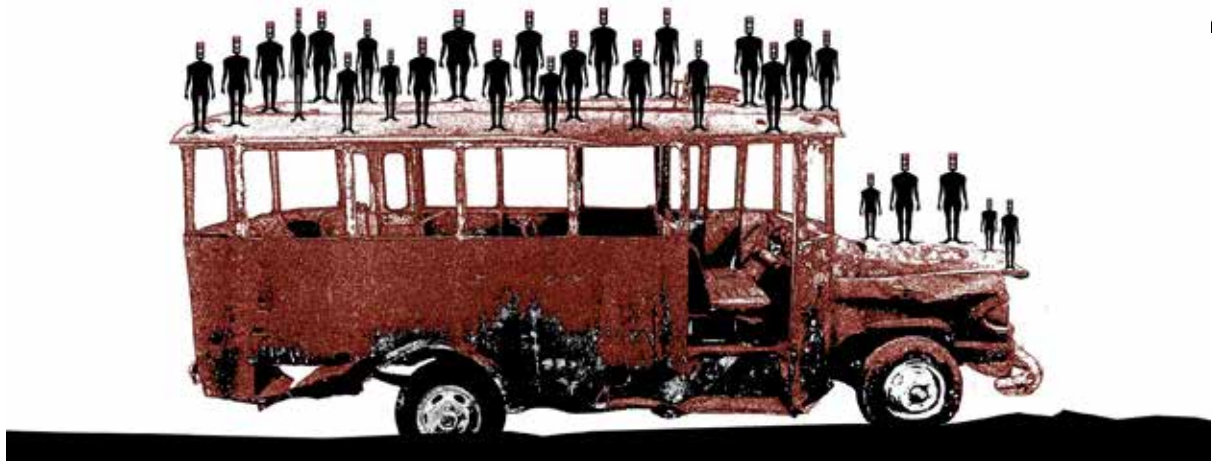




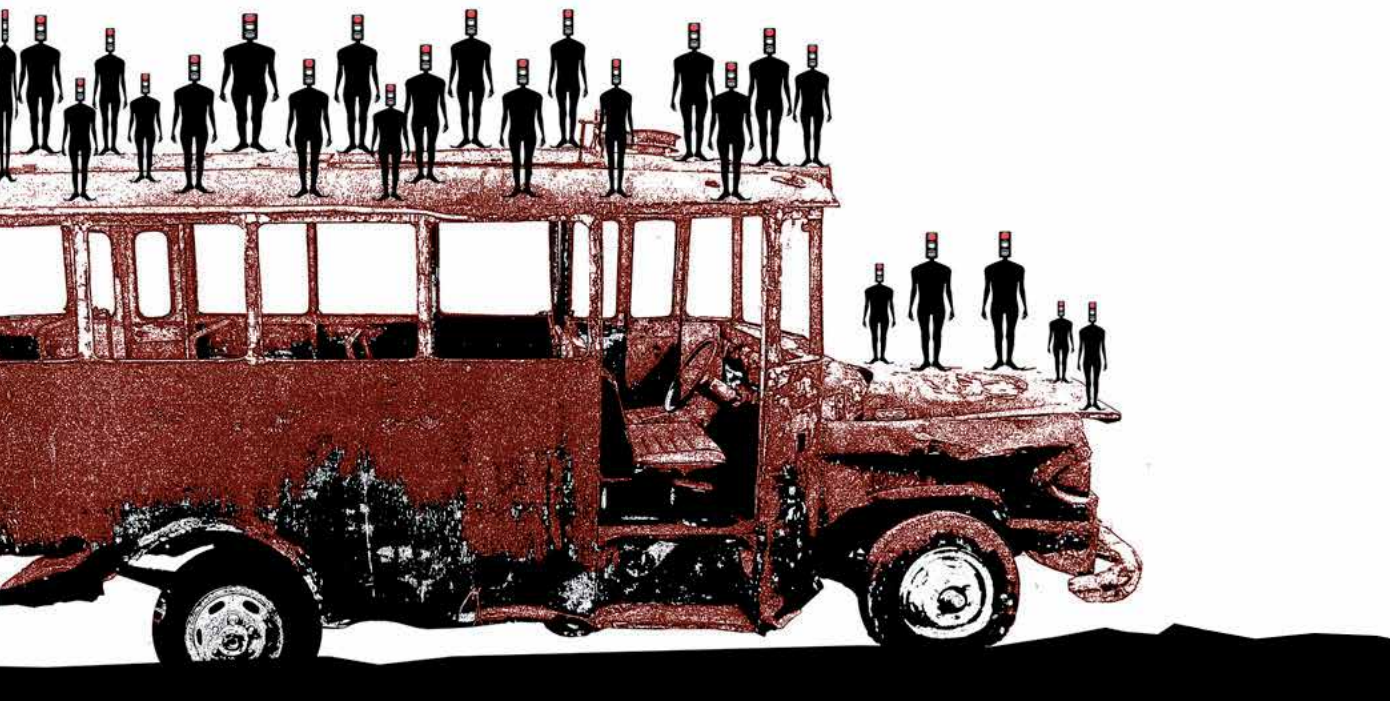
Youth Reflections on Violence in Lebanon From 1975 to 2025

Critical Reckoning with Violence and Youth in Lebanon



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Between the Past and the Present

Nancy Faour

Nothing happens in this world without a reason, even wars. Wars are built slowly, quietly, almost invisibly. Every day, little things pile up, tension increases, words become harder, and trust is broken until suddenly you reach a point where there is no turning back. This is the threshold point at which you wake up and find yourself in the middle of the war. A war between people you love and whose motives you do not know. What seemed like minor disagreements or small acts of mistrust now burn like fire. And you wonder how something so ordinary ever turned into war. I did not live through the Lebanese Civil War, but somehow I grew up feeling its weight. That war shaped everything around me, from the way people talk to the way they look at each other.

Although the echoes of gunfire may have faded, a deeper presence remains, one that continues to shape our lives long after the battle has ended. I remember watching the

Lebanese film “West Beirut” for the first time in high school. I was struck not just by the gunshots and checkpoints, but by the way life kept moving around them; children still played, friends still fought, and people still laughed. Another time, in school, a teacher played a Fairouz song “Li Beirut” and I did not understand why it made my chest tighten. I had not experienced the destruction she sang about, but somehow, I felt it.

Moments like these allow the war to feel so near to me in a way that no history book has permitted. They revealed how the past continues to breathe through culture, emotion, and silence. Therefore, I want to explore how the scars of war continue to affect us today, scars formed by an invisible violence. These scars manifest in our thoughts, our treatment of one another, and the systems in which we live. Additionally, war leaves behind psychological wounds and economic hardships that affect us every single day.

Invisible violence is not about what we see; it is about what





we carry but often cannot explain. During the Lebanese Civil War, many who were not hurt physically were wounded in quieter, deeper ways. People turned on each other not because of personal conflict, but because of religion, sect, or simply the group they were told to follow. I believe many did not truly want the war; they were just following orders, pulled into something bigger than themselves. Some young men, maybe for the first time in their lives, held guns and felt powerful, but they did not understand the cost. What happens when that feeling fades, and all that is left is grief? When you lose someone you love, you are left with questions that haunt you. Was it worth it? Why did this happen? Think of the woman who lost her son or the daughter who lost her father, her only source of strength. How did she continue? She would have lived with pain, bitterness, and anger toward people she never truly knew. That anger becomes inherited, passed down not because of truth, but because of silence and lack of understanding. And that is one of the most painful legacies of war, the way it keeps living in us, even when it is over.

What about the children who grew up hearing gunfire,

witnessing death, and losing their right to a normal childhood? Do you think they grew up without scars, without pain or trauma? These children became adults, but many still carry the weight of their past. Every time they hear the sound of a gunshot, fear grips them once again. The invisible violence is a part of our daily existence. It shaped the way we interact and the way we raise the next generation. It is not just about the past; it affects our present and our future too.

The trauma of war does not only affect those who fought in it; it affects all of us, even those who were not born yet. It shows up in how we treat each other. That is why it is so important to acknowledge the invisible violence, to understand the scars we carry. The first step to heal something is identifying the problem. Because only then can we begin to heal, not just as individuals, but as a community. Only then can we break the cycle of silence and pass down a legacy of understanding, empathy, and peace.

Wars do not just kill or physically harm people; they also destroy the very foundation people depend on to live. During and after the conflict, many people were financially broken, their jobs disappeared, the country's





economy collapsed, and the prices rose. A large group of citizens found themselves homeless without any shelter or money. All their hard work throughout the years was gone. They lost the ability to think of a brighter future. Many families had to start over with nothing. Factories closed, businesses were destroyed, and food essentials were cut off. Until this moment, Lebanon had not fully recovered from that crisis. A destroyed economy does not only mean poverty; it means desperation, inequality, and a generation forced to survive instead of thrive. Wars interrupt education and put the future on hold. Talented people leave, the brain drain grows, and those remaining have fewer resources to handle the load.

It is not about some numbers and economic statistics; it is about the people. It is about the man who cannot afford a living to support his children; it is about the farmer who cannot afford to buy new seeds; it is about the shop owner who never reopened; it is about the man who left his family behind and left his country just to



be able to work and get his family what they needed. The war's weight is still in our job market. This is a kind of violence that continues long after the ceasefire.

We were born after the war, yet we still carry it in ways we cannot explain. My generation inherited its silence, its fear, and its division without really knowing its reasons. We grew up with names of neighborhoods that we were told not to enter, people we were warned not to trust, and deep wounds we did not cause but were still expected to carry. Without even realizing it, we were born into a system where hatred is passed down through generations, often without context, just stories told by elders who also heard them from someone else, without knowing their origin or truth. We learned to be cautious of people we have





never met, to inherit weight that was never ours to begin with.

Forget everything that came before; on this momentous 50th anniversary of the war's end, I choose to believe. I believe that, little by little, day by day, we will

move toward a Lebanon where all its people truly love their country and long for peace. A Lebanon where its citizens do not just coexist but care for one another deeply, genuinely, and without fear.





The Stories We Inherit: War, Memory, and Lebanon's Fractured Present

Joelle Abou Nader

Growing up in the shadow of Lebanon's civil war, I belong to a generation that never lived through the conflict firsthand but has inherited its deep scars and competing narratives. For many of us, the recent Hezbollah-Israel conflict reopened old wounds, raised urgent questions about the future of a country still divided by history and identity, and brought new perspectives that challenge long-held beliefs and offer possibilities for change. This struggle over narratives is not only political; it is profoundly personal, shaping how we see ourselves, our communities, and the fragile prospect of peace. Much like during the 1990–1975 civil war, Lebanese communities remain sharply divided along sectarian lines. This piece explores how these narratives are shaped, and whether storytelling

might help bridge Lebanon's growing divides.

After the recent conflict, two primary youth perspectives have emerged, each deeply influenced by the legacy of the Lebanese Civil War—a 15-year conflict marked by sectarian violence, foreign interventions, and deep national fragmentation—and by the stories passed down through generations. The memories are more than history; they live on in families and communities today, shaping how young people see themselves and their place in the country. Some youth, inspired by stories of resistance, believe Hezbollah's fight against Israel is a necessary continuation of that struggle. Others, worn down by decades of violence, see only pain and destruction, hoping for an end to war altogether. For me, these competing narratives are not distant; instead they are the threads that weave through





everyday life, influencing who we trust, who we fear, and whether we can imagine a peaceful future.

In the southern suburbs of Beirut, young activists—primarily women aged 16 to 30—have turned the destruction from Israeli airstrikes into political expression. They use graffiti to paint images of the late Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah on the walls of Dahieh. For many of these young women, this is not just art—it is a way to reclaim their sense of belonging and hope amid chaos, a powerful assertion that their community's voice will not be erased despite the devastation.

Further north, Lebanese University students rallied in solidarity with Gaza, condemning Israeli aggression and calling for national unity. In addition, Hezbollah's student councils orchestrated a solidarity rally at the Hadath University Complex, where students voiced their support for Palestine and condemned Israeli actions. Witnessing these protests and others, it is clear how Hezbollah continues to hold a symbolic place as a bulwark against foreign interference and a source of pride for many. The students' chants and signs reminded me of how deeply the narratives of resistance are ingrained in Lebanon's youth, passed down

from older generations who lived through war and occupation.

For me—and for many others who grew up hearing the stories of Lebanon's civil war—the desire to avoid another war is not just political. It is deeply emotional, a plea rooted in the trauma passed down through our families and the constant fear of repeating the past. With the country already buckling under economic hardship and political uncertainty, the thought of yet another conflict feels not just overwhelming—it feels unbearable.

This can be seen in other areas of Beirut, where anti-war posters bearing messages like «Enough, we are tired, Lebanon doesn't want war,» have proliferated. These signs signal a growing youth dissent against Hezbollah's military role. Even within the Shi'a community, traditionally Hezbollah's support base, unease is rising as destruction and displacement mount. This division reminded me how deeply the civil war's legacy still splits us, with young people caught between inherited narratives and the harsh realities unfolding around them.

I have seen stories—shared online, whispered in interviews, sometimes hidden behind





animation or pseudonyms—by Lebanese and Syrian civilians who clearly reject the war. One civilian said: “This hostility and war have cost us dearly”. These are not just political statements—they are lived experiences, quietly challenging the idea of conflict. As more of these stories surface and gain attention, I cannot help but feel the tension rising. These stories do not just expose hidden realities—they highlight how fractured our understanding of conflict has become.

In one part of Beirut, the Rawdat al-Shahidayn cemetery in the southern suburbs holds around a hundred graves of young Hezbollah fighters, many of whom died in battles with Israel or in Syria alongside Assad’s forces. Their gravestones are marked with yellow ribbons declaring them “Martyrs on the road to Jerusalem.” Families, especially grieving mothers, regularly visit the site to mourn and honor them. One such mother lost her son, a 30-year-old father of two, in an Israeli strike on Aytash Shab. She sees her son’s death not with regret, but



as a noble sacrifice for land and faith.

In a separate moment, a medical professional visited a government shelter where she attempted to console a grieving widow. To her surprise, the widow responded, “Do not console me—congratulate me.” She expressed pride in her husband’s death as a martyr. The response surprised the visitor and underscored the differing perspectives on loss and sacrifice. These personal encounters highlight the deep divisions between religious and political perspectives, showing that even in grief, Lebanon’s communities are separated by deeply rooted beliefs about sacrifice and identity. This contrast illustrates how one family’s hero can be another’s source of pain or division,





revealing how differing narratives shape perceptions of one another and often contribute to ongoing separation rather than unity.

These competing narratives do not just shape how I understand the present—they also influence how I see the future. If these stories remain rigid and opposed,

we risk repeating the cycle of conflict that has shaped my country's past. But if we learn to listen across divides and recognize both pain and hope, there is a chance for a different future—one where these stories bring us closer instead of driving us apart.





Echoes After the Guns Fell Silent

Jana Malaeb

Although I was born years after Lebanon's civil war ended, its shadows never left our home. My grandmother kept war stories live, not as history lessons, but as warnings. From the way she stacked extra food, to how she flinched at a slamming door, I understood that the war had not truly ended for her, nor her children.

What I did not realize until much later was that the war had not ended for me either.

My mother was only a child when war tore into her world. In 1983, during the Kfarmatta massacre, she and her family fled the village. They hid in the back of a tomato truck, pressed between crates, her small hands clutching her mother's dress. She still remembers the smell of crushed tomatoes under her feet; she hates them to this day and refuses to even buy them. She did not understand politics. She did not know who was shooting or why, all she knew was that she was not safe, and that her childhood quietly slipped away in

the back of that truck.

To this day, if my mother sees a firearm on TV, in a photo, or in real life, she screams. Not out of drama, but out of pure, uncontrollable terror. She never watches war movies. She cannot. The pain is too loud, too near, and too deeply engraved into her nervous system.

She survived, yes. But surviving is not the same as healing, and in ways I am only now beginning to understand, her war reached me too.

In school, we learned almost nothing about the civil war. Lebanon still lacks a unified history curriculum covering the conflict. Some of my classmates had parents who were fighters, others had parents who were refugees, and most of us were taught to stay quiet about both.

Without a shared narrative, our generation was left to piece together history from family stories, whispers, and silence.

My father's story was different, but no less terrifying. He was a fighter in the People's Liberation





Army (PLA), trained in the USSR by KGB soldiers, and eventually became a commander. He does not speak of it much. Sometimes I think he has words that he has buried so deep that even he cannot find them anymore. All I know is that he was a child thrown into a brutal world, believing that soil is more precious than human life, carrying a rifle that is heavier than him, while other children carried books. I have learned to respect his silence, but I have also learned to read between it.

The economic effects of the war are another inheritance we carry. My grandparents' home in Kfarmatta was burned not once but twice, and they never fully recovered financially. Like many families displaced by violence, they spent years trying to rebuild from nothing, carrying trauma in one hand and poverty in the other.

