The historiography and the memory of the Lebanese civil war

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Historiography and memory of the Lebanese Civil War 1975-1990

A) Introduction

The Lebanese Civil War was both an internal Lebanese affair and a regional conflict involving a host of regional and international actors. It revolved around some of the issues that dominated regional politics in the Middle East in the latter part of the 20th century, including the Palestine-Israel conflict, Cold War competition, Arab nationalism and political Islam. Conflicts over these issues intersected with longstanding disagreements in the Lebanese political elite, and in parts of the population, over the sectarian division of power, national identity, social justice and Lebanon s strategic alliances. During 15 years of fighting, around 90,000 people lost their lives, according to the most reliable statisticians, Labaki and Abou Rjeily (1994). The much higher numbers of up to 150,000 that are often given appear to have been based on international press reports from the early 1990s and subsequently repeated uncritically (Hanf 1993: 339). By contrast, Labaki and About Rjeily, supported by the second most reliable statistical source (Hanf 1993: 339-57), base their figures on information from the Lebanese army, security forces, Red Cross and various professional organisations, parties and militias, as well as reports in the Lebanese press during the war. Even so, this information was gathered under extreme difficulties, and it is possible that the real number exceeds 100,000. Of the 90,000 killed, close to 20,000 are individuals who were kidnapped or disappeared, and who must be assumed dead as they have not been accounted for. Nearly 100,000 were badly injured, and close to a million people, or two-thirds of the Lebanese population, experienced displacement (Labaki and Rjeily 1994: 20).

In addition to the large number of dead, much of Lebanon s infrastructure was shattered, as was Lebanon s reputation as an example of cross-sectarian coexistence in the Arab Middle East. The Lebanese Civil War was one of the most devastating conflicts of the late 20th century. It left a number of political and social legacies that make it paramount to understand why it involved so many instances of mass violence. The question of Civil War memory is acute for many Lebanese, who have come together in the post-war period to debate the war and create public commemoration. In their view, the war has continued through other means in the post-war period, and the periodic rounds of violent conflict plaguing Lebanon since 1990 are directly related to the Civil War. Remembering, analysing and understanding mass violence in Lebanon, therefore, is not just an academic exercise, but for many Lebanese an urgent task directly linked to political reform and reconciliation.

The Ta if Accord that ended the war in 1989 failed to resolve or even address the core conflicts of the war, including the sectarian division of power in Lebanon, the Palestinian refugee issue, the presence of Syrian forces on Lebanese soil and Syrian tutelage, and Hizbollah s status as the only armed militia. The killing of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in 2005, the 2006 war between Hizbollah and Israel, and continued political instability in the country have only added to the sense among many Lebanese that political violence is endemic to their body politic. In daily discourse in Lebanon, and even in academic writings about the war, the widespread experience of being caught in recurrent cycles of mass violence can translate into descriptions of violence as irrational , or simply beyond belief (see Khalaf 2002: 1-22 for a discussion of the rationality of civil war).

Lebanon is not an anomaly, and its experience with mass violence does not defy social analysis. It does, however, require the outside observer to be aware of the deeply divisive context in which Civil War historiography is being produced. The perceived unfinished nature of the war has rendered debates about it very contentious inside Lebanon. Some historical work has been politicised under the influence of the political and physical reconstruction process that followed in the 1990s and 2000s, and, more generally,

under the influence of political discourses surrounding the immediate past in reconstructing Lebanon, while other work   much of it produced by scholars of Lebanon in Western universities   maintains a high standard of objectivity. This is not to extol non-Lebanese scholars over Lebanese ones. In fact, two of the most painstaking and convincing histories of the war were written in French by Lebanese scholars (Beydoun 1993, Kassir 1994). However, as Beydoun (1984) has shown, Lebanese scholars during the war were under the heavy influence of political and ideological projects that sought to mould history in their shape. Given the vast amount of historical work on the war, this review does not pretend to be all-inclusive, but seeks to summarise some of the main debates surrounding the war.

