34]

[31] UNDP, 2009a, pp. 17 and 23.

[32] Ibid., p. 56.

[33] Ibid., p. 56.

[34] Ibid., p. 56.

III. SETTING THE SCENE ON CAUSES OF COMMUNAL CONFLICT

The dynamics of communal conflict and the underlying phenomena of group solidarity, communal mobilization and group interaction have spawned a vast body of academic literature, in particular during the last decade of the past century and in the first decade of the current one. The diversity and bulk of this literature already attest to the complexity of the phenomenon. Some attempts at theoretical conceptualization tend to look for explanations within the social fabric of groups. The most important of these is the acquisition of membership through birth and the subsequent socialization into a shared sense of identity, manifested by cultural tradition, language, religion, and historical narratives. The last is reinforced by social relations of kinship, conviviality and similar issues that tend to be stable. Other approaches theorize the formation of social groups and the emergence of communal identities as responses to economic and political conditions, the latter being seen as inherently dynamic and changeable over time.[35] Historical events may serve to significantly strengthen or even create a sense of communal identity among a given people. Here, political actors, often with interests of their own, may succeed in manipulating or even initiating such a sentiment.[36] In addition, group identities are relational, in particular by the way in which membership is defined, acknowledged or denied, and how relations to non-members and other groups are negotiated.[37]

Every conflict has its own specificity and set of causes. Every conflict unfolds in time and space, potentially relating to and frequently becoming entangled with conflict configurations that may be located either in a sometimes distant past which is present in the mind of the parties or a geographically removed place.

The diversity of the ingredients of individual conflicts as well as the complexity of interlocking procedural dynamics governing their interaction appear to make a comprehensive and cohesive framework or model describing the causes of civil and communal conflicts difficult to achieve. However, and for the purpose of this study, we would argue that these causes or factors should be organized conveniently into a matrix of four main, interdependent clusters:

1. Social and economic factors;
2. State-structural and political factors;
3. Cultural factors;
4. External factors.

To investigate each of those factors separately will only lead to significant gaps in the overall narrative of the conflict and its genesis. It would also fail to account for the impact each factor may have as a function of its interaction with the other factors.

1. Social and economic factors fuel conflicts when and where inequalities exist between different communities. Discriminatory economic systems are the basis for horizontal inequalities.[38] Such discrimination creates feelings of unfairness and exacerbates grievances.[39] Cases found in the Tamil-Sinhalese, splits between groups in Sri Lanka or in the ethnic Hutu-Tutsi in Rwanda and Burundi support this argument. Parallel with this, the communal division of labour may widen such divisions and may be a leading force for conflict. Many multicommunal societies feature the concentration of particular groups in a specialized sector of the economy in many multicommunal societies.[40] For the most part, external factors play an important role in the origin of this phenomenon. Colonial policy often played a significant part when colonizers recruited members of one ethnic group, whose services were indispensable, over another group. The cases of Fiji, Iraq, Malaysia, and Rwanda provide ample evidence to support this argument.

[35] Horowitz, D. L. 1985. *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[36] Brass, P. R. 1997. *Theft of an idol: Text and context in the representation of collective violence*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

[37] Taylor, G. and Spencer, S. (eds.) 2004. *Social Identities: Multidisciplinary Approaches*. London: Rutledge.

[38] Stewart, F. 2002. Root causes of violent conflict in developing countries. *British Medical Journal*. 324: 342-345.

[39] Brown, M. 1996. (ed.) Internal Conflict and International Action in *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

[40] Horowitz, 1985.

Such inequalities as educational discrimination deepen the economic disparity and sustain an existing division of labour. Disenfranchised groups locked in situations that prevent them from improving their status, would harbour feelings of resentment so that members of one group would bond together and would thus enhance communal cleavages.

2. The political representation and nature of State structures are also critical causes of conflict. Lack of representation of groups and communities is often the leading cause for communal resentment. The political system failing to represent all communities fairly even magnifies the problem.[41] It becomes especially contentious when members of certain groups would solely vote or follow their leaders on the collective consideration of their communal identity rather than on economic, social or other issues.[42] As such, political practices may become the source of tensions and conflicts if their ideology and strategies focus purely on their communal constituencies. In such situations, certain communities will try to control most of the political power, while disadvantaged groups will try to assert themselves economically and politically. Such groups can be potentially violent if those avenues are not available to them due to the bias of the political system. Violent conflict may also ensue when State power and State institutions become weak, and communities step into the vacuum thus created.[43] Evidence from South Asia, Africa and the Balkans shows how communal antagonisms themselves may enfeeble the State and initiate a downward spiral of disintegration, caused through the undermining and supersession of loyalty and accountability to State institutions by the power of communities. Such communities then proceed to supplant those institutions, further deteriorating and discrediting them in the process.

3. The politics of collective cultural identity is often used to perpetuate group divisions and conflicts. This happens with the manipulation of culture to sustain certain "group histories and group perception of themselves and others",[44] whether based on true or false histories. A case in point is the dissemination of hatred towards the other that takes shape in the oral history and popular culture of a group and is then utilized to mobilize group members. Histories of past grievances and oppression, stories of martyrdom and images of iconic heroes maintain the collective memory of the group and contribute to group mobilization.

Nonetheless, strong collective identity – whether communal, tribal or national – is not necessarily a cause for conflict and tension. In many places of the world and throughout history, groups with a strong collective identity have lived in peaceful coexistence, while conflict between them has been the exception.[45] However, when political actors intend to build up political support and exclude such groups, strong feelings of collective identity catalyse polarization and oil the wheels for the build-up of animosity.

4. External factors refer to forces that contribute to the conflict from outside the borders of the State. The initiation of external intervention by foreign States is often based on the strategic interest of such external powers to seek territorial, economic or military gains.[46] Most of the time, these external interventions would fuel the conflict. This also may happen in the course of interventions ostensibly initiated with the objective of restoring and maintaining peace. External intervention can be directly used either by providing military or financial support or by sabotaging a peaceful settlement.

