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# When do Displaced Persons Return? Postwar Migration among Christians in Mount Lebanon

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## Abstract

Under what conditions will forcibly displaced persons return to their original homes after wars end? We draw on theories of labor migration to show that displaced persons who have positive feelings towards their original location may choose to return as regular visitors rather than permanent residents unless the location offers attractive economic opportunities. However, we argue that violence can create a negative emotional orientation not only towards geographic locations of bloodshed but also against its perpetrators; after ethnic wars displaced may be unwilling to return to intermixed locations, exacerbating ethnic separation. We study postwar migration among Lebanese Christians displaced during the 1980s and identify economic conditions using exogenous price shocks for olive oil, a major local export. Policy implications of our findings include rethinking where to allocate postwar reconstruction funds and how to evaluate restorative justice initiatives for the displaced.

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# 1 Introduction

Under what conditions will forcibly displaced persons choose to return to their original homes after wars end? This is an important question in a world with an unprecedented 65 million displaced, and has major policy implications for addressing ongoing migration crises in Syria and elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Policymakers traditionally assumed that most displaced persons will generally return to their original homes once armed hostilities cease, but contemporary practitioners reject this unrealistic assumption (Harild, Christensen, and Zetter 2015). Recent work on whether displaced households return – based on attitudinal surveys and ethnographic case studies – highlights the importance of physical security, emotional legacies of violence, sufficient livelihoods, material destruction, respect for prewar property rights, and legal status (Serrano 2011; Arias, Ibáñez, and Querubin 2014). In recent years we have gained an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the social, economic, and political factors that cause wartime displacement (Davenport, Moore, and Poe 2003; Kalyvas 2006; Engel and Ibáñez 2007; Steele 2009). However, the literature on postwar reconstruction focuses on the merits of partition, elections, and outside peace-keeping forces and has largely ignored the question of migrants (Sambanis 2000; Paris 2004; Gilligan and Sergenti 2008).

We go beyond the simple dichotomy of whether displaced persons return as permanent residents or not at all, and consider a third possibility: some internally displaced persons may prefer to return as regular visitors and to maintain a strong connection by keeping a family home and return for weekends and holidays. To study the decision of how to return – as a permanent resident or as a regular visitor – we draw on a large literature about labor migration (Stark and Bloom 1985; Constant and Massey 2002) and focus on both economic and emotional incentives for migrants to return (Niedomysl and Amcoff 2011). While most labor migrants express a desire to return to their original home, in practice many do not return permanently. We argue that the inertia of stable employment can affect the displaced in much the same way, even if they have fond feel-

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1. 22.5 million of the displaced are refugees because they crossed an international border. The remainder are considered Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Data as of February 2018 from <http://www.unhcr.org/>.

ings of their original home. Unless there are lifelong economic prospects in the original location, the modal displaced person who wants to return may prefer to do so as a regular visitor and stay comfortably settled with housing, jobs, and schools in their new place of residence.

Second, while the literature argues that emotions such as anger or fear make displaced persons avoid locations that witnessed massacres or where their property was destroyed or stolen, we argue that an equally salient dynamic should be for displaced persons to avoid the perpetrators of those crimes. Violent displacement can poison relations between victims and perpetrators at least as much as the connection between victims and physical space. In the aftermath of ethnic wars we argue that resentment can make displaced persons unwilling to return to locations with a large non-coethnic population, either as residents or as visitors. Since visitors incur a cost to visit, they must derive a benefit in order to make this choice; data on where the displaced choose to visit thus gives us a behavioral measure of how the displaced feel about their original location. Our argument explains how civil wars can cause major demographic change when large numbers of people from underdeveloped regions with limited social and economic opportunities are displaced to wealthier and more dynamic regions, or when one ethnic group abandons previously intermixed locations.

To evaluate our argument we study postwar return among Lebanese Christians displaced from the Mount Lebanon region during the Lebanese civil war of 1975 to 1990. During one episode of the civil war in 1983-1985 Muslim and left-wing militias forcibly displaced the Christian population from over 200 villages in this intermixed region, who could not return until the war ended in 1990.<sup>2</sup> By 2007 – almost twenty years after the war ended – only 21% of displaced Christian households had returned to their original villages as permanent residents. However, the rate varies across villages from 0% to 100%; furthermore, about 11% of displaced households visit their original location most weekends but retain their primary homes elsewhere, mostly in Beirut. The low rate of return for permanent residence is surprising because returnees faced comparatively favorable conditions. After the war ended militias demobilized and there was no further ethnic violence in this region. The government chose to respect prewar property rights, and even paid off wartime

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2. This wave of displacement affected about one eighth of Lebanon's roughly 1600 municipalities (Labaki and Abou Rjeily 1993).

squatters such that by 1993 virtually all Christian real estate was returned to its owners. How can we explain these outcomes?

We use rich data on displaced Christians gathered during extensive fieldwork, and in particular a set of reports compiled by a Lebanese research institute, *Institut Libanais de Developpement Economique et Social* (ILDES), that measure Christian return migration for each village at regular intervals from 1991 to 2007. We use this observational data to establish correlates of return migration, and subsequently identify the impact of economic opportunities with a natural experiment design based on exogenous price shocks in the production of olive oil, an important national export good. The price of olive oil in international markets soared in the early 2000s as Western consumers warmed to its health effects, and Lebanese villages with the geological prerequisites to grow olives reaped the economic benefits of this boom.

After outlining our theory and introducing the reader to the Christians of Mount Lebanon, we present a variety of evidence for our argument. Returnees differentially avoid places in which violence occurred in conjunction with displacement, mixed communities in which the displaced would have to live alongside non-coethnics, and these two in combination. Furthermore, permanent residents respond to economic opportunity in their place of origin by differentially returning to places that could take advantage of the olive oil boom. We conclude the article discussing policy implications. To induce displaced to return home we need to focus on both economic reconstruction and transitional justice efforts. However, one important implication of our argument is that in many circumstances it may be more effective to help displaced in their new location rather than induce them to return to their old homes.

## **2 Violence, Migration and Return**

We introduce a simple additive decision making model that clarifies how orientation toward home and economic prospects determine return migration choices. The displaced migrant has three options after armed conflict subsides. (1) *Stay* in her current place of residence. (2) *Stay* in

her place of residence, but regularly *visit* her village of origin. (3) *Move permanently* back to her place of origin.

The displaced migrant's choice is based on three components. First, her orientation toward home,  $v_o$  which captures the emotional and social utility of returning home. The orientation toward home is intended to capture the typical emotional and social reactions of labor migrants like homesickness and missing the lifestyle or community. It also includes emotional reactions to violent displacement such as anger, fear, and resentment toward perpetrators. For the model, it is critical recognize that when  $v_o > 0$ ), the displaced migrant *wants* to return as they have an affinity for their original home. When  $v_o < 0$ , the displaced migrant *does not want* to return as they have an aversion to the location.

The second component is her economic prospects in the place of residence and place of origin,  $w_r$  and  $w_o$ , respectively. We draw on a neo-classical perspective of the migration decision, and so the economic prospects is meant to encompass a longterm expectation about a stream of wages or earnings. We discuss the logic of the neo-classical assumption in greater detail below.

Finally, there is a cost associated with return: either the cost of visiting,  $c_v$  or the cost of returning permanently  $c_m$ . We assume that making a permanent move is more costly than visiting regularly. Thus,  $0 < c_v < c_m$ .