Some of the most salient engagement with the Civil War has been produced outside the realm of academic history, in elite and popular cultural production, political discourse, urban space and mass media. It is a key point of this scholarly review that such material should be viewed as part of the historiography of the war. By making a conceptual distinction between academic history and memory culture, the review does not validate one over the other, nor claim that the two realms are hermetically sealed from one another. On the contrary, the aim of this review is to show how the different genres of memory production overlap and form part of the ongoing assessment of the war. Hence, it gives an overview of the main themes and topics in academic literature, cultural and media production, and public debate relating to the war. Finally, it examines a body of meta-historical literature analysing the production of historical memory in Lebanon.

B) Outbreak, cores issues and driving forces of the war

What is habitually referred to as the Lebanese Civil War was in fact a series of more or less related conflicts between shifting alliances of Lebanese groups and external actors, who from 1975 to 1990 destabilised the Lebanese state. The conflicts can be divided into five main periods: the two-years war from April 1975 to November 1976; the long interlude of failed peace attempts, Israeli and Syrian intervention and a host of internal conflicts between November 1976 and June 1982; the Israeli invasion and its immediate aftermath from June 1982 to February 1984; the internal wars of the late 1980s; and finally the intra-Christian wars of 1988-90, which led to the end of the war.

In each of those periods, notorious battles, massacres and assassinations took place, including the Black Saturday, Tal al-Za tar and Damour massacres of 1975-76; the War of the Mountain between Druze and Christian forces in 1982-83; Israeli bombardment of West Beirut in August 1982, and the Sabra and Shatila massacres that followed; the War of the Camps between Palestinian and Shiite forces from 1985 to 1987; and Michel Aoun s war with Samir Ja ja s Lebanese Forces and the Syrian army in 1989 and 1990. Debates over these particular events intersect with a number of thematic debates, which this review will summarise.

There is agreement among historians that the war broke out as a result of a period of growing division between those Lebanese who supported the right of the Palestinian resistance to stage operations against Israel from Lebanese soil, and those who opposed it. This division intersected with other contentious issues, most prominently whether or not the system of power sharing in place since the 1943 National Pact was sustainable or due for radical reform, and whether Lebanon should orient its international alliances towards the Arab world and the Soviet Union or towards the West and its local allies. On the one hand, the Lebanese National Movement (LNM), under the leadership of Kamal Junblatt, called for an overhaul of the sectarian quota system, and for a leftist-Muslim alliance that would realign Lebanon with other radical regimes including Syria, Libya and Iraq. Destabilisation of the internal security situation allowed various militias to arm, not just those affiliated with the LNM, but also the Christian-conservative front. Hence, many scholars (e.g. Traboulsi 2007: 174) point to President Suleiman Franjieh s decision to dismantle the deuxième bureau security services in 1970 as a crucial turning point following the statist approach of his predecessors Fouad Chehab and Charles Helou.

The biggest bone of contention regarding the outbreak of the war is the role of the Palestinian armed presence. The historiographic debate is not just over the Palestinian question as such, and the right of the LNM to support the PLO, but over whether or not Lebanon from 1943 to 1975 had developed a viable system of consociationalism, and over the relative impact of external powers on the Lebanese state. In Breakdown of the state in pre-war Lebanon, Farid Al-Khazen (2000: 385) argues that the Lebanese system had by and large proven itself a flexible mode of power sharing between the countries sects. From the Cairo Agreement in 1969 to outbreak of war in 1975, he points out, all but one of Lebanon s many cabinet crises revolved around the PLO. The destabilisation of the Lebanese state, therefore, must primarily be seen as an effect of the Palestinian question.

Although well argued and scholarly, Al-Khazen s book can be boxed with more simplistic attempts to place the blame with outside forces. For those who stress internal factors such as the inability of the quota system to deal with the rising numbers of Shiites, and Maronite hegemony over the state more generally, emphasis on the Palestinian issue overwrites critiques of the Lebanese system, and can even be read as part of a Christian or conservative historical discourse that seeks to admonish either the Christian right or the sectarian system. A famous shorthand for externalising the war by pointing to outside forces is the idiomatic term a war of others , or une guerre pour les autres, the title of journalist and diplomat Ghassan Tueni s renowned 1985 book (Tueni 1985). After the war, a war of others became shorthand for externalising collective and individual feelings of guilt associated with the Civil War. Much of public debate about the war since 1990 has revolved around the external/internal question, and critical historiography has not been immune to these debates (Khalaf 2002: 15-22).