In some instances, external intervention comes in the shape of support to a co-ethnic or co-national group in the disputed State. This is true as many ethnic and national groups are often not

[41] Gugler, J. (ed.) 1997. *Cities in the Developing World: Issues, Theory, and Policy*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

[42] Bookman, M. 2002. *Ethnic Groups in Motion: Economic Competition and Migration in Multi-Ethnic States*. London: Frank Cass Publishers.

[43] Brown, M. 1996. (ed.) Internal Conflict and International Action in *The International Dimensions of Internal Conflict*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

[44] Ibid., p. 21.

[45] Fearon, J. and Laitin, D. 1996. Explaining Interethnic Cooperation. *American Political Science Review*. 90 (4): 715-735.

[46] Esman, M. J. and Telhami, S. (eds.) 1995. *International Organizations and Ethnic Conflict*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

confined to one nation-State but can be spread over different countries. Gleditsch observes that "existing research has demonstrated that external interventions in conflicts often seem motivated by efforts to support ethnic kin in other states, and ethnic kin and immigrant communities in other states have often played an important role in mobilizing and financing insurgencies".[47]

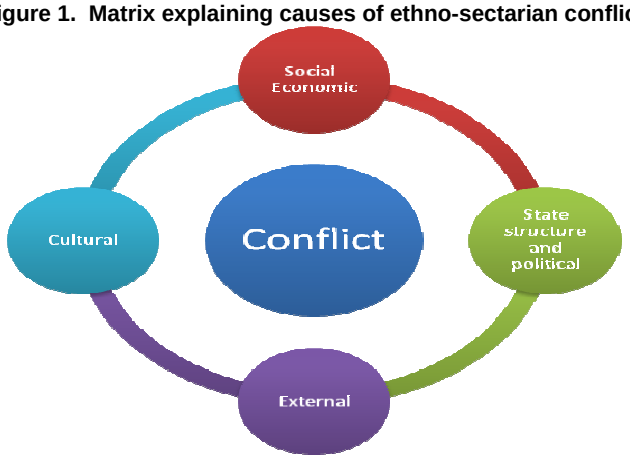
Thus, a matrix of causes is useful to understand the causes of communal conflicts. In this matrix, social, economic and politically horizontal inequalities create a sense of grievance among a community or communities, which leads to tension and protest. Leaders and "political entrepreneurs" often use cultural differentiation as a tool for mobilization. The failure of State institutions to address and resolve the concerns of protest exacerbates tensions and deepens polarization. External factors can aggravate the conflict further. Examples are direct or indirect intervention from neighbouring States in the form of political and military support.

Furthermore, there is a central role for political/conflict entrepreneurs who attempt to mobilize their communities and groups against others. Charles Tilly defines them as politicians who "specialize in activating (and sometimes deactivating) boundaries, stories, and relations".[48]

They also "specialize in connecting (and sometimes disconnecting) distinct groups and networks". They "specialize in coordination" as in organizing joint action. Political entrepreneurs "specialize, finally, in representation".[49] They are **"**individual[s] who [take] the necessary and deliberate steps to ignite a violent conflict by utilising a specific situation or in order to gain something through the exploitation of new power relationship".[50] Their exploitive nature does not conceal their self-portrayal of defenders of their groups and communities. They become the leaders and strongmen who "defend" the community, the neighbourhood and/or the nation.

The matrix of causes discussed above offers a bird's-eye view of the macrofactors that may cause communal conflict. Other microfactors need to be uncovered to complete the jigsaw of understanding the causes of communal tension, animosity and conflict. In particular those are the factors that could push tension into a cycle of conflict and violence and that are related to everyday life, such as the nature of social and socio-spatial relations between members of different communities.

Figure 1. Matrix explaining causes of ethno-sectarian conflict



[47] Gleditsch, K. S. 2007. Transnational Dimensions of Civil War in *Journal of Peace Research.* 44: 293-309. Essex: University of Essex. P. 297.

[48] Tilly, C. 2003. *The politics of collective violence.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P. 34.

[49] Ibid., p. 34.

[50] Giustozzi, A. 2005. The Debate on Warlordism: The Importance of Military Legitimacy. *Crisis States Discussion Papers, No. 13*. Crisis States Research Centre. London: London School of Economics and Political Science. P. 10.

IV. UNDERSTANDING THE DYNAMICS OF COMMUNAL TENSIONS AMONG YOUTH

A. DYNAMICS OF COMMUNAL TENSIONS

The previous section explored the macrofactors that cause communal conflict. Against this backdrop, the following section delves into understanding the dynamics of communal tension, animosity and conflict utilizing Lebanon as a case study, through the analysis of focus group discussions with youth between the ages of 18 and 25.

The analysis looks into what we would label as the microfactors that deal with the perceptions and everyday experiences of the individual explaining the processes that fuel sectarian tensions. The analysis, which is based on the focus group discussions, comes at a moment where communal polarization and animosity in Lebanon have reached peak levels since the end of the civil war in 1990. The growing tension, especially after February 2005, has put the country at risk of civil strife.

The section unravels four building blocks which the study argues are part and parcel of the root causes of the existing communal tensions:

1. The reproduction of communal identity;
2. The compartmentalization of intercommunal social relations;
3. The exclusionary spaces of social relations;
4. The clientelistic nature of the political system.

B. FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS OF COMMUNAL TENSIONS

1. *The reproduction of communal identity*

Identity, as argued by Taylor and Spencer, is "a work in progress, a negotiated space between ourselves and others; constantly being re-appraised and very much linked to the circulation of cultural meanings in a society".[51] Collective identity is defined "as an individual's cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity".[52] It is a "social category that an individual member either takes a special pride in or views as a more-or-less unchangeable and socially consequential attribute".[53] Identities, however, as Amartya Sen rightly points out, "are robustly plural, and that the importance of one identity needs to obliterate the importance of others".[54] Each individual has an array of different, cross-cutting identities. Some of these identities derive from clearly defined groups (e.g. student, teacher), while others emerge from somewhat abstract and imagined social categories (e.g. Arab). The weight given to one identity over the other is dependent on the individual perception of group membership which is largely based on the social sphere where these identities are formed and re-formed.