When the displaced person decides to stay they receive wages in the place of residence  $w_r$ , and loses (gains) whatever affinity (aversion) they have for returning home,  $v_o$ .

$$U(Stay) = w_r - v_o \tag{1}$$

By similar reasoning, when the displaced person decides to visit, she receives wages in her place of residence,  $w_r$ , gains (loses) whatever affinity (aversion) she has for returning home,  $v_o$ ), and pays a cost associated with visiting,  $c_v$ .

$$U(Visit) = w_r + v_o - c_v \tag{2}$$

Last, when the displaced person decides to move permanently, they receive a stream of wages in their place of origin,  $w_o$ , gains (loses) whatever affinity (aversion) they have for returning home,  $v_o$ , and pays a cost associated with visiting,  $c_m$ .

$$U(Move) = w_o + v_o - c_m \quad (3)$$

To make comparisons among the options, we define  $\Delta w = w_r - w_o$  to capture relative economic prospects. When  $\Delta w$  is negative, economic prospects are relatively better in the place of origin. Conversely, when  $\Delta w$  is positive, economic prospects are relatively better in the place of residence.

The migrant compares the utility of the three options and chooses their best response. First, a displaced person prefers visiting to staying when  $U(Stay) < U(Visit)$  or when

$$v_o > \frac{1}{2}c_v \quad (4)$$

This result provides the first implication of the model. A displaced person will only visit regularly when she *wants* to return home, for emotional or social reasons. She is willing to incur an otherwise unnecessary cost to do so.

Next, the displaced person prefers moving permanently to visiting when  $U(Visit) < U(Move)$  or when

$$\Delta w < c_v - c_m \quad (5)$$

Since we have assumed that  $c_v < c_m$ , the displaced migrant will only choose to move permanently over visiting when  $\Delta w$  is negative. Thus, we have a second implication of the model: a displaced person will only return permanently, rather than visit regularly, if the economic prospects in the place of origin are *better* than the economic prospects in their place of residence.

Last, the displaced person prefers moving permanently to staying when  $U(Stay) < U(Move)$  or when

$$\Delta w < 2v_o - c_m \quad (6)$$

This condition can be satisfied regardless of whether  $v_o > 0$  or  $v_o < 0$  and regardless of whether  $\Delta w > 0$  or  $\Delta w < 0$ . Much of the return literature has viewed incidence of return as indicative of successful post-conflict programming. However, our simple model reveals that we can infer neither that permanent returnees necessarily have an affinity for home nor that those who failed to return permanently have an aversion toward home. The decision to move back permanently, rather than staying in their new location, may intuitively imply that the returnee has both economic and emotional reasons to return. This may often be the case, but is not necessary as one set of factors may dominate the other.

The decision to return permanently tells us more about the migrant, though. If the migrant has an aversion toward home ( $v_o < 0$ ) and nevertheless chooses to move back permanently it must be the case that economic prospects in the place of origin were better than in the place of residence ( $\Delta w < 0$ ). Conversely, if economic prospects are relatively better in the place of residence ( $\Delta w > 0$ ) and the migrant nevertheless chooses to move home permanently, it must be the case that they have an affinity for home ( $v_o > 0$ ). Furthermore their affinity must be relatively large because it must dominate the cost of moving home and the decrease in economic prospects.

This analysis provides two final implications. Displaced migrants who have some aversion to returning home ( $v_o < 0$ ), may nevertheless return home because the economic prospects in their place of origin are sufficiently good. Last, displaced migrants who have some desire to return home may nevertheless not return because of insufficient economic prospects in their place of origin.

## **2.1 Regular Visitors**

We introduce and theorize the concept of regular visitors, which previous literature on conflict-induced migration has neglected. By regular visitors we mean something more than tourists: these are households that often maintain a family home where they return for the summer or on weekends, visit for major holidays, and hold important events like weddings and funerals. They maintain socially meaningful personal ties to the location that go beyond the pleasures of tourist trips. In some ways they exhibit behavior similar to many labor migrants, who often work in more devel-

oped urban places but retain strong personal connections to their place of origin that may be rural or less developed.

Displaced households that choose to return to their original location as a regular visitor after wars end, but not to move back as permanent residents, choose to incur a cost in order to maintain a connection to their original home. Since visitors pay a cost to visit, but do not work or derive other economic benefits from visiting, their behavior – effectively their revealed preference – tells us that they must have some positive affective feelings for that location. Empirically, data on visitors therefore gives us a behavioral measure of emotional orientation.

## **2.2 Orientation Toward Home**

A migrant's orientation toward home arises out of feelings for the place and social connections to the community there. The orientation toward home can be positive or negative. For instance, labor migrants have fond feelings and memories of home and express a desire to maintain connections to their original location. They express affections both for the place itself, including local culture for instance connected to climate and food, as well as for social ties to family and friends (Reichert 2002; Jauhiainen 2009; Niedomysl and Amcoff 2011). Labor migrants often believe that they will indeed return to their original location one day (Stark and Bloom 1985; Constant and Massey 2002; Leblang 2017). These sentiments may extend to some migrants who were violently displaced.

Yet not all migrants *want* to return. For instance, the literature on return migration shows that many displaced persons whose original location experienced massacres or bloodshed are less likely to want to return because of fear, anger, traumatic memories, and other lasting legacies of violence (Arias, Ibáñez, and Querubin 2014). However, there are also examples of the opposite dynamic. Sometimes forced displacement, paradoxically, creates stronger ties between individuals and territory by transforming particular territory from a material good to an indivisible component of group identity (Toft 2003). Social identity can be endogenous to violence (Kalyvas 2006) and displacement (Malkki 1995). Shared dispossession and suffering is the central ideological tenet of

many nationalist ideologies, including for instance both Zionism and Palestinian nationalism.

We add to the literature by arguing that displaced persons' emotions may also be directed at other individuals or communities just as much as towards physical space. Displaced persons may fear, resent, or be angry at other individuals or other ethnic groups in addition to having feelings about geographic locations. We theorize that displaced persons may develop an aversion to return to locations where they would have to live next to the perpetrators of violence who caused their displacement. In the most direct sense this means that displaced persons may not want to return to live in close proximity to specific individuals who participated in wartime violence and who the displaced view as perpetrators. After conflicts involving ethnic cleavages the displaced may also abstract blame away from particular individuals and instead assign guilt for their displacement and suffering to the non-coethnic community in its entirety. Violence between individuals can poison relations between entire ethnic groups. A person who considers returning to an intermixed community may have aversion to return because of the presence of the other ethnic group; we argue that this aversion because of perpetrators or their ethnic should be at least as strong as the effect on return from legacies of massacres or material destruction.

In the context of ethnic or religious war, this dynamic may drive many displaced to avoid returning to mixed locations with a high proportion of non-coethnics.

### **2.3 Future Prospects for Livelihood**

Theories of labor migration provide two alternative frameworks to understand the potential returnee's decision (Constant and Massey 2002). The New Economics explanation views return as a resolution or indicative of a conclusion, arguing that migrants move to accomplish a goal or temporarily smooth their income in response to a negative shock. Once the goal is accomplished or the shock is resolved, the migrant returns home (Stark and Levhari 1982; Merkle and Zimmermann 1992; Dustmann 1997; Jaeger et al. 2010). The alternative explanation, from neo-classical economics, frames migration decisions as a rational comparison of potential lifetime earnings and utility in two locations. (Borjas and Bratsberg 1996; Constant and Massey 2002).