Another group of scholars who stress the internal dynamics of the Civil War are interested in interpretations of political economy. They highlight the over-reliance of the Lebanese economy on Western capitalism from the late 19th century onwards. Inspired by dependency theory, sociologist Salim Nasr (1978), among others, shows how the penetration of foreign capital dovetailed with the social and political dominance of a both local and wider Arab bourgeoisie in Lebanon. This bourgeoisie was in collusion with the zu ama political class of political bosses of wealthy and influential families. As Michael Johnson showed in his 1986 study Class and client in Beirut, the zu ama were critical in maintaining a check on violence at a local level. By controlling lower-ranking political bosses, who in their turn reigned in the street , the zu ama were critical both to the parliamentary system of consociationalism, and to the local negotiation of sectarian power and influence. When their influence particularly that of the Sunni zu ama in West Beirut waned in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Johnson argues, the wider system of social control in Lebanon began to unravel (Johnson 1986). In a later work entitled All Honourable Men, Michael Johnson returns to his earlier work and critiques it for being too based on a class reading of the roots of the Civil War. Instead, he proposes a socio-psychological reading that places emphasis on the changing relations in the nuclear family in Beirut before the war (Johnson 2002).

C) Debates over sectarian violence

The work of Marxist sociologists like Salim Nasr (1983), Fawwaz Traboulsi (1993) and Fuad Shahin (1980) presents a corrective to what they see as over-reliance on sectarianism as a catchall to explain the conflict. The sectarian explanation is even more problematic, as it dovetails with hardened stereotypes repeated in journalistic accounts of the war as a resurgence of age-old sectarian hatred. Sectarian identification and the way in which it shaped political subjectivities during the war and leading up to it, however, cannot be explained away completely. The issue of sectarianism in the war intersects with a much longer debate about sectarianism in Lebanon going back, at least, to the 1840-60 wars in Mount Lebanon (Weiss 2009). One side in the debate believes that Lebanese nationalism emerged not because of political sectarianism but despite it. As Firro (2003: 67) puts it, the French creation of Lebanon in 1920 empowered

sectarian representation and the leadership of political oligarchies locally and nationally. In this view, the institutional arrangement of sectarianism has produced an idea of two separate people and coexistence between them. Critics of the sectarian system believe that only the resilience of civil society during the war saved the future existence of Lebanon as a country. Frequent sectarian bickering in the political leadership, resulting in political stalemate, inefficiency and stalled reforms, has only reinforced this view in the post-war period.

On the opposing side in the debate, proponents of the confessional system stress its historically proven ability to contain and resolve conflict (Weiss 2009: 143-4). As Samir Khalaf (2002: 327-28) has formulated this idea, despite their ungratifying social and political expressions in the recent past, communitarian roots can be stripped of bigotry and become the base for equitable forms of power sharing. The Lebanese national identity may be fragile, but it is nevertheless a well-established identification with a long history that rests on an overlap of multiple identities. The insistence on one seamless national unity led to disasters for Lebanon as well as for its proponents in the Lebanese National Movement. Lebanese nationalism in this view can be defined as a fragile net of confessional identity, national identity and superstrata ideologies , and the acceptance of this loosely connected net (Reinkowski 1997: 513). In political terms, this implies that, because the sectarian system merely reflects the makeup of society, it is ultimately better suited to regulate conflict than a secular system would be (Messara 1994).

Sectarian violence has been a difficult topic for novelists, filmmakers and others. Many have skirted the issue, focusing instead on civilians who resisted the logic of separation and exclusivity. A case in point is the most popular film about the Civil War, and the first such film to be shown in mainstream Lebanese cinemas, Ziad Doeuiry s West Beyrouth (Doueiry 1997). It portrays a Muslim boy and a Christian girl and their middle-class families, as they become victims of a war that they wholly reject. The conclusion is comforting, as it falls in line with the war-of-others thesis. Militiamen and sectarian violence here is presented as an outside force, external to the life-worlds of ordinary Lebanese. The focus on a victimised middle-class can partly be explained by the fact that many cultural producers hail from this group, and in any case rejected the logic of militia warfare and sectarian violence.

