War: A Memory Passed Down from Generation to Generation

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Though it happened long ago, the war still lingers vividly in the memory of many of us. I did not live through it, yet I have imagined it countless times in my mind. It is the force that marginalized my mother's identity, deepened division in my country, and cultivated symbolic violence in my daily life, a violence that has carried over into our present generations.

One of the most difficult ordeals Lebanon has endured was this war that erupted among its own people, under the banner of "seeking a unified identity." In the end, however, it led to the erasure of the very notion of a national Lebanese identity. From the spark that ignited in 1975 until its official end in 1990, the people of Lebanon suffered immeasurably across human, urban, economic, political, and social hardships whose effects remain with us today.

The war manifested in many forms of violence: direct physical violence, sectarian violence that fueled hatred among people, political, economic, psychological, and social violence—alongside a symbolic violence that still haunts Lebanon to this day.

Since its inception, Lebanon has been shaped by sectarianism, with sectarian slurs woven into both jest and seriousness. Violence—particularly political and sectarian—became familiar. Yet one of the most profound legacies of the Civil War is this symbolic violence: a violence expressed through language, symbols, and meanings that breed resentment, imposing social and cultural domination without physical force. This legacy, passed down from generation to generation, reappears each time we revisit the memory of that war.

Who among us has not heard those recurring sectarian speeches—echoes of the Civil War that continue to this day? Words designed to sow fear of the "other," as if the mere existence of another sect posed an existential

threat. Who has not noticed how each sect recounts the war in its own way, bending truth to serve its own interests? But reality unmasks these distortions: whoever kills or slaughters their own countrymen forfeits any claim to righteousness.

After the war, this symbolic violence became embedded in politics, in the speeches of party and sectarian leaders, in the rhetoric of politicians who sweeten their poison to plant hatred in hearts through media, through art. In doing so, they erode the common good and reinforce cultural hegemony.

Symbolic violence spreads like a malignant cancer, nourishing sectarianism through hidden messages. Peace will remain impossible until this cancer is cut out from politicians, rulers, and the political class. Its spread has reached even the nation's vital organs—its schools and universities—where, knowingly or not, educators reproduce this "incurable disease," shaping the minds of children and youth with symbols of violence. A generation grows up detached from its Lebanese identity, clinging instead to religious or political identities, repeating sectarian expressions in casual conversations, oblivious to the danger they carry. In doing so, they revive divisions, extinguish hope for coexistence, and fan the flames of resentment until they consume our true identity.

This war stole what cannot be replaced from those who lived it as well as from us. Like Um Nader, a woman from East Beirut, who lost her son in a futile clash; she waited for him in vain until her death, clinging to a rumor that he was in Syria. Or Salim, who lost his sense of belonging and wandered from one region to another before finding refuge in Choueifat. Or George, whose childhood under bombardment left him haunted by panic, so much so that even at fifty, ordinary sounds trigger the same terror. Ordinary people, just like us, bore the brunt: some lost loved ones, others were exiled, and many were left scarred with fears that time could not erase. Violence does not fade—it grows in memory until it strangles awareness and steals inner peace, turning serenity itself into a trap for repressed hatred.

As for me, I too am a victim of that war. A war that robbed my country of safety and peace of mind, a war that planted fear in every journey between one region and another. I did not hear the roar of shelling, nor did I flee my home, change my sect, or hide in fear of being slaughtered. But today I live with its aftermath: a Lebanon divided not by geography but by hearts, identities, sects, and politics. Those in the south are oblivious to the

hunger of the north, and those in the north turn a deaf ear to the massacres of the south. We share the same land, yet what was divided was our souls. What unites us is only violence. Every sect, every region, accuses the other of it—and in this, we have been generous beyond measure. Lebanon continues to suffer with every step it takes, still weighed down by the divisions inherited since that infernal war began in 1975.

We must recognize that the victims are not only those who perished. We are all victims. Some witnessed countrymen killing countrymen. Some survived but were broken. And others—like me—inherit the scars, living daily with their consequences, dying a hundred silent deaths without ever knowing our fate. Lebanon died when the worm of violence began devouring its green leaves, leaving behind a barren tree awaiting the waters of identity and true citizenship to revive it.

The war's impact fell most heavily on ordinary people—people like you and me. Some lost loved ones, others were forced into exile, while still others live tangled in the threads of fear rooted in the past. Violence does not vanish; it persists, carving itself into memory, draining awareness, stripping hearts of safety, and leaving people to believe that peace is nothing

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more than a trap for suppressed hatred.

Decades have passed since that war, but it still clings to our hearts and minds. Its shadow remains in the soul of every Lebanese who lived it—and in those of us who inherited it. I was not there, but I have felt how it deepened division instead of building a single national identity for my generation. Even at my young age, I see its results embedded in my country's fabric. The Civil War planted seeds of hatred so deeply that people no longer know who is with them and

who is against them. Symbolic violence has seeped into our very nature—visible in our streets, on television, across the internet, in political speeches, even in schools and textbooks. Children grow up immersed in it, absorbing it unconsciously, practicing it daily without reflection. Lebanon is left spinning between drowning in violence and fighting to break free of it.

Movements for change that sought to rescue Lebanon were again met with symbolic violence. With every passing phase, division deepens. This has been Lebanon's story since its beginning: each group clings to its own identity, forgetting the one that binds us. And so Lebanon has lived—and may die—in this state. Any voice raised above the noise of violence is silenced. And so the Lebanese dream remains: to one day live in true coexistence, in peace among sects, freed at last from the specter of war that haunts us everywhere.

But when Lebanon is finally cleansed of these symbols of violence, the people will raise a cry louder than the cries of those clinging to division. The air will clear of violence's dust, its streets will be swept clean of sectarian remnants, and the unified Lebanese identity will remain—our pride, our dignity, and our aspiration. Then, and only then, will Lebanon live free, healed of the malignant disease that has burdened it with the constant fear of death.