The literature on postwar return appears to implicitly adopt a New Economic perspective on conflict-driven migration. The return literature characterizes violent displacement as an unexpected shock and implies that once the reasons for displacement are resolved—safety is assured, property rights are restored—the natural tendency for the displaced is to resume their regular pre-displacement life (Harild, Christensen, and Zetter 2015; Zeager and Bascom 1996).

Rather than the natural resolution of a crisis, the decision to return represents a new migration decision – often made years after initial displacement – with lifelong implications for livelihood and lifestyle. During protracted displacement, the displaced become more settled in their new location over time. Thus, we draw on neo-classical economics, which argues that migration decisions are based on a comparison of expected lifetime earnings. Individuals find new livelihoods and make new social connections in their place of residence. The longer that people live in their new location, the more they establish themselves there. New generations grow up with weak or nonexistent memories of ancestral family homes. To the extent that the displaced have stable employment, attend school, and socialize in a new community it becomes increasingly costly to leave and return to their place of origin as time goes by.

## **2.4 Aggregate Returnee Behavior**

Our argument applies primarily to IDPs who face protracted displacement, spells that last for at least several years. It may not generalize to those who are able to return very soon after displacement. A second caveat is that migrants who cross an international border may not be able to obtain legal residence in the new country, which may provide added incentives to return to their original location - or to some other location within their country of origin.<sup>3</sup> When displacement is internal there is generally no legal impediment for displaced to staying in their new place of residence. That said, a third caveat to our argument is that there are situations when IDPs may be confined to internment camps or other sites for legal or political reasons; our argument obviously

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3. Alternatively, if the refugees gain permanent status or citizenship in the new country they may have incentives to stay.

does not apply to migrants with no choice in whether to return or not.

While we theorize individual decisions, our argument primarily has observable implications at the village level. That is because both variables that affect individual decisions occur at the village level: the presence of non-coethnics, and local economic conditions. Within a particular population some individuals may want to return home so intensely that they are willing to forgo better economic prospects in their place of residence. Others might have such a strong aversion to returning home that no level of economic opportunity in their place of origin are enough to draw them to return. Most individuals will trade-off between emotional and economic factors, giving rise to difference in village-level rates of return and our three hypotheses.

The first two hypotheses concern emotional incentives to return. In line with our discussion on violence and emotions, we expect that armed conflict and forced displacement poison the relationship between victims and perpetrators, and by extension between displaced persons and co-ethnics of the perpetrators. We therefore predict that the displaced will return in smaller numbers to places where conflict produced a negative emotional orientation. Furthermore, the negative emotional orientation should be evident in regular visitor's behavior than in permanent returnees as the latter may still be attracted by economic incentives.

**H1:** Mixed villages will on average have fewer total returnees than homogeneous villages, and the number of returnees will decrease with the proportion of non-coethnics in the village at the time of displacement. The effect will be most clear among visitors.

Because violence enhances negative emotions, we also predict that displaced will return in even fewer numbers to mixed locations where bloodshed accompanied forced displacement. However in homogeneous villages, violence alone should be a less significant barrier to return because potential returnees do not face the prospect of living alongside non-coethnics.

**H2:** Villages where massacres occurred will attract fewer returnees than villages. The effect will be stronger in mixed villages than in villages that were homogeneous, and most clear among regular visitors.

As for economic prospects, we posit that most displaced will only return to their original villages as permanent residents if there are attractive economic opportunities. We thus expect that greater proportions of the displaced will return as permanent residents to places poised to take advantage of economic growth. By contrast economic opportunity should have little import for visitors. This reasoning provides our final hypothesis.

**H3:** Locations with expanding economies or more economic opportunities will attract more displaced to return as permanent residents. However, economic opportunities will not effect regular visitors.

### **3 Lebanon in the Aftermath of Civil War**

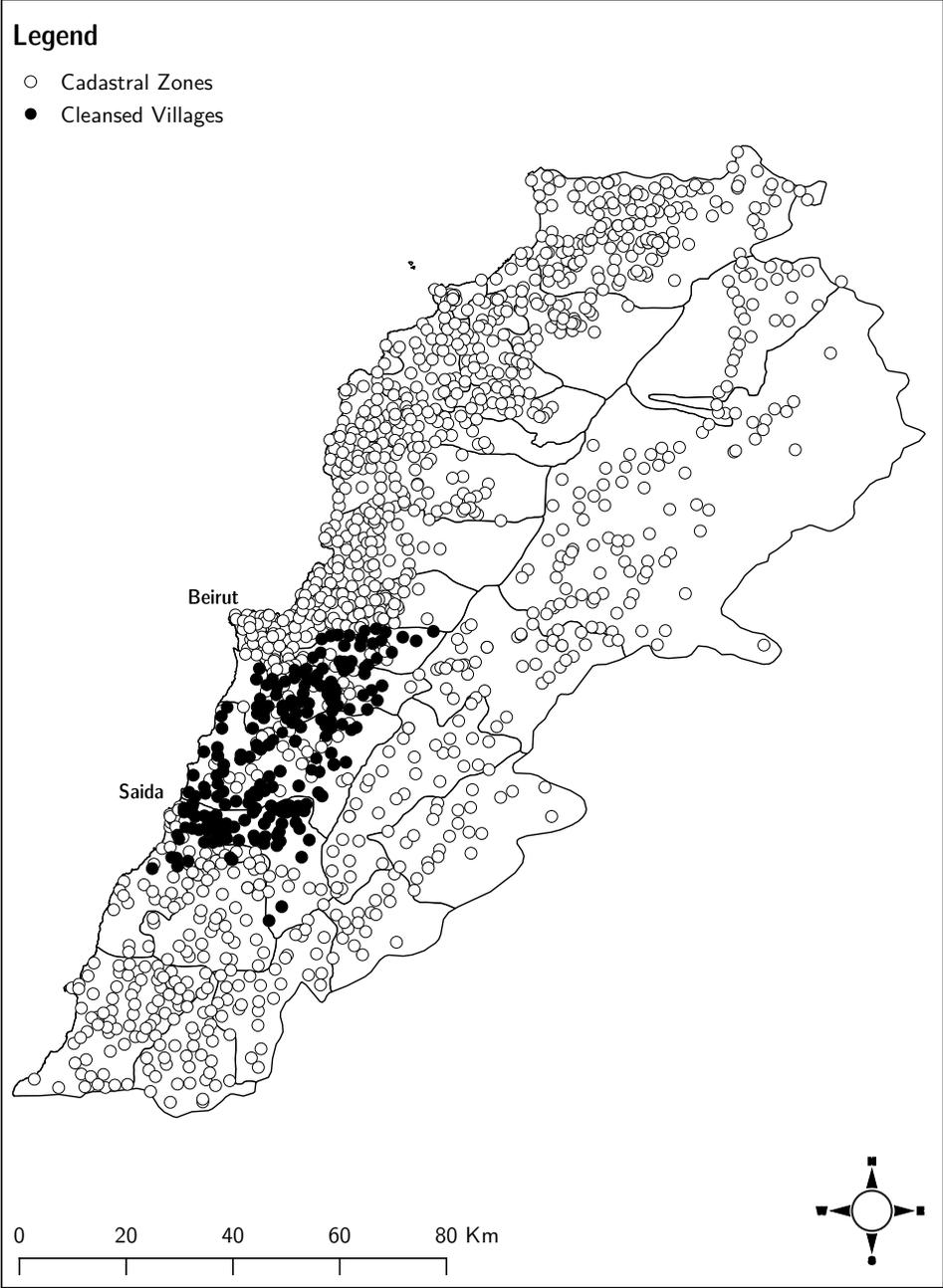
To evaluate this argument we use a case from the Lebanese civil war of 1975-1990: displaced Christians in Mount Lebanon and east of Saida. The Lebanese civil war had deep roots both in domestic politics, where Muslim and secular parties challenged a consociational power-sharing model that privileged Christians, and in the regional Arab-Israeli conflict (Salibi 1976; El-Khazen 2000). Armed Palestinian groups relocated to Lebanon after the 1970-71 civil war in Jordan and triggered an arms race with Christian political parties that escalated into an armed conflict in April of 1975. Syria invaded Lebanon in late 1976 to stop open warfare.