Other artists have produced less self-censored descriptions of sectarian bloodshed. Two of Lebanon s foremost novelists, Elias Khoury and Rashid al-Daif, have written semi-biographically about their experiences as fighters for the LNM in the two-years war. The much younger Rawi Hage, in his prize-winning De Niro s game (2007), describes the experiences of a young Christian fighter in East Beirut and his motivations for joining the Lebanese Forces and participating in the Sabra and Shatila massacre. The novel suggests that ideology was only secondary to a range of personal circumstances ranging from poverty to broken families that could motivate young men to join the militias and participate in mass violence. A similar description from West Beirut can be found in Yussef Bazzi s Arafat looked at me and smiled (Bazzi 2007). On film, Randa Chahal Sabag s 1999 Civilisées (Civilised People), a portrait of militiamen during the war, suggests that the Lebanese populace bore more responsibility for the violence than they would like to believe (Sabag 1999). However, such bluntness is rare. In public debates about memory of the Civil War since 1990, critics of self-delusion have more commonly linked the problem to political and sectarian leaders who are blamed for keeping a lid on discussions about the war in order to pacify the population and avoid uncomfortable discussions about their own involvement in the war (Haugbolle 2010: 74-84). Equally, the more than 50 Lebanese films that deal with the war tend to treat individuals even perpetrators as victims caught up in a war beyond their control and design (Khatib 2008: 153-184).

D) Massacres and mass violence

There is no disagreement over the fact that several massacres took place and that hundreds, in some cases thousands of civilians were murdered. Rather, historiographic debates centre on the interpretation of the political circumstances surrounding the massacres and the perceived necessity of these crimes. In several cases, the events have become foundational for the self-understanding of political groups. Disentangling them from ideological discourse is a difficult task, and not one that Lebanese historians are always able to fulfil. Today, a phalangist narrative, as represented on the Lebanese Forces webpage, maintains that the massacres of 1975-76 and 1982 were in fact reactions to onslaughts on the Christians of Lebanon, defensive measures made necessary by the actions of the LNM [1]. Conversely, proponents of the left (who outnumber rightists in the group of intellectuals and artists dominating public debate about the war) stress that the worst massacres were committed by members of the Christian right.

Massacres of the two-years war

The outbreak of the war was marked by its first massacre, known as the Ayn al-Rumana incident on 13 April 1975, where 27 Palestinians were killed by Kata ib militants (Picard 2002: 105). Although the assault was clearly committed by Kata ib, Christian leaders accused the Palestinians and their leader Arafat for provoking a confrontation in an environment of heightened tension (Hanf 1993: 204). Ayn al-Rumana was followed by other massacres in the so-called two-years war from April 1975 to November 1976. As Elizabeth Picard points out, the attacks on refugee camps and villages in this period were not the product of lawlessness and militias ruling the street, although a vast number of militias were active and many areas were quite lawless. Rather, the massacres followed a logic of forming homogeneous cantons propagated by leaders such as Pierre Jumayil and Camille Chamoun, but equally even if in retaliation by leaders of the LNM like Kamal Jumblatt (Picard 2002: 110). The logic necessitated cleaning areas of non-Christian, or non-progressive, elements, and it sanctioned mass murder.

The killing of civilians was also motivated by a cycle of revenge, as massacre followed massacre in the two-years war. The first major incident was the Black Saturday massacre of 6 December 1975, when falangists killed between 150 (Chami 2003: 57) and 200 (Hanf 1993: 210) civilians in East Beirut. The LNM responded to Black Saturday and the ensuing massacre of civilians in the slum districts of Maslakh and Karantina on 18 January 1976, where several hundred (Hanf 1993: 211) perhaps as many as 1,500 (Harris 1996: 162) civilians were murdered, by bombarding and pillaging the coastal cities of Damour and Jiyé on 20 January, killing more than 500 inhabitants (Nisan 2003: 41).

