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# WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

## LEBANON'S WAR-LOADED MEMORY

[ An UMAM D&R Project ]



Documentation & Research

The least that one can do is admit that Lebanon has not yet recovered from the effects of the 15 years referred to by the Lebanese as “the war.” The least one can say is that this war (or even wars), according to seemingly crystal-clear statements by leaders and politicians still looms large as a real, feared risk - and in recent years such a risk has not always loomed only behind the door. One is left to assume, therefore, that the Lebanese have so far “failed” in abstaining from “war.” The least one must ask is what causes the Lebanese in 2008 to believe that they have almost returned to the year of 1975.

In the beginning of the 1990s, just as they had done on occasions of previous civil conflict, the Lebanese opted to exit the “war” with a general amnesty aimed, according to the Lebanese formal and political discourse, at “turning the page of the past” and starting a new one. One only has to look at the rationale that accompanies this amnesty law, to see that it was motivated by the fear that crimes perpetrated during the “incidents that have hit the country since 1975” would “awaken grudges and undermine the peace process if they remained on the table for discussion and debate.”

And that was indeed a genuine fear. However, today more than ever, what does not need to be proven is that the Lebanese choice - opting for amnesty and “turning the page of the past” - has clearly been a fiasco. Once the Lebanese hand was released from the knots of Syrian “tutelage,” the hands of the people’s representatives were raised under the dome of Parliament, voting on two additional amnesty laws in the name of “national reconciliation and promotion of civil peace.” One only has to look at the accompanying rationales for these two new laws, to have a clear idea

about the years between 1991 and 2005, particularly within the security services and judicial system. Some believed that those years were Lebanon's opportunity to start settling accounts with the "war." Yet the rationales for the amnesty laws demonstrate the factors that led to the complete absence of serious governmental or civil initiatives to deal with the past, whether urging reconciliation, urging open acknowledgement of the harm that groups did to one another, or seeking any degree of justice, even if symbolic.

And this is not all. Looking at the rationales for the two amnesty laws, with which the Lebanese tried to end what they agreed to call the era of "tutelage," one can understand what led each of the parties involved in a war that was considered over, to create a narrative that justified the chapters of violence that they were involved in. These memories multiply with the plurality of groups. They refer explicitly to simple, and simplified, conceptions of Lebanon and to the history and geography of war - conceptions that divide Lebanon into just two physical or moral camps: before and after, victims and executioners, Muslims and Christians, East Beirut and West Beirut, etc... In brief, they are as much conceptions resulting from war as they are descriptions of war.

Hence, there is no wonder that the domination of a culture of collective amnesia was coupled with the deliberate absence of the concepts of justice, accountability and responsibility. It is also no wonder that, regardless of the political bickering and the fact that some welcomed and others rejected the news, the Lebanese were all shocked by the establishment of an international investigation commission into the assassination of former Prime Minister Hariri in accordance with an international resolution, and later by the establishment of a Special Tribunal for Lebanon in order to try suspects connected to that assassination and other crimes. Until then, it had looked as if the quest for truth and the rule of justice and accountability were alien concepts or concepts from another time.

UMAM Documentation and Research, as well as other associations and committees, did not wait for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, the establishment of the investigational commission or the inception of the tribunal to oppose those who had taken the past lightly, especially its violent chapters, nor to add to its agenda "truth-seeking and memory-management," setting this issue

at the top of its priorities. (One only has to review the activities that UMAM has initiated and participated in since its establishment to verify that we are saying what we mean and that we mean what we are saying).

Perhaps the most difficult question that has been asked of UMAM since its inception - and that is also being asked of civil society organizations active in the same domain - concerns “meddling” in the past, and stirring up its painful chapters. This question is often formulated as a question of time, such as: “Is it time to open files of the past?” Barely concealed in the question is the assumption that provokes the very same questioner to refer to the experiences of supposedly advanced countries that had to be patient for tens of years before they started stirring up stagnant waters, or others in which disputes flared up between the elite and the people regarding the commencement of, or abstention from, the stirring process.

As for UMAM's answer to this question, it is in accordance with an idea that we were and have always been highly convinced about: the question is legitimate, and every society has its own rhythm. However when groups, even if only a few, from a certain society start expressing their need to go over the past, it is proof that this past still exists. Hence, this expression can be seen as part of the stirrings of debate in society, which is hidden at some times and banned at others.