In 1982 Israel invaded Lebanon and engaged both Palestinian and Syrian forces as its army pushed north to reach Beirut and link up with its Christian allies (Schiff and Yaari 1984). Under Israeli military cover Christian militias ventured south from Beirut to establish a military presence in Mount Lebanon, a region mixed mostly between Maronite Catholics and Druze and controlled until 1982 by a Druze militia.<sup>4</sup> However, the Israeli public soured on the war after Christian forces perpetrated massacres in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps. Following massive public protests in Israel, the key architect of the war—defense secretary Ariel Sharon—resigned and Israeli forces pulled back to a buffer zone in south Lebanon.

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4. The Druze faith is an offshoot of Shia Islam.

Figure 1. Villages ethnically cleansed of their Christian population, 1983-85



When Israeli forces withdrew from Mount Lebanon in 1983 they thus left two rival militias, one Christian and one Druze, contesting the region. The result was a swift and extremely brutal war in August-September of 1983 that ended with a complete victory for the Druze. In the course of its military advance, Druze forces staged numerous massacres of Christian civilians that remained in the area. Many Christians also elected to flee before enemy fighters reached their village. In 1984-85 the violence spread south from Mount Lebanon into the two neighboring districts of Saida and Jezzine as well and drew in Sunni and Palestinian forces fighting along Druze. The episode caused a “quasi-complete” expulsion of the Christian community from over 200 villages: roughly 163,000 individuals displaced, about 2,700 disappeared, and 1,155 confirmed dead (Labaki and Abou Rjeily 1993). Some displaced Christians left the country and emigrated abroad, but the decisive majority moved into the growing Christian suburbs of East Beirut. Figure 1 shows all locations where Christians were ethnically cleansed between 1983 and 1985.<sup>5</sup>

The villages we study occupy most of five electoral districts: Baabda, Aley, Shouf, Saida/Zahrani, and Jezzine. The former three constitute part of the Mount Lebanon administrative region while the latter two form part of the South. For clarity of exposition we use “Mount Lebanon” as shorthand for the region we study, although we acknowledge that this moniker is somewhat inaccurate.

The civil war ended in 1990 with the Taif Agreement brokered by regional and Western powers. The war had been exceedingly destructive and displaced perhaps as many as one third of the population from their original homes. As the war ended, civilians grappled with how to rebuild their lives, their homes, and their country; the rest of the paper studies their choices.

### **3.1 Return Migration in the Lebanese Context**

Three important aspects of postwar reconstruction facilitate our study. First, after the civil war militias demobilized and Mount Lebanon did not witness further sectarian violence. Second, unlike in many other postwar environments, Lebanese Christians in Mount Lebanon retained formal

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5. Technically, a handful of locations in the southeastern corner of the data set were not ethnically cleansed as they were never conquered by hostile forces. However, a large share of Christians left as the region became a combat zone.

property rights to the land and homes that they left behind, and these rights have generally been respected in the postwar environment. Third, after the war the Lebanese government set up a new government ministry, Ministry for the Displaced, to work on political reconciliation and compensation for victims with a view to enable refugees to return to their original domicile if they so desire. When the war ended many Christian homes in Mount Lebanon had squatters living in them and the ministry spent a considerable amount of money during 1993-1994 to induce squatters to leave those homes. This project was successful and the issue of squatting essentially was resolved by the end of 1994.

The stable security situation and respect for property rights mean that Christians in Mount Lebanon faced relatively favorable conditions for return compared to many other post-conflict environments. Even so, less than a quarter of households had returned as permanent residents by 2007. How can we explain this outcome? The Lebanese themselves have no shortage of explanations. For instance, when we interviewed a Druze mayor in a small village in Mount Lebanon in 2017 he blamed the role of economic decline:

[In the 1950s] there were jobs here. In agriculture. [...] Apples, peaches, nuts, tomatoes, onions. The onions of [our village] are famous! [...] The production was enough for the population. But life became difficult in the villages. People left for the cities, looking for work. [...] And education. Universities. The educational level in the villages was very low. [...] Christians come back here to visit. Some build summer homes. But they don't move back [permanently]. It's the economy. There are no jobs here. Even [Druze youth], they are leaving.

On the contrary, when we spoke to a Christian priest with ties to the region he emphasized the role of resentment and explained its full complexity:

The perpetrators are still living there. Second, there is the sectarianization of state institutions. So [state institutions in Mount Lebanon] are all run by the [former Druze warlord family] Jumblattis. [...] [Third,] in intermixed areas, Christians may also have

perpetrated violence there. So they know they could not return and be a part of the community.

During fieldwork we interviewed national and local politicians, public and religious officials, former militia commanders, and olive oil growers and other businesspeople. Resentment is a pervasive theme with Christian interviewees. Interviewees frequently highlight that the Druze warlord who presided over ethnic cleansing remains not only the most important regional political leader, but also served as Minister for the Displaced during the 1990s in clear violation of all norms for transitional justice. As a result many Christians believe that postwar programs on reconstruction and reconciliation in Mount Lebanon, while explicitly aimed at returning displaced Christians, were disingenuous and corrupt.

However, we find that virtually no Christian interviewees mention fear as a factor inhibiting return. This omission might surprise some readers who would expect Christians to worry about resumed ethnic violence. In addition to our own interviews, we also find further evidence for our claim in a survey that ILDES conducted asking Christian public officials in Mount Lebanon why it is, in their opinion, that so many Christians have not returned. Table 1 shows the results.

Table 1. Reasons Cited for Displaced Persons Not Returning

Reasons for non-Return	Frequency
Lack of job opportunities	51.8%
Working/residing outside of region/country	48.7%
Original homes not habitable	21.3%
Psychological scars: insufficient reconciliation in mixed villages	21.3%
Bad state of physical infrastructure	19.8%
Youth not interested in region	19.3%
Insufficient government financial compensation	7.1%

*Note:* Any one respondent was free to list multiple answers. *Source:* ILDES 2002, 2003

The two most important reasons, according Christian officials, relate to economic factors. More than one fifth of respondents also mention psychological scars. Yet in line with our own interviews, it appears that local Christian leaders do not believe that fear of resumed ethnic violence is a major barrier to return.