In the meantime, Kata ib laid siege on the Palestinian camp of Tal al-Za tar. The camp fell on 12 August 1976. Syrian forces participated in or at least accepted the massacre that followed. The number of people killed varies. Harris (1996: 165) writes that perhaps 3,000 Palestinians, mostly civilians, died in the siege and its aftermath , whereas Cobban (1985: 142) estimates that 1,500 were killed on the day and a total of 2,200 throughout the siege. More reliable is Yezid Sayigh s estimate of 4,280 Lebanese and Palestinian camp dwellers, as he bases it on reports in the immediate aftermath of the massacre (1997: 401). In retaliation, LNM forces attacked the Christian villages of Chekka and Hamat, killing around 200 civilians (Chami 2003: 94).

1982 invasion and Sabra and Shatila

The Israel Defence Forces (IDF) invasion of Lebanon and subsequent shelling of West Beirut in the summer of 1982 must be considered an instance of mass violence. The invasion was the single most violent incident of the war, costing at least 17,000 people their lives and wounding up to 30,000 others (Hanf 1993: 341). One of the most influential artistic renderings of the civilian experience of invasion is Mahmoud Darwish s long prose poem Memory for forgetfulness: Beirut August 1982 (Darwish 1995), a series of testimonies and reflections on the relation of writing to memory and human suffering.

The invasion paved the way for the best documented of the war s massacres, at the Palestinian camps of Sabra and Shatila (for details of the history and numbers, see Aude Signole s article in EMV) [2]. In painstaking works like al-Hout s Sabra and Shatila (2004), reliable figures have been garnered from international organisations such as the Red Cross and extrapolated with individual accounts, media reports and military accounts, reaching a total of between 1,400 and 2,000 killed. Partly as a result of numerous and very detailed accounts of participants of the Christian right, from Joseph Abou Khalil to Robert Hatem (Eddé 2010), as well as investigative journalists like Alain Ménargues (2004), we know who participated (Lebanese Forces), what their motives were (revenge for Bashir Jumayil s death days before), and what they did in the most disturbing detail. In fact, it is probably the viciousness of the killings, as well as their international exposure, that has made Sabra and Shatila the iconic massacre of the Lebanese Civil War. Sabra and Shatila has been the object of commemorations and political co-optation by various parties, including Hizbollah, while other massacres have not been commemorated as vigorously (Khalili 2007:168-76). On the positive side, at least from an historian s perspective, the attention has resulted in detailed documentation.

Similar objective works on Damour, Black Saturday and other, less prominent massacres like the inter-Christian attacks on Ehden and Safra in 1978 and 1980, are yet to be written. Episodes 3 and 4 of Al-Jazeera s 2001 documentary on the war, Harb Lubnan (War of Lebanon), contain detailed footage of these massacres, eye-witness accounts and interviews with political leaders, but no statistical information comparable to that available on Sabra and Shatila (Issawi 2004). Harb Lubnan may lack the apparatus of academic history, but it has become the most widely distributed piece of Civil War history, and the best-selling documentary DVD in Lebanon. It is particularly interesting for its large number of extensive and sometimes candid interviews with some of the leaders in the war.

E) Shelling, car-bombs and habitual forms of mass violence

While Hanf (1993) and Labaki and Abou Rjeily (1994) give convincing data for the death toll, there are few substantiated accounts of the exact nature of the violence from which people died. In up to 25% of all cases of death by violence reported in the Lebanese press, the exact reason could not be given (Hanf 1993: 341). Although the massacres described above account for around one-fifth of the 90,000 killed during the war, the largest number of civilians perished in almost daily shelling, sniper fire, murder and other indiscriminate acts more or less directly related to actual warfare throughout the 1975-1990 period. In the struggle for control over Palestinian camps in West Beirut, known as the War of the Camps , between former allies of the LNM from April 1985 to 1987, more than 2500 Palestinian fighters and non-fighters are estimated by the Lebanese government to have been killed (Brynen 1990: 190). The real number is likely to be higher, because thousands of Palestinians were not registered in Lebanon; and since no officials could access the camps in the aftermath of fighting, the casualties could not be counted. In addition, Amal and Shiite inhabitants suffered considerable losses (Sayigh 1994: 317).