Understandably, the collective identity of the participants in the focus groups appears to be plural, multifaceted and cross-cutting, meaning that it is related to a young age group (university students), belonging to a family, regional (for example, related to Akkar, Baalbek, Beirut, Chouf, Zgharta), communal (Maronite, Sunni, Shiite), religious (Muslim, Christian, Druze), and national (Lebanese). Surprisingly, pre-civil war identities that topped the intellectual and political debates during the formation of modern Lebanon in the 1920s and 1930s and on the eve of the civil war in the 1970s were less prominent in the discussion of the focus groups. As an example, the Phoenician identity versus the Arab identity very rarely came across during the discussions. This is a sign of the dynamic nature of identity formation and re-formation.

[51] Taylor and Spencer, 2004, p. 4.

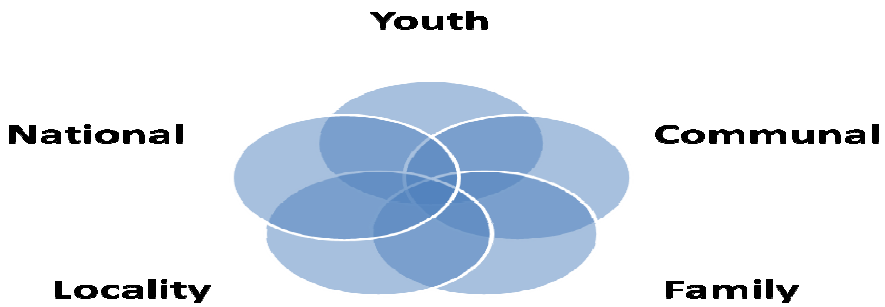
[52] Polletta, F. and Jasper, J. 2001. Collective Identity and Social Movements. *Annual Review of Sociology.* 27 (1): 283-305. New York: Columbia University Press.

[53] Fearon, J. and Laitin, D. 2000. Violence and the Social Construction of Ethnic Identity. *International Organization.* 54(4): 845–877. Cambridge.

[54] Sen, A. K. 2006. *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc. P. 19.

The identities of the Lebanese youth discussed are not mutually exclusive and need to be seen as a continuum of identities and most of the times as conflated identities (see figure 2 below). They often come hyphenated although at varying degrees. While hyphenated collective identities are the norm in almost all societies, the communal dimension among the young Lebanese appears to carry a somewhat larger weight compared to such other identities as those of belonging to a family or a region. This was difficult for participants to explain in the focus groups, but it related to the prominent role of the community in the political system. In the words of one focus group participant: "If my community is sound, my region would be fine and so would my family – the reverse is also true".

Figure 2. The conflated nature of identities



Three inter-related features appear to bring to the fore the communal dimension of the identities of most participants:

First, the existing tension and instability in Lebanon: This is especially true in light of the relational nature of collective identities where the competition between "us", the in-group, is seen through the lens of asserting "our" position in front of "them", the out-group. Such a relational aspect of sectarian identity is more prominent in an atmosphere of tension and brewing conflict that is currently witnessed in Lebanon, where the enmity of one group towards the other creates the basis for intensified solidarity within each group. Georg Simmel has asserted this phenomenon in his seminal work on conflict when a state of conflict "pulls the members [of a group] so tightly together and subjects them to such a uniform impulse that they either must completely get along with, or completely repel, one another".[55]

Second, the perception of collective grievances and collective self-victimization: Here, the collective perception of historically distorted justice and of collective grievances is central to the construction of a collective identity. Before the civil war, Michael Hudson rightly noted that the reason behind strong collective communal identities in Lebanon is "the result of historic doctrinal differences and memories of oppression, both antique and recent".[56] This phenomenon seems to continue until today. Focus group participants clearly reflected, each in his or her own way, on the "weak status" and feeling of "marginalization" and "deprivation", of their communities. This perception was shared almost across the board. It is always the others who are more "privileged", "better off" and in control of resources and power. The sense of collective grievance is often coupled with a sense of fear of obliteration by others. For example, the Sunni participants in the focus groups feared that the Shias are becoming more organized, more powerful, and are "threatening" to take over the

[55] Simmel, G. 1955. *Type and Fluctuation of Social Conflict*, translated by K. Wolf. Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press. P. 92. NOT AVAILABLE.

[56] Hudson, M. 1968. *The Precarious Republic: Political Modernization in Lebanon*. New York: Random House. P. 25.

country. Similarly, Christian participants reflected on their sense of "helplessness" and "deprivation", whereas Muslims "have everything". One Christian girl talked of "bad roads and lack of schools" in Christians areas, unlike Muslim areas where people "are comfortable and have the best schools and the nicest homes". The perception of grievances and horizontal inequalities that were discerned by a group before the war was transformed into a universally perceived wisdom among all communities. Although often imagined and unsubstantiated, the mere universality of self-victimization is alarming and contributes significantly to the production of collective consciousness among each community.

Third, the traumatic memory of the civil war and of major incidents of political violence: Although most of the participants were either not yet born or very young during the last phase of the war, it clearly came across as a central element of their discussions, especially when reflecting on their relationships with other communities. Those narratives of the war were rarely personal since almost none of the participants had themselves witnessed them. Narrating stories of the war and of political violence by the young Lebanese reflect, however, the collective trauma caused by war and violence. Stories of the traumatic past still occupy a major space in the collective consciousness of the young. The campaigns for the parliamentary elections in May 2009 were vivid examples of the centrality of memory in the political discourses of various groups and parties. Almost all major political/sectarian parties used a selective memory of the war and of major political violence to create sympathy among the in-group, often against another group or party. Such slogans as "we shall not forget as long as the sky is blue", or the "role of former warlords during the war" or the "liberation of South Lebanon by the Islamic Resistance", along with images of assassinated politicians and leaders, were cornerstones of the campaigns.