## 4 Data and Methodology

We use data from a series of reports on postwar migration in Mount Lebanon produced by ILDES, a research institute run by social scientists at Lebanese University and partly funded by the European Union. The institute hired a team of research assistants to visit every village in Mount Lebanon where Christians were ethnically cleansed during the 1983-85 period. The ILDES reports record the number of displaced families in each village and the number that subsequently returned. The original report was updated, yielding eight waves of data between 1991 and 2007 (Abou Rjeily 2006, 2008). In addition, for the years 2003 and 2007 ILDES compiled data on the number of families that visited the region on weekends or over the summer but have not returned permanently.

### 4.1 Massacres and Community Composition

To evaluate the first two hypotheses about violence and orientation toward home, we compare the extent to which villages receive returnees, given the incidence of violence with displacement and the presence of Muslims in the village.<sup>6</sup> Violence is measured by the incidence of massacres during displacement. The presence of Muslims is a continuous measure of the proportion of Muslims in the prewar community. We use the proportion of displaced who returned as our dependent variable with three measures of return: weekend visitors, summer visitors, and total return (permanent residents and regular visitors).

We leverage the panel data structure to estimate the correlates of return in a Fixed Effects Ordinary Least Squares framework:

$$y_{it} = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 Massacre_i + \alpha_2 Muslim_i + \alpha_3 Massacre_i \times Muslim_i + X\beta + \eta_i + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (7)$$

The key variables of interest are  $Muslim_i$  and the interaction  $Massacre_i \times Muslim_i$ . A nega-

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6. In the empirical sections we include Druze in the category Muslim to create one consistent measure of non-Christian population. In Lebanon Druze count as Muslims in some administrative circumstances such as establishing the share of Christian to Muslim seats in Parliament. However the faith is distinct from Sunni and Shia traditions.

tive estimate of  $\alpha_2$ , the coefficient on the share of Muslims, will constitute evidence for the first hypothesis, that fewer displaced return to mixed communities. Similarly, a negative estimate for  $\alpha_3$ , the coefficient on the interaction term, is evidence for the second hypothesis – in mixed villages where massacres occurred, even fewer displaced return than in mixed villages or villages where massacres occurred alone. Finally, the estimate for  $\alpha_1$ , the coefficient on the first order term  $Massacre_i$  – the incidence of massacres – helps distinguish our argument about resentment from a more general aversion to violence. If the coefficient is negative, this would suggest that violence in a place, even in the absence of non-coethnics, is associated with fewer returnees.

## 4.2 Natural Experiment: The Olive Industry

For the the third hypothesis, on economic opportunity, we argue in two parts. First, we establish through summary analysis that places that receive the most permanent residents are different from places that receive the most visitors. Then we use a natural experiment to identify the impact of economic prospects on return of permanent residents. The natural experiment disentangles economic decline and political violence, that are otherwise endogenously related, using exogenous price shocks in a difference-in-difference framework.

Our research design takes advantage of the fact that roughly coincident with the end of the Lebanese civil war is the beginning of a world consumer boom for olive oil. Thus, places with olive trees, like many villages in Mount Lebanon, got a sudden unexpected economic opportunity because their produce became a lot more valuable. We use the volatility of world olive oil prices over time and the fact that some village had olive trees and others did not, to proxy for economic opportunity.

When the war ended, the average olive tree in Lebanon was more than 100 years old and the country has a long tradition of growing olives and making olive oil.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, throughout the period Lebanon's exports makes up less than 1% of world production; thus, we can be confident that Lebanon is price-taker in olive oil and that price fluctuations are exogenous to other sources

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7. Records of Lebanese olive oil exports date back to Pharaonic Egyptian trade statistics from around 3500 BC.

or consequences of economic growth in Lebanon.

Our design is similar to Card (1990), but takes advantage of commodity price shocks like Dube and Vargas (2013). More generally it is in the same spirit Diamond and Robinson 2010. The design solves the problem of reverse causality: returning Christian residents did not cause either the geological prerequisites for growing olives – such as soil, elevation, incline, or sunlight hours – or world market olive oil price fluctuations. However, olive trees are not randomly assigned to villages, and villages with olive trees may differ from those without. We use difference-in-difference estimation with year and village fixed effects to address omitted variable bias.<sup>8</sup>

Specifically, we explain the proportion of displaced households that returned as permanent residents using the exogenous treatment as follows:

$$y_{it} = \gamma_0 + \gamma_1 Olive\ Tree_i \times Log\ OOPrice_{t-1} + \gamma_2 Olive\ Tree_i + \gamma_3 Log\ OOPrice_{t-1} + X\beta + Log\ GDP_{t-1} + \eta_i + \lambda_t + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (8)$$

The key variable is the interaction of the presence of olive trees in the village and the log of the world price of olive oil, lagged ( $Olive\ Tree_i \times Log\ OOPrice_{t-1}$ ). This measure constitutes our treatment. A positive  $\gamma_1$ , the estimate on the coefficient of the treatment, constitutes evidence for our third hypothesis: villages with better economic prospects – the expanding olive oil industry – should attract more permanent residents. Finally, note that the controls,  $X$ , in this specification include all the covariates included in the earlier specification (Equation 7) which examined correlates of return.

### 4.3 Data and Descriptive Statistics

We build two panels from the ILDES data. The first panel includes data on return of permanent residents and regular visitors across 141 villages in Mount Lebanon in 2003 and 2007. The second panel includes data on permanent residents from 209 villages in the Mount Lebanon region and

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8. Nevertheless, our remains an observational study that unlike a randomized control trial has potential bias. We cannot entirely alleviate this concern. We discuss the most theoretically relevant threats to inference at the end of the results section.

spans the period from 1995 to 2007 in four year increments. Across the villages in 2007, the share of displaced who had taken up permanent residence ranged from 0% to 100% with an average value of 20%. Figure 2, produced with ILDES data, shows the returnee rate by village and the incidence of violence.

**Massacres** To capture violence, we construct an indicator for each village for whether a massacre of Christian civilians occurred during the process of displacement. Data on lethal violence against civilians comes from a report by the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ). Massacres occurred in 57 villages.<sup>9</sup>

**Muslim Share** About one third of the villages were mixed (Muslim and Christian) before the war while the other two thirds had only Christian residents. We examined two measures of the percent of Muslims in each village. The ILDES reports estimate the share of each village that was Muslim in 1982 based on their proprietary surveys. As an alternative measure we use the counts of the number of Sunni, Shia, and Druze Muslims in each village from the 2010 Lebanese voter registration rolls (Eid 2010; Cammett and Issar 2010). The measures are very similar and the substantive interpretation of our analysis is the same, regardless of the measure used. The results we present use voter registration data.