As part of the activities undertaken by UMAM in the past few years, and as a continuation of its contribution to what it considers an open debate among the Lebanese regarding truth-seeking and memory-management, even if it is a debate without rules, UMAM has commenced preparation of a suite of different activities in cooperation with local and international partners, under the general title:

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## **COMPONENTS OF THE PROJECT**

The project is composed of seven specialized workshops and multiple cultural events that are open to the public. The public events are related to the topics of the workshops, and a press conference will precede the inauguration and the inauguration ceremony:

Date	Activity	Venue
Thursday, April 10, 2008	Inauguration of activities	Beirut, UNESCO Palace
Saturday & Sunday on April 12 & 13, 2008	Workshop 1: And So the War Ended...	Beirut
May 2008	Public Cultural Event and opening of the second workshop	Chouf
May 2008	Workshop 2: ...And they Never Came Back: Enforced Disappearances in Lebanon	Chouf
June 2008	Public Cultural Event and opening of the third workshop	North Lebanon
June 2008	Workshop 3: A War Without Crimes: About Prosecutions	North Lebanon
July 2008	Public Cultural Event and opening of the fourth workshop	Bekaa
July 2008	Workshop 4: The Story Beneath Us: Forensics and Mass Graves	Bekaa
October 2008	Public Cultural Event and opening of the fifth workshop	Beirut's southern suburb
October 2008	Workshop 5: Lest the Past Escapes Us: Archiving and Documentation Techniques	Beirut's southern suburb
October 2008	Public Cultural Event and opening of the sixth workshop	South Lebanon
November 2008	Workshop 6: How to "Pay" for it? War and Reparation	South Lebanon
November 2008	Public Cultural Event and opening of the seventh workshop	Beirut
November 2008	Workshop 7: The War as Memorial and Monument.	Beirut

Each workshop lasts for 2 days. Around 25 civil society activists and academics are expected to take part in the workshops, in addition to local coordinators and one or more international experts. In order to maximize the productivity of discussions UMAM, in cooperation with its partners, will provide participants with the relevant literature.

The workshops and accompanying activities will not only be focused in Beirut, but will also be held in other areas. The organizers are convinced that talking about Lebanon's war-loaded memory, as a common history that has gathered some and separated others, is not to be equated with lip-service to an idea but rather is a real and crucial matter whose place-related dimension should be taken into account, even if only symbolically.

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[www.umam-dr.org](http://www.umam-dr.org) | [www.memoryatwork.org](http://www.memoryatwork.org)

Under the patronage of His Excellency the Minister of Culture, Tarek Mitri  
UMAM DOCUMENTATION & RESEARCH  
Invites you to the opening ceremony of the project

# WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

LEBANON'S  
WAR-LOADED MEMORY

++ the launch of the exhibition

## Missing

THURSDAY, APRIL 10, 2008

@ 6 PM, UNESCO PALACE, BEIRUT

The evening will include presentations from His Excellency Mr. Haber, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in Lebanon, and Dr. Boraine, former Vice President of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa and co-founder of the International Center for Transitional Justice.

تحت رعاية معالي وزير الثقافة، الأستاذ طارق متري

أمم للتوثيق والأبحاث

تدعوكم إلى إطلاق مشروعها

# ما العمل؟

لبنان وذاكرته حمالة الحروب

++ وإلى افتتاح معرض

## ... ولم يعودوا

السادسة من مساء الخميس

١٠ نيسان ٢٠٠٨ في قصر الأونسكو

يتخلل حفل الافتتاح كلمة لسعادة السفير الألماني في لبنان، هنز بروج هاير، وأخرى للدكتور أليكس بورين، نائب رئيس لجنة الحقيقة والمصالحة في جنوب أفريقيا سابقاً، وأحد مؤسسي المركز الدولي للعدالة الانتقالية.

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Institut für Auswärtige  
beziehungen e.v.



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Foreign Office

TRANSITIONAL  
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## SPONSORSHIP AND FUNDING

It is obvious that this project could only be accomplished on a solid basis of moral and material partnerships - local and foreign ones. UMAM is delighted that its local partnership circle has widened because of this project, and will be crystallized through the activities listed above, as well as the website [www.memoryatwork.org](http://www.memoryatwork.org), a Lebanese platform for dialogue on dealing with the past. UMAM also has to admit that this project could not have seen the light of day if not for the expertise and financial sponsorship of the following international institutions:

- ++ Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen e.V.
- ++ Federal Republic of Germany - Foreign Office
- ++ International Center for Transitional Justice
- ++ Heinrich Böll Foundation - Middle East Office
- ++ Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo

## فيا رعاية المشروع وتمويله

على ما لا يحتاج الأمر إلى بيان، ما كان لهذا المشروع من نجاح ممكن إلا على أرضية صلبة من الشراكات، المحلية والخارجية، المعنوية والمادية. وبمقدار ما يسرُّ أمم أن دائرة شراكتها المحلية، بمناسبة هذا المشروع، قد توسعت، وأن هذه الشراكة سوف تتبلور شيئاً فشيئاً من خلال النشاطات وورشات العمل المعدة أعلاه - فضلاً عن موقع إلكتروني موقوف على قضية «الذاكرة» - لا يسعها إلا أن تعترف بأنه ما كان لهذا المشروع أن يخرج من طوره الأول كفكرة إلى أطوار التحقق لولا الرعاية النظرية والمادية للمؤسسات الدولية التالية:

i f a Institut für Auslands-  
beziehungen e.V.



Federal Republic of Germany  
Foreign Office



HEINRICH  
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