Generally speaking, the historiography of the war has not been devoted to precise descriptions of massacres, body counts or debates over responsibility. Histories of the early war by writers such as Deeb (1980), Petran (1987) and Cobban (1985) stress how sectarian divisions in the political elite and the population led to a level of divisiveness that condoned indiscriminate killing of others . Less scholarly accounts, including bestsellers by Fisk (1990), Randall (1983) and Friedman (1990), tend to linger more on the massacres, but stop short of any systematic documentation.

Although the famous massacres of the war were very serious instances of mass violence, they tend to overshadow less prolific forms of violence that became an habitual part of life during the war. Part of this habitual violence took place between soldiers and militiamen. It is impossible to make a neat distinction

between legitimate violence during battles and indiscriminate violence against civilians and combatants. During all phases of the war and on all sides, atrocities were committed against both groups. Kidnappings, road-block executions on the basis of people s sectarian identity, revenge killings of civilians, torture, wanton shelling of residential areas, and many other breaches of the conduct of war were integral and well-documented parts of the Civil War (Hanf 1993: 341).

Another category of mass violence was car bombs and planted bombs, which throughout the war claimed more than 3,000 lives, most of them civilian (Chami 2003: 317-19). At least 49 political and religious leaders were murdered between 1975 and 1990 (Chami 2003: 323-26). However, these numbers pale in comparison with the kidnapped and disappeared during the war, which have been estimated at 17,415 by the civil society organisation Committee of the Families of Kidnapped and Disappeared in Lebanon. Founded in 1982, the Committee has worked since then for the release of information about the thousands of individuals who were abducted by militias (Haugbolle 2010: 199). The Committee has also become one of the proponents of a more open debate about the war, along with other civil society organisations.

F) Testimonies

Hundreds of personal testimonies of the war have been written in English, Arabic and French. They give rich detail of life during the war, and in many cases seek to challenge established histories of the war. Many more novels and films are based on memories and can be read as testimonies. They fall into four different categories: combatants, political leaders, civilians and foreign observers.

In total, around 25 former combatants have written testimonies of the war, most of them political leaders (Eddé 2010). A larger number of personal accounts have been given to the Lebanese press (Haugbolle 2010a). On the one hand, former militia leaders like Walid Jumblatt [3] and Elias Hobayqa, as well as lower-ranking leaders like Assa ad Shaftari and Robert Hatem, have spoken publicly about their experiences and reflections on the war (Haugbolle 2010a). Other examples of self-representations include semi-biographical novels (Bazzi 2007, Hage 2008) and memoirs by former soldiers, among them two women (Beshara 2003, Sneifer 2008).

Memories of Israeli soldiers who participated in the 1982 invasion have been treated artistically in a number of internationally acclaimed films like Lebanon and Waltz with Bashir, which address (and occasionally dodge) the question of Israeli responsibility. Yermia (1983), a soldier during the invasion, details the IDF s indiscriminate behaviour in the war, in particular atrocities committed in Sidon in 1982. It also includes detainees narratives from the Israeli special camp of al-Ansar set up close to Ayn al-Helwa. Further narratives from these camps have been collected by Khalili (2010).

A much more systematic and detailed assessment of crimes committed by the IDF can be found in the report of the International Commission into reported violations of international law by Israel during the 1982 invasion (MacBride 1984). The report is based on testimonies and researched accounts. It contains a long section on Sabra and Shatila, which concludes that at a minimum, Israel s role in planning and coordinating the militia operation amounts to a reckless disregard of probable consequence (MacBride 1984: 179). As a whole, the report is a severe indictment of Israel s breach of international law in the invasion of Lebanon. On the use of weapons, the report finds that the use of fragmentation and incendiary weapons by the Israeli armed forces violated the international legal principle of proportionality and discrimination (MacBride 1984: 188). It found evidence of degrading treatment often leading to death during the imprisonment of Lebanese and Palestinian fighters. And it further lambasted the IDF for indiscriminate and systematic bombing of civilian areas, as well as complicity in Sabra and Shatila (MacBride 1984: 194). An international law assessment of the 1982 invasion from 1985 comes to similar

conclusions (Mallison and Mallison 1985).