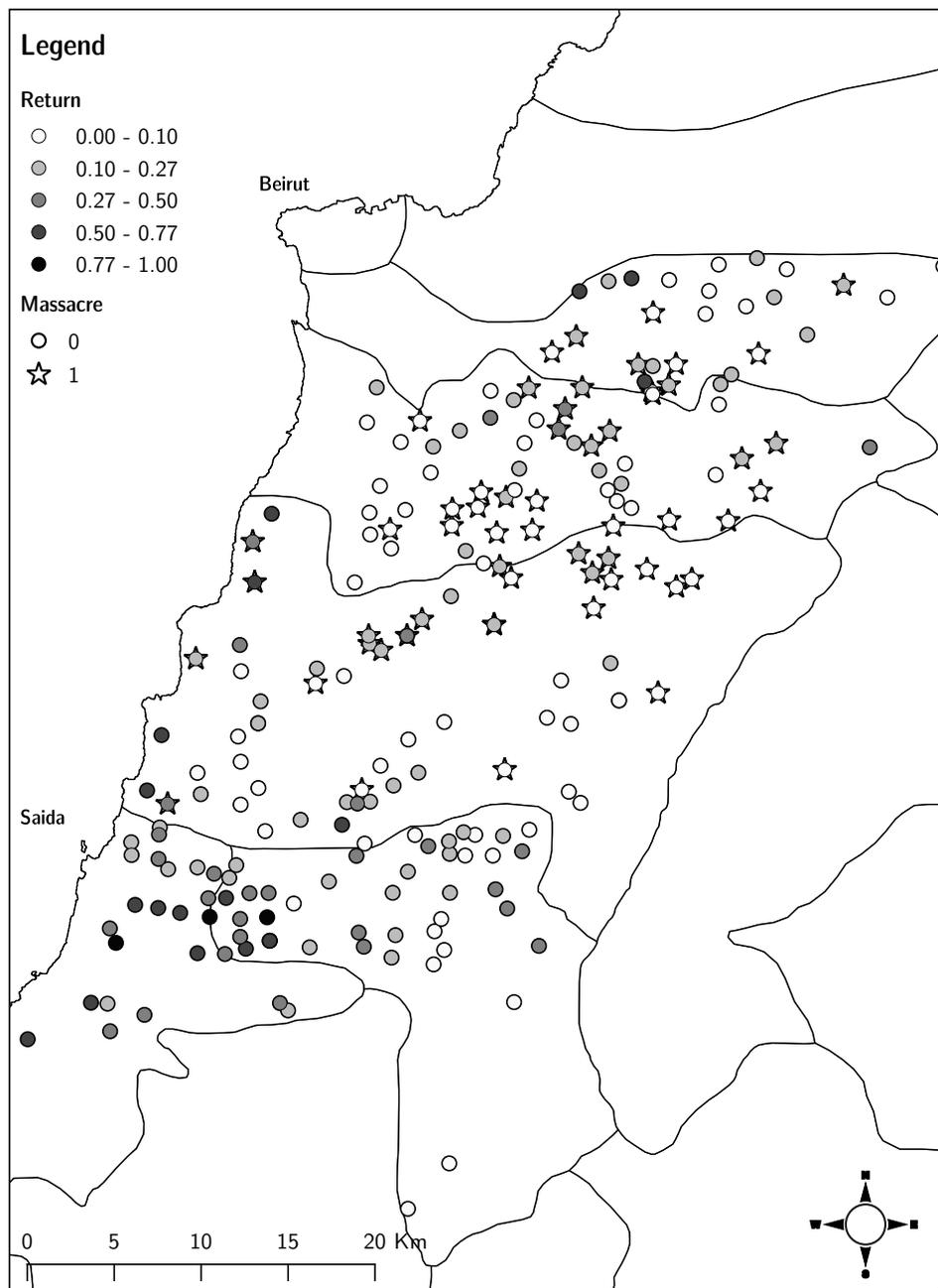
**Economic Prospects** For the natural experiment we construct a set of measures aimed at capturing the economic prospects of individual villages. We use two measures of olive trees in the analysis. The first, from ILDES, is an indicator for the presence of olive trees. The second is a weighted measure, where the presence of olive trees is scaled by the proportion of agricultural land surrounding the village. Agricultural land is based on time series satellite imagery for land cover (ESA 2017). Cells of 50% or greater cultivated land within a three kilometer radius of the village center are considered agricultural.<sup>10</sup> The weighted measure is useful because it varies over time and captures greater (lesser) capacity of the village to take advantage of the olive oil price shocks.

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9. We use an indicator as we do not have reliable death counts for all instances of violence.

10. Three kilometers is determined using an equal area projection. The percentages are calculated using QGIS v1.14.

Figure 2. Massacres and Rate of Permanent Resident Return by Location



With the olive tree measure, we pair world prices of olive oil from the International Monetary Fund (IMF 2017). Figure 3 displays a graph of the variation over time in the world price of olive oil and the cumulative proportion of households that return permanently.

Figure 3. World Olive Oil Prices and Permanent Return



*Note:* World Price of Olive Oil in Current US Dollars per metric tonnes is based on IMF data. Percent of Christian households displaced from Mount Lebanon and returned is based on ILDES 2008 report.

**Controls** We construct a series of village-level controls from the ILDES reports and other sources. To capture general economic conditions in the villages, we include road distance from each village to Beirut.<sup>11</sup> For each village, we add a time-varying measure of urban land use.<sup>12</sup> GDP data comes from the World Development Indicators (WDI 2017). Finally, the ILDES reports include information on property destruction, including the state of Christian homes in affected villages when the war ended.<sup>13</sup> From their measures, we construct two indicators: one for when homes were

11. We geocode each village. Using the GPS coordinates of the village and a reference point in central Beirut, we calculate the distance by road from Open Street Map data in ArcGIS.

12. Using QGIS v1.14 and an equal area projection, the urban land use measure is the percentage of cells in a 3km radius area of the village location that is categorized as urban in ESA (2017). The measure is similar to the land use data in Cammett and Issar (2010).

13. The reports only provide data on material destruction for villages in three out of five electoral districts; we complete the estimates of destruction using primary interviews with local NGOs and academics for the remaining 68 villages.

razed and one for when homes were damaged. Table 2 displays some descriptive statistics of village characteristics and Table 3 presents summary statistics for data used to produce the empirical results.

Table 2. Village Characteristics

Characteristic	Frequency	% of Villages
Massacre occurred	57	27.0%
Part Muslim	69	32.7%
At least one home razed	27	12.8%
At least one home damaged	83	39.3%
At least one olive tree	133	63.0%
At least one public school	61	28.9%
A town or urban area	96	45.5%

*Note:* Town/Urban classification is based on Cammett and Issar (2010) and includes less developed (category 3) and most developed (category 4) towns.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	St. Dev.	Num.
<b>Cross-Sectional</b>			
Village Population (Persons)	1,363.51	1,704.83	211
Households Displaced	301.20	394.80	211
Permanent Return (Households in 2007)	63.54	146.66	211
Road Distance to Beirut (kms)	46.48	13.54	211
<b>Time Varying</b>			
Olive Oil Price (Current USD per mT)	3,863.88	1,035.24	17
GDP (Billions of Current USD)	14.92	6.53	17
<b>Cross-Sectional &amp; Time Varying</b>			
Urban Land Cover (%)	0.0227	0.0524	844
Agricultural Land Cover (%)	0.2506	0.2058	844
Weighted Olive Tree Measure	0.1770	0.2255	840

## 5 Empirical Results

We find substantial evidence for our theory. We present this evidence in three parts. First, our inquiry into emotional and social dimensions of return suggests that massacres, mixed com-

munities, and mixed communities in which massacres took place (the interaction), are associated with less return. Displaced Christians choose not to return to places where they would have to be alongside non-coethnics. Finally, our analysis of the impact of economic prospects demonstrates strong evidence that the economic outlook in rural villages figures prominently into the decision to return permanently. Displaced Christians respond to the combination of olive trees, substantial cropland, and the world price of olive oil (our measure of economic prospects) by returning to live as permanent residents in their place of origin.