For the Zgharta group for instance (Zgharta is a town in northern Lebanon), the Ehden Massacre, referring to the killing of former Minister and Member of Parliament Tony Frangieh and his family on 13 June 1978, appears to be a central feature in the collective memory of the supporters of the Marada movement, especially when talking about their relationship with neighbouring districts of Bcharri and the Lebanese Forces. For some Druze participants, the "War of the Mountain", demoting the collective violence that took place in the Chouf and Aley districts in 1983 between armed Christian and Druze militias, where numerous atrocities against civilians were committed by both sides, was still seen as a key element in forging the collective consciousness towards the Christians regardless of the current political alliances. One participant from Mount Lebanon put it very candidly: "They have murdered us; they committed massacres and war crimes. We can never forget that." For Sunnis, the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri on 14 February 2005 was a major event in the collective consciousness of the Sunni community and was seen as a culmination of an offensive to weaken the Sunnis in Lebanon.

Furthermore, the war was remembered differently by participants. Memory of the war was used selectively. Only "relevant" landmark events were mentioned as key historical reference points and often to the advantage of the participant and to support his/her claim or argument. The selective narrative of the war was used to benefit one's own version and more critically to perpetuate a sense of collective grievance and sense of vengeance. "Unresolved grief does not allow accommodation or reconciliation but perpetuates stereotyped repetitions of thought and behaviour. A nostalgic sense of loss may be a powerful discourse in the formation of national/ethnic violence. "[57] As such, the collective social remembrance of unavenged actions becomes the cornerstone in the collective consciousness of a group or community. Collective self-victimization, as reflected in the focus group discussions, needs to be seen in this context as a "politicized approach to remembering".[58] It is the glue between the cultural identity of the collective and their claims. Consequently, memory becomes a tool in drawing

[57] Ray, L. 1999. Memory, Trauma and Genocidal Nationalism. *Sociological Research Online*. 4 (2). P. 5.

[58] Kenny, M. 1999. A Place for Memory: The Interface between Individual and Collective History. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*. 41: 420-437. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.

clear boundaries between "us" and "them" by invoking images of the past.

These observations shed light on the unending vicious cycle of animosity between communities. On the one hand, the feeling of unresolved grievances and self-victimization creates the terrain for communal identity to thrive and tends to strengthen solidarity among each group through a surfacing of strong sentiment of "we-ness". On the other hand, strong communal identity and in-group solidarity are enacted through the assertive beliefs of the group and its norms vis-à-vis the other group. Consequently, solidarity of each group evolves into what Portes and Sensenbrenner call "bounded solidarity".[59] The production of a strong sense of communal identity accentuates feelings of intercommunal distrust and antagonism, and, as such, maintains the conditions for tension and conflict.

2. *The compartmentalization of intercommunal social relations*

This section delves into understanding the everyday practices of the different focus group participants and investigates into the dynamics of intercommunal social relations. Social relations are an essential element in any society. It is those relationships that constitute a social group and differentiate it from just being a nominal conglomeration of individuals.[60] The density, nature and context of social interaction are critical to the understanding of the quality of social relationships. In conflict-prone and multicommunal societies, understanding such social relationships helps in assessing the strength and dynamics of coexistence. Paramount among those is understanding the quality and determinants of social trust. Rebuilding trust is imperative in the process of rebuilding post-conflict societies.

To some extent, focus group discussions reveal the paradox of social relations in such multicommunal societies as Lebanon. The paradox comes from the nature of social relations: participants (as other Lebanese do) socialize and interact with members of different communities, yet not to a degree that would eradicate their concerns towards the others. Social relationships appear to be compartmentalized in various forms and differing degrees. To a large extent, the composition, strength and heterogeneity of these relationships depend on the context as well as on the meaning given to the relationship. At university campuses and institutes of higher education, students interact and socialize on a daily basis. Here, cordial relationships exist and political discussions take place even if they are sometimes heated. At the workplace and in business contexts, politeness towards the others exists in abundance, yet is often benefit-driven. Focus group participants were clear in announcing their complacency towards members of other communities in public places–whether at universities, work, shopping or leisure centres.

Although a broad view of social interaction points at the conviviality of young Lebanese towards each other, an in-depth look reveals the compartmentalized nature of social interaction. To a large degree, social interactions remain superficial. This became apparent in the focus groups from three different angles*:* first, by looking at the level and quality of social trust; second, through the exposure of the discourses portraying the negative other and the positive self that surfaced in the focus group discussions; and third, through highlighting the rejection of even the idea of mixed marriages.

Trust, which depends on the belief trustworthiness of the other and is shaped by a complex web of personal, social, economic, and political factors,[61] remains a private matter and is limited to a very intimate circle. Most of the focus group participants declared that they did not trust colleagues or acquaintances, or even friends from other communities, some of whom were even described as close. Using a figure of speech from the Arabic language, one participant maintained that he would never leave his mother or his sister alone with his friend from another community,

[59] Portes, A. and Sensenbrenner, J. 1993. Embeddedness and Immigration: Notes on the social determinants of economic action. *American Journal of Sociology*. 98 (6):1320-1350.

[60] Sorokin, P. 1937. Fluctuation of Social Relationships, War, and Revolution. *Social and Cultural Dynamics, Volume 3*. New York: American Book Company. INCOMPLETE.

[61] Leigh, A. 2006. Trust, Inequality and Ethnic Heterogeneity. *The Economic Record*. 82 (258): 268-280. Queensland: The Economic Society of Australia.

not even for a few minutes. Participants could not clearly express the reasons for this discomfort towards others. Some related this feeling to the education they had received, and to the ideological differences and social customs that make the others different from what we are.

These findings confirm quantitative studies which demonstrated a general prevalence of distrust in the Lebanese post-conflict society. A study by Khawaja et al. shows that, among Lebanese adolescents in three disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Beirut, only 6.3 per cent trusted most or many people.[62] The study also revealed that the majority of the adolescents "did not engage in any form of instrumental exchange with neighbours, family, or friends during the month preceding the survey".[63] In a survey conducted in 2006 in Lebanon, Hanf likewise proves that the level of distrust of one's social environment was as high as 84 per cent among respondents – an increase from 78 per cent in 2002.[64] The levels of distrust were similar across all communities but were much higher in the districts of South Lebanon and, to a lesser degree, in the Christian neighbourhood of Ashrafieh and in some quarters of the Shiite Beirut suburbs. The survey by Hanf shows that the Lebanese are turning to close circles of trusted friends and family members, with 94 per cent of the respondents declaring that they only trust close relatives, whereas 71 per cent also trust their intimate friends.