Foreign medical relief workers have also provided valuable accounts of serious human rights violations in Sabra and Shatila, other Palestinian camps like Rashadiya, Bourj al-Shamali and Mieh Mieh, and the Israeli camps of al-Ansar and Khiam in South Lebanon (al-Qasem 1983). Cutting (1988) and, more ethnographically and reflected, Sayigh (1994), have written narratives of the War of the Camps, while Nassib (1983) and Mikdadi (1983) contain vivid descriptions of the 1982 invasion of Beirut. Perhaps the best testimony of the invasion, as well as other periods in the war, has been written by Edward Said s sister Jean Makdisi (Makdisi 1990).

G) Memory cultures and memory studies

Written historical accounts of the war are but a small part of the total production of historical memory in Lebanon after the war. Political parties, sectarian groups, neighbourhoods, families, schools and other institutions of socialisation have produced their own, often very skewed and antagonistic versions of the war. The difficulty of producing a national history in the aftermath of a divisive conflict has been made more difficult by the fact that the Lebanese state has refused to engage in a debate about how to commemorate the war and how to produce a space for open national debate about the past. It has been argued that the Lebanese state, through the semi-public reconstruction project conducted under the auspices of late Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, actively erased reminders of the war and sought to create a downtown memory-space that emphasised the good aspects of Lebanon s pre-war years and ignored the war itself (Makdisi 1997). In reaction to this (lack of) policy, which many critics have linked to the general amnesty announced in the wake of the war and labelled a state-sanctioned politics of amnesia , a big group of activists, artists, journalists and a few politicians have since the mid-1990s mobilised to break the silence . Their aim has been to shake the Lebanese population out of its lull , in order for the country to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past . Learning more about the Civil War, they argue, will teach people that it was a painful and pointless war that only benefited a small group of political and economic leaders the same group who are today running the country (Haugbolle 2010: 64-84).

The results of this loosely connected social movement aimed at commemorating and debating the war have been mixed. On the one hand, awareness of the problem has undoubtedly been raised, and this may have contributed to a greater reluctance to start new armed struggles despite periods of enormous political tension since 2005. On the other hand, the movement suffers from elitism, and its events often cater to a crowd of educated Beirut-dwellers who are already well aware of the problem of amnesia. It has also been difficult for the movement to develop new strategies and arguments. In 2011, many arguments are still being heard that were first formulated in the mid-1990s. However, the tensions of the 2007-08 crises in Lebanese politics in the aftermath of Hizbollah s and Israel s 2006 war have arguably also revitalised parts of Lebanese civil society in defence of civic virtues, cross-sectarian collaboration and anti-sectarian activism (Kanafani Zahar 2011: 111-24). Moreover, new kinds of events that seek to engage the public more openly and draw in non-elite groups have also been launched, not least under the auspices of the largest NGO devoted to memory work, UMAM, whose institute is located in the southern suburbs of Beirut (Barclay 2007). UMAM was founded by the German-Lebanese couple Lokhman Slim and Monika Borgman, and has strong links to most of Lebanese civil society. Since 2005, UMAM has organised close to a hundred events and run several large-scale projects including interactive local history writing. UMAM also produced the documentary Massaker in 2004, a series of interviews with participants in the Sabra and Shatila massacre. The film provoked discussions about the difficulties of giving perpetrators of violence a voice in a state where formal prosecution of their heinous crimes is made impossible.