## 5.1 Legacies of Violence and Return

The first set of analyses provides evidence for our theory of return and orientation toward home because of violence and perpetrators. There is strong evidence for the first hypothesis, namely, that displaced choose not to return to mixed communities. The greater the proportion of Muslims in a community, the smaller the proportion of return. There is the comparably strong evidence for the second hypothesis, that violence in mixed communities (the interaction term) will be associated with even less return. These correlations are most clear among visitors, as our model suggests. Furthermore, the association of mixed communities and reticence to return is at least as strong as that between violence and avoidance of return.

Table 4 displays results from the analysis on emotions and return based on the fixed effects OLS model in Equation 7. Each of the three columns presents the same model where the dependent variable is the proportion of returnees (out of all who were displaced) but with different types of return. The first column includes all returnees. The middle and last columns include regular visitors, who visit on the weekends and in the summer, respectively.

The key estimates in Table 4 are those for the proportion of Muslims ( $\% \text{ Muslim}$ ) and the interaction of the proportion of Muslims with the incidence of massacres ( $\text{Massacre} \times \% \text{ Muslim}$ ). The estimates on the proportion of Muslims are all negative and statistically distinct from zero at conventional levels. The magnitude varies a bit across kinds of return. Summer visitors (Column 3) avoid mixed communities the least. Among summer visitors, the proportion of return in ho-

Table 4. Correlates of Return: Violence and Community Composition

	% Return	% Weekend Visitors	% Summer Visitors
Massacre, Indicator	-0.533 (0.018)	-0.532 (0.009)	-0.892 (0.009)
% Muslim	-5.672 (0.350)	-4.238 (0.185)	-3.914 (0.179)
Massacre x % Muslim	-4.727 (0.065)	-3.930 (0.034)	-5.066 (0.033)
Homes Damaged, Indicator	-1.945 (0.321)	-1.397 (0.170)	0.124 (0.164)
Damaged x % Muslim	5.427 (0.411)	4.550 (0.217)	4.123 (0.210)
Homes Razed, Indicator	-0.734 (0.031)	-0.760 (0.016)	-1.463 (0.016)
Log GDP (Current USD), Lagged	-0.053 (0.143)	-0.075 (0.138)	-0.116 (0.108)
R-squared	0.908	0.811	0.856

*Note:* Estimates are calculated with OLS. In each model the denominator of the dependent variable is displaced households. Robust standard errors are in parentheses and are clustered at the village level. All models include the full set of controls, year and village fixed effects with 284 observations and 142 clusters.

mogeneously Christian communities is 130% larger than in a community that is a third Muslim. Furthermore, the mixed communities are associated with reticence to return at least as much as violence. A village that is 10% Muslim is associated with same magnitude of decrease in returnees as a massacre.

The estimates on the interaction term reinforce the theory. All returnees differentially avoid mixed communities in which there were massacres. Substantively, a community that was a third Muslim and had no violence received 258% more summer visitors than in a comparably mixed community in which was a massacre. Taken together the results suggest that displaced Christians do not return in as large numbers to places where Muslims live, and among visitors past violence reinforces this effect. The prospect of living alongside members of the ethnic group who violently displaced them is a barrier to return for many Christians.

Finally, we surmise that damage to one's home may operate through an emotional channel or and economic one. Like a home robbery, having one's home damaged or destroyed in violent displacement could be a personal affront and could facilitate aversion toward the place of origin

even in the absence of bloodshed. However, the evidence suggests that damaging or razing homes operates very differently than violence. Returnees in general, and visitors in particular, are less likely to return when home have been damaged or razed. This does not seem to have to do with community composition. One explanation for these results is that home damage may not elicit an emotional response. The other possibility is that these results are hard to interpret because of the strategic objectives of those who would displace Christian and then move into their homes.

## **5.2 Re-establishing Livelihood**

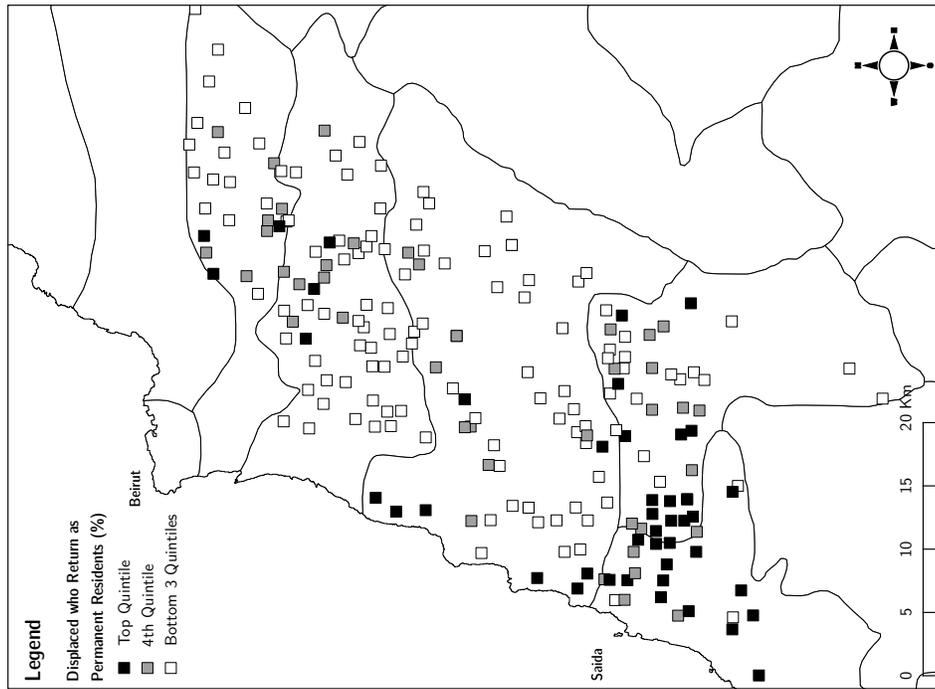
We find strong evidence that economic prospects draw people to return as permanent residents, but has little pull in attracting visitors. Figure 4 summarizes a key point: villages that attract greater proportions of the displaced as permanent residents are generally in different places than the villages that attract the greater proportions of the displaced as regular visitors. The map on the left shows villages that are in the top two quintiles in terms of the proportion of permanent residents. The map on the right shows villages in same quintiles but with respect to regular visitors.

The maps highlight two important characteristics of the geography of return. First, permanent residents cluster heavily in the northwest and southwest corners of the map. These are locations that are close to the two major cities of Beirut and Saida and in many cases within commuting distance. Second, visitors are more frequent as we move further to the east. Those locations are generally in mountainous areas, at higher elevation, further removed from major cities, and generally less well connected to the outside world.