The compartmentalized nature of intercommunal social interaction is also reflected in the emergence of discourses that portray the negative other and the positive self. These discourses appear to be collectively construed out of the negative stereotyping of members of other communities. On many occasions, participants in the focus groups did not shy away from deriding other communities. Some labels that were used to describe the others included "dirty", "sexually frustrated", "disgusting", "fanatic", "full of hatred", "terrorist", "backstabber", "have no God", and "self-centred". Those powerful labels stem from and, in turn, reinforce narratives and myths that demonize and dehumanize the other. Conversely, the inferior view of the other was often coupled with a superior view of the self. Many held a positive self-image about their own communities and described themselves as "clean", "open-minded", "educated", "great character", and "civilized".

Furthermore, the prevailing view among the young participants in the focus groups was to reject the idea of mixed marriages. It was seen as a "headache" and as a cause for future marital problems. The difficulty of integrating the other person in one's own social and cultural realm was seen as the problem in mixed marriages. The view was almost universal across all sectarian and religious groups. Almost all participants were categorically against the idea of marrying someone from outside their religion. Participants viewed marriage as sacred but also as a social event where some of them saw the inferiority in marrying outside their religion by labelling it as "going backwards". Among Muslims, the Sunni-Shiite schism has taken its toll on the idea of mixed marriages, and some of the participants, noticeably children born in this type of marriage, felt very strongly about mixed Sunni-Shiite marriages.

3. *Spaces and places of social relations: "banal" versus "exclusionary" spaces*

The compartmentalized nature of intercommunal social relations that was discussed in the previous section is clearly translated at the spatial level. As Massy has noted, it is "important to begin by conceptualizing space in terms of a complexity of interacting social relations, it is also important to recognize that within that open complexity both individuals and social groups are constantly engaged in efforts to territorialize, to claim spaces, to include some and exclude others from particular areas".[65]

The focus group discussions showed that the young men and women have a clear distinction between different types of spaces depending on their use of them. Geographic

[62] Khawaja, M., Abdelrahim, S., Afifi Soweid, R. and Karam D. 2006. Distrust, social fragmentation and adolescent health in the outer city: Beirut and beyond. *Social Science and Medicine.* 63: 1304-1315. P. 4.

[63] Ibid., p. 4.

[64] Hanf, 2007.

[65] Massey, D. 1998. The spatial construction of youth cultures. *Cool places: Geographies of Youth Culture.* London and New York: Rutledge. P. 126.

spaces are intertwined with social spaces depending on the meanings given to them.

Some spaces are used for leisure, shopping, work, and studying. Those public spaces allow for social mixing and are accepted as heterogeneous places. In the schema of the participants, they are what we can call "banal" spaces and places that carry little political or communal meaning beyond their function of shopping, leisure and work. As such, choosing an area for shopping, a café or a night club has normally no communal or political bearing. This outlook stems from a logic that balances the quality of the products with the cost. The southern suburbs of Beirut, for example, were visited by some participants for shopping, regardless of their communal background, because goods and services are cheaper. Similarly, spaces of leisure were sought after on the basis of reputation for good services. Eastern Beirut and its suburbs were the preferred destination for many of the youth to look for fun and leisure activities. These places were popular among participants including many Muslim (Sunni and Shiite) members. The reputation for those spaces of fun and perhaps the availability of alcohol were key elements in the specific logic for going there.

When it came to choosing a place of residence, however, living in communally mixed neighbourhoods and quarters was neither common nor seen as acceptable by the young men and women who participated in the study. In fact, a common answer across most groups was that "there is nothing that would force us to live in mixed areas". The first choice of the majority of the participants was to live in a homogenous neighbourhood or area. These findings confirm the survey results of Hanf who saw that the proportion of Lebanese who would prefer to live with neighbours having the same background "had risen enormously" in 2006 where "almost three fifths of the respondents would like to live among people with a similar background".[66] Strikingly, the rate in 2006 was higher than during the years of the civil war.

Consequently, the notion of entering a locality where other communities are the majority was voiced several times in the discussions of the focus groups. The use of the term entering is very indicative of the spatial-communal classification of certain territories/localities. It connotes a mental map of the city and of the country that draws the virtual boundaries between our area, our city and theirs. It highlights the degree of virtual and spatial enclaves that the Lebanese youth live in.

While this was seen by participants as a logical choice, the standpoint of enclaves and the desire to live in homogenous places of residence is partly conceived by the fear factor. Fear stems from the perception of (mostly) imagined or real threats, insecurity and apprehension of the other. Fear becomes a phenomenon which cannot be alleviated except by living in a place where the imagined resemblance of the individual lives and where security can be felt via homogeneity. It should also be noted that the State is not expected to be able to provide security and services on a neutral or impartial base. This makes living in a homogenous area a rational choice, since homogeneity or majority status also provides electoral and institutional power.

There was indeed a perception of security anxiety among the focus group participants that emerged from their concept of living in (and in same cases from passing through) areas where other communities form the significant majority. It was clearly expressed by the participants that their desire to live in homogeneous neighbourhoods guarantees them security. As one participant from Baalbek put it, "security means living with people from the same community". Another participant from North Lebanon continued with the same logic: "I don't live in regions where other communities are a majority; I prefer living in a region where I have full authority". Moreover, a Christian male participant exposed his anxiety: "If I go down to Gharbiye (West Beirut) I am afraid they would know that I am Christian especially if I were wearing my cross. I may be harassed, beaten or even shot. That is why I prefer to stay in a Christian area". Along the same lines, some Shiite participants observed that entering a Sunni stronghold neighbourhood is a ticket for harassment and intimidation. "If you enter Tarik al-Jadide [a Sunni neighbourhood] and they know you are a Shia you risk being beaten; better to say goodbye to your family before entering there…Even girls

[66] Hanf, 2007, p. 19.

wearing the chador would be harassed which is why it is better to stay in Dahiye." Many Sunnis felt the same anxiety towards the Shia areas. As one girl argued, "I do not dare go to Dahiye [Southern Suburb of Beirut], I am afraid they will either insult me or kill me".