Concurrent with the growth of this social movement in favour of public memory work, a number of

academic studies about memories of the Civil War have been published. My own book, on which some of this review is based, analyses the different ways in which Civil War history was made the subject of public representation in Lebanon from 1990 to 2005. It argues that a particular pacifist-leftist group of intellectuals have dominated the debate, giving it an anti-sectarian tinge that does not necessarily correspond to sentiments in the wider population (Haugbolle 2010). Volk (2010) puts the politics of commemoration and martyrdom into a longer historical perspective, arguing that post-war debates and public commemorations draw on long-running contentions over sectarian and national identity. Aïda Kanafani-Zahar s study (2011) includes long accounts of the war in Mount Lebanon and deals in particular with the psychological dimension of the war legacy and the fractured social contract in Lebanese localities. From an equally ethnographic perspective, Larkin (2008) has studied how young Lebanese rely almost completely on postmemory , passed-on accounts and cultural production in their understanding of the war. The result is sometimes troubling repetitions of clichés and hardened myths, while other young Lebanese seek to counteract the signs of brewing sectarian conflict around them by exploring and subverting political language.

Perhaps the biggest challenge facing the historiography of the war is to combine the rich and varied cultural and academic productions dealing with the war and memory of the war with actual history writing. Many periods of the war, and many perspectives beyond political and military history, are understudied. If social historians of the war begin to make use of the sources collected and created in cultural memory work, and to systematise these sources, we could gain insight into some of the blind spots of the historiography of the war. Memory work should of course be treated critically, as it often serves ideological purposes. Having said that, memory culture is not just a collection of dubious sources. Constructions of memory in post-war Lebanon also point to narratives about history. History is not just numbers, dates and facts, but equally the telling of stories, and the blending of events into salient narratives. In Lebanon, there are many different narratives, many different histories of the war. Any attempt to write a history of the war or to forge a national history must start by acknowledging the multiplicity of historical narratives. The next step must be a proper research agenda, in Lebanon or by foreign research institutions, to support collective projects that include archival studies, ethnography, oral history and cultural studies. French scholars Franck Mermier and Christophe Varin (2010) recently published the results of such a comprehensive research project. Similar projects that actively involve Lebanese academics and memory activists in a creative collaboration could open the door to the immense archive of sentiments, memories, impressions and expressions from and about the Civil War and begin working on it in earnest. The result could be a more precise and more textured history of the Lebanese Civil War, hopefully materialising in the coming years. A much more systematic and detailed assessment of crimes committed by the IDF can be found in the report of the International Commission to enquire into reported violations of International law by Israel during the 1982 invasion (MacBride 1984). The report is based on testimonies and researched accounts. It contains a long section on Sabra and Shatila, which concludes that at a minimum, Israel s role in planning and coordinating the militia operation amounts to a reckless disregard of probable consequence (MacBride 1984: 179). As a whole, the report is a severe indictment of Israel s breach of international law in the invasion of Lebanon. On the use of weapons, the report finds that Israeli use of fragmentation and incendiary weapons by the Israeli armed forces violated the international legal principle of proportionality and discrimination. (MacBride 1984: 188). It found evidence of degrading treatment often leading to death during imprisonment of Lebanese and Palestinian fighters. And it further lambasted the IDF for indiscriminate and systematic bombing of civilian areas, as well as complicity in Sabra and Shatila (MacBride 1984: 194). An international law assessment of the 1982 invasion from 1985 comes to similar conclusions (Mallison and Mallison 1985).

Foreign medical relief workers have also provided valuable accounts of serious human rights violations in Sabra and Shatila and other Palestinian camps like Rashadiya, Bourj al-Shamali, Mieh Mieh, as well as the Israeli camps of al-Ansar and Khiam in South Lebanon (al-Qasem 1983). Cutting (1988) and, more ethnographically and reflected, Sayigh (1994), have written narratives of the War of the Camps, while

Nassib (1983) and Mikdadi (1983) contain vivid descriptions of the 1982 invasion of Beirut. Perhaps the best testimony of the invasion as well as other periods in the war has been written by Edward Said s sister Jean Makdisi (Makdisi 1990).

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[1] http://www.lebanese-forces.org/lf_history/index.shtml

[2] http://www.massviolence.org/Article?id_article=142&artpage=4

[3] Jumblatt speaks about the violence perpetrated by his militia in episode 7 of Al-Jazeera s Harb Lubnan