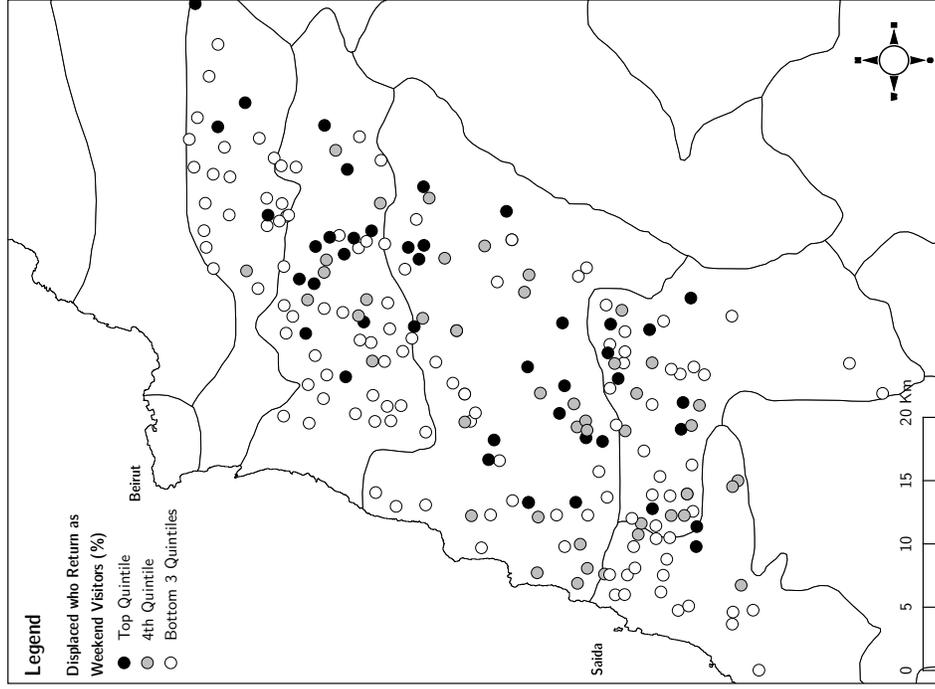
Table 5 presents strong evidence that economic prospects are a driving factor in permanent return, our third hypothesis. Specifically, more displaced Christians return to villages that have more olive trees when olive oil export prices increase. The results use the panel of villages every four years from 1995 to 2007. The first three columns use the indicator for olive trees and the last three columns use the weighted measure. All the results include the full set of controls and year and village fixed effects. The positive results are robust to the inclusion of region-specific time trends (Columns 2 and 5) and a treatment-specific time trend (Columns 3 and 6). Furthermore, returnees

Figure 4. Return of Permanent Residents and Regular Visitors by Location

**Villages with Most Permanent Residents**



**Villages with Most Regular Visitors**



*Note:* Permanent resident return is based on cumulative return as of 2007. Regular visitors is based on weekend return for the period between 1999 and 2003.

are not responding to positive olive oil price shocks in general, and olive trees themselves do not instigate permanent return. These results reinforce the argument implicit in our design, that the price shocks are external and operating through production.

Table 5. Impact of Economic Propsects on Return of Permanent Residents

	Ratio of Permanent Resident Return to Total Displaced					
	Olive Tree Indicator			Weighted Olive Tree Measure		
Price-Olive Tree Interaction	0.033 (0.022)	0.035 (0.022)	0.018 (0.016)	0.122 (0.051)	0.149 (0.057)	0.138 (0.064)
Log Price of Olive Oil, Lagged	-0.022 (0.015)	-0.034 (0.016)	-0.008 (0.012)	-0.023 (0.011)	-0.033 (0.015)	-0.007 (0.012)
Olive Tree	-0.913 (0.179)	-0.911 (0.192)	-0.791 (0.142)	-2.606 (2.853)	-1.932 (2.981)	-2.16 (2.911)
Region Specific Time Trend	N	Y	N	N	Y	N
Olive Tree Time Trend	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
R-squared	0.897	0.900	0.897	0.898	0.901	0.899

*Note:* Estimates are calculated with OLS. In each model the denominator of the dependent variable is displaced households. Robust standard errors are in parentheses and are clustered at the village level. All models include the full set of controls, year and village fixed effects with 765 observations and 209 clusters.

The measure of olive trees, weighted by land used for crops, improves precision. This is because the weighted measure takes into account whether the village has a lot, or very little, land devoted to agricultural production. Substantively, a 1 point increase in the world price of olive oil in places where there are olive trees and 50% of the land devoted to crops results in 6% increase in households returning permanently—an average of 4 or 5 families.<sup>14</sup>

The estimated impact of olive oil price shocks in places with olive trees, weighted by land used for crops, is remarkably robust to variation in specifications. We cannot address a few theoretically relevant concerns about the approach, though. These have to do with the fact that Christian minority community, like Greek Catholics, cluster in villages in some areas with olive trees as do mixed Muslim communities that are not Druze. The concerns is that these minority dynamics may have systematically effected violence or return and that this occurs in places with olive trees. As these are minority communities, we are confident that these problems are limited to a small number of villages. However, we cannot systematically rule out this concern without more detailed data on return and the ethnic makeup of villages.

14. The scenario is realistic given the data. World olive oil prices have that kind of variability and 30 villages at some point during the panel had 50% of their land devoted to agriculture.

## 6 Conclusion

The decision to return after forced displacement blends many diverse and sometimes contradictory impulses. Most forcibly displaced experience feelings associated with conflict: loss and dispossession connected to displacement, and anger and resentment at the perpetrators. Many also face the dilemma, well-known among labor migrants, of how to reconcile their desire to return home with the economic realities of limited job prospects in that location. This article shows how the full weight of these divergent forces kept the majority of Lebanese Christians from returning to Mount Lebanon after the civil war ended in 1990.

Every forced migration crisis is unique and our Lebanese setting has several features that facilitate econometric analysis but limit generalization. The lack of postwar violence, respect for prewar property rights, and political ambition to end squatting may distinguish Lebanon from many other post-conflict environments. On the other hand some characteristics of displaced Lebanese Christians are becoming increasingly common among displaced populations worldwide. Large numbers of displaced persons are leaving rural homes for urban areas, and the typical spell of displacement now lasts for multiple years. Because of these shared characteristics, insights from Lebanon can inform return programming and other policies for internally displaced in countries such as Colombia, Iraq, Syria, Sudan, Nigeria and Yemen. To induce displaced persons to return postwar efforts must include both transitional justice initiatives to overcome resentment and economic reconstruction to provide attractive job opportunities.

Yet the most important policy implication of our argument is that the goal of postwar reconstruction need not be that all displaced persons return as permanent residents. If migrants left rural areas of economic decline for urban areas with more vibrant economies it might be more feasible to offer them a comfortable life in their new surroundings. All societies continuously face demographic flux as a result of economic change, and urbanization ranks among the most powerful demographic trends in the contemporary world. In some instances – especially when displacement involves young persons or families with children that have few memories of their former homes – policymakers may want to focus economic reconstruction efforts on urban locations where dis-

placed households currently live. After all, it is more important to rebuild lives for the future than to rebuild villages from the past.

Another policy implication is that the evaluation of transitional justice efforts should include not only by whether they induce displaced households to return as permanent residents, but also consider whether they encourage the displaced to return to intermixed locations and as regular visitors. The forces of economic change may keep many displaced persons from returning permanently but if they nevertheless visit regularly they signal attachment to physical space. Future evaluations of return programming should take this metric into account.

Future research should address several topics. First, it remains unclear whether and how transitional justice initiatives can overcome deep resentment, but re-evaluating initiatives in light of regular visitors may reveal more promising best practices. On a related note, little is known about how governments pick different policies to address post-conflict migration. Issues like prewar property rights and the position of squatters have major distributional implications and should be investigated further. Researchers could also study how dispossession and displacement affects ideological disposition: do the forcibly displaced develop more recalcitrant political positions, support more hard line candidates, or differ in their views on political violence? Ongoing migration crises remain among the most difficult challenges to peace and justice in the international community, and few issues require more urgent attention among scholars and policymakers alike.

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