Most of the above quotations did not relate to personal and direct experience. The threats were exaggerated to sometimes absurd levels, and they originated from mostly inflated media reports and popular stories on violence. This was particularly accentuated following February 2005 and especially after the incidents of May 2008. The quotations are telling, however, on the perception towards the threat of the other and fear from trespassing into their spaces. Fear as such becomes an element in perpetuating divisions. It reinforces partitions and enclaves at the spatial level and accentuates social distrust. Trust and fear become mirrors of each other where fear and distrust are linked to the perception of risk and threat. Consequently, fear can only be alleviated through relying on a small group of close friends and relatives.

The perception of places of residence as safe place and their requisite homogenous features indicate the significance given to these spaces. They become laden with meanings. They are bounded settings where the identity of the collective is constituted and represented and where people who share similar beliefs and traditions congregate to encompass one community. It is the place of home that needs to be homogenous and shared with people like us. More importantly, it is a place that would distinguish "us" from "them".

The territorialization of collective identity is a foundation block in maintaining the identity of the collective–be it communal, tribal, ethnic etc.[67] As Massey argues, the constitution of any identity is a process that entails political, cultural as well as spatial articulations and symbols. The building of religious sites, shrines, murals, and hanging of political posters are indicators for asserting one's identity within the locality and on its space. [68]

[67] Tilly, C. 1994. *A Phenomenology of Landscape*: *Places, paths and monuments. Oxford*: Berg Publishers.

[68] Massey, 1998.

4. *Political system and clientelism: the entangled foundations*

The hitherto observed distrust and sense of enclaves that exist among the youth need to be seen along with their disillusionment of the Lebanese State and policy. Alarmingly, focus group participants expressed complete disrespect of the State as an institution. The State was consistently pictured as a powerless entity rather than a common umbrella under which citizens congregate. Furthermore, the youth demonstrated that their understanding of the State as a term is distorted and always confused with Government. Consequently, the State becomes equated with whoever is ruling or presiding and where approval or disapproval comes according to each person's position towards a certain party or *zaim*. It is within this mindset that participants across focus groups perceive the State and define their expectations from it.

Disenchantment with the State and its institutions appeared in many of the discussions with an almost universal view of an enfeebled Lebanese State. In the opinion of the participants, the State has failed to cater to the needs of its citizens. Security is not provided and equal rights and opportunities are non-existent. As one participant noted, "it is unequal opportunities that are an indicator of the dysfunction of the political system". According to focus group participants, theft, corruption, criminal cover-ups, sectarian tensions, foreign intervention, nepotism and favouritism were synonyms of the public domain in Lebanon. Surprisingly (or not), this was the prevailing perception among all the focus groups regardless of their confessional or communal belonging.

Undeniably central to the discussions were the problems of getting a job or entering the labour market, since all participants were at an age to begin a career or only a step away from it. Many showed their frustration about the non-existence of equal opportunities. Across the divide, young Lebanese share the same view towards the waning legitimacy of the State.

Many of the focus group participants believe that the State has been seized by the traditional concept of Government. The prevailing perception is that the State has "sub-contracted" its duties to the politicians and political-

communal leaders. These leaders exploit the system for their own benefit and advantage, and in order to sustain their positions. “The system is based on confessional and regional representation as well as a repartition of positions among different religious communities”, as one participant put it. Another participant noted that “because the State is absent and because of its inability to serve its citizens, it is normal that a political leader offers services provided citizens vote for him”.

Yet, these leaders have become a necessity: they are the “protectors”, “employers” and “welfare providers or facilitators”. Despite the frustration of the young regarding the role of leaders in weakening the State, many of the participants did not shy away from declaring that they would use the informal patronage system to get access to certain services or to find jobs. Across all the communities, this was seen as “the only way to get things done”. One participant was clear in his views that “getting a job is always linked to bribery. I, personally, would go to the political leader who represents my community.” Similarly, another participant openly declared that “when we want to apply for a job vacancy, we go directly to our representative; it is easy and guaranteed”. One more participant was equally candid: “We re-elect the same political leaders because we are in need of services and job opportunities, which the State should provide us with”.

Undoubtedly, clientelistic networks offer a quick remedy for some of the young men and women. They facilitate people’s endeavours to get accepted in university and to get jobs. The paradox, however, is that this enhances their view of the illegitimacy of the State and deepens their frustrations. More critically, the clientelistic system and its practices reinforce the prominence of traditional and communal leaders who act as the patrons, gate-keepers, brokers, and facilitators to services, and State-related goods and opportunities in particular. In a polity that is built on the continuous negotiation and bargaining between the various communities and groups for a larger stake, much value is placed on strong communal leaders who would appear to defend the rights of their communities. One participant noted: “Our rights in Lebanon are preserved only by the leader of the confession; a Shiite wouldn’t defend a Christian and vice versa”.

5. *The common aspirations*

Although the feeling of territorial and social enclaves was seen in the discussions and disenchantment with the State and the political system were clearly expressed among the youth, there was no tendency for rupture. On the contrary, the multicultural aspect of Lebanon was seen as a societal asset by almost all participants, albeit paradoxically coming from young men and women who showed strong attachment to their communities and exposed their high levels of mistrust towards members of other communities. That being said, it is clear that young Lebanese aspire for an equitable polity where they will all live in equality. Almost all participants reflected on the twisted practices and the need for change at the level of political organization. The urge for a system of good governance where accountability would be practiced was reflected time and again by the young focus group participants. More importantly, Lebanon was seen as the sole nation for all its citizens, thus echoing clauses and phrases of the Taef Agreement. Although it seemed somewhat romantic, almost all the youth had an aspiration for a united Lebanon as one nation. This sheds some positive insights on the possibility of moving into a sustainable and peaceful coexistence.

The positive aspect of this belief is that it stems from an almost unanimous convergence of opinions regardless of sectarian background. The need for a just, accessible and equitable political system and State institutions came from across the divide. If one thing would unite the Lebanese, it is the frustration of an enfeebled and corrupt system, and the universal demand for equity and a better quality of life. Favouring policies that promote universal equality were reflected by the majority of the participants across all sectarian backgrounds, which confirms the prevailing perception among three quarters of the Lebanese as per Hanf’s 2007 national survey. Furthermore, the focus group participants across all communities unanimously suggested the need for policies and institutions that would facilitate the accessibility of the political system to the young. The need for a breakthrough which enables the emergence of new and young leaders was constantly reiterated.

V. CONCLUSION

This study has analysed the discussions of 15 focus groups with 113 young Lebanese men and women aged between 18 and 23. The focus groups aimed at assessing the perceptions of youth about the themes of intercommunal relations, intercommunal spatial dynamics and the nature of the political system in Lebanon. The paper examined the views of the youth on these four concepts; it looked at the perceptions embodied in the young Lebanese which contribute to the make-up of their communal identities.

If one phrase would sum up the perceptions of the Lebanese youth, it is that of living in paradox. They are torn between two worlds. On the one hand, it is apparent that they aspire for a State and society where they would enjoy equality, stability and peace, and where living with the other is valued under the banner of multiculturalism. On the other hand and of equal strength, they have the tendency to live in milieus that are social, political and spatial enclaves where parochialism is favoured in the name of maintaining the identity of the collective. It is also apparent that the young Lebanese are caught between disillusionment with the political system and political practices and the hope for greater participation through a cross-sectarian public sphere.

In consequence, the findings of the focus groups point out the failure to initiate a robust reconciliation process and to build sustainable peace since the end of the civil war in 1990. After almost two decades since the end of the war, it is alarming to note the sense of social and territorial enclaves among the youth which surfaced in the focus group discussions. Distrust and resentment powered by intercommunal stereotyping still exist albeit behind a surface of "superficial normality".[69] Young Lebanese appear to have confined their social trust to a small circle of relatives and friends. Their levels of social mixing with the other are confined to contexts and spaces that are perceived as banal where the identity of the collective is neither contested nor threatened. Conversely, spaces of residence have to be homogenous. These are places where people who share cultural norms and common beliefs reside; hence they have to be exclusive. Exclusivity to spaces of residence was portrayed as providing a sense of security. It also contributes to maintaining the identity of the collective through the appropriation of territory.

Furthermore, self-victimization and the feeling of unavenged actions still occupy the collective memory of some Lebanese. Memories of the civil war, although not personally lived by the focus group participants, were invoked by the youth when discussing the nature of communal relations. Memory was selective and used to support a certain claim. It was also used to draw the boundaries between "us" and "them".

Another paradox that emerged from the focus group discussions is how the youth view clientelism and political patronage. Clientelism was seen as one of the evils that is rotting the Lebanese political system. In the words of some of the focus group participants, clientelism nurtures corruption and bribery. This perception was universally shared regardless of confessional or communal background. Yet, many of the participants felt the necessity of engaging in clientelistic practices and in using clientelistic networks as one of the main avenues to secure a job or to get access to public goods and services. Political leaders whom the young focus group participants criticized for "taking over the State" were valued on the basis of their ability to offer all sorts of protection through the power thus acquired.

[69] Halpern, J. and Weinstein, H. 2004. Rehumanizing the Other: Empathy and Reconciliation. *Human Rights Quarterly*. 26 (3): 561-583.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the analysis of the focus group discussions, a number of recommendations have been construed to mitigate the ever-growing scourge of communal tensions. The recommendations are put forth to concerned State institutions, multilateral organizations, civil society and donors. They revolve around curtailing the incessant regeneration of the exclusive and politicized communal identity; de-compartmentalizing intercommunal social relations; addressing the challenge of exclusionary spaces of social relations; and limiting clientelism within public institutions through programmes and policies that strengthen good governance practices which enhance the public sector capacity for development, social cohesiveness and peaceful coexistence. A separate section on recommendations for future research follows.

Curtailing the incessant regeneration of the exclusive and politicized communal identity through the promotion of civic values; mobilizing the public on issues of common concern and projecting commonalities of different communities are at the base of the following policies and programmes to combat communal tensions:

1. To promote civic values, namely the combination of human rights values and national identity. These should be seen as a priority in diverse societies where the education system could be the main venue to build civic values and introduce life skills as a means to mitigate communal tensions. (Interestingly enough, the UNDP Report of 2008 entitled Education and Citizenship, Concepts, Attitudes, Skills and Actions: Analysis of Survey Results of 9th Grade Students in Lebanon indicates the low level of civic knowledge among Lebanese students and suggests recommendations).

2. To introduce in educational curricula (at both school and university levels) the study of different religions and ethnicities. This would include their historical and contemporary commonalities as a way to demystify the other. Within that context, the development and introduction of a unified history book is important for school education.

3. To promote (at universities and think tanks) the comparative studies of communal conflict and peacebuilding, nation- and democratic institution-building in diverse societies. Other subjects should be the developmental and economic aspects of identity-politics, power-sharing, multireligious/ethnic/cultural citizenship, and the management of diversity.

4. To encourage the engaging of civil society and the general public in issues that transcend communal cleavages. This would foster horizontal solidarity and engender a sense of shared citizenship, common rights and obligations (issues of common concern could range from the improvement of the provision of essential services, labour right, social justice, environment, security, access to natural resources, etc.).

5. To support initiatives that deal with the remembrance and documentation of political violence and trauma and that are geared towards justice and reconciliation.

6. To solicit, among others, the support of religious leaders to assist in projecting commonalities of human rights, civic and religious values.

The de-compartmentalization of intercommunal social relations is extremely important for promoting peaceful coexistence. Incentives to media and civic organizations advancing intercommunal relations could prove useful, more specifically:

1. To design programmes that address interaction in the public sphere and the role of the media in different stages of conflict. This would include the positive potential of the media to promote intercommunal peace, as well as its negative influence on conflict through incitement to communal strife:

(a) Enhance the role of the media in advancing intercommunal relations, promoting civic values and addressing the threat of communal tensions. This can be in the form of training for professional journalists, but should also be a part of the journalism curriculum at universities; support the creation of informative

programmes introducing various communities through websites, blogs, printed materials, comics, films, television series and television programmes; without negating issues of conflict, stress the social practice of communal coexistence (mixed marriages, businesses, and neighbourhoods; intercommunal economic, social and political relations; interfaith dialogue);

(b) Set up and maintain independent watchdogs that monitor communal incitement taking place in public discourse, for instance, when political actors deliberately use media outlets as their mouthpieces to mobilize their constituencies along communal lines. These could be exposed through periodic reports accessible to the public;

(c) Encourage the creation, training and follow-up of media ethics. Media outlets should be and encouraged to follow standards of fair and objective reporting and abstain from communal incitement;

(d) Support media expressions targeting youth and stressing intercommunal relations. This would promote civic values and address the threat of communal tensions (for example though facebook, blogs, comics, video-games).

2. To provide incentives for civic organizations composed of diverse communities and that have a nation-wide agenda and as such target different communities in their work.

3. To promote social agendas that seek to alleviate the compartmentalization of intercommunal relations. Examples would be initiatives to introduce civil marriage and to de-confessionalize personal status codes and laws.

4. To establish suitable programmes for interaction of different communities through specific incentives targeting youth in particular. An example is a national military service in the form of civic duties within the public sector or in municipalities.

Addressing the challenge of exclusionary spaces of social relations is also deemed important for strengthening intercommunal relations. Taking this into consideration, what could prove to be effective is the construction of affordable public social milieus (such as urban parks, playgrounds, sports grounds, leisure camps, beaches, and national parks) which would allow for mixing and interaction, hence preparing the terrain for alleviating stereotypes and fostering intercommunal relations. The aim is to reach a level where all communities and all sub-cultural groups build a shared sense of belonging to the country or to the city while at the same time maintaining and respecting their differences. Moreover, cooperation and interaction between civil society and grass-root organizations help in managing conflicts and fostering understanding.[70] Other initiatives addressing exclusionary spaces could entail the following:

1. To create public and affordable spaces of quality education and information (State schools, conference venues, cultural spaces, libraries, museums, computer labs, vocational training, etc.) that allow for mixed learning and the formation of intercommunal peer groups.

2. To support civil society initiatives that explore the meaning of public space in diverse societies and that lobby for the right to public space. These initiatives could also address the negative effects of the privatization of public space and resources on intercommunal interaction (such as the right to quality public schooling, urban green spaces, coast, beaches, etc).

3. To introduce awareness at the university level (architecture, landscaping, and urban planning) on the effect of spatial divisions on intercommunal relations and vice versa; to support initiatives that seek to strengthen interaction and coexistence through conflict-sensitive urban planning.

The State and its institutions should play a leading role in promoting and safeguarding peaceful coexistence. To achieve such a goal, clientelism should be curtailed within public institutions. This could be done through programmes and policies which strengthen good governance practices and enhance the public sector capacity for development, social

[70] Varshney, A. 2001. Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and beyond. *World Politics*. 53(3): 362-398; and Yassin, N. 2008. Can Urbanism Heal the Scars of Conflict? *City*. 12 (3): 398-401.

cohesiveness and peaceful coexistence. These are all critical to mitigate communal tensions. The following policies and programme themes are suggested:

1. Ruling elites should be encouraged to reach a political accord or covenant to insulate the public sector from political and communal struggles and pushing it further towards a meritocracy. Such political accord could be brokered by the head of State and could be implemented in stages, beginning with those ministries and public institutions that specialize in the provision of essential services.

2. National development goals should be balanced within an inclusive social and participatory process that does not lead to deprivation and inequality, particularly when it is geographically localized or takes communal colours.

3. Invest heavily in promoting a conflict-sensitive governance approach that would provide for equitable planning and facilitate the provision of essential services which would:

(a) Provide an opportunity for increased efficiency of State institutions and local governance structures. These would act as the vanguard of peaceful coexistence;

(b) Lead to sustained stability, development and reconciliation efforts.

4. Target the public and in particular the youth with policies. These should be mainly in relation to communal economic problems and to making the public aware of their civic rights. The right to public goods needs to be propagated via non-sectarian and non-partisan media. Here, State and civil society would play a major role in the provision of as well as the advocating for such rights.

Recommendations for future research

1. Assess the struggle over resources and the political rewards associated with specific communal identities. These are singled out as some of the most potent causes for promoting highly politicized and exclusive communal identities, and need to be addressed by researchers, policymakers and peacebuilding practitioners.

2. Examine the 'tipping point', that is the point where the richness of diversity is transformed into 'killing identities', is advisable. This is important when looking at the stages where the existence of diverse identities is problematized by political actors and becomes a source of tension or conflict.

3. Investigate the most suitable manner in which religious studies can be used to encourage tolerance and acceptance of the other.

4. Future research should examine the factors that exacerbate communal tensions and ascertain the most effective interventions to mitigate such tensions in Western Asia, including external factors. Further utilization of the focus group method involving a more diverse age group drawn from different regions and socio-economic backgrounds could prove useful for such research.

5. Study the economic problems of young adults and how their economic exclusion in diverse societies contributes to their dependence on clientelistic networks and political parties. Also look at how clientelism and patronage exacerbate intercommunal tension.

6. Research conflict-sensitive governance and development instruments for diverse societies.

7. Research how egalitarian provision of public services and goods by the State could help weaken identity-driven politics, and loosen the grip of identity-driven parties and service-providers in the respective communities. This would alleviate intercommunal tension.

8. Research the impact of the media on the general public, and the young in particular:

(a) Study the ways in which the media, especially the growing transnational media outlets, are shaping the political views and beliefs of the population;

(b) Identify ways in which the media can be used to foster civic values and advance intercommunal relations.

9. Research the manner in which categories of space and territory (banal, exclusionary and others) are used, especially by young adults. Also study the symbolic meanings people attach to places, with regard to conflict or peaceful interaction between communities.

10. Research the interrelatedness of spatial division, privatization of public space, and intercommunal tension.

11. Study the potentials of shared space and spatial factors that are able to foster intercommunal mixing and the alleviation of stereotypes

12. Research the impact of spatial divisions on the mobility of girls and women and how this shapes gender perceptions and practices of intercommunal conflict and/or coexistence.

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