Lebanon's post-war economy was never built for recovery. Instead, it favoured former warlords turned politicians, creating a system where corruption and nepotism flourished while everyday citizens struggled. The result for my generation? Skyrocketing unemployment, decaying infrastructure, a collapsing currency, and the painful realization that we are still paying the cost of a war we never fought.

The warlords changed suits, not souls.

Many of us have grown up watching our parents stretch every lira, praying the electricity does not cut out while taking a shower, dreaming of leaving the country for somewhere more stable, not because we want more, but because we want rest.

Lebanon's post-war political structure, based on sectarian power-sharing, institutionalized the divisions the war etched into the country. It locked in the influence of many of the same figures who fuelled the violence and passed that dysfunction down like a cursed inheritance.

For us, the children of war survivors, this system reinforces a sense of betrayal. We are expected to move forward in a country governed by those who refused to reckon with its past. We see the same flags, hear the same speeches, and walk on streets named after men our parents once feared. We have inherited not only trauma, but a national identity that feels broken, suspended between survival and disillusionment.

And yet, we endure. Maybe because we must. Maybe because, somewhere inside us, that resilience is also inherited.





I think of my mother in that tomato truck terrified, hidden, silent. And I think of her now, watching me speak up, watching me write this. She still carries the war in her bones, but I carry her courage in mine. I wish I could have hugged that little girl and covered her eyes and ears.

But there is power in naming what we carry.

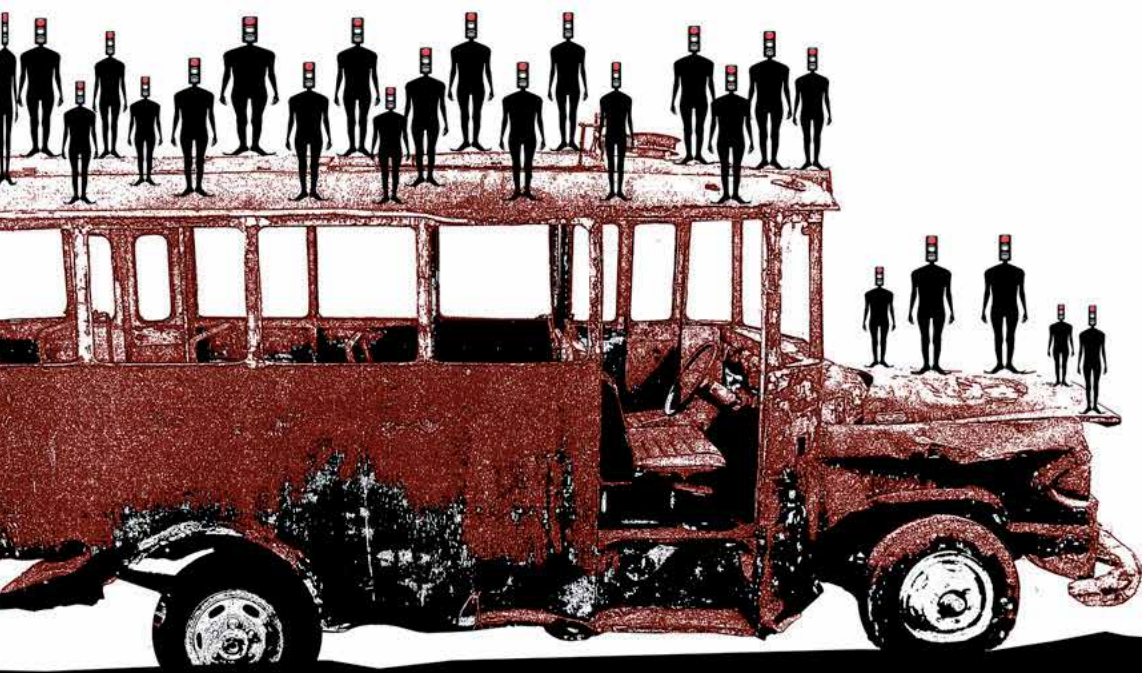
The war shaped our parents. Our parents shaped us. And now, we have the chance to shape something different. We may still live with ghosts, that is true, but we do not have to let them haunt the future.

There are stories that I know I will never hear, chapters of my parents' lives that were folded shut before I was born. Sometimes, in the quiet, I can almost feel them sitting inside those silences, too afraid to turn the page. I have stopped asking certain questions, not because I do not want to know, but because I have learned the cost of remembering. When my father stares off into the abyss for too long, I know he is somewhere I cannot follow. When my mother



turns off the news mid-sentence, I know it is not just noise she is avoiding, it is memory. They have taught me that survival sometimes means silence, but I have also learned that healing comes from naming the things we are afraid to speak. And maybe one day, when the grief is softer, they will let the words come. Maybe one day, we will sit together and finally open the chapters they locked away, and heal them.







Our War Games: The Desensitization of Lebanese Youth to the Sociopolitical Reality Around Us in Beirut

Jade Doumani

Militancy was an unfortunate fixture of life in Beirut in the early 2000s. The assassination of Rafic Hariri, the July War, and the 7 May Clashes were just a few of the many security incidents that took place during that era, and they invariably rattled the Lebanese who had survived the brutality of the Civil War. And yet, we growing up amid this strife were not fazed by the carnage broadcast on our TV screens in the way our parents and their parents before them had at that tender age. Compared to decades prior, the 1990s were a period of relative calm in Lebanon, so, entering the 2000s, these uncharacteristic acts of aggression should have shocked and awed us, but we were oddly apathetic to resurgent tensions. Simultaneously, we were the generation introduced to unprecedented realism in video games with the advent of 3D graphics to the extent that

they mimicked real life in the way cinema had, but with an interactivity that allowed us a sense of agency within their fantastical scenarios. As internet culture has entered the mainstream, I have come to the conclusion that these occurrences are unfortunately interlinked. Even as a lifelong fan of the medium, it is clear to me that titles that tackled military and warfare as a subject were a significant reason for the desensitization we experienced by reframing our perception of the turbulent reality around us in a way that distorted how we processed sociopolitical violence in Southeast Asia and North Africa.

At the onset of the decade, real-time strategy (RTS) series such as Age of Empires, Total War, Civilization, and Command & Conquer became popular with tweens in private schools. It was a marked shift from the fantastical platformers such as Super Mario





Bros. or Sonic the Hedgehog that we had been raised on. In these new games, skirmishes were glorified chess matches that had us hurling units at each other for minor advantages, collateral damage be damned, as if these pixelated soldiers were mere pawns for power grabs. Not only did it trivialize the real-world conflicts that the franchises tried to recreate virtually, but it also placed us in the position of the generals who commanded these battles, in turn, skewing our perception of their priorities from protecting the homeland to taking down the enemy, no matter the human cost. It reached a point where we would have heated debates at school, hashing out how we would have overseen the operations, comparing and contrasting them to what we could accomplish in the digital realm.

Worse was yet to come, however, as technological advances meant that a new subgenre was starting to dominate the scene as the decade progressed. First-person shooters (FPS) date back to the early 1970s, but id Software's *Wolfenstein 3D*, published in 1992, would become the archetype from which subsequent releases were based. Then, inspired by the competitive multiplayer of *Street Fighter II* and its ilk, the developer's follow-up, *Doom* (1993), permitted

matches between multiple players, successfully achieving it on a large scale, popularizing the feature en masse. Slowly but surely seminal games were released which introduced voice acting, complete interactivity with the environment, and urban settings to the genre, reaching the logical conclusion of these design elements with releases like 1999's Tom Clancy's *Rainbow Six* which adopted a tactical approach aimed at simulating spec-ops that 2000's *Counter Strike* and 2008's *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare* would then lift and launch the concept into the stratosphere. It was these FPS titles, which were far more accessible than RTS, that drew us in droves to the cybercafes in our neighbourhoods, where for a fistful of liras we would sink hours coordinating strategem to take each other out. Instead of childhood memories of carefree adventures in the nooks and crannies of our villages or the parks and beaches of our cities, we shared vague reminiscences of gamified terrorism and counterterrorism operations that were indistinguishable from one another.

Outside of these hacker caves, the Levant was vulnerable to seismic shifts that were slowly but surely upturning our existence as parents fretted about what to do if the





worst came to pass and spillover from foreign instabilities would reach our borders. Of course, we were impacted by these stressors, but playground back-and-forths on hostilities that had erupted from them were strangely detached from the severity of the situation, with public spats between followers of opposing factions discussed as if they were deathmatches between Red Vs. Blue. We were just too caught up in treating each of these vicious confrontations as if we were cheering on e-sports teams for their performances in that round, rather than acknowledging them as clear signs of the collapse we would suffer from in a matter of years.

Thankfully, my friends and I did not have to live through the Civil War, nor were we affected by its ramifications. Still, we eagerly exchanged a simplified narrative of it—one that envisioned an unimaginable tragedy as a fierce competition, regardless of who we championed. It was instilled in us by this computerized roughhousing that always rewarded the ‘strong’ at the expense of the ‘weak.’ And it was hard to shake it, because we observed events they imitated at arms length on our smartphones,



disengaged from them in the way we were disconnected from the cacophony of sight and sound on our PCs.

But the Beirut Blast of 2020 was a rude awakening. Much like the motion blur effect you would find in F.E.A.R., I remember it as a psychological puncture that shattered whatever was left of my juvenile notions as I escorted my sister to refuge underground, avoiding the broken glass and our distressed neighbours, all the while the piercing screams of our mother echoed in the background. After dozens of hours of lobbing hand grenades in Medal of Honor, detonating charges in Team Fortress, and dropping bombs on urban landscapes in Battlefield, I was now overwhelmed by the disorienting devastation of an explosive, the same disruptions I had inflicted on countless ‘enemies’





as a gamer in order to win. In a flash, everything had changed, and I had felt the unbridled terror our elders had to endure day in and day out, unable to flee, incapable of retaliating, like indiscriminate non-playable characters that are unceremoniously slaughtered in a standard mission whose objectives I once proudly cleared. None of this was 'fun.' It should never be.

During the 2024 Israel invasion of Lebanon, I lost a relative of mine in one of the airstrikes in the South while I watched each side cheer on the streamed exchanges of fire, calling for more bloodshed, as if combatants were notching kill streaks in an online battle

royale like PUBG: Battlegrounds or Fortnite. It is no surprise that we are so willing to support militias, and I wonder if we will recover from this scarring to our collective psyches, because I think that the impact of this phenomenon is different on Arabs than it would be for Americans. It is one thing to pantomime this mayhem from the comfort of an affluent suburb in a coastal city than it is to play them in a desecrated apartment in a wartorn sprawl, where the levels are recreations of people and places you know, the crises that fuels the action-packed narrative has directly hurt you and your loved ones, and the threat is very, very real.





A Mosaic of Belonging

Ghiwa El Fakhry

My connection to memory, reconciliation, and peace-building began as a deeply personal journey. At university, I held tightly to a single narrative of the war, one passed down through family, community, and political affiliation. It gave me certainty; it gave me identity. But soon, I was exposed to different ways of seeing the past. Through my involvement in social work and cross-sectarian projects, I encountered peers whose stories challenged mine. Their truths collided with what I had always believed. That is when I began questioning the very roots of my identity and political beliefs.

This awakening was not peaceful. It was painful, disorienting, and lonely. As I dared to cross the imaginary borders that still divide us—borders of memory, loyalty, and fear. I was met with resistance. I lost friendships. I was accused of becoming an outsider with dangerous thoughts. Maybe even poisonous. My curiosity, once celebrated, was now seen as a threat. I was “too much” for some, “too soft” for others. And at times,

I too wondered: why am I doing this?

But the more I listened, the more I realized how fragile our understanding of truth is. I began assembling a mosaic of stories, fragments of memory from across the Lebanese landscape. Each encounter, painful or joyful, added a new piece. Slowly, I came to realize that truth is not singular. It is layered, conflicting, and often uncomfortable. But it is in these tensions that healing can begin.

One of the most difficult things I’ve had to accept is the psychological violence that persists today. This violence is not physical. It is more insidious. It manifests as exclusion, silence, mockery, and shame. It appears when someone tries to express a different viewpoint and is immediately dismissed as a traitor. It surfaces when we are taught to accept rather than question, to follow not to think, not to cross lines drawn long before we were born.

In many ways, we are still at war, within ourselves and with each other.





I know that today's political polarization between left and right is not unique to Lebanon. Around the world, new conflicts are taking shape, fueled by misinformation and competing truths, each serving a different agenda. No, we are not the only victims; many youth are suffering across this world. But what makes Lebanon's situation particularly harmful is that we haven't healed from our own war. That unhealed memory has left the war and post-war generations with a violent twist: a tendency to cancel others, to dismiss their opinions, their suffering, their pain. And this, too, is violence.

I now understand that reconciliation is not just about national unity or political agreements. It is about making space for complexity. It is about allowing others to exist in our memory, even when their truths challenge ours. It is about acknowledging that there are wounds we did not cause but still carry. Wounds we have inherited through silence.

I write this reflection not because I have answers, but because I have questions. Questions about who gets to belong in this country.



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About who defines our history. About whether it is possible to build a citizenship that is not built on fear, or on forgetting.

I believe that young people can lead this transformation, if they are given the space to feel, to express, and to remember without fear. But today, we are often expected to remain neutral, apolitical, and detached. Even when we witness injustice, we are told to stay silent to “protect the peace.” But peace without justice is only another form of oppression. Silence is not neutrality. It is complicity.

I do not claim to have transcended my biases or my pain. I still carry the weight of my background. I still struggle to reconcile love for my community with the harm its narratives are causing, especially toward today's youth who do not





adopt them. Even within a single religious community, there are tribal, familial, and ideological fractures. And those who oppose the dominant narrative often face the same silencing tactics. The cycle repeats.

But I am trying. I am listening. I am learning.

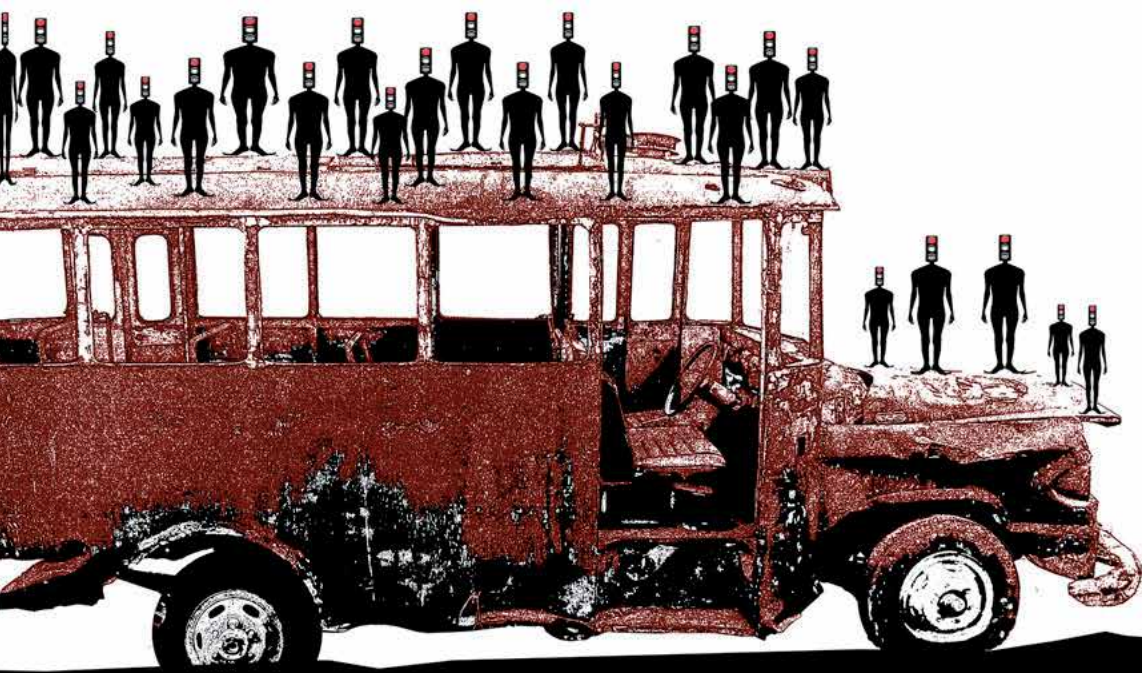
And maybe that is what this country needs: more people willing to listen. More spaces that

allow young people to wrestle with memory without being punished for it. More courage to say, “I don’t know everything,” and to sit with that not-knowing.

In the end, all I really want is to belong—to Lebanon, to a community of truth-seekers, to a future where no one is excluded for daring to ask: “Is there another way to remember?”

Is that too much to ask for?







At the end, it was not all inside of my mind

Elissa Biagini

From the year that I was born, 2005, and even before, Lebanon has been going through large-scale violence, from internal disturbances to international armed conflicts; it experienced a lot of wars. And even if I did not live all of them, I have seen pictures, I have heard and read a lot of stories from these days, and how they impacted the Lebanese people from different ages to the way they act today, or to the way they perceive and go through any war or any idea of a conflict. These violences started even before 1975, and it has been proven by various studies, that ever since Lebanon got its independence and became its own state in 1943, there were at least two huge crises taking place in Lebanon, and influencing its people, government, and all the rest.

One thing about me is that I am so empathetic. Whenever I was around people and heard different versions of their stories, what they went through in these hard times. I always put myself

in their position, just like I did whenever I read a book. I liked to live the experience to the maximum. Except for this time, the experience was really scary, that I even had nightmares about it.

I remember my mom's stories of between 1975 and 1989, of always running to the living room and shouting "It's a bomb!" whenever she heard a sound. She was 3 or 4 years old, she lived in Beirut. I cannot imagine what a child would think or would feel when they had to go through such a thing. There is also the story of when she had to run away from school to her home with her younger sister, my aunt, because they suddenly told everyone to leave since the situation was very dangerous. I could not even begin to think how it must have felt like to live such tragic moments at such a young age. I am sure that this is one of the main reasons why she grew up as a strong woman who always counted on herself. She built her own self, and that is an image of her that I could never change. And it is





really unfortunate that she and her whole generation had to go through such a thing while growing up. No one deserves this, no one deserved going through all these wars in such a very short period of time.

Even Lebanon itself did not deserve this. Lebanon never deserved to be treated this way; like it is a large playground where all the other players or states want to have a role in, without even asking for its permission. It has always been like this, and Lebanon and its people are paying the price of all this. Despite its indescribable beauty and its incomparable territory, its geopolitical place on the map is one of the main reasons why it has been going through all that it has gone through until today.

I have been told a lot of stories about the horrific war that took place the year after I was born, from July till August 2006. That the sound of bombing was everywhere, without any warning. People were completely afraid because no one knew where the next targeted spot was. It feels like every bone in my body felt and lived this because of being a sensitive and an empathic person. When it unfortunately happened again recently, it was not only definitely terrifying, but also it felt like it was something

that I've seen before, like constant déjà vu flashbacks. This is one of the major scary principles of feeling too much, how can anyone explain such a thing?

The most recent war, the "support" for the Gaza war cost the lives of thousands of Lebanese people, just because it is a task that needs to be done for the political agenda of states outside Lebanon. The first day the opponent state threatened to bomb Dahiyeh, in Beirut, was in mid-September 2024; That day they made us leave university early, especially since my university is really close to where they were going to bomb. I felt like something was wrong and that the situation was actually escalating. I did not want to believe any of this. I was thinking that this must have been something to scare us. I wanted to convince myself of this. But deep inside I felt like I wanted to go smash something, lots of things. I just was not processing the fact that after all the progress of the world over the years, such things, meaning wars, were going to happen again.. But I knew that wars are essential in international relations, I just did not expect to actually live one. The horror movies were coming to life. As a person who did not even





live that close to the places where they were bombing, I still felt every single bomb, every time the ground shook. I just keep thinking about the people who had to suddenly leave their homes, those who saw their buildings highlighted in the warnings; they lost their whole life's hard work and memories, with their literal home disappearing after a few minutes.

I felt everything, the shakes, the sounds, the real and imaginary sounds in my head; I reached a point where I could not even be able to tell which sound was real or if it was just all in my head. I really wanted my brain to help me find a way to escape but I could not help the fact that I was completely trapped inside it. It is catastrophic that I can still picture and feel everything right now, even while writing this. This country's pain is unmatched. It is similar to a person who has a lot of great friends, but no one who truly cares about it. It keeps getting involved in toxic relationships with its government that it cannot let go of, and the same unhealthy attachment has been built between this country and its people who are trying



their best to help it. But it never felt enough, because they were never this country's priority. And it is sad because despite the truth that their love for this land is unconditional, they never had the true control over it.

It is sorrowful to see the decrease of progress here in Lebanon, the lack of seriousness and trust in the government. There's not even one history book that is being taught in schools; from 1989 till today, the Taif Agreement at the end is still just a historic known written agreement. I do not know if I should laugh or cry when I last heard a politician saying a few weeks ago that «we should apply the Taif agreement.» Now it is finally the time, after more than 30 years? After all this unstoppable suffering among the people who chose to love their country? How can a state treat its own population this way? Is





this the kind of disregard they
deserve, even when they are one
of the fundamental principles of a
state?

To those who are still breathing
the dust of yesterday's war

To the hearts, filled with silence
echoes and lost dreams

Allow the wounds that speak
without words

Let your story be carried like the
veins between your bones

Let us be empathetic and keep
our faith

For the ones we lost, who we will
always appreciate

In our hearts, the love for this
country will never end

With everything left in us, this
place we will always defend.





Yesterday's Bullets... Today's Silence

Alicia Tarraf Labaki

Beirut the city that
never sleeps.

She breathed life into every corner, whispered songs from her windows, and laughed through her narrow streets. Beirut, the capital of hope, “the lady of the world,” as her lovers called her, never imagined that this spring would carry within it an early autumn.

People stepped out to their work as always, coffee in one hand, dreams in the other. The morning was ordinary: too ordinary. But time was hiding its surprise. Fate had run out of patience and chose to announce its coup.

Gunfire echoed through streets that once woke to Fairouz’s voice. War erupted from the heart of a city that had loved everyone unconditionally. In a moment, faces changed. Neighbors became enemies, neighborhoods became battlefields, and silence became a terror only broken by explosions. Pictures hanging in homes were torn apart. Childhoods were crushed beneath rubble. That was the beginning of a story no one chose

to tell, yet it was written upon us all.

A true story, written by time in black ink, decorated with unbelievable details—drowning the reader in waves of conflicting emotions: wonder, anger, pain, and then one great unanswered question: Why?

The Lebanese Civil War was not just an armed conflict, it was the tearing apart of a social fabric, the breaking of a people’s soul. A nation that once dreamed of justice awoke to a homeland booby-trapped with sects, weapons, and division. The city walls still carry the scars of bullets, as if screaming at anyone who forgets—or pretends to forget: “Here the war passed. Here, there was pain.”

From 1975 until 1990, the nation fell into the trap of war and did not emerge as it had entered. War devoured everything: friendships, neighborhoods, trust, even laughter. Each sect built its wall, each street had its checkpoint, each name became an identity that could mean life or death.





A child slept under the bed to hide from the shelling. A woman covered her ears so she wouldn't hear the gunfire. A young man lost his future at a checkpoint because he spoke a name the militiaman did not like. Minarets burned, church bells fell silent, and hearts grew cold. How does a nation heal when its memory still bleeds? How can a society reconcile when each person carries their own version of the same war?

Churches and mosques—meant to be houses of worship—became frontlines. Sectarian belonging turned into a weapon. Identity became a passage, or a death sentence. How can a nation where martyrs' graves are forgotten, and the fate of thousands of missing remains unknown, ever know true peace?

I did not live through the war, but I was born from its ashes. I did not run between bullets or hide in shelters. I did not hear the shells, but I heard my mother fall silent whenever history was mentioned. I inherited fear in whispered conversations, in glances slow to trust. The war never visited me, but it lived around me, in broken streets, in faces hiding more than they revealed. I love cautiously. I rejoice shyly, as though a memory I do not own warns me against safety. I am the daughter of a

peace not yet born, trying to live in a homeland still learning how to forgive.

Violence in Lebanon was not just screams in the streets or gunfire across neighborhoods. It has worn many masks—sometimes sectarian, sometimes political, sometimes disguised in the numbers of the dollar suffocating life without a single shot fired.

The Civil War ended, they said. But what kind of peace is it when a child is born carrying a fear he cannot name? When a young man grows up in a street closed off to his sect alone? When a girl learns from childhood not to trust those who are “not like us,” just because someone decided this land cannot belong to everyone?

Our generation did not hear the cannons, but we heard them in our grandmothers' stories, in the trembling hands of our fathers as they told what they wished they could forget. We did not live the war, but we were raised in its shadow, between its decaying walls. We saw how killers became politicians, then leaders, then “saviors,” without trial, without apology. We saw a nation robbed before everyone's eyes, a generation buried alive between migration, unemployment, and collapse. We saw mothers weep in silence, fathers endure



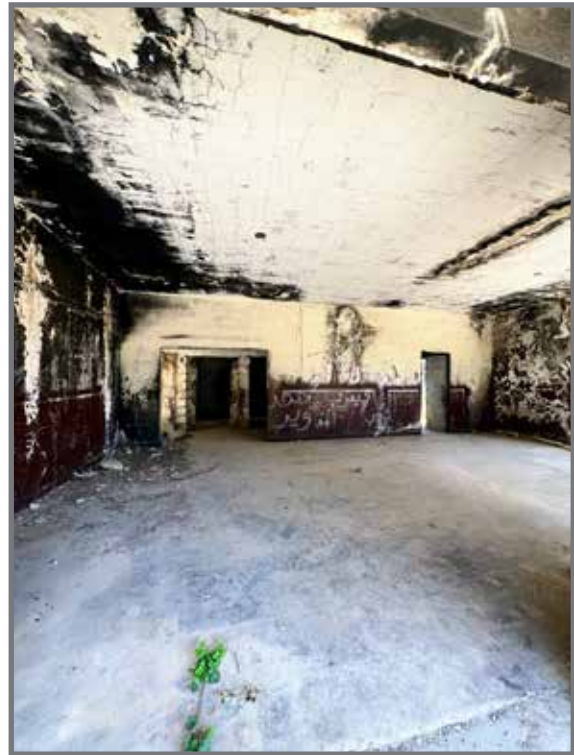


with hard patience, and dreams dissolve in the morning coffee as if they never existed.

In school, silence spoke louder than lessons. No unified history curriculum, no national narrative to protect the truth from fragmentation. Children were asked to forget a war they were never taught while it boiled beneath society's surface, an unprocessed memory. And so, confused questions were born: Who started the war? Who betrayed? Who was the enemy? The answers remain saturated with fear of the other.

We are a generation that did not live the war, but we know the sound of bullets. We did not run to shelters, but we shiver at breaking news. We did not say farewell to loved ones at checkpoints, but we grew up on stories of mothers who did. We are the post-war generation, but the war did not let us grow up in peace.

In Lebanon, the war ended, but no one mourned. We did not bury our memory; we hid it. Our parents carried it in their trembling voices when "those days" were mentioned, in mothers' eyes when a street or neighborhood was named, the place where someone was lost. At home, stories always began



with: "They were killing us" and ended in long silences hanging in the air like alarms that never stop ringing. How can we grow without fear when we are raised on caution? How do we build one nation when we are taught to beware of "the other"? It was not always hatred, but a wound. A fear so deep it dressed itself as wisdom: "Trust no one." Hatred was not always screaming—it was sometimes a quiet wall, built slowly, between you and another. And here we are, a generation inheriting wars we never fought, living under memories we never chose, trying to write a new page in an old book that still has no ending.





But maybe—just maybe—if we dare to speak, to question, to listen to the stories of others, we might finally write that page. Not to forget, but to remember differently. To remember in a way that heals instead of tears apart.

After the war, violence did not disappear—it changed form. It became silent, deliberate bullets. Assassinations of thinkers, journalists, politicians: small steps on a hellish road. Each assassination was a message—not just to the victim, but to everyone like them. To anyone daring to speak, to rebel, to demand accountability. We, the younger generation, grew up on these messages. Every time we started believing in change, an assassination came to remind us: “This is the price of a word.” How then can we believe in justice in a country where voices are silenced instead of protected? How can we trust a state where citizens fear speaking more than they fear war itself?

In October 2019, the silenced voice finally erupted. Thousands of young women and men poured into the streets, chanting simple yet deeply rooted words. It was a rare moment of collective awakening, where Lebanese united not around sectarian identity, but shared pain. The system did not drop its

weapons, it only changed their shape. It confronted the uprising with repression, accusations of treason, and new attempts to sow sectarian division. Peaceful protests became battlefields, facing every weapon of intimidation, from tear gas, to rubber bullets, to arbitrary arrests.

And yet, that cry, despite its simplicity, was an earthquake in a country accustomed to silence. A popular uprising that crossed sects, crossed fear, demanding something Lebanon had not known in decades.

August 2020: more than just a date, it is an open wound in the heart of the city. The port explosion was no “accident,” but the consequence of years of negligence, corruption, and indifference. Hundreds killed, thousands injured, entire neighborhoods erased. And yet, not a single person has been held accountable. Even pain in this country is left without justice.

And so, the question returns, quietly piercing the heart: Will these scars continue to haunt those not yet born? Will our children inherit fear as we did? Will they grow in a country that remembers war more than it dreams of peace?

We, the youth, stand on a bridge between tragedy and hope. We





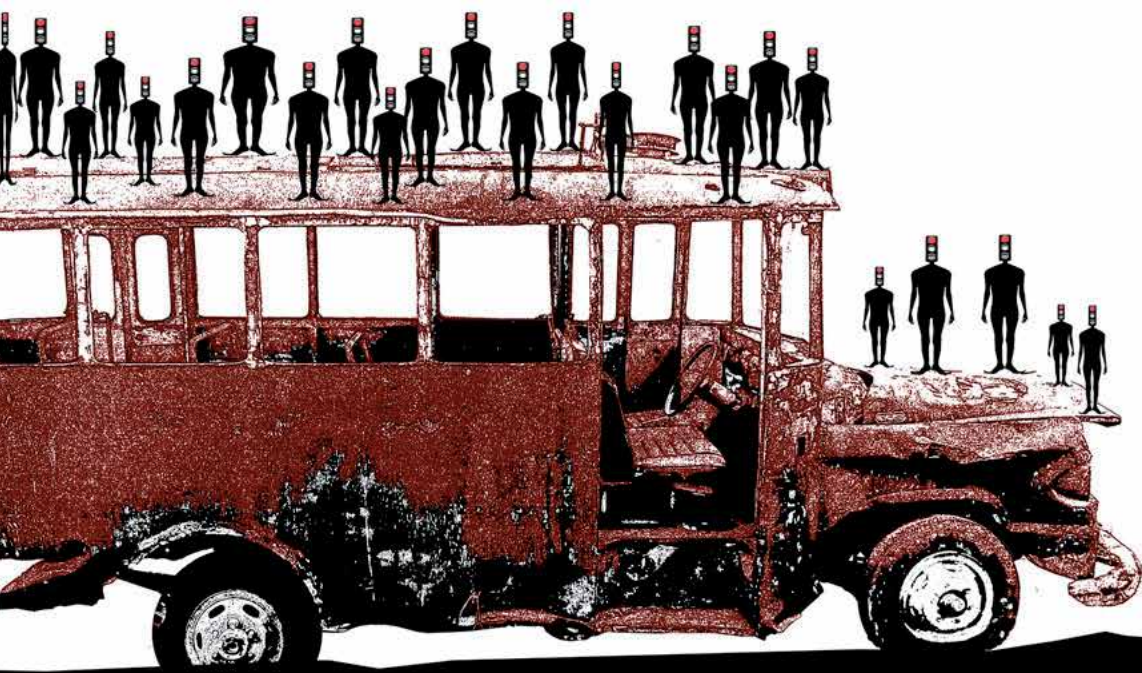
are the children of war without weapons, and the children of peace without its comfort. But we are also the children of hope, for we ask the questions others were too afraid to ask. We dream of what many never dared to imagine. Can we—this so-called “post-war generation”—dare to say enough?

Do we choose silence or anger?
Do we all emigrate or do we try to build, even upon ruins?
What is our role, in a time when everything is broken?

Perhaps our role is to refuse what is “normal.” To hold accountable. To question. To write. To love, despite everything. Perhaps our role is simply to believe that this land—no matter how much it bleeds—is worth those who will try to heal it, not abandon it.

Our generation does not have all the answers, but we have the courage to ask with hope, to dream of a peace we deserve, and to love this homeland, even if it remains an open, bleeding wound.







A Lebanese Forged by War

Joseph Khoury

Every time my grandmother begins with the words “Back in those days...” I know it will be a story from the time of war. She starts with the opening line, and I complete it, prompting her to ask in surprise: “How did you know the ending?” I tell her: “There are fifty years between us, and although the war happened before I was born, I’ve searched every detail of it, and I’ve lived through similar events in the past two decades, where the scene most often repeated has been war.”

One of the stories she once told me was about the family’s displacement from the southern town of Jarmak in the Jezzine district. They fled under the sound of gunfire and the range of snipers’ bullets. Along with their neighbors, they escaped to nearby villages, their journey marked by hours of relentless fear, clinging only to the hope of reaching safety alive. What they remember most from that day was how strangers welcomed them with warmth and humanity, opening their homes until things returned to normal—if,

that is, those same hosts were not themselves displaced later on. And indeed, that is what happened when the war spread to countless towns.

My family was scattered, some heading toward Beirut and its suburbs, becoming strangers wherever they settled, while others went to Marjayoun, the southern border town, where life was no better. Marjayoun, where they live to this day, bore the scars of war and destruction, particularly since the 1969 events and the Cairo Agreement.

As my grandmother once put it: “Every quiet day filled me with dread, because I knew something terrible was coming.” In times of chaos, every crime becomes possible. People back then lived through unbearably bitter days: if bullets didn’t kill you, kidnapping might. One relative, a young father of three, was abducted. Some say he was killed immediately, others that he was imprisoned in Syria. In the end, he was never found. But the harshest memory she shared was the killing of her teenage brother who was shot dead during





the dark era of identity-based killings. And what a cruel irony: a murderer who killed for identity would, in the eyes of others, be just as much a doomed victim because of his own identity. So what kind of displacement are we talking about, when neither Jarmak, nor Jezzine, nor Marjayoun—nor anywhere—was safe for anyone?

A strange thought often crosses my mind: will I one day sit with my grandchildren and recount to them my war stories? I, too, had my first encounter with war in the July 2006 conflict, at nine years old. I was forced to act maturely for my younger brother, who had not even started school. His first lesson then was this: if we hear planes approaching and feel their rumble, we must run to the fortified corner of the house. I still remember nights when the stars blended with the flashes of exploding shells over Marjayoun, when night was no longer truly night. Some remember “Grapes of Wrath” in 1996. Yes, we started giving wars names. But more dangerous than naming them is passing them down to future generations. Why should we fill young minds with such terms?

We grew used to avoiding lights in the darkness because in the language of war, light signals unwanted movement. Our home became unlivable, so we moved

into our relatives’ house, twenty of us crammed together in a narrow alleyway dwelling. I could almost hear my grandmother saying “Now you’ve felt what we felt.” The hardest decision came the next day, the decision to head for Beirut. We drove in a convoy of cars draped with white flags of peace, an eight-hour journey. I remember one thing clearly: though there was no stray gunfire that day, I still bowed my head, just as my grandmother had once taught me.

The months that followed were uneasy, with tensions always simmering along the border, whether from gunfire or breaches. Fear of war’s return was constant. Many school days ended abruptly, with parents rushing to collect their children before things escalated. Rare were the times we wished to stay for the last class, to complete the school day instead of leaving early in fear of what tomorrow might bring.

As children, we thought of war as seasonal, waiting each year to see if another would erupt. Why we waited, I cannot say; perhaps to prepare ourselves mentally, or to stock up on food, medicine, and shelter in case we were besieged again, never knowing exactly when it would start. I felt the same anticipation at the beginning of the Gaza war on 7 October 2023, when Lebanon was drawn into





the conflict the very next day. This time, though, I could not tell whether our fear came from the uncertainty of war, or from a numb familiarity born of past battles. In southern Lebanon, we lived through the first months of this war as though nothing had changed. Of course, livelihoods suffered, schools closed, and some families fled, but most of us stayed in our homes during that initial stage.

This war dragged on longer than the 2006 conflict. Approaching its first anniversary, its end remained unclear. But as events grew heavier and more dangerous, the memories of July 2006 returned, and once again, the eldest child was called to act like an adult.

Since I worked in Beirut, I could no longer visit the South. I reasoned that if I returned to Marjayoun, I would be of no real help to my parents, trapped with them under land and air sieges, clutching the pillars of the house as shelling surrounded them, staying awake at night to the grinding sound of tank tracks approaching town. My brother remained with me in Beirut, and the responsibility of caring for him fell on me. Many nights I spent glued to breaking news tickers, trying to learn whether the shelling had reached our home, reaching out to anyone in town to check on my parents.



The war only ended when we were finally able to return, to reunite with our family and loved ones. We went back to our towns at the ceasefire, but the truth is, we had never really left them in our minds; we lived the war from afar as though we were in its very center.

From my grandmother's generation to my parents', a chapter of war shaped the resilient Lebanese spirit that yearned for life. And from my parents to me, another chapter was written—one that forged us, the Lebanese youth, into fighters who struggle to stay rooted in our land. Across





time, we have shared the convoys of displaced families, the crowded homes sheltering strangers, the sounds of tanks, shells, planes, and bullets. And today we ask ourselves: is this truly what we want our children to inherit?

Perhaps the new generation no longer cares for tales of the past, and that is their right, to refuse a legacy of violence and destruction. But our collective memory stretches through history, and ignoring the past brings no benefit. It is from those memories that we draw lessons to carry into our present and future. For my part, I always believed, even

as a child, that we would remain safe and peaceful in our land. I also believe that I went through these trials for a reason—that they shaped me into someone who fights, despite the obstacles. Without them, these words would never have been written.

Despite the battles around us, we choose our own fight: to overcome the obstacles of survival and to search for hope in life.

In the end, I say: “A person comes out of war at a crossroads—either to pass the war on to the next generation, or to be strong enough to prevent its return.”





We Left, But You Remained

Jessie El Hage

It is time for me to write. But I have been thinking all along—in which language should I write? Arabic? French? Or English? I am not sure. In a country like ours, even the choice of language is not merely cultural—it is political too. Yet something deep inside whispered: “Write in your mother tongue—the language that resembles you, and resembles them.” Perhaps language is the only thing still binding us together, though even that, I cannot say with certainty. So let us start here. Maybe, by the end of this piece, we will discover whether language truly unites us, or if something deeper does.

Now we can begin.

The Lebanese Civil War ended in 1990. The guns fell silent, tanks withdrew from the streets, and we were told that people had moved on from those fifteen years of bloodshed. At least, that is what they told us. But for us—the generation born after the war, the ones who never lived the kidnappings or the killings at checkpoints but always felt their shadow—the war never truly ended. It only changed form. It seeped into our language, into

our fears, into the corners of our homes. We inherited wounds so deep that we never actually saw them bleed. Strange, is it not? They were kidnapped, yet we are the ones who got lost. They were wounded, yet we are the ones who bled. They survived, yet we are the ones who died. Do you see what I am describing? That is what it feels like to live without a real ending.

A real ending to war means tending to the psychological wounds, building a society capable of living in peace after years of violence and disorder. A real ending means accountability.

I was born years after the war was “over.” I never had to flee from one shelter to another. I never had to say goodbye to my brother, fearing I would never see him again. I never had to rip apart my political party card and swallow it at a checkpoint. Yet, I grew up haunted by the echoes of these stories. I grew up hearing fragments of sentences that always began with “Back in the war...” spoken in half-broken voices. My parents, my relatives, my teachers, they all spoke the same way: as though the war was





something they lived through but never healed from. Every time they began talking about it, they quickly fell silent. And that silence was heavier than any shell or bomb.

They were telling us about the war—but not in the way we imagined. Imagine someone telling you a story: they tell you about the hero, about the villain, and about what happened in between. But suddenly, someone burns the last page. There is no ending, no answers to your questions. Just emptiness. Annoying, is it not? That is exactly how we, the post-war generation, feel. We live in the ruins of a story that was never written. Because after the Taif Agreement, “peace” was reduced to a single phrase: “Let bygones be bygones.” Yet neither God forgave, nor the past truly passed.

It is a sad, painful story with no ending and no closure. And the authors? They are still here—living among us, writing a new history book—while we remain stuck on the burned page, searching for an ending that does not exist. What is worse, we lack a collective memory to grieve through together. Each sect has its own history book, each victim has their own villain, and there’s never a shared ending. Our history is fragmented, sectarian, broken into pieces. What we longed for was a unified narrative, a shared truth to mourn or to heal from.

But instead, our very identity as Lebanese became like our history: fragmented, incoherent.

The problem is, there was never any acknowledgement. No naming of victims. No naming of perpetrators. Why was there not any transitional justice? Why no trials? How could it be that the very men who waged war simply shed their militia uniforms, put on suits, and became the “leaders” and rulers of the state? That is not reconciliation: that is public reward. Meanwhile, those who were lost remained just that—lost. Reduced to photos on living room walls, with mothers whose hearts broke and lives ended when their children’s lives were cut short.

This is what happens without accountability: warlords are recycled as national heroes. How can a victim respect their killer when that killer now sits in power? How can trust be built with a system that never once apologized, and instead asked us to stay silent?

Let us talk more about the consequences of this lack of accountability, and how it left Lebanon trapped in a fragile peace—without unity, without reform.

Because there was no justice, the memory of the war became property of politicians. They resurface it whenever it suits them, and bury it whenever it threatens





them. What followed the war was not peace, it was merely a ceasefire. No reconciliation. No acknowledgment. No confrontation.

Socially, we became even more divided. Every sect wrote its own version of history. Our homes stopped resembling those of our neighbors. We grew into a society living in a fragile, negative peace, empty of true reconciliation. We neither faced the past nor made peace with it. That is why fear of the other, distrust, and sectarian walls remain. Even our silence is no peace, it is a ticking time bomb. Sectarianism became the very backbone of the political system, when transitional justice should have been the foundation for building a civil state. Instead of bridging gaps, sectarian identities deepened. Lebanese politics was built on sectarian interests, not on national ones. And so, we lost the chance at a unified identity.

Economically, the lack of accountability deepened class divides. The post-war political system had no real mechanisms for rebuilding Lebanon's economy fairly. Instead of channeling resources into development, the majority of wealth flowed into the pockets of politicians. Clientelism became



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the norm, worsening poverty and unemployment. Public services deteriorated drastically, plagued by corruption and favoritism. Investment in infrastructure mattered less than preserving political patronage networks that kept the corrupt in power.

And for us—the youth—this absence of accountability created a void. As I said, we did not live the war directly, but we grew up in a country that never told us the truth. We heard no acknowledgment, we saw no justice. What does it mean when they say, “They are not us, and we are not them”? Who are they? Who are we? Just like that, we are divided? Most young people, instead of being raised with a sense of belonging to one nation, were raised on sectarian divisions and political rhetoric. How are we expected to believe in a state when its leaders are the





very same who destroyed it? How can we imagine a future when the past—the supposed past—remains unresolved? This bred an entire generation with no trust in the system, in its institutions, or in the future. We see Lebanon as a place incapable of giving us hope. For many, the dream is not change—it is migration. Because really, what can we change in a system that never held anyone accountable, never admitted guilt?

Sometimes, I get consumed by anger—by hatred—by something I can't even name. I find myself staring at them. The same faces. The same speeches. The same lies. The very same ones who spilled our blood and showed us hell through our parents' eyes are the ones ruling us today. They built their glory on our suffering and on the cries of our mothers. When I see them on TV, sitting comfortably in their chairs of power, my soul suffocates. How did they manage? How, after everything—corruption, theft, destruction—do they still hold authority, media presence, and even prestige? How did the faces that waged war become the faces of “stability”? Perhaps my anger is not only that they were not punished, but that they were rewarded.

We are the post-war generation—the children of silence. We have no narrative. We do not know the truth. All we know is that the

war ended without ever ending. The guns went quiet, but their echoes never stopped screaming. They taught us that the past is a shame to be hidden, not a wound to be healed. We are ruled by the same faces that once fought, then reconciled, then divided the country among themselves. They became “statesmen” when they were the very ones who destroyed the state. They sat on seats of power that should have been platforms for justice.

We carry the weight of that past in our daily lives—in jobs that cannot sustain us, in fuel queues, in the collapse of our currency, in a sectarian system never tried or dismantled because it was cemented to last. Our identity is blurred—we do not know if we are citizens or followers. We see Lebanon as a dream, but only a postponed one. Like a case waiting for evidence of innocence, even though guilt has already been proven. We doubt, we rage, we cope, and then we fall silent again—because silence has become our habit.

The war ended. But you did not leave. I used to think that the unwritten ending would finally arrive with your departure. But you survived.

We left. You remained.





Ouzai: A Land of Estrangement and Displacement

Rayan Nasser

“Identity is the creation of its bearer, not an inheritance of the past.”

— Mahmoud Darwish, Palestinian poet

How can identity remain open to multiplicity? This question has long lingered in my mind since leaving Ouzai, a place that marked a defining chapter of my life, from birth to upbringing. I grew up listening to countless stories of the demographic upheavals the neighborhood endured through war.

To carry the weight of childhood and youth on your shoulders and walk away is to re-examine the place of your origins through a wider, deeper lens—one that often casts doubt even on that so-called “safe square” you once knew. How did groups from such diverse backgrounds, displaced from different regions, converge at a single point of settlement? And how did what we now call “demographic segregation” come into being?

When a community loses its sense of individual identity in a closed space, the need to belong becomes the engine for building a collective one—shared wounds, shared dreams, sometimes even a shared fate. In Ouzai, this is what defined the community that emerged with the outbreak of Lebanon’s Civil War: the absence of personal identity replaced by a collective one, a “place-identity” binding together those who had fled the eastern suburbs of Beirut with others uprooted from southern and Beqaa villages. They gathered on this narrow stretch of coastline, later to be called “the land of strangers.”

The need for safety pushed Ouzai’s people to unite, to weave a tightly knit block, distinct and self-contained, with its own code words and inner language. Groups that once spoke differently met in a single place; their words blended, until the unique dialect of Ouzai emerged and was passed down to my generation, preserved through memory and speech.





Inside the Place

As a child, I knew no official street names written on walls. My memory is framed instead by the crossroads where “Um Mohsen’s shop” stood, and my school—Royal School—in the “hayy al-jawwani,” (the inner neighborhood). My playground, my horizon of dreams, always ended at Ras al-Tal’a, where the main road began—the gateway to Beirut, as I later learned.

Neighborhoods lived within neighborhoods: some named after their ancestral villages, like Hayy Ahl Bleyda; others after families, like Hayy Al Assaf. Many names echoed the Civil War itself and its “martyrs,” those of internal factions and repeated rounds of fighting, whether Lebanese or Israeli.

Geographically, the salty scent of the sea filled our lungs and its spray touched our lips with every morning wash, although not every house was blessed with a view of the water. The displaced were many, their homes pressed tightly together. A few windows opened to the vast Mediterranean, but most looked only into each other.

I was born after the war, but its consequences shaped the cement walls around me. The random sprawl of buildings blocked both the sea’s blue horizon and the life of the city beyond. Some names that lingered in our ears as children—

San Simon, Acapulco—carried heavy echoes of a past we never saw. Today, only ruins remain of those resorts and chalets where Beirut’s elite, its politicians, and foreign tourists once swam and summered in the 1950s and 60s.

The war transformed this glamorous coastline into blocks of grey concrete and overcrowded quarters. Today’s closed-off neighborhoods—some defined by family ties, others by lawlessness—echo daily with incidents of violence, drawing their brutality from the small wars we continue to fight among ourselves.

The Village of Hantous

Tracing further back, I often wondered about the origins of this strip of land. Once a sandy rise stretching to Ramlet al-Bayda, it was, some 1,240 years ago, a small village called Hantous, lying south of Beirut along the coast. Hantous faded with time, except for its mosque—the Mosque of Hantous—which became the resting place of Imam al-Awza’i, who died in 773 CE.

Why did such a figure—Abd al-Rahman ibn Amr al-Awza’i, born in Baalbek, revered as the Imam of the Levant and even of al-Andalus—choose to be buried here? Known for his knowledge, his piety, and his fearless pursuit of





truth before rulers and kings, his followers named him “the protector of Muslims, Christians, and Jews” in the Umayyad and Abbasid eras. Why did he will that his grave be in this tiny coastal village? Do today’s residents even know whose name their neighborhood carries?

Imam al-Awza’i now lies in solitude, his mausoleum hemmed in by haphazard buildings: exiled, like the people of Ouzai, in his own land. Once a landmark on Beirut’s shore, his shrine is today nearly forgotten. Even the Beirut families who once lived and worked here by the sea gradually abandoned the place during the war. Now, only a handful still visit the mosque.

The Church of Our Lady of the Sea

Hayy al-Kanisa—the Church Quarter—was another curious name of my childhood. What was a church doing among us? For a child born after the war, “Christian” meant the other, the stranger. My first understanding of it came from the story of our neighbor, Mona Maroun, a Christian who had married a Muslim. Her children were known in the neighborhood by her surname, like her son who is still known as Mohammad Maroun.

But the Christians were not only displaced from Ouzai, they were uprooted from all of southern Metn’s coastline—Haret Hreik,



Mrayjeh, Laylaki—families whose properties were once lush with orange groves and gardens, as Mona would tell me.

This was the war’s doing. Its aftermath is what we live with, without final answers about its causes, its beginnings, or its open-ended ending. My childhood image of the “other” is reduced to Mona, and to the ruins of that church I later learned had been built in 1952 for the area’s Christian community.

History tells us that after the 1860 massacres in Mount Lebanon, Christians fled to the coast—Ouzai, Khaldeh, Damour—where they farmed, settled, and lived. Ouzai was once largely Christian, home to families like Hussein, Ibrahim, Matta, Tawil, Saadeh, and Dakkash. Wealthy Christian vacationers also frequented Ouzai’s shore, and to





worship they built the Church of Our Lady of the Sea between 1952 and 1953.

But after the Civil War, no one returned. Neither the summer resorts nor the Christian residents. The church remains abandoned, awaiting its parishioners. Like the unfinished story of the Civil War, it too is unresolved.

No answers come from the archdiocese to which it belongs, no plans from the municipality under whose jurisdiction it falls. Other churches along the southern Metn coast have been restored, their keys returned to congregations—but Our Lady of the Sea still waits alone.

On the war's 50th anniversary, I compared Ouzai before and after. Here stood the mosque of Imam al-Awza'i, once a beacon of faith and culture at Beirut's southern gate. There, the church of Our Lady of the Sea, once inaugurated with crowds

waving Lebanese flags. There too, the Acapulco beach resort, built by Raja Saab and Ferdinand Dagher.

In a photograph, two women lie in swimsuits, smiling at the camera under the sun. Where did these people go? When did they pack their belongings? On what day did they leave this place?

Fifty years on, the church still does not keep company with Imam al-Awza'i in his solitude. Its people never returned to restore the memory of a community that was born, lived, and raised children here.

Fifty years on, the war has not ended. We still live with its remnants: in violence, in fractures both vertical and horizontal. Fifty years on, we, the post-war generation, still search for its causes and beginnings, knowing we will never find its happy ending.





War: A Memory Passed Down from Generation to Generation

Zahraa Salman

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

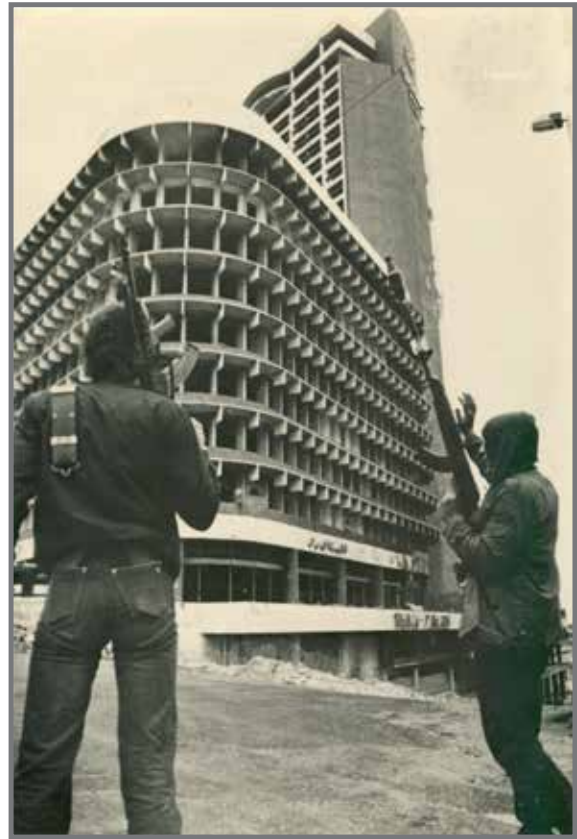




hunger of the north, and those in the north turn a deaf ear to the massacres of the south. We share the same land, yet what was divided was our souls. What unites us is only violence. Every sect, every region, accuses the other of it—and in this, we have been generous beyond measure. Lebanon continues 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.





War and Its Conflicting Narratives: Do We Need a Single Story?

Celine Ibrahim

On April 13, as we happened to sit together in a circle during a short break in one of our university classes, a classmate suddenly asked “When did the Lebanese Civil War end?” Some hesitated. Others answered “1990.” But one colleague smiled and said “That’s if it really ended!” We laughed.

Then he asked “And who fought whom?” The laughter stopped. Each of us began telling a different version. Some said the Lebanese fought each other. Others rejected that angrily “No, it wasn’t the Lebanese—it was groups brought here to fight on our soil!” Still others insisted it was foreign interference that turned Lebanon from a country of prosperity into a battlefield it never needed to be.

Each one of us held a personal “truth” about the war. As if each one of us had lived in a different time, memorized a different story. A simple question suddenly exposed an unhealed wound, a fractured memory, and a nation

living in more than one narrative. That question revealed that every group has its own version of the war—and that we are far from any shared truth.

What was most striking in that moment was not only the contradictions between the stories, but the absolute certainty with which each was told. Every voice carried conviction, as though their version were a sacred text, unquestionable. It became clear that the war was not only fought on the ground—it was also fought in the realm of narrative.

How Are Narratives Built?

We are not born with a ready-made story. We hear it, absorb it, repeat it, circulate it, mimic it in our own way, adjust it, and hide behind it. Each emerges within a particular frame.

In Lebanon, people build their narratives about the war from their own sources:





a grandfather who “fought to defend his village,” parents who recount events through their own perspective, a neighbor who was displaced from her home, a political party that commemorates “resistance” or “steadfastness,” a writer who offers his viewpoint in a book, or even the silence of the school curriculum, skipping over the war as though it were a contagious disease, or a shameful crime unfit to be discussed.

The absence of a unified history textbook does not only mean students graduate without knowing what happened. It means they graduate each knowing something different about the very same event. Narratives form when the same story is told again and again, in familiar voices, within an environment that resembles us. The problem is that these stories do not meet, do not dialogue, do not acknowledge one another. The result: a fragmented collective memory, each side convinced that its narrative is the real one.

In most countries, even where narratives about past events differ, there exists at least one official reference—a standard history taught in schools and returned to when needed. In Lebanon, the vacuum left every group free to write its own history, built on fear and selective memory.

Narratives are not created in a void. They are reinforced through daily discourse: a song, a painting, a street named after a battle, or a memorial to an “unknown martyr” at a street corner. Each of these elements engraves a particular image of the past into collective consciousness.

What Does the Absence of a Shared Narrative Mean?

In a country that emerged from a long war, multiple narratives are expected. But when those narratives become walls separating people, diversity turns into division.

The absence of a shared narrative in Lebanon is not just a historical issue. It is an identity crisis. It is a crisis of belonging: if we cannot agree on what happened, how can we agree on what we want for our future, or how to achieve it?

Perhaps what we need is not a single, rigid narrative, but rather a space where multiple stories can meet, confront one another, and engage with empathy—not clash again. Acknowledging multiplicity does not mean surrendering to division; it could instead be the first step toward justice. When each of us tells our story, and listens to the other's, some healing begins. Not because we agreed, but because we respected difference without





denial or superiority.

Maybe the unifying narrative we seek is, in truth, a narrative of honesty: accepting that the war was not a single story, but dozens of stories—contradictory, painful, yet all real.

How many times have we entered into debates with friends or relatives about “who started the war, and why,” or “who was right”—only for the conversation to end in tension or heavy silence? This is not simply a disagreement in opinion; it is a deeper conflict over the very foundations of memory.

The absence of a common narrative also means the absence of a common sense of justice. Those who feel they were victims do not see themselves reflected in the other’s story. Worse, they may feel their suffering is denied or belittled whenever an opposing version is presented. The result: a constant sense of betrayal, a feeling that no one truly understands the other. It is as if the war never ended, but merely shifted—from the streets into memory.

We see this division everywhere: in politics, in media, even in art. Memorials or “victory” celebrations often take place on the same



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dates, yet with entirely different language and symbols. Massacres are recounted heroically on one side, and as shameful stains on the other. It is no wonder reconciliation in Lebanon has never truly taken place—how can we reconcile with a past whose story we cannot agree upon?

This absence of narrative even shapes our daily lives: when some avoid discussing the past out of fear of reopening old wounds, while others weaponize it to fuel new rhetoric. We remain trapped between silence and undeclared conflict.

Do We Need a Single Narrative?

It is not a simple question.





Some argue that a unified narrative is essential for building one nation. Just as the body needs one heart, a state needs a shared memory—a story that includes everyone, excludes no one, recognizes all victims, and condemns all crimes, without justification.

But in a fractured reality like Lebanon's, is this possible? Or would trying to impose one narrative merely silence other voices? Would it risk reproducing injustice in the name of unity?

Perhaps what we need is not a "single" narrative in the narrow sense, but rather a space for many narratives to face each other, to converse, and to humanize each other. Not to fight again.

Perhaps what we need is the whole, unvarnished truth.

How the younger generation engages with the war could either deepen today's divisions or help overcome them. What we need as youth is not only to understand what happened, but also to draw lessons from it, and to pass them on to the next generation. Fifty years after the war began, it has become necessary to finally close that book with a collective

story told in one voice for all generations.

From Narrative to Future

Without a unifying story, the past becomes a burden rather than a source of understanding. Some remain silent out of fear of old wounds, while others exploit it to manufacture new enemies.

At the end of that short classroom debate, we found no single answer. But we were left with questions.

We asked ourselves: Was what we heard at home enough to understand what really happened? Was the whole story told—or only the version that fit the environment we grew up in?

The absence of a shared narrative is not just narrative chaos—it is a sign of pain still unprocessed. Perhaps reconciliation begins not with repeating one story, but with listening to them all. Perhaps nations are built not on forgetting, but on remembering—on writing, listening, and exchanging the small stories we tell one another.

That may be the path toward a country that does not beautify its past, nor run away from it, but recognizes it in all its complexity.





Collective Memory and Official History in Lebanon: A Struggle Over Narrating the Past

Mohammad Khabbaze

A Torn Memory Between War and Official History

Since the end of the Civil War, Lebanon has lived in a state of historical paralysis, where the questions of war were pushed to the margins of national memory. Between a wounded collective memory and an incomplete official history, the consciousness of new generations has been shaped on fragile ground, riddled with conflicting narratives.

In schools, the war is presented as an “exceptional circumstance” that ended with a political agreement, while families pass down personal stories steeped in fear, blood, and division. This split between memory and official history not only distorts our view of the past but also threatens the very possibility of building a shared future.

The challenge is even greater

because every political party and sect in Lebanon has its own version of the war, stories that often glorify itself while demonizing or diminishing the other. The Lebanese Forces’ narrative, for instance, frames the war as a struggle for survival and a threatened Christian identity. Amal and Hezbollah recall their past as a legitimate resistance against marginalization and occupation. The National Movement champions a story of defending social and economic rights. Each has its saints and its demons, its martyrs honored year after year—proof that, in many ways, Lebanon has never really left the war behind.

Political-sectarian parties have invested directly in writing these versions, magnifying their own role and belittling the other, turning narratives into tools of ongoing political mobilization that feed division instead of healing it.





A Passage of Fear in Wartime

I grew up hearing stories of the war seeping into family gatherings. My mother, like many of her generation, carried the memory of fear in her heart, even when she did not always put it into words.

One story she told remains etched in my mind as if I had lived it myself:

In 1983, as a young woman, she was traveling with her uncle from her hometown of Sarain in Baalbek to Beirut. They took the road through Dhour al-Shweir, where they were stopped at an armed checkpoint by militiamen, either Kataeb or Lebanese Forces, as she recalls. She had no ID on her at the time. Panic set in. Her uncle pleaded with the gunman: “For the sake of the Qur’an, this is my brother’s daughter.”

The fighter, holding a Pepsi bottle in his hand, responded with chilling sarcasm: “I have the Qur’an, the Bible, and this Pepsi bottle—all at once.”

At that moment, their fate seemed sealed—until chance intervened. Another fighter at the checkpoint recognized her uncle; he was from their village. Without that coincidence, the outcome might have been tragic.

This story, passed down to me by my mother, was more than a personal memory. It was a window

into how sectarian belonging and imposed identities could decide life or death in a single instant.

Like thousands of other family stories, it reveals a bitter truth: in wartime Lebanon, sectarian identity was the only passport—or a death sentence.

The “checkpoint story” is not just a personal incident. It distills the very logic of the Lebanese war: the dominance of weapons, sectarian killings, and a life lived under the fear of one’s name, sect, or birthplace. Death often came not through combat but through arbitrary decisions made at checkpoints—based on an ID card, an accent, or a place of origin. It was a terrifying reminder of human fragility in wartime, when identity itself became a deadly burden.

Decades later, these stories have not faded. They continue to circulate—sometimes whispered, sometimes told aloud as part of a collective narrative passed to younger generations, whether through family tales or partisan youth activities that keep the memory of war alive to sustain a sense of perpetual threat.

The question is unavoidable: Is remembering enough to close the chapter? Or does repeating these stories, without critical reflection, keep them alive and ready to resurface?





Sectarian narratives are still told with the same fervor, rarely questioned or deconstructed. That makes them more than memory—they remain an ever-present possibility. Those who once killed according to sect no longer stand at checkpoints, but they live on in stories never verified, and in a public space filled with images of “saviors” who were never held accountable.

Grand Narratives and the Individual Experience

The story my mother told—like thousands of others never officially recorded—shows clearly how political and sectarian forces reshape collective memory to serve their interests.

Postwar Lebanon never built a unified national memory. Instead, fragmented memories persisted. Each party, sect, and region chose to preserve its own version of the past, glorifying itself and demonizing others. Schools, books, and media all reinforce these parallel narratives, which rarely meet.

Thus, even a small incident at a checkpoint can take on national symbolism: crossing from one area to another was never just physical movement, but a passage through a complex web of fear, identity, and imposed belonging.



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Telling such personal stories, and setting them against political and official discourses, gives us a rare chance to question dominant narratives and rethink what it truly means to build an inclusive collective memory—one that accommodates everyone, not just the victors or the loudest voices.

Identity as a Weapon, Sectarian Killings, and the Army's Collapse

Sectarian killings were one of the ugliest practices of Lebanon's Civil War. Religious or regional markers—exposed by a name or ID card—became tools of deadly selection at militia checkpoints.





Sectarian belonging ceased to be a mere social attribute; it became a criterion for survival or annihilation. Thousands of ordinary citizens who had no active role in the conflict fell victim to this coercive classification.

The Lebanese Army itself was not immune. Despite attempts to maintain national neutrality, the army disintegrated as the conflict escalated, with units splitting along sectarian and regional lines. This not only weakened the institution's ability to act as a guarantor of stability, but also made many soldiers themselves targets of sectarian killings at frontline zones.

These experiences of sectarian killings and the army's fragmentation are not just episodes in Lebanon's violent history. They are open wounds in collective memory. To recall them honestly and consciously—beyond sectarian narratives—is a necessary step toward building a national story that transcends divisions and fosters a more mature understanding of a past that continues to cast heavy shadows on the present and future.

Divided Memories, Competing Narratives

Lebanon's streets still speak the language of division. Today, the

country remains fractured even in its memory of the war.

In Beirut's southern suburbs, narratives describe the war as a legitimate resistance against aggression. In regions like Keserwan, Metn, and Jbeil, the story is told as resistance against the Palestinian presence and the weapons of leftist parties. Neighborhoods and cities each have their own history, their own local heroes, and their own carefully drawn enemies.

What is most alarming is that this fragmentation is not confined to the older generation; it continues across generations. Parties instill their versions of the past in children through youth camps, partisan activities, and even educational curricula.

Official narratives have ignored these lived experiences and bitter truths. The postwar political order chose to craft a sanitized history that obscures collective responsibility, presenting the war as the work of "external forces" or a domestic "misunderstanding" quickly overcome through reconciliation. The aim was not just to move on from the past but to protect a political class largely responsible for the war itself. The Taif Agreement sealed this by promoting "forgetting" in exchange for sharing present-day power.





These partisan narratives did not remain confined to history books or past speeches; they were carefully reproduced and entrenched in the consciousness of new generations. They spread not only in political events and party publications but also through party-run scout camps, where children are raised to glorify their “martyrs,” relive the symbols of battle, and chant wartime slogans as if the war had never ended.

Beyond that, parties dominate the public sphere through visual symbols: portraits of martyrs, sectarian flags, party slogans covering walls, and renamed streets and squares that reflect the narrative of whichever group prevailed locally. In the southern suburbs, the space tells the story of heroic resistance against Israeli occupation, while parts of Metn and Keserwan project the story of a “Christian” survival against an existential threat. Places themselves have become mirrors of narratives,

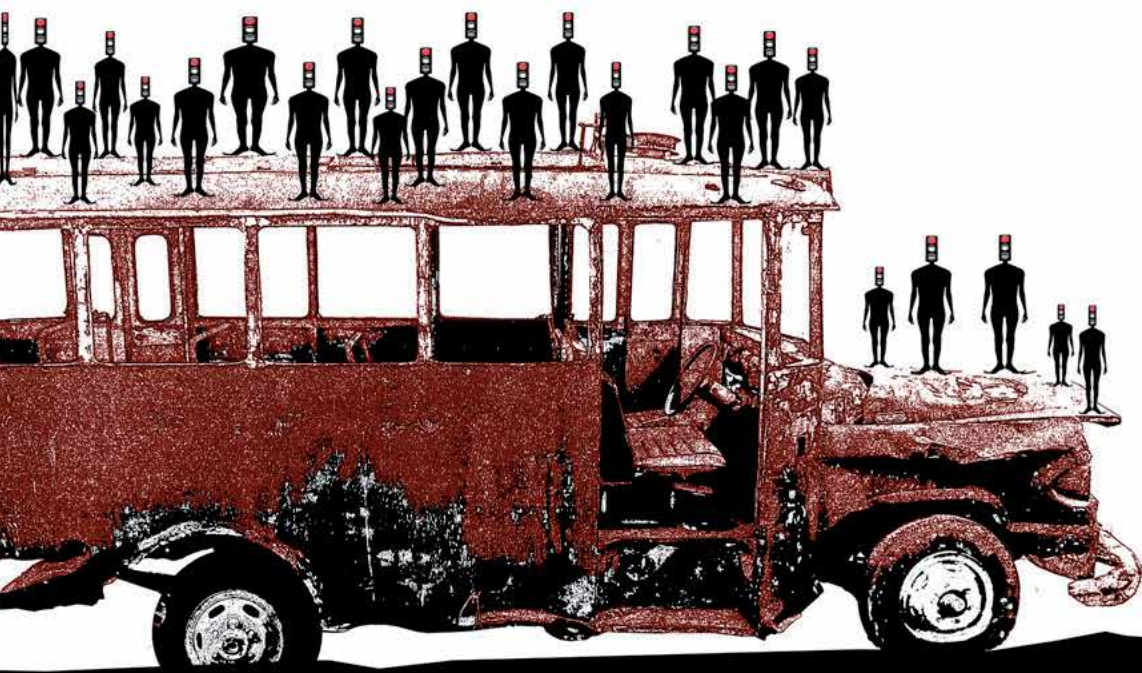
tools that normalize one version of history in everyday life.

Building a Collective Memory Beyond Divisions

Bridging the deep gap between collective memory and official history in Lebanon requires extraordinary courage. The first step is to acknowledge the multiplicity of narratives without erasing one another, and to accept that each community, each sect, has its own story. These stories are not necessarily contradictory; together, they are fragments of a larger national tragedy.

Official history cannot be written truthfully unless it begins from these individual experiences and shared sufferings. Only by linking the national story to real, inherited, lived accounts can we build a collective memory that is healthy—not based on denial, falsehoods, or erasure, but on recognition, accountability, and hope.







From Violence to the Unconscious: War as the Invisible Heritage of the Present

Mohammad Marwani

In the dictionary, heritage refers to the collection of tangible and cultural legacies passed down from previous generations: buildings, values, customs. According to UNESCO, heritage is “the cultural and natural legacy shared by humanity, of exceptional value, to be preserved, protected, and passed on to future generations.” A definition tied to what is precious, symbolic, and honorable. But what if war itself were among these inheritances?

In Lebanon, war—and especially the Civil War—cannot be reduced to a past historical event. It has not truly ended. It has transformed into a temporal marker, invoked as a permanent chapter of the Lebanese story. Just as one might say “in winter” or “in summer,” one says “during the war.” It has become a unit of time, a term everyone recognizes—even those who never lived through it.

War has succeeded in rooting itself within collective memory, not as a tragedy overcome, but as a living component of identity. It seeps into daily details, into reflexes, into social relations, public discourse, even architecture and art. In this sense, war—with all its devastation—has become part of Lebanon’s living heritage: an intangible legacy carried not as a historical anecdote we retell, but as an invisible behavior, as an engraved memory.

Invisible Violence: When “Heritage” Shapes the Self

I only realized the depth of invisible violence I carried within me after leaving Lebanon. Distance—geographic and cultural—was necessary to see what was hidden yet familiar. In my new surroundings, in everyday interactions with people from different cultures, certain





behaviors began to surface: reactions I had always considered normal, yet which revealed themselves as exaggerated responses in moments of tension. They took the form of an instinctive tendency toward caution or confrontation in the face of difference, or an approach to disagreement as though it were a battle to be won or lost.

Even language betrayed traces of this inherited violence. I used terms naturally in my work as an architect such as “front lines,” “our areas and theirs,” truce,” and “hostages,” as if they were part of ordinary technical and planning vocabulary, without noticing their weight or symbolism. It was the reactions of my colleagues to these expressions that forced me to reconsider the cultural baggage they carried.

This invisible violence is profoundly collective. It reflects unprocessed traumas and experiences, layered over by silence, transformed into an inner stratum of the collective personality. One does not need to have lived through the war to bear its mark; the cultural and social legacy it produced is enough to transmit it unconsciously from one generation to the next. It emerges most clearly when we step outside our familiar context and are forced to see ourselves from the outside.

Living Heritage: A Memory Suspended

Every 13 April, the Civil War’s outbreak resurfaces on its anniversary. Repeated annually, commemorations are held and articles written. And yet, rarely is the date of the war’s end ever mentioned. No one says “the war ended in....” Instead, there is only reference to the Taif Agreement, as though it were merely a political settlement frozen in text. This temporal gap—between a well-known beginning and an unresolved ending—is not incidental. It reveals a war that never truly concluded, but rather settled as a permanent mental state, like a ceasefire.

This temporal stretching of war is clearly reflected in cultural and artistic production. Lebanese theater, cinema, and music continue to invoke the war, proof that memory has not yet been laid to rest.

Even in architecture—a discipline meant to build rather than recall destruction—some architects have drawn upon war as a design language. In Bernard Khoury’s work, metallic cannons appear on rooftops. In Lina Ghotmeh’s Stone Garden in central Beirut, the façade is punctuated with randomly scattered openings, echoing the bullet holes of the





capital's buildings. She has described the design as a way to transform scars into openings for life. And yet, even this aesthetic gesture remains bound to the memory of devastation—turning suffering into a permanent image. It is an attempt to tame the wound, not erase it.

If we recall UNESCO's definition of heritage, such designs perpetuate the past and reproduce it. But events as traumatic as civil war should not be preserved and transmitted in this way. Consider the Beirut Port silos: preserving them as witnesses to a catastrophic event is necessary. But replicating their destroyed form in new designs would risk immortalizing destruction itself. The difference lies between transcending the past and enshrining it in the present.

A similar ambiguity surrounds Beit Beirut, the Ottoman-era building restored as a museum. Its tours ostensibly highlight its historical and architectural value, yet most of the narrative centers on its role during the war as a sniper's nest along the front lines. Stories are often exaggerated or inaccurate. The building's identity is thus reduced to a single chapter of its



history—precisely the part that perhaps ought to have been left to oblivion, rather than magnified in collective memory.

Memorials in Lebanon further illustrate this symbolic conflict over memory. Instead of unifying markers, they have become politicized symbols, each tied to partisan narratives. What one community erects as a monument to a “heroic martyr” is seen by another as a tribute to a “war criminal.” Every party has its own memorials: Hezbollah's “Martyrs' Garden” in the southern suburbs; Lebanese Forces' monuments in Zahle; Amal Movement's recognition of fighters in Zahrani and Nabatieh. Yet there exists no single national memorial to honor all victims of the war across all communities.

These monuments have not served reconciliation. They are mirrors of division, reinforcing





sectarian identities and keeping the heritage of war alive.

Children of War: A Stereotype and a Complex Identity

Outside Lebanon, we are often perceived as “children of war.” Our identities are not defined by our diverse culture, intellectual legacy, or individual achievements, but by the shadow of war cast upon us. The first glance is often loaded with assumptions: that we carry within us, perhaps even in our genes, a legacy of violence, of division, of conflict.

What makes this harder is that such perceptions are not always unfounded. Even those of us who did not live the war directly carry its echoes unconsciously. Our collective memory is heavy with loss: homes destroyed, loved ones vanished, landmarks erased or replaced, photographs still hanging on walls. Memory still beats with grief. This is a violence unseen, but deeply rooted. It does not always surface as anger or aggression, but in subtler forms—in body language, in cautiousness toward others, in the fear of full belonging.

Thus, the heritage of war continues to function as a lens through which we are seen, reducing identity to a fragment

of itself, defining us by what we endured rather than what we aspire to. It is as though we are not only victims of a historical moment, but its carriers, perpetrators, bound to its cycle. Which raises a painful question: will we ever be able to tell our story apart from war?

A Heritage to Be Dismantled

“There is nothing more sordid than war. We must not present it as heroic, but as horrifying. We must make people fear it, not admire it,” so wrote the Russian novelist Viktor Astafyev in his novel «The Cursed and Killed.”

In Lebanon, more than three decades after the Taif Agreement, war endures as untouched heritage. No one was held accountable; on the contrary, all warlords were pardoned by an amnesty law. Society itself was never treated—left instead to adapt to its scars as though they were destiny. Even initiatives with sincere intentions—like We Remember So We Don’t Repeat—while meant to warn, ended up reinforcing the specter of war as a ghost ever-present, always feared, never overcome.

In this sense, Lebanon has not turned the page. War persists as heritage, though it is not the kind to

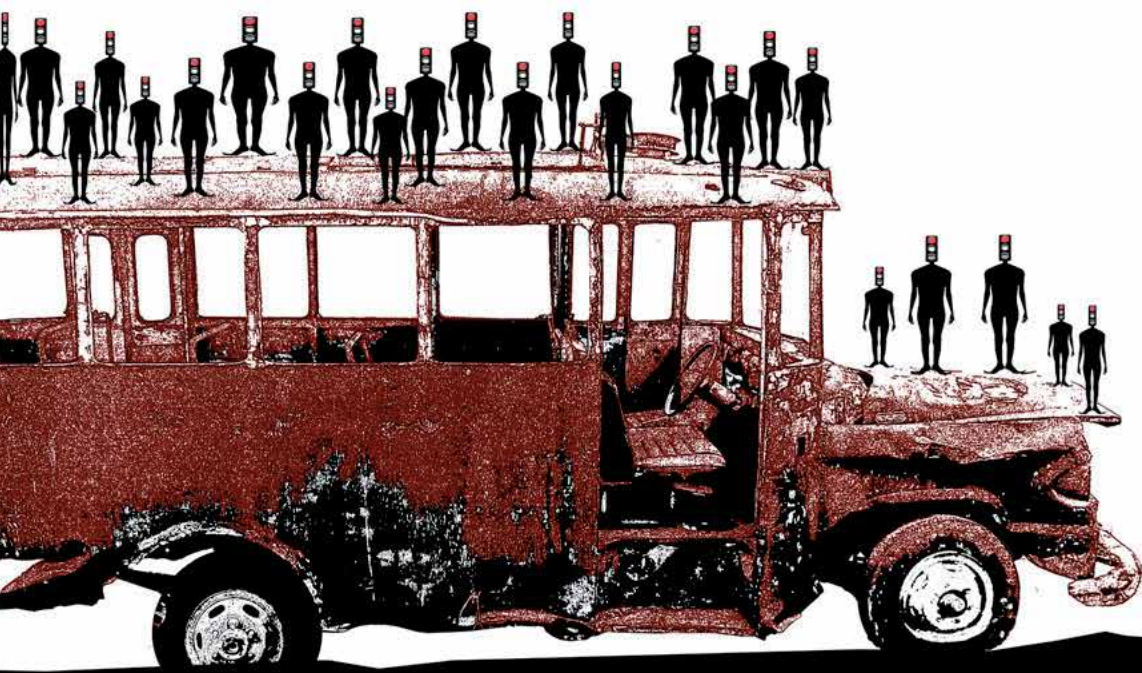




be preserved or passed on. It is not something to commemorate, but a burden to shoulder responsibly—an ethical duty to dismantle. Such an inheritance demands double courage: the courage to speak

truth, the courage to question, and the courage to build a new narrative—one that begins not from fear but from peace, not from division but from plurality, and from the hope of a healthy tomorrow.







Writing as a Women's Archive of the Civil War

Mihad Haidar

I was born on the fifth anniversary of the start of the Lebanese Civil War, in a Beqaa region where the war carried a different face than it did elsewhere. We came to know of the Syrian army through the checkpoints scattered at the crossroads of our villages, and through the stories within our small family that lived through that era. The whip marks still visible on my grandfather's back remain a living testimony of that time.

Because we were far from the capital, the war reached me in fragments, disjointed and scattered like a broken puzzle. I pieced it together from stray words and muffled voices, later reconstructing it in my memory when I was first asked what year the war began. I denied knowing with my lips pressed together and my eyebrows lifted.. Perhaps those who lived the war hold its shock vividly, but for my generation, the postwar generation, the shock lies hidden. We inherited it in a hazy way, through genes, through rumors, implanted in us without consent, buried deep within both our collective and personal histories.

And because of it, we still live miniature civil wars today: between the self and the other, between likeness and difference, trapped in the snares of ideology, in the body's endless war against itself.

When Memory is Reconstructed Along the Frontlines

My parents never once used the term "civil war." They called it "the events," especially when we passed the abandoned houses in Housh Barada and Majdaloun, where broken doors and looted rooms revealed the violations that had taken place. They would simply say: "People here were displaced during the events," and leave it at that.

There is no photo of my parents' wedding in our family album. My mother says they married during the week of strikes in 1987, strikes that symbolized Lebanese insistence on unity, and served as a prelude to the symbolic end of sectarian wars.

She recalls that when she was five years old, she had a nightmare that terrified her: the shrine of the Virgin in Zahle and the Kaaba





both burning, with children's fingers falling to the ground. The nightmare became reality when her school and the church of St. Roch in Riyaq were encircled and demolished by an armed militia.

The first time I ever heard the phrase "civil war" was from a friend who took me to Beirut for the first time, and we visited the former frontlines between Chiyah and Ain al-Rummaneh. With great passion, she told me about the importance of oral history in documenting the crimes she encountered in her work. She shared story after story, and I often had to close my eyes and ears while we walked, to avoid imagining the faces of women and children, their screams, or the gunmen's heads peeking from behind barricades.

The absence of detail left me full of questions about the past. My first real confrontation with violence came during the brief clashes at the Tayouneh roundabout in 2021, when I was living on the edge of Furn al-Shebbak. That experience taught me direct fear, fear of shells and bullets that claimed lives around me. My feelings deepened later with the Kahaleh truck incident in 2023, when I found myself taking a clear personal stance: a rejection of all forms of weaponry, no matter who carried it.

Another time, when a relative was

driving me home to Ashrafieh, his fourteen-year-old son asked "How can you live in the East? Do you feel safe there?" I was startled by how "East Beirut" and "West Beirut" had turned in the minds of children from mere geographical markers into sectarian and territorial divisions.

I also wondered: how could a woman like me, coming from the margins, still fleeing gender-based violence in her own environment, ever feel safe? It was then that I realized, for the first time, how women's stories in war are inseparable from their everyday struggles under patriarchal and sectarian systems.

I stood before the bullet-riddled building at the Tayouneh roundabout, scanning for fresh bullet marks not yet framed by politicized media. In my mind appeared one of Alawiya Sobeh's heroines, terrified of crossing Tayouneh because of the shelling. I too feared walking through Old Saida Road. I wanted, once again, to escape the structural violence that constantly besieges us.

A Feminine Language and Our Deferred Memory

I have always felt that violence is the engine of history, and my only escape from it was through





language. In language I found a meeting place with many women, through their feminist and female writings. What do we have left in this country but words? Language is our only tool for documentation against forgetting. Through it we carry stories that expose the forms of violence we endure, and sometimes even participate in, knowingly or not, under social or political labels.

In women's writings I found war and patriarchy laid bare: fear, anger, desire, and the unraveling of the structures that produced such violence. I learned how some women lived the war not only as fighters, but as activists, and as mothers forced to perform their caregiving roles.

I read Layla Baalbaki, who announced the coming of war before it erupted in her novel "A Spaceship of Tenderness to the Moon." "Why doesn't war break out?" she asked, rejecting modernity, class inequality, and masculine violence, and declaring: "I do not belong to any side, and I hate them all, all the fanatics." Like her, I belonged to no side.

Then I discovered Jean Makdisi,



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Najah al-Qadi, and Dalal al-Bizri; women who wrote their war experiences, unveiling the many faces of patriarchy and violence.

Through Makdisi, I understood how the question of "Who is responsible?" collapses ethically when sectarianism engulfs everything. Yet she refused silence, writing of women who "learned the geography of the country from shelling." Is it not still true for us today? She also revealed how women became the final line of defense, "managing households" and running crises within their private spaces.

Najah al-Qadi, in her memoirs as a war journalist, made me realize how caregiving work extends beyond the private sphere to become a political act, as in the story of Umm Shafiq, who cooked for her entire neighborhood. Yet the male





fighters dismissed her because she was “a girl who didn’t understand battles.” But is it not we who fight them with our bodies every day? Is there not a blind complicity with violence against these bodies, as in the massacres of al-Maslakh and Karantina?

Dalal al-Bizri, meanwhile, drew attention to the gender disparity within progressive factions themselves, where women had to double their efforts to earn recognition, where female students were recruited through the charm of the “comrades,” and where caregiving tasks were still assigned to women, even in the most open party environments. It reminded me of the jokes we still hear today: “Come over and I’ll explain class struggle to you at my place.”

Etel Adnan, from an exile not far from us, whispered that women are the true witnesses of devastation. We are the keepers of domestic memory, the ones who recount war in its details, and carry the burden of protection. I cannot forget the image she drew: a mother receiving her son’s corpse in silence so as

not to frighten his siblings. How many of us have swallowed the same scream? Adnan also pointed to what I had always felt: the city closes itself off to me and streets that once echoed my footsteps become monopolized by men. We are excluded from the scene; no public space welcomes us.

Then I read Iman Humaydan, and I found myself. Her women resemble those of my generation: daily losses, love torn apart, motherhood under fire. From her I understood that violence is not only in war—it is in the stares, in the words, in the alleys, in the broken conversations. In “Songs for the Darkness,” I discovered how the city disintegrates, how war unravels our last bonds, pushing us toward the unknown, burdened with the weight of memory.

Amid this patriarchal and sectarian violence, their writings gave me room to understand, to dismantle, to breathe. Women’s deferred memory rescues what remains of history—before bias buries it for good.





A Massacre in the Village... and Wounds That Never Heal

Myriam El Hajj

More than half a century has passed since the Lebanese Civil War, yet I still see its traces in every corner of our lives—on the streets, in our conversations, and in the silences that stretch between people. Yesterday's massacres have not been forgotten, nor has the violence been fully buried. At times, it feels as though the war never truly ended; it simply changed form and slipped back into our lives in different guises.

I live between two generations: one that fought in that war and refuses to forget, and another born after it but who inherited its wounds—as though memory itself passes through blood. I often ask myself: was silence ever a real choice? And can forgiveness mean anything without accountability?

In this piece, I return to the Ain Toura massacre of March 1976, which occurred in my birthplace, to ask whether the absence of justice allowed violence to repeat itself, and whether we can truly build a future without confronting our past with honesty.

I spoke with the local head of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) as well as members of the Kataeb Party, comparing testimonies and narratives in search of a thread of truth amid conflicting memories.

According to one version, the events began when Ahmad al-Khatib's army entered the village and discovered that nearly every home bore the SSNP emblem, even though many of the residents were affiliated with Kataeb.

Suspicion deepened after several young Kataeb members were kidnapped. Yusuf Fouad of the SSNP attempted to negotiate their return but was assassinated. After al-Khatib's forces withdrew, Kataeb youth regrouped in Antelias and marched toward Ain Toura. By the time they arrived, the army had already retreated, yet a massacre followed, and many SSNP members were brutally killed, some at the hands of fellow villagers. Among the most harrowing testimonies was that of a father who witnessed his son's murder, then paid money





just to bury him with dignity. In retaliation, the SSNP killed and tortured those involved in the massacre, as well as Kataeb members who had not taken part.

When I asked the SSNP official about commemorating the massacre, he replied firmly: “We do not want to return to the past. We only honor our martyrs.”

On accountability, he stated: “We are not seeking trials. We only want an apology. We once tried to reach such a settlement in a meeting with the Kataeb representative and the local priest. We were ready to apologize, but at the last moment, they backed down.”

The Kataeb, for their part, described their village as having been under “occupation” by outsiders: al-Khatib’s troops, Palestinian fighters, and the SSNP. Many residents, caught in the crossfire, fled to neighboring towns after heavy shelling.

Al-Khatib’s forces accused Kataeb of killing a family of ten, with only two survivors. In response, Kataeb youth attacked to retake the village, insisting their aim was to expel the outsiders, not to fight fellow villagers. Still, the violence left casualties on all sides, and civilians bore the heaviest cost.

One Kataeb witness recalled that, prior to the massacre, villagers

from the SSNP had tried to convene a meeting to regulate weapons and avoid escalation. There was even hope that al-Khatib’s army would simply pass through without occupying the village. But the opposite happened; the army stormed Ain Toura, burned homes, and imposed a six-month occupation.

As for the failed reconciliation attempt, a Kataeb member told me their party never rejected the idea of an apology. The deadlock, he said, was because the SSNP demanded that Kataeb accept full responsibility without offering any reciprocal acknowledgment. “We wanted to apologize as a gesture toward calm,” he explained, “but their refusal to admit responsibility made reconciliation impossible.”

Other testimonies remain etched in memory. A man who was only eleven at the time said the sound of shelling still haunts him. His uncle, uninvolved in any political group, was killed like many other innocents caught in a war that recognized no neutrality.

Listening to all these accounts, it becomes clear that the truth is fragmented. The horror cannot be denied, but it is nearly impossible to establish who struck first or what triggered the spiral of violence. Each side felt it was defending its identity and survival.





This cycle of grievance and retaliation made it impossible to assign all blame to one party.

The lack of apology, and the refusal to confront the past, allowed the circle of violence to endure into the next generations. Young people raised in its shadow became victims of a heavy legacy. Without honest reckoning or acknowledgment, each side has clung tightly to its narrative.

This reality surfaces even in small gestures—a photograph hung on a wall, a simple public act, a partisan song—that spark renewed tensions. In 2018, for instance, the local Kataeb head hung a portrait of Bashir Gemayel in March, the very month of the massacre's anniversary. SSNP youth considered it a provocation, stormed his home, tore down the picture, and physically assaulted him.

In another incident, a man once involved in the massacre returned to the village and, with unsettling nonchalance, drank beer in public. His presence reignited anger, leading SSNP youth to confront him at his home. Violence was narrowly avoided, but the



encounter showed how raw the wounds remain.

Even religious celebrations became flashpoints. During the Feast of the Virgin Mary in Ain Toura, a young man sang Lebanese Forces party songs at a table where SSNP members sat. They quickly retaliated, throwing bottles at him. No one was injured, but the episode was another reminder of how easily the old fault lines can erupt.

These clashes among younger generations are proof of a deeper problem: reconciliation never truly happened. Violence, whether in words or actions, became a language of frustration for youth burdened by an unresolved history.

Decades after the Ain Toura massacre, its scars still shape daily life. The wounds were never properly treated; instead, they remain visible to new





generations. Real reconciliation cannot happen without a candid confrontation with the past and acknowledgment of its painful truths.

Violence does not fade with time. It mutates, especially when silence takes the place of justice. Delays in accountability have only frozen society in its wounds. Attempts at reconciliation, though well-intentioned, faltered under hesitation and retreat. As a result, they did not bring healing but left the roots of conflict untouched.

The road to reconciliation is not easy—it demands collective effort and sincerity. It cannot rest on temporary truces or simplified agreements. It requires full acknowledgment of the past and a serious reckoning with its legacy. Despite the obstacles, even small steps toward justice and mutual understanding remain the only way to imagine a future different from the past: one free of rancor and resentment, where peace is possible at last.





The Land of Lead and Blood

Najeeb Al-Attar

To be born after a war does not necessarily mean you have survived it; war reserves for itself several generations of delayed victims. But to be born after a “civil” war that is also Lebanese, now that is a tragedy far more brutal and painful. It means inheriting the warlords and the justifications for their battles, passed down from one generation to the next.

My own birth, ten years after the ceasefire, did not prevent the war’s legacy from being the earliest memory of my childhood: two Kalashnikov rifles, a mortar shell, and a bullet hole in the door of an old wardrobe. That trinity was all my father’s family had “gained” from the Communist tide in the country. The mortar shell became my favorite toy, strategically placed at the entrance of our house in one of the most wretched quarters of the southern suburb of Beirut. According to my father, that place once bore neither its present name nor its misery until the war branded it so.

Perhaps with that shell I compensated for not being able

to play with flowers, which were considered alien, even suspicious, in our neighborhood. I saw in its blades what children usually see in the petals of a blooming rose. I believe that, with the imagination of a child, I wove a bond with this object that had crashed into my grandfather’s home in Burj al-Barajneh in the early 1980s. However, I spent summers in the village; though flowers were available there in reasonable abundance, the first thing I did upon arrival was to inspect the two rifles hidden in that bullet-pierced wardrobe, displaced “temporarily” like so many others by the war.

Among my cherished games was another weapon: the “pellet guns” so commonly sold for children, and adults too. The toy pistol was the only “weapon” I could afford from my own resources, while owning a pellet gun, with its greater range and power to hurt my neighborhood rivals, felt like the dream of a poor country yearning for nuclear weapons. It was truly a weapon of deterrence. The “pellet wars” deserve their own story, but I’ll borrow one chapter: at home, I





felt a surplus of power—childish, of course—when demanding things from my younger siblings. I recall once pointing my pellet pistol at my sister as we negotiated over her chocolate stash. Needless to say, it was easier to get my share with the pistol in hand.

Gunfire, too, was abundant in the suburb and elsewhere: for weddings, funerals, exam results, a passionate verse of *ataaba* from Naeem al-Sheikh, or sometimes for no reason at all. I remember one particular phenomenon vividly: the celebratory shooting that erupted during speeches by Hezbollah's former Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah. I no longer recall how it stopped, but I think it was after the early years of the Syrian war. Whenever we heard heavy gunfire then, our first instinct was to flip through TV channels to check whether Nasrallah was speaking, or if the bullets were for something else. Each time shots rang out, I dreamed of one thing only: to graduate from pellet guns to guns that made the same thunderous sounds I heard outside.

And so, between the weapons we reached for and those that reached for us, playing with war's remnants in an atmosphere saturated with war instilled in me a fascination with arms, while also stirring the question: which came first, the weapon or the war? Which

paved the way for the other, and which preceded the other in the calculations of the fighters? To be fair, the question was first planted in me by a survivor of the war, who once rebuked my love of guns by saying: "Whoever carries a pistol will see the world only through its barrel." I do not know if he was quoting someone else. But the question could be reframed: if there had been no armed factions, would the "civil war" have happened at all?

The question may seem naïve, since the causes of war were far greater. But the point is not to state the obvious: that wars are fought with weapons. Rather, it is to reconsider the conditional, logical relationship between civil war and armed groups. The question is not about the gun itself, but about armament, and what logically follows in a country whose people have yet to agree on a single identity, or even on their place in the world. It is a question about the role of weapons in shaping the choices of armed groups. In essence, it is a question about the possibility that all that happened might not have had to happen. Not in order to apportion blame among the warlords and their followers, but so that it does not happen again, so that war does not become a tradition among us.

Lebanon's first taste of fire came in





1958, a rebellion—or revolution, as others called it—that exposed the deep division over the country’s identity: Arab in its Arabness or Arab in its Westernness. An ideological split at heart. The rift deepened under different names until the point of no return arrived with the Cairo Agreement of 1969, imposed by the same foreign powers at stake in 1958, except this time, the outside had moved inside.

That agreement and the arrival of Palestinian factions in Lebanon brought a surge of arms to the Left, where rifles became cannons and mortars became tanks, confronting a Right that wielded state power as its greatest weapon. Excess arms meant excess power, and together with other factors, this abundance exploded the country in the hands of leftist and rightist militias alike. Here perhaps, we understand why the late Mohsen Ibrahim said “We made it too easy” when reflecting on the war. To his credit, he was one of the rare few who offered criticism of his participation instead of justifications.

So, the question can be rephrased: had it not been for that mutual escalation of arms—regardless of who armed themselves first—would the descent into war have been so easy? Can a militia ever behave as anything but a militia?



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By nature, a militia not only acts as one, it thinks as one. In a country whose political scene is dominated by militias ideologically opposed to one another, their “natural” behavior was precisely what we witnessed in 1975. Thus, the very existence of militias made civil war an inevitable outcome, rendering the resolution of disputes by means other than war harder than war itself. For a militia, every adversary is viewed “through the barrel” of a gun, just as I once saw my sister through the barrel of a pellet gun when negotiating over candy.

In other words, the very existence of weapons can sometimes be enough reason to use them, especially in societies accustomed





to daily, even momentary, encounters with violence and arms. Hence the necessity that the state, and the state alone, must monopolize violence and weaponry as instruments of force.

The most dangerous aspect of the war was that it was fought not for rights, but for ideas. The issue is not to critique one idea or another, but to reject the very principle of fighting for an idea, any idea. This is a call to approach armed struggle, as a collective endeavor, from the perspective of human rights: distinguishing between natural rights, like the right to life, and acquired rights, like the right to establish or preserve a political system.

At its core, fighting can only be deemed legitimate when it is the last resort to defend a violated natural right. Resistance, for example—so often invoked in the war's rhetoric—means defense against an occupier who violates two natural rights: the right to a dignified life that is incompatible with occupation, and the right to self-determination. Under this definition, the word "resistance" cannot be applied to Lebanese fighting Lebanese, since determining Lebanon's destiny is the right of the Lebanese people as a whole, not of a faction. Disagreement over that destiny, over Lebanon's place in the world,

does not constitute a violation of rights. To change or preserve a system is an acquired right—a matter of ideas facing other ideas, both sharing the same right to access power. War cannot be a legitimate means to claim that right.

The gravest danger in fighting for an idea is that it pushes the fighter toward one of two extremes: either to search for a sacred idea to fight for, or to sanctify the first idea at hand. For once a cause is cloaked in the sacred, it grants absolute legitimacy to the war.

As for me, my war record is hardly unique among Lebanese. Every Lebanese man and woman carries a personal history of war. It has become almost customary for us to mark our daily lives by wars. Perhaps it would be useful to invent an official document—a "war record extract," akin to a civil registry, listing each citizen's war data. Or a "clearance certificate" signed by the state and newlyweds before they have children, making them responsible for raising a child in this geography weighed down by weapons and their equivalents.

As for myself, I would add recent entries: the war of 2024, with its weapons depots exploding between homes; new stockpiles of mines and unexploded ordnances, waiting to take lives with a single





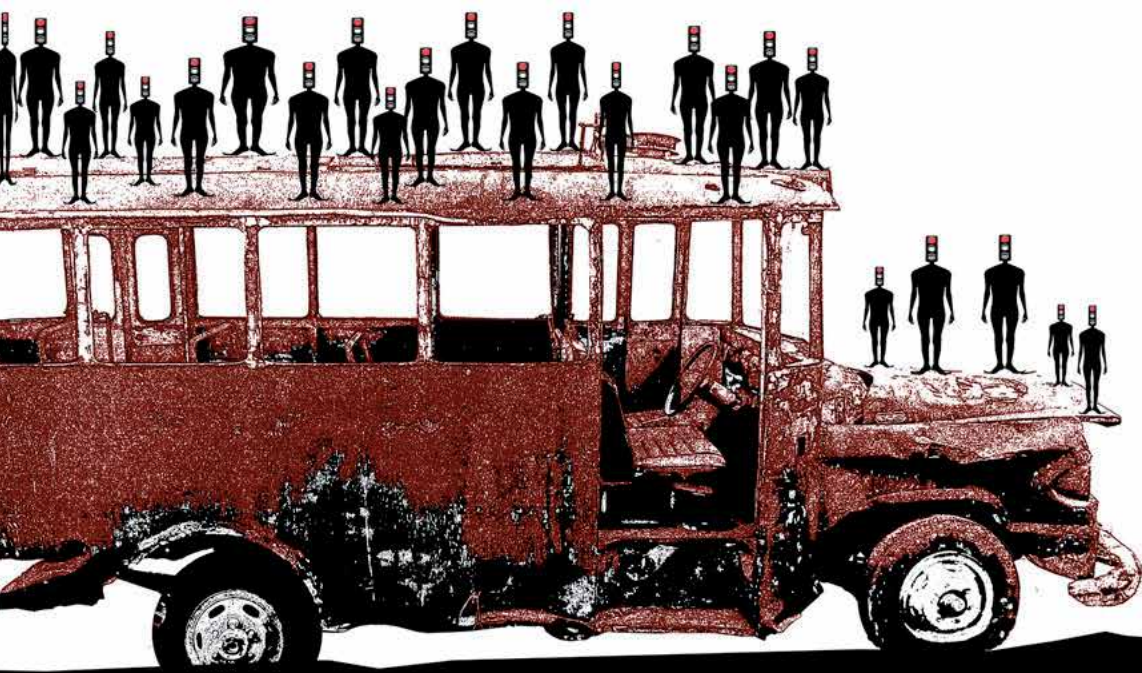
misstep; and a rain of stray,
sometimes fatal, bullets.

And so, to the trinity of the Civil
War and our endless conflicts,
I now add a new member: a
fragment of a rocket that fell near
our village home in the last war.
My grandfather's shell, my father's
rifles, my own shard. Alongside
them, I add another question: if I

had chosen differently, to marry
and bring a child into this world,
would he one day write his own
testimony about this war-born
family he inherited from me,
without having to add yet another
weapon to it?

Here, on this land that never truly
dreams of peace, except in its
fleeting slumber.







Writing the History of the Lebanese Civil War from a Gendered Perspective

Nour Hattit

This article was born from memory. The memory of a child who witnessed the devastation etched into her father's thigh in the form of a bullet wound from the Lebanese Civil War, and the burns across his face that erased some of his features from when a fuel tank exploded in front of him while he was serving as a soldier in the Lebanese Army's Sixth Brigade.

Writing imposed itself on me, compelling me to explore the political distance between myself and my father. I had not anticipated the difficulty my research into the history of the Lebanese Civil War would bring. While my father often used his own past to lend legitimacy to certain views, I approached the subject without nostalgia, driven instead by my desire to look beyond the narrow sectarian box I was born into.

In school, history stopped with the Ottoman period. Time itself seemed to freeze there across all

Lebanese schools: the Civil War had no face, no place, no trace. I am not an advocate of a single, unified history of the war. I was born after it ended, only to realize later that memory itself remains the driving force of the present in this land. Every community clings to a mythologized past, mobilizing memory to reinforce the very sectarian enclosures that still shape our lives.

When I listened to my father's stories of the war, I assumed it was a war reserved only for men. Women were rarely mentioned, except in a few autobiographies I read later or in scattered oral accounts that surfaced years afterward. Women were always pushed into the background, into the shadows, as though the erasure of their stories was itself a deliberate feature of every faction's collective memory project.

And so the question "How does gender shape the organization of historical knowledge?" became





my entry point for imagining a different understanding of the Lebanese Civil War, one that brings to light the groups and experiences sidelined by dominant narratives.

Reading Means Re-reading

I am not here to revisit the theoretical debates around gender and the organization of historical knowledge. What interests me is how “feminist historiography” raised questions that fueled my curiosity to read and research the war: Why must we view history through women’s eyes? Did women participate in the Lebanese Civil War? And in what ways?

The Civil War, which dragged on for fifteen years, was largely told as a sectarian conflict, written from the perspective of dominant powers and grounded in their experiences. Women’s diverse roles were largely ignored. And when mentioned, it was often through stereotypes that reduced their contributions to private, domestic acts of care. Yet the testimonies I present here reveal otherwise, proving their voices were far more than “personal details.”

In “Women in the Lebanese Civil War – The Power of Guns,” Dr. Rosemary Sayigh recounts the story of a Sunni Muslim woman who, alongside her 18-year-old

daughter, joined the Red Cross to provide relief during the war. The mother describes her harrowing encounters at checkpoints, particularly in Christian-controlled areas, where her family name — tied to one of Lebanon’s founding political figures — repeatedly saved her and her children from being killed.

Her daughter recalls how tireless her mother was in hosting displaced families, providing them with food and shelter, caring for her own children, and tending to the wounded. She recounts one day when, on a simple errand to buy coffee, an explosion erupted. By sheer luck, she survived, shielded by a nearby pillar. As the smoke cleared, she saw corpses and bleeding survivors. Instinctively, she grabbed headscarves from nearby women and used them to bandage wounds, trying to save whomever she could.

Understanding women’s roles in war requires dismantling the binary that separates the private from the public sphere. When women’s experiences — with their bodies, lives, and relationships in wartime — are brought to the center of history, they become political and social issues, even those linked to care work. Feminist historiography is founded on this very shift. It insists that women’s stories are not marginal but central to grasping





the true impact of their diverse participation in the war, especially given their erasure from official narratives.

Lebanese author Regina Sneifer, in her memoir “Je dépose les armes – une femme dans la guerre du Liban,” tells of her experience as a woman who lived the Civil War, fought within a Christian militia, and ultimately resigned, leaving the war and the country behind.

In another example cited by Dr. Sayigh, a 13-year-old girl named Michelle, from the Ashrafieh district, recalls how she was drawn into the war. Her father was a member of the Kataeb Party, led by Pierre Gemayel. With a checkpoint stationed outside their home, she was recruited to handle radio communications for the party, later receiving weapons training and carrying a gun.

On the other side of the divided city, in West Beirut, Dalal al-Bizri, in her book “Journals of the Lebanese Civil War,” recounts her involvement with the Lebanese Communist Party and her collaboration with Palestinian factions, even participating directly on the frontlines. She describes how her responsibilities extended beyond



cooking for comrades to executing external missions — her war work far from confined to the domestic sphere.

Women were also at the forefront of peace activism, like teacher-turned-activist Iman Khalifeh, who called for protests against the atrocities committed by militias. Though her efforts were largely suppressed by the armed groups that dominated public space, her activism resonated abroad, sparking solidarity demonstrations in London, Paris, and New York demanding an end to the war.

The Importance of Oral Testimony in Feminist Historiography

More than two decades after the war ended, the organization





Legal Action Worldwide (LAW) published a groundbreaking report in June 2022 based on women's testimonies gathered through interviews. When asked why their stories had never been documented before, the women responded: "Because no one had ever asked us."

The report bears the title: "They Raped Us in Every Possible Way, in Ways You Can't Imagine: Gendered Crimes During the Lebanese Civil Wars." It sparked public outrage, exposing the systematic use of sexual violence by militias during the war.

This report reminded me of the centrality of oral testimony in feminist historiography. Oral history is not an optional supplement; it is essential to rewriting the history of the Civil War from a perspective that reveals the richness of women's experiences. The report underscores that women's memories — whether personal or collective — expose the dynamics of power and domination within the war narrative, while opening space for discussions about transitional justice.

How Does a Gendered Reading of the Civil War Shape Our Future?

Re-reading the Civil War through a gendered lens helped me understand how militias and the powers that documented history perpetuated exclusion and discrimination in the society I lived in for most of my life.

For me, feminist historiography is vital as a woman who dared to step outside the cloak of sectarian identity I was raised in. It provides tools to analyze both public and private spheres without silencing women's roles. It gives me language to craft a post-sectarian discourse, one that demands justice for everyone marginalized, excluded, or victimized by wartime atrocities, regardless of their sectarian background.

As I wrote this article, I remembered the words of French writer Jean Genet: "Writing is the last refuge of those who have betrayed." I wrote because I betrayed — I betrayed the first narrative, the narrative of my sect and my surroundings — in favor of what little remains of this homeland.





War Never Leaves Me... Nor Do the Memories

Yara Abboud

In southern Lebanon, displacement was never just a forced geographical move. It was a deep psychological uprooting that altered the destiny of thousands. War was not a passing episode in time, but a radical turning point in the lives of people who lost their homes, their loved ones, and their sense of safety.

Much has been written about the political and military dimensions of war, but the human and psychological pain often remains sidelined—even though it is the most enduring and transformative for survivors.

Among those most deeply affected were women, forced into cramped, temporary shelters without privacy. Their scars were not visible to the eye, but they still ache to this day.

The stories of Zeinab, a woman displaced from the South, and Brigitte, who lived through the Lebanese Civil War in Beirut, remind us that pain does not recognize time, and trauma knows no borders.

Uprooted Lives in the South

During years of security unrest and repeated assaults, southern Lebanon witnessed harsh waves of displacement. Villages once filled with life suddenly turned into danger zones. Families fled under shelling and panic.

These were not distant images on a television screen—they were burned homes, shuttered schools, abandoned fields, and families crammed into school halls, relatives' houses, or, at times, the streets.

Displacement carried multiple losses: material, social, and emotional. The most vulnerable—women, children, and the elderly—were hit the hardest. Women, in particular, found themselves carrying the burden of survival under unbearable conditions, even as they longed for someone to carry them.

Zeinab's Story

Now in her late thirties, Zeinab still remembers the day her life changed forever. In her early twenties then, she was preparing





for her wedding and dreaming of finishing her nursing studies in Aitaroun. When I met her, she recalled with tears streaming down her cheeks:

“I never imagined I’d have to leave everything in a single moment. I left behind my home, my dreams, my fiancé. Even my photographs—I couldn’t take them with me.”

As the shells rained down, Zeinab and her family fled to Beirut, finding refuge in a school-turned-shelter. The floor was their bed, the walls had no doors, and the nights were long and stripped of safety.

“I slept afraid, woke up afraid, lived inside a body that never knew rest.”

The deepest wound came when she learned her fiancé had been killed: “It was as if I died three times. The first when I felt fear, the second when I fled, the third when the man I loved was gone.”

Zeinab described her collapse as a slow drowning. No one truly listened. Whenever she tried to speak, she was met with words like: “Be strong, this isn’t the end of the world.” But for her, it was the end of her world.

Her trauma was not a fleeting sadness but a lasting psychological rupture. She lives in

a state of constant alert, haunted by the fear of loss, always bracing for the next disaster. The sound of planes sends her spiraling back into memories of shelling and escape. Crowded places suffocate her. She lost her appetite, her energy, her desire to connect with others. Trust, once given freely, now feels impossible.

“I didn’t even know what was happening to me. I was just exhausted... drained... crying for no reason.”

Without psychological support, her suffering deepened. No one asked, “How do you feel?” The focus was only on survival of the body, while the soul was forgotten.

Over time, Zeinab began showing clear symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): recurring nightmares, flashbacks of planes, smoke, and her fiancé’s screams. Words themselves became painful—she avoided talking about the past, often feeling detached from reality, as if her body was in one place and her soul in another. Even small triggers—a light going out, a sudden loud noise—were enough to spark terror. Her relationships with loved ones frayed; she felt “walled in by something invisible,” unheard and unseen.

The weight of it all eventually grew into deep depression: loss of





interest in life, relentless insomnia, and emotional exhaustion.

Brigitte's Story

Decades earlier, during the Lebanese Civil War, Brigitte from Beirut's Ashrafieh neighborhood lived through her own devastating loss. She still recounts it as if it were yesterday:



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"I was preparing food for my son, George... then an explosion. When I entered the room, everything was burned. Nothing was left of my son but his name."

Even thirty years later, Brigitte screams when she hears a child running.

"I call out without knowing: George! George! As if I'm searching for him in every face."

Her symptoms mirror Zeinab's: relentless nightmares, sudden panic attacks where her voice breaks and her chest tightens as though trapped on all sides. She lives with a constant urge to run, without knowing where. She fears loving again, convinced her heart could not endure another loss. She lost trust in her community, no longer seeing it as protection but as a reminder of

her wound.

Her deepest pain was survivor's guilt: "I lived, but I didn't know how to go on living without him. My survival felt like betrayal."

Like Zeinab, Brigitte found little understanding. Society turned away. Social expectations were harsh: "They told me life goes on. But no one told me how I was supposed to go on."

From Silence to Voice

And yet, Zeinab refused to remain a victim. After months of despair, she returned to her nursing studies: "I wanted to understand my body, to understand my pain, and to help other women."

She joined psychological support workshops and began participating in community initiatives for women





affected by war. The silence that once crushed her became a voice defending the right to healing.

Like Zeinab, many women transformed grief into resilience—through education, work, and telling their stories.

The Unfinished War Within

Displacement is not measured by the kilometers we are forced to leave behind, but by the distance it creates between us and our sense of safety, identity, and self.

War does not end when the fighting stops. It lingers—in insomnia, in shattered dreams, in long silences.

Only acknowledgment of pain, and the creation of safe spaces for expression and healing, can restore balance.

The stories of Zeinab and Brigitte testify that women carry not only the memory of survival but also the potential for resilience and transformation.

Through their voices, we preserve a memory that must not be forgotten and open the door to collective healing. Because surviving in the body alone is not true survival—unless the soul is also healed.





The Language of Violence and the Violence of Language: We Unknowingly Normalize A Never-Ending Civil War

Hawra Dahaini

“Do I want a civil war? Of course not. But if it happens, I already have a list of 200 people I’d want to tear apart.”

That was how journalist Joseph Abu Fadel put it in a recent TV interview. His comment quickly went viral, turning into a joke on social media. People laughed and shared it, but hardly anyone seemed unsettled by the fact that it was, in essence, a call for renewed civil conflict.

It is not the first time violence—or references to the Civil War—has surfaced as humor on Lebanese screens or in public spaces.

I was born in South Lebanon, three years after the war had officially ended. My parents did not carry direct memories of it, but I grew up under the weight of other wars, ones that touched daily life more closely.

In the South, the real ghost was

not the Civil War; it was Israel. That was the fear shaping our childhood, the threat adults whispered about, the shadow always hanging over us. In the cellar of my memory live images of “Operation Grapes of Wrath” in 1996, the massacre at Qana, the children of Mansouri.

And yet, on the edges of those memories, there were other wars—the “War of the Brothers,” the “War of the Camps,” and new wars we were always waiting for, lurking around the corner. We never fully understood their causes; they stayed confusing, half-told in stories, hinted at in jokes and insults, present in silences and in fear.

Sometimes I ask myself: Can a war break out without us even noticing? What makes war seep into our language and imagination? Does it really end





when the guns fall silent—or does it lie in wait, ready to return?

Language as Inheritance

We do not only inherit houses, debts, or family names. We inherit language, memory, and ways of speaking. Words and expressions imprint themselves on us from childhood, so familiar we forget to question their meaning.

My mother never laid a hand on us, yet when we pushed her too far, she would say: “You need to be hung on the Blanco!”—her way of insisting that what we had done could not go unpunished.

Our neighbor, whose brother was kidnapped at the very start of the Civil War, would cry whenever the threat of renewed fighting loomed. She would whisper lines from the poet Zain Shuaib: “The Angel of Death is always setting a trap for us.”

As a child, I used the word “Blanco” with my siblings and at school without knowing what it meant. Later, I learned it was the name of the iron chain butchers use to hang meat, repurposed during the war as an instrument of torture. What could be more terrifying than that? Another classmate once said to me: “You’ve made me so angry I should cut you up and

pour concrete over you.” Another image pulled straight out of Civil War violence. Even imagining it made me shiver.

The Violence of Language

Psycholinguistic studies show that violence is not only physical. It can also be linguistic: words hurled like blows, insults and threats that wound as deeply as action. Violent language does more than express anger; it shapes how communities think and talk about conflict.

In moments of rage, people discharge their bitterness and frustration through violent words. Sometimes it is just a safer release. But repeated too often, this kind of language normalizes aggression, planting the seeds for violence beyond words. The more our brains get used to violent images and expressions, the easier it becomes to imagine—and accept—them in real life.

Literature’s Struggle with Violence

Trying to make sense of the language of violence, I revisited Lebanese novels born out of the Civil War. Each, in its own way, wrestled with the same question: how do you tell the story of war without reproducing its violence?





In her 1976 novel *Beirut Nightmares*, Ghada Samman writes: “Neutrality in a world of violence is also a crime. It means helping one side eliminate the other. At least joining one side makes death less bitter—collective death is easier to face than confronting death alone.” She goes on to ask: “To what extent can rejecting violence be a crime? And is it one punishable by violent death?”?

Samman’s novel left me haunted by an image of rats devouring children trapped in a shelter. Ever since, the word “rats” conjures up terror.

Mona Shatila’s *The Disappointed* (1995) is different—rich, layered, almost overwhelming in its detail. She dissects the contradictions in Lebanese society, exposing the fault lines that, she argues, fueled the war. Her characters argue fiercely, often violently, their words brimming with the aggression of the time.

Hanane Sheikh’s *The Story of Zahra* (1980) follows a woman destroyed by violence in all its forms—mockery, harassment, rape—until she met her end in murder. Zahra’s story was about survival, but also about how violence becomes normalized, how justice remains always out of



Oil painting by: Kazimir Malevich

reach.

Elias Khoury’s *Yalo* (2012) was the hardest to endure. Its pages are filled with torture, humiliation, and the grotesque. Reading it felt like stepping into the abyss left by war—a place where people become creatures of instinct, unable to live outside its stench.

Alawiya Sobh’s *Dunya* (2006), Rabi Jaber’s *Confessions* (2009), and Jabbour Douaihy’s *The Vagrant of Houses* (2010) offer something gentler. They evoke the war with empathy, with compassion. These stories made me feel, rather than recoil. They seemed to belong to what I would call “elevated storytelling.”





Between Questioning and Normalizing Violence

The Civil War has held Lebanese writers captive. To ignore it would be to deny reality itself. But its grip also means much of our literature remains steeped in violence.

So, how much responsibility do writers bear for shaping a less violent imagination? And how much does raw, unflinching storytelling—saturated with

horror—actually reproduce violence instead of dismantling it?

The line between questioning violence and normalizing it is hard to pin down. What is certain, though, is that demanding “more balanced language” risks sliding into censorship. A society’s language is nothing more—and nothing less—than the echo of its lived experiences, a mirror of